

Attaining the Text: Direct Cinematic Quotation in Video-Essays, Essay  
Films, and Found-Footage Cinema

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Film Studies

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Ottawa, Ontario

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## **Abstract**

The availability of films on DVD and via online sources, together with the proliferation of inexpensive and easily usable video editing software allow for unprecedented access to the close study and manipulation of film. One result of this has been the recent prominence of the video essay, or audio-visual film criticism. With these new technologies, film scholars, artists and cinephiles are able to rework filmic material, adding imagery or voice-over narration in order to perform critical analysis of the moving image using the medium itself. My project focuses on the video essay as an emerging form of criticism in order to explore and clarify the different paradigms evident in such work. I will also assess the potential value this form of criticism may have for film scholarship. Works of this character have not yet been widely incorporated into academic programs of study, even while many initiatives in the digital humanities are pioneering alternative forms of scholarly productivity. My project will examine important precedents for this kind of work and use existing theoretical writing on film and critical practice in order to elucidate the strategies that these works employ. Works from three contexts will be considered: the current stream of online video-essays, essay films that employ direct cinematic quotation, and found-footage works that use pre-existing films as source material. This thesis will explore how the recent video-essay form can be situated in the broader context of essay filmmaking as well as in relation to text-based film criticism.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my wonderful co-supervisors, Erika Balsom and Malini Guha. The generosity, encouragement, and patience extended to me by both provided for a profoundly memorable graduate experience.

I would also like to thank the faculty and administrative staff at Carleton University's Film Studies Department for all of their help and support over the course of my time there.

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## Introduction

In 1938 Rudolf Arnheim penned a reflection on the “unsatisfactory” (199) quality of the sound film entitled “A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film.” Within his musings on the place of cinema amongst the other arts, Arnheim argues that literature is “the most complete medium of all,” yet despite its “universality,” “language cannot go beyond a certain degree of approximation. It cannot materialize things to the point of presenting us with their material nature itself” (216-217). Michel Foucault also discusses this particular shortcoming of the written or spoken word in *The Order of Things* (1966). In the first chapter, midway through an exhaustive description of Diego Velázquez' *Las Meninas* (1656), the author offers a brief digression, stating:

These proper names would form useful landmarks and avoid ambiguous designations; they would tell us in any case what the painter is looking at, and the majority of the characters in the picture along with him. But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. (9)

Yet for Foucault, if the writer is to attempt the task of evoking the visual through language, the “infinity of the task” must be preserved, and it is “through this grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations” (10). Foucault is addressing the analysis of painting; however, when the cinema is approached through language this difficulty becomes compounded. As Raymond Bellour notes in “The Unattainable Text” (1975), the moving image “On the one hand... spreads into space like a picture; on the other it plunges into time” (25). Furthermore, the images are most often accompanied by sound, adding another dimension that cannot be 'materialized' through language. The unquotable nature of the

cinematic medium finds a potential remedy through new technologies. That these developments in film have changed the experience of spectatorship is obvious. No longer an elusive, fleeting object, films can be watched, re-watched, paused, and rewound using digital formats, making them far more graspable than in the past. Due to this capability, fragments of cinema are increasingly used as the starting point for new modes of expression. The processes of quotation and montage made widely possible through digital media have led to an explosion of remix and collage efforts. Yet the ease with which the film image can be repurposed also holds implications for the realm of film criticism and analysis. One of the byproducts of these technological developments is the increased ease with which fragments of cinema can be quoted, reassembled, and combined with new sounds and images in order to conduct analyses of cinema using the medium itself. In a sense, such an approach seems fitting to the current epoch, where even written scholarship is commonly read on a variety of screens. Yet the use of the moving image to conduct film scholarship is still relatively rare, and most written work, even when published online, lacks visual augmentation. In light of this situation, an investigation of audio-visual criticism becomes necessary in order to gain a conception of how, moving forward, film criticism and analysis can incorporate the benefits of new technology into its address.

In order to understand the achievements of works that employ direct cinematic quotations, it is first worth exploring how some of the issues facing written film criticism and analysis have been conceptualized. It becomes clear that work which approaches the cinema as its object of study faces unique hurdles. Raymond Bellour describes text-based film scholarship as “carr(ied) out in fear and trembling, threatened continually with dispossession of the object” (19)<sup>1</sup>. Unlike the analysis of literature, characterized by an “undivided conformity of the object of study and the means of study, in

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cavell also notes this difficulty in the foreword to the Enlarged Edition of *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Harvard University Press, 1979). He states that because writers “cannot *quote* the thing [they] are speaking of... [t]his puts an immediate and tremendous burden on one’s capacity for critical description of cinematic events” (ix-x).

the absolute material coincidence between language and language” (20), the film as object of analysis is “unattainable because it is an unquotable text” (20). Distinct from a literary work, which can be reproduced in the body of a text, the film, as audio-visual object, eludes direct quotation; as a consequence, “one speaks more 'about' an object the less one can draw it into the material body of the commentary” (20). Roland Barthes also describes the shift in meaning inherent to the written description of visual material in “The Photographic Message,” where he states that

to *describe* consists precisely in joining to the denoted message a relay or second-order message derived from a code which is that of language and constituting in relation to the photographic analogue, however much care one takes to be exact, a connotation: to describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different from what is shown. (198)

Bellour goes to great lengths to circumvent this shift in meaning throughout his own writing. In several of the essays collected in *The Analysis of Film* (2000), his standard written analyses are punctuated with still images, detailed shot charts, and series of pages exclusively devoted to detailing sequences of films through the use of frame grabs. Yet even though the critic may painstakingly attempt to suggest the dynamic workings of a film through devices such as these, Bellour states that they “only ever reveal... a kind of radical inability to assume the textuality of the film” (25). These reflections on the act of writing about film lead Bellour to “ask if the filmic text should really be approached in writing at all” (26). Here he offers as an alternative examples “in which film was taken as the medium of its own criticism” (26). In these examples from *Cinéastes de notre temps* (1964-) “there is no longer any divergence, no need of narration,” as they provide “A true quotation, in all its obviousness” (26). For Bellour the capability to use the medium itself to quote and analyze a cinematic work is a powerful way of escaping the paradoxical unattainability facing the film analyst. Yet at the time of writing, before the advent of VHS and digital modes of viewing and editing films,

the process of assembling cinematic quotations and adding new material was time-consuming and difficult, and furthermore required access to specialized and expensive equipment, not to mention copies of the films themselves. Contemporary formats of viewing and editing films have made this process much more accessible, allowing the study of cinema through cinema to emerge as an increasingly viable practice<sup>2</sup>.

Laura Mulvey theorizes the changing nature of film analysis due to the proliferation of digital technology in her 2006 book, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, whose title evokes something of the paradoxical process of film analysis that Bellour mentions<sup>3</sup>. In a chapter called “Delaying Cinema,” Mulvey describes the activity of the film analyst thusly: “In film theory and criticism, delay is the essential process behind textual analysis. The flow of a scene is halted and extracted from the wider flow of narrative development; the scene is broken down into shots and selected frames are further subjected to delay, to repetition and return” (144). The “essential” aspect of film analysis that Mulvey describes requires both access to the films themselves and an apparatus which allows the analyst to control the movement of the film. As such, the nature of critical activity in the digital age has changed; according to Mulvey, “With the spread of digital technologies this kind of fragmentation of film has become easier to put into practice. In this context, textual analysis ceases to be a restricted practice and returns, perhaps, to its origins as a work of cinephilia” (144). If Walter Benjamin's “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” describes a democratization of the spectatorial experience made possible by processes of mechanical reproduction, Mulvey here implicates the digital turn as resulting in a similar democratization of the act of textual analysis, the

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<sup>2</sup> For references concerning the use of cinema in an institutional context, and historical work concerning the development of film studies as a discipline, see: *Useful Cinema* (eds Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson: Duke University Press, 2011), *Inventing Film Studies* (Eds Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson: Duke University Press, 2008), and Dana Polan's *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginning of the U.S. Study of Film* (University of California Press, 2007). While relevant to the topic, specific institutional considerations are beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>3</sup> Mulvey's book also responds to Cavell's assertion, made in the Foreword to the Enlarged Edition of *The World Viewed*, that there exists a need “for a study of how using an analyzing machine may modify one's experience of a film” (ix).

broadening of an ability to not only experience the film, but to unravel it, to “break down” the “linearity associated with film projection,” (150) in order to “endlessly elongate(…)” (149) the process by which meaning is made by the moving image. Referring to the “displaced” meanings located in the classical melodrama, Mulvey writes, “Although the alert spectator of melodrama may well have had the ability to read the cinematic language of displacement, consciously or subliminally, at 24 frames a second, today's electronic or digital spectator can find these deferred meanings that have been waiting through the decades to be seen” (147). Mulvey's perspicuity should be obvious to anyone with an internet connection, as websites such as Mubi and countless blogs abound with amateur film criticism and analysis revealing the labours of a cinephilic examination dependent on the availability of films in digital formats, ready for the process of delay, repetition, and return. One aspect that Mulvey fails to mention is how the file-sharing revolution has contributed to the democratization of film analysis. As obscure works previously attainable only through limited screenings or archives requiring physical travel are now available to any computer-savvy film enthusiast with an ample amount of hard disk space, access to an astonishing variety of film is unprecedentedly available.

In addition to renewed cinephilia, Mulvey predicts that digital technologies “should bring about a 'reinvention' of textual analysis,” (160) hinting that the end result of the analytical process shall undergo a change as well. While there exists an ever-increasing amount of writing on cinema published online, both by amateur and professional scholars, there also exists an increasing number of works which undertake the analysis of cinema through the medium itself, a prominent example being the current surge of digital video-essays. For along with the increased ability to gain access to and examine filmic material there comes the ability to quote and create, to re-assemble fragments of films in new works which use these quotations to craft analyses of the films themselves. Christian Keathley summarizes the major difference that the emergence of video essays has on the consumption of criticism in his article entitled “La Caméra-stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia”: “Instead of

a reader relying on her own memory of a film under discussion – or on the accurate description and interpretation of the author – she can see for herself just how the scene looks, sounds, plays” (178). Yet this is not exactly a new phenomenon, as there exist precursors to this approach, as mentioned by Raymond Bellour above. Keathley proposes the terms “explanatory” and “poetic” to differentiate between the registers that these cinematic essays operate in. The explanatory video essay generally establishes a clear argument through voiceover narration, employing filmic quotation as a means of bypassing the burden of description and providing illustration for the claims made. He notes that in this mode, “it is language...(spoken and written) that guides it. Images and sounds – even when carefully and creatively manipulated in support of an argument – are subordinated to explanatory language” (181). The poetic video essay functions in a more abstract manner, and the analysis conducted by works in this register is far more open to interpretation. Keathley states that “These videos resist a commitment to the explanatory mode, allowing it to surface only intermittently, and they employ language sparingly, and even then as only one, unprivileged component” (181). As a result, these poetic works “effectively engage... with the poetic potential of working with images and sounds, without totally abandoning the knowledge affect that we associate with the essay form,” (182) however, this approach means that the works “risk... an opacity that means potentially going unrecognized as criticism” (183). Yet as there exist earlier examples of works that analyze the cinema through its own means, it becomes possible to see the current video-essay as continuing a tradition of filmmaking that perhaps saw its birth with works such as *Rose Hobart* (1936) and *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* (1969). Furthermore, Keathley's theorization lacks a recognition of the context in which the works are found. As such, it becomes necessary to re-examine these newer works in light of previous attempts, allowing the efforts made in the past to shed light on current iterations. The problem of quoting film directly, capable of being overcome in the past, is now more easily approached than ever before. This project aims to investigate the range of work that performs such a function in order to determine what kinds of

achievements are made. Audio-visual criticism from three main contexts will be investigated: the range of current works found online, earlier examples of films which primarily used video technology as a means both to gain access to films and to edit them into critical assemblages, and finally a range of experimental found-footage work that uses pre-existing cinema as its source material. From a consideration of these three contexts it becomes clear that each represents a fertile area of critical activity.

A current area of interest is the digital video-essay, typically found online. Appearing gradually over the last decade, these works take on a variety of forms, united by the digital manipulation of direct cinematic quotation. The first chapter of this thesis undertakes a relatively large-scale survey of these online works in order to determine the main principles at stake in their operation. While previous accounts of the digital video-essay, such as those penned by Christian Keathley, Catherine Grant, and Adrian Martin have focused exclusively on the body of these video-essays and generally maintained that there are two main categories within which these works can be divided, this chapter seeks to complicate such a distinction by extending a consideration of these works to the actual online spaces in which they are encountered. Such an investigation reveals that there is more at stake in the operation of a majority of online works than can be revealed by limiting one's focus to the works themselves; indeed, the surrounding circumstances of viewing these works often provide material that becomes vital to understanding their achievements. Through a close look at the context in which video-essays by Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López, Kogonada, and Catherine Grant are found, it becomes clear that the work performed by the digital video-essays hosted online is less of a purely cinematic variety than a component of a multimedia-address, in which arguments and analyses are crafted using video-essays in tandem with a variety of other materials.

It also becomes evident that the term “video-essay,” although used widely, is somewhat problematic when referring to the works located online. Firstly, these works are primarily made using

digital copies of the films as source material and software such as iMovie or Pro Tools, thus the term “video-essay,” strictly speaking, becomes something of a misnomer. More importantly, the term “essay” is too vague to describe the textual operations of many of these works, which range from thematically organized assemblages to detailed analyses conducted using a variety of frames within the frame and extensive text onscreen. Additionally, the essay form has its own theoretical lineage. The literature surrounding the essay as both literary and cinematic form, such as T.W. Adorno's “The Essay as Form” and Timothy Corrigan's *The Essay Film: From Montaigne to Marker*, have provided complex and specific definitions of the essay as a mode of investigation. It is these accounts that provide a starting point for chapter two. Beginning from Adorno's radical conception of the essay as a form markedly distinct from that of instrumental reason, and drawing from Corrigan's definition of the essay film as a mode of cinematic practice distinct from documentary and fictional modes, a unique register of films that analyze cinema will be delineated. By looking at both the form of Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) as well as Daniel Morgan's analysis of its operations in his *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, it becomes possible to locate a specific paradigm of cinema which investigates itself. In this chapter, both Mark Rappaport's *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* and Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* will be approached as essay films working within this tradition that offer roughly feature-length analyses of cinema. Following from *Histoire(s)*, it becomes clear that both films offer a foregrounded subjectivity undertaking an encounter with the images of cinema's past made available through video. What results in each case is a type of collision: the personal element at work actively examines, interrogates, and reflects upon the images in question, inviting the viewer to actively think along throughout the film's duration. Concrete historical evidence is sought by investigating images drawn from narrative cinema, complicating the boundary between the fictional and the real. Furthermore, this process is created through the dynamic interaction between word and image, often taking the form of questioning the images themselves, representing the 'testing

of ideas' that Corrigan posits as essential to the essay film. Following from Adorno's thoughts, these essayistic journeys reveal the presence of elements which dominant ideological structures typically efface, serving to justify the essay as a productive mode of inquiry.

Despite bearing multiple similarities with *Histoire(s)*, which enables the establishment of a specific register of operation, it remains a fact that neither of the above films display the formal inventiveness of Godard's work. Indeed, the experimental montage techniques employed in *Histoire(s)* are thoroughly idiosyncratic. Yet there does exist a third area of film practice relevant to the project at stake in this thesis, whose textual strategies approach the multi-layered density of Godard's work. Although lacking the foregrounded subjectivity or linguistic component of *Histoire(s)*, these works evince a similar use of cinematic quotation in the creation of complex, formally experimental works. Here it becomes necessary to look outside the boundaries of mainstream or art cinema, and into the world of the contemporary art gallery. In chapter three, the works considered employ virtually no linguistic intervention on the part of the filmmaker: found-footage works including Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*, Martin Arnold's *Pièce Touchée*, Matthias Müller's *Phoenix Tapes* and Candice Breitz' *Him + Her* will be analyzed in order to determine how they reflect back on their source material or the cinema more generally, and what kind of insight they are able to generate. It becomes clear that these works mainly offer three unique contributions: they act as a materialized performance of a process of analytical viewing rendered visible to spectators, they function in a specific register of expression based on a discourse of similar, repeated images that resonates with the character of contemporary visual culture, and finally, they perform a specific type of visual interpretation known as the figural, which has been conceptualized by Erich Auerbach, Nicole Brenez, and Adrian Martin.

Since the platforms of exhibition and technology employed in the creation of these works vary, the term "audio-visual criticism" is perhaps the best way to refer to the variety of work considered here. Through a large-scale survey of a broad range of such work, it is clear that the act of "attaining" the

film text has several unique benefits. A first, obvious benefit is a lessening of the degree of distortion, noted by Barthes and Foucault, that inevitably occurs when visual material makes its way into language. While there still exists the issue of context, as prising a fragment of cinema out of the setting from which it initially appeared is likely to effect its meaning, the segments do still appear, in many cases, relatively unchanged. A second benefit is the bypassing of the issue of memory; an argument mounted audio-visually has the benefit of providing the material under consideration for the viewer. Both of these are touched on by Mark Rappaport in “Mark Rappaport's Notes on *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*”:

When someone writes an article about representation in film, you have to rely on your dim memories (that is, *if* you've seen it and *if* you remember it at all) and on their description of what *they* were seeing. If they are describing several examples, *they* are making the connections for the reader. In my format, you bring the source to the spectator. Even if the scene is out of context, the authenticity of what is presented, what is seen and hear, is undeniable. You are not subject to the additional, and unreliable, barrier of a secondary source's impression of whatever it was *they* think they saw. (22)

Yet there also exists the ability to enact dialogue between films through editing, the creation of simultaneous comparison through formal manipulation, such as split-screen effects, and to create passages which call for active reflection upon images, prompting a viewer to consider images in light of information given. This process creates the activity of thinking with the images in real time. Despite these advantages, however, it is necessary to look at these works closely, to avoid an overabundance of enthusiasm before their contributions are carefully weighed. Following from this, it becomes clear that audio-visual criticism is but one aspect of a larger change to the presentation of analysis caused by advancements in technology. What is discernible at the current moment is that the boundaries between media are dissolving, and an online format allows for the publication of works

which construct arguments through the dynamic combination of a number of media forms. This blending points to a shift in the way in which image and language have previously been divided, as contemporary screen-dominated modes of communication increasingly employ streams of images, attaining an expressive quality previously associated with text. It is this shift that D.N. Rodowick designates as the “figural,” using the term to “define a semiotic regime where the ontological distinction between linguistic and plastic representations breaks down” (2). It is in this context that a consideration of audio-visual criticism attains urgency. If current modes of signification employ images in new and expressive ways, it is regarding the cinema, an art whose capability to move viewers has long eluded capture by written language, that such an image-based mode of thought and expression sees perhaps its most appropriate application. As a result, conceptions of what exactly counts as film criticism or analysis require re-thinking as the relation between image, language, and the medium of expression changes.

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## Chapter One - The Multi-Media Message: Investigating the Digital Video-Essay as Online Phenomenon

“None of the traditional arts reveals so massive a disproportion between the possibilities it offers and its achievements” (45) – Luis Buñuel, “Cinema, Instrument of Poetry”

In Whit Stillman's *Metropolitan* (1990), young university student Tom Townsend (Edward Clements) earnestly declares: “I don't read novels. I prefer good literary criticism. That way you get both the novelist's ideas as well as the critic's thinking.” Although a naïve statement, something about Tom's words assumes a distinct urgency; indeed, his ingenuous remark seizes a certain recognizability from the vantage point of the contemporary media landscape. What Tom expresses is not simply mere pragmatic time management in the quest for knowledge, it also indicates a desire for more than the bare text, for both the initial expression and analysis of that expression to be encountered simultaneously. That wish is what makes Tom's statement risible, for obviously the critic can only re-present the ideas of the author, offering an already-mediated version for interpretation. Yet a degree of this naïveté informs some recent discourse surrounding the digital video-essay. In the introduction to the Society for Cinema & Media Studies' *Cinema Journal* teaching dossier entitled “The Video Essay Assignment,” one can easily perceive the enthusiasm for an undeniably zeitgeist-y form. Christine Becker and Erin Cople Smith note that “Though video essays are in many ways fundamentally similar to the traditional written essay, they offer specific advantages that written essays cannot” (“Introduction,” 2013). Yet unfortunately, the co-editors remain somewhat vague about what exactly these “specific advantages” are, offering the nebulous conclusion that “In short, the video essay transforms the written argument into something more meaningful and more productive in teaching students not only how to build an argument, but also how to engage with and demonstrate facility with media vocabularies and texts.” How this differs from the aims of the old-fashioned written essay is unclear, and the rhetoric employed

indicates that perhaps the perceived novelty of the form has caused the authors to exhibit a lack of perspicacity regarding its exact benefits. What is clear is that the discourse surrounding the digital video-essay and its potential role in the scholarly realm is more prominent than ever; earlier this year, *Cinema Journal* and *MediaCommons* introduced *[in]Transition*, the first peer-reviewed academic journal exclusively devoted to this form of media. Due to the increasing visibility of the digital video-essay as a mode of scholarship and a medium for academic dialogue, and in light of the exuberantly laudatory discourse surrounding the adoption of this mode by the academic sphere (whether as a pedagogical tool or a mode of scholarly production), it becomes a necessary task to investigate the content and achievements of these works through a critical lens, without the short-sighted utopianism exhibited by some existing accounts. Through an investigation of a large sample size of these works, it becomes clear that much work remains to be done before regarding this form as a viable mode of scholarly production. While the domain of audio-visual criticism exists as a rich ground for experimentation, the form as it has been articulated thus far has yet to be theorized adequately. Furthermore, the digital video-essay need not be seen as a replacement for or progression of traditional modes of scholarship; part of the productive potential of these works is the way in which they can supplement or interact with conventional forms, introducing an augmented affective dimension to written work. Additionally, the video-essay can also function as an engaging way of re-staging or repositioning existing scholarly work. Lastly, what needs to be made clear is the extent to which the reception of these works is coloured by the context in which they are found, a context which often adds to the scholarly contribution these works can be said to perform. As the majority of other literature focusing on the digital video-essay has approached these works as stand-alone objects, a look through a broader optic seems necessary in order to understand how they operate as they are typically encountered by viewers. While previous accounts of current video-essays have tended towards strict categorization, as noted in the Introduction, a close consideration of Adrian Martin and Cristina

Álvarez López' "Intimate Catastrophes" reveals such distinction to be limiting. Instead, the video-essay will be approached as the site of three related tensions: between art and criticism, language and image, and cinephilia and an analytical impulse. By closely investigating the work of Kogonada and Catherine Grant, it becomes clear that the context in which these works are found, as well as their use of a multimedia address becomes integral to evaluating their function as criticism. This focus reveals that the aspect of the video-essay which marks the most significant departure from previous critical work is the ability to utilize a variety of media within the same location, crafting arguments that employ the clarity associated with written language as well as the affective dimension associated with moving images and sounds, without compromising the effect of one for the other.

Due to the diffuse nature of the internet as a site of publishing or exhibition, a project that attempts a relatively large-scale survey of this type of work is doomed to a certain inconclusiveness from the start. As stated in the Introduction, there have only started to develop more traditional scholarly networks for the publication and discussion of such work, thus any approach to studying these works must attempt to cast a fairly wide net, make judicious choices about what to include for consideration, and acknowledge the impossibility of including everything, despite the digital video-essay's relatively recent existence. That being said, there are several key hubs of activity in this vein<sup>4</sup>, without which this project would have been impossible. The methodology for this study then became to review the work either located on or linked to through these sites of interest with a consistent set of criteria, in order to arrive at a sense of the dominant paradigms and characteristics of such work, and how these might be situated both within the discipline of film studies and in a longer tradition of filmmaking that takes pre-existing film material as its starting point. In total, over 300 digital video-essays mostly culled from eight main sites of activity were considered, with roughly 100 being

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<sup>4</sup> Among others, *Audiovisualcy: Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies*, *The Seventh Art*, *Press Play*, *KeyFrame*, *Shooting Down Pictures*, *Moving Image Source*, and Catherine Grant's *FilmAnalytical*.

subjected to closer analysis. The majority of these works were not made by academic professionals, although there are exceptions. The major guiding principle in choosing work for inclusion was the use of direct quotation from pre-existing cinema, as well as the distinction of an analytical presence behind the construction of the work, expressed either through the addition of text or narration, or formal intervention to the image track, such as montage, split-screen effects, zoom, or slow-motion, among other possibilities.

### **Two Essay Forms?**

An overview of a sample of digital video-essays might lead one to conclude that they can be divided into two opposing categories, primarily distinguished due to the amount of language employed. On one end of the spectrum, there exists those that very clearly mimic the form of a written essay: voiceover narration (typically spoken by a male voice) delivers a pre-written argument accompanied by images from the film(s) in question, the film's sound either absent or low enough in the mix to ensure the clarity of the speaker's address. At significant moments, the narrator typically pauses and a longer portion of the film is allowed to play, generally a relevant sequence that has been introduced by the narrator, and the film's sound is turned up in the mix. Besides beginning and ending credits, there is little to no text employed onscreen, and formal intervention besides simply the sequential ordering of relevant clips is minimal. The films are sometimes identified as the clips play, chapters are sometimes marked, or thematic concerns introduced through the use of intertitles, but these interventions are not standard. Steven Santos' "The Prototype of Noir: Fritz Lang's *M*" offers an example of a video-essay that functions in this relatively straightforward fashion. Clips from *M* (1931) are used in order to illustrate an argument laid out through a series of captions displayed onscreen. At times the image track is frozen in order to allow viewers ample time to read. Santos' central argument posits *M* as a film which links the formal conventions of German Expressionism with later noir films. "The Prototype of Noir" is structured around a series of clips that illustrate the text's assertion that formal

and narrative elements found within the fragments of *M* prefigure what would later become conventions of film noir. Here, the images serve a purely illustrative role, essentially providing visual support for a written essay. For example, a caption tells the viewer that Hans Beckert (Peter Lorre) “delivers one final speech to ask for mercy that could express the inner thoughts of any noir protagonist [of] the past 80 years,” followed by a clip depicting the speech in question, allowed to play in its entirety. The author's assertion, delivered through written language, is followed by the clip it refers to, a strategy from which the work does not stray. In essence, Santos has augmented a written essay with a selection of relevant clips, an approach shared by, among others, Matt Zoller-Seitz' five-part series focusing on Wes Anderson entitled “The Substance of Style,” (2009) as well as several works by Kevin B. Lee.

While this format does have its merits, allowing the spectator direct access to the object of study (albeit already modified through editing), works which employ this approach are often problematic in several ways. Firstly, it is an approach that very quickly becomes formulaic after one watches a few of these; one wonders if Christopher Heron noticed the irony when stating in his “*Moneyball* (Video Essay)” (2012) that “This audio is paired with an unfortunate series of images that seem to follow the trend in documentary filmmaking to simply show an image of whatever is being talked about,” a statement that could very well apply to the majority of works featured on *The Seventh Art*. Secondly, the running time of these works is on average relatively short, rarely exceeding fifteen minutes' time. This means that denser or more complex arguments often proceed at a rapid pace, potentially rendering them difficult to comprehend. Indeed, the temporal dimension of film analyses using the video-essay format becomes very significant, as the makers are imposing a time span within which viewers must grasp the assertion being presented. As the creators are crafting an argument not only audio-visually but also temporally, the prescribed duration assumes a key importance. While lengthier productions such as Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003) sketch an argument over a longer than

feature-length running time, with spaces built into the text of the film allowing the spectator time to digest and reflect, the shorter-length format can become overly dense, and viewing becomes overwhelming; indeed, this is the case with Christopher Heron's "Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers*: Video Essay," whose complex analysis of Yang's film using Antonioni as a major point of comparison becomes hard to follow due to the pace at which it proceeds. In this sense, to pause and re-watch sections becomes necessary, an operation more cumbersome than simply re-reading a passage of text, and tampers with the forward movement inherent to the medium. A film essay that is incomprehensible or overwhelming even on a superficial level without the re-watching of sections is perhaps not the most compelling way to usher in a new form. Finally, the authoritative and impersonal male voiceover, such as that found in most of Christopher Heron's video-essays as well as the majority of works featuring spoken narration, recalls the techniques of conventional documentary forms, implicitly aligning these works with institutional modes of knowledge production. The use of this convention comes with a great deal of baggage, including an assumption of mastery over images, conveyed by a white, European male voice.

On the other end of the spectrum lies the less conventional, less obviously didactic digital video-essays characterized by Christian Keathley and others as "poetic." The absence of text or voiceover narration distinguishes this category, whose fundamental strategy is often montage without any overarching unification offered by language. This category could include much of Catherine Grant's work, some of the collaborations between Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López, B. Kite and Alexander Points-Zollo's "Vertigo Variations" (2011), whose meaning is perhaps so abstract as to prompt Adrian Martin to characterize the essay as "a wash of *poesis* that has not quite yet managed to fashion itself into the musculature of a real cine-poem" (Martin 2012). These works, as Christian

Keathley asserts, aim to perform an emotional or thematic element present in the initial work<sup>5</sup>. Or do they? Besides being able to categorize these by the absence of an essay-like written or spoken component, the terrain on this end of the spectrum is actually quite varied, and the 'aim' described above too simplistic. In fact, the level of variance among the works which do not conform to the previously discussed paradigm is so extensive as to prohibit any attempt at clear categorization. For instance, there are works that mainly consist of montages organized around themes, such as Nelson Caravajal's "Women in the Works of Martin Scorsese" (2014) and Ian Magor and Andy B. Moore's "Does the Camera Describe or Devour?" (2014). In such works, an argument is easily discerned, despite a lack of voiceover and minimal use of text. Another approach allows selected scenes from films to play out with quotations from pre-existing scholarship added, re-staging previous scholarly work in a dynamic fashion, such as Catherine Grant's "Refashioning the Femme Fatale? - *Gilda* in Motion" (2011). Split-screen comparisons offer a chance to view multiple films playing side-by-side in real time, actualizing a kind of intertextual dialogue, such as Cristina Álvarez López' "Games" (2009), Grant's "Garden of Forking Paths? Hitchcock's *BLACKMAILS*" (2012), and works that push this principle to the extreme, placing a multiplicity of frames within the image, such as Grant's "Intersection[s]: On Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love*" (2014) and Kevin B. Lee's "Andrei Tarkovsky's Cinematic Candles" (2014).

A dichotomy established between video-essays that feature language and those that do not essentially treats the works as hermetically sealed, ignoring the setting in which they are found. Indeed, a look at the context in which these "poetic" works are located often clears up much of the uncertainty surrounding their function as criticism: one is offered essays, quotations, and links to relevant scholarship, firmly anchoring the efforts of these video-essayists in the written word, even if

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<sup>5</sup> Keathley, Christian. "La Caméra-stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia." *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*. Eds. Clayton, Alex and Andrew Klevan. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. p. 182.

these words exist outside of the body of the video-essays themselves. In “Rhetoric of the Image,” Roland Barthes addresses the relationship between images and text in signifying systems, posing the question: “Does the image duplicate certain of the informations given in the text by a phenomenon of redundancy or does the text add a fresh information to the image?” (273). While Barthes was primarily speaking of still images, his thoughts are nonetheless relevant to the text-image relationship at stake in the case of digital video-essays. Barthes proposes two functions of text in relation to image, that of *anchorage* and *relay*. Because “all images are polysemous,” (274) meaning that they contain multiple messages, written language becomes a method of “fixing” the “floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terrors of uncertain signs” (274). In terms of the accompanying text at stake here, the function falls under what Barthes refers to as *anchorage*:

the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. In all these cases of anchorage, language clearly has a function of elucidation, but this elucidation is selective, a metalanguage applied not to the totality of the iconic message but only to certain of its signs. (275)

Yet despite a critic's best efforts, it is dubious that such control may be exercised over the viewer/reader in this case. Firstly, they may have familiarity with the filmic material in question, and thus their own established reading of events compete with the critic's. Secondly, the amount of signifying material present in even the most rudimentary of digital video-essays offers more than can likely be anchored by a written essay<sup>6</sup>, no matter how exhaustive its aims may be. Nonetheless, the relation that the accompanying written materials bear to the digital video-essay is still that of anchorage, offering a potential guide to reading the signifying audio-visual material, yet without the absolute repression of

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<sup>6</sup> As Christian Metz asserts in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, cinema employs five channels of expression: moving photographic images, recorded dialogue, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, and written language.

excess meaning.

### **“Intimate Catastrophes” and “Troubles Every Day”**

An example of a work that offers a written text in order to complement a “poetic” video-essay is Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López' “Intimate Catastrophes” (2013). The work consists of an assemblage of scenes from four films, both edited to create a successive montage of visually similar scenes, as well as placed side-by-side to play simultaneously. The films are referenced in their accompanying essay, “Troubles Every Day,” located on *Transit*, an online journal published in Spanish but featuring English translations for some of their features. While the written work clearly designates the meaning and reasoning behind the sequences offered in the audio-visual essay, these are not clear from viewing the video work alone. However, the short video functions as both evidence for their written claims, as well as performing the emotional or sensory dimension of the material at stake. Beginning with a quotation “adapted” from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, “Intimate Catastrophes” consists of an assemblage of material from four films: Jean Epstein's *Le Tempestaire* (1947), Josef Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), Alain Resnais' *Coeurs* (2006), and Boris Barnet's *By the Bluest of Seas* (1936). Neither the films nor the introductory quotation are identified until the ending credits, and many of the clips play without their original soundtrack; Martin and López state in their accompanying essay that “The action and sound of water score the mixed-memory of a fragment of cinema we offer in this video” (2013), pointing to the intention to create an affective atmosphere. However, Calvino's words do offer something in the way of a thematic guide to interpreting this assemblage:

I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcade's curves... but this would be the same as telling you nothing. The film does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past. As this wave from memories flows in, the film soaks up like a sponge and expands...

From this somewhat mysterious passage one can understand that the relationship between memory, space, and events is at stake, and that exactness is not of primary importance. Yet this passage remains insufficient in order to determine the work's critical purpose. What can one make of the scenes chosen, not identified until the video's end? What informs the pattern of cutting, and the alternation between full and split-screens? While the video-essay is engaging as a stand-alone work, materializing a dialogue based on similarity across these four films, a look at the context in which the work is found encourages a more nuanced and clear interpretation. The information underpinning the aforementioned formal choices can be found in the accompanying essay. While quite brief, the written text offers several key assertions that inform “Intimate Catastrophes.” López and Martin state in their essay that “cinematic memory and the physicality of space enchant one another,” further arguing that “cinema is intimately architectural” (2013). Using their assertions as a guideline, it is worth revisiting the video-essay in some detail in order to examine how its formal choices reinforce the authors' thoughts.

After Calvino's words, “Intimate Catastrophes” cuts to a scene from *Le Tempestaire* depicting an elderly, bearded man gazing intently into a crystal ball, within which he sees a vision of a stormy sea (had it not been explained in the written essay, one might assume that the “sound of water” stems from this clip). Following this scene, a clip from *Morocco* is shown; Monsieur La Bessiere (Adolphe Menjou) opens a large set of doors and enters a room where Amy Jolly (Marlene Dietrich) awaits. In both these cases the viewer is presented with a framed scene where events are taking place: in the former, the crystal ball creates a frame within the image, and in the latter, the doorway serves the same purpose. These compositions both recall the act of cinematic spectatorship and display the essay's thematic notion that cinema and the concrete architecture of space are somehow linked. A split-screen view follows, displaying scenes from *Morocco* and *Coeurs* side-by-side, prompting comparison. In the latter, a woman navigates a busy nightclub, a look of cheerful expectation on her face, while in the

former *La Bessiere* and Amy Jolly embrace. Both scenes contain an air of romantic hopefulness. As the “backward sound-effect” mentioned in “Troubles Every Day” is heard on *Coeurs'* soundtrack, the film is shown fullscreen, coinciding with the woman's moment of realization that the man she is there to meet is addressing another woman instead of her, providing the main point of conflict in the sequence. Another split-screen composition follows, this time showing clips from *By the Bluest of Seas* and *Morocco*. A silent exchange between a man and a woman plays in the former film as Amy Jolly is told that Légionnaire Tom Brown (Gary Cooper), the third member of *Morocco's* love triangle, will be returning from the front. The composition allows these two moments depicting conflict to play out simultaneously. The essay then cuts to a fullscreen image of the scene from *By the Bluest of Seas*, culminating in a slow-motion shot of the woman ripping her necklace off, and what appear to be crystals are shown falling to the ground by her feet and shattering. This scene is followed by a return to Resnais' film; as the protagonist realizes the gravity of the situation she has found herself in and makes a hasty retreat, she crashes into a waiter, the sound of glassware crashing together mirroring the significant action occurring in the previous film, *By The Bluest of Seas*. A second retreat follows, this time Amy Jolly leaving dinner to go see Tom Brown. As she hesitates in front of a chair, her long pearl necklace gets caught on the chairs' back, and as she moves away it too breaks. The video then brings the viewer back to *Coeurs* for a brief moment, as the waiter watches the woman leave the club, the eyeline match is answered by a return to *Le Tempestaire*, mimicking a shot-reverse-shot pattern: the man's gaze at the woman leaving merges with the man's gaze at the crystal ball, both men's eyes' trained on something emotionally charged. Finally, the ball drops and shatters, again replicating the action and thematics of the previous films' conflicts.

When viewed as a stand-alone piece, as one might encounter it on Vimeo, “Intimate Catastrophes” can be taken for a purely “poetic” work, creating an assemblage based on thematic content and visual resemblance but whose specific critical assertions may remain unclear. However,

when viewed in the context of its publication on *Transit*, with the accompanying text offered in “Troubles Every Day”, its aims become crystal clear, and the work reveals itself to be a considered treatment of the films, exhibiting delicate formal construction. It is through the written essay that we learn of the love triangles central to three of the four films, placing significant actions in a context that links the material on a stronger basis than mere visual similarity. As the clips are not identified until the video-essay's end, the context of each scene may escape many viewers who are not intimately familiar with the original films. Furthermore, the sequence of editing and use of split-screen allows the films to enact a dialogue with one another, the emotional content of one scene emphasizing the content of the other through their interaction. For instance, as *Morocco's* Amy Jolly learns that Tom Brown is returning, her feelings are projected onto the shattering necklace of *By the Bluest of Seas*, as if the second film carried out the shocking revelation of the first. More generally, the written essay makes clear the way that “Intimate Catastrophes” shows the viewer how the emotional events of narrative become manifest in architectural space, and significant actions such as the shattering of glass or the breaking of a necklace extend these emotions physically, impregnating the *mise-en-scène* with signification. Through the use of an audio-visual format, the films become capable of informing one another, as memories from one film “flow in” to another, materialized through careful montage.

As in “Intimate Catastrophes”, a look at the actual conditions in which purportedly “poetic” works are encountered often reveals their aims to be numerous, and the meanings neither elusively poetic nor abstract. In the case of López and Martin's work, a small amount of text can go a long way in clarifying what might be considered indeterminate material, revealing the extent to which a clear interpretation is put forth by the work's creator. The murkiness of both ends of the spectrum of digital video-essays here points to a need to re-evaluate an impulse to categorize, and additionally, to consider the context of exhibition as a fundamental part of the potential contributions of such work. A close consideration of dozens of digital video-essays suggests that there is not so much a need for a list of

categories, although there are a number of dominant strains to be discerned. What can be most prominently identified, from the particular moment that this study was conducted, is that the digital video-essay as form can most productively be approached as a site of multiple tensions. These tensions become essential to an understanding of how these works operate, what unique contributions they are able to bring to scholarly discourse concerning the study of moving images, and what areas remain to be explored.

### **The Video-Essay as Site of Tension**

At a basic level, what the digital video-essay exhibits is a display of the tension between what is considered criticism and what is considered a work of art – whether the primary function is to express something, or to comment and offer insight upon a previous expression, functioning as metadiscourse. Because these works mainly draw on pre-existing material, when they lack a clear, easily discernible argument – presented either via voiceover narration or text onscreen – their aim becomes vague, transforming whatever critical statement that they make into one more easily approached as individual artistic expression rather than analysis of an existing expression. Consequently, if such works are not clearly contextualized as critical commentary, they may be interpreted as containing more of an artistic statement rather than an analytical one<sup>7</sup>. As mentioned previously, Christian Keathley attempts to resolve this tension by proposing a dichotomy, classifying video-essays as either functioning mainly in an “explanatory” or “poetic” mode. Yet slippage exists to such a degree that a simple dichotomy is not adequate. Instead, viewing these works as actively performing and foregrounding the tension between critical and artistic practice is perhaps more accurate. Indeed, the form prompts reflection on how unstable the boundary between criticism and art is, for even in relatively straightforward examples that present a clear argument through voiceover narration or text, with images functioning mainly as

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<sup>7</sup> As Keathley states in “La Caméra-stylo” when discussing Paul Malcolm's work, because it “engages primarily with the poetical mode [...] it risks an opacity that means potentially going unrecognised as criticism” (183).

illustration, there still exists an excess produced by the montage or presentation of images, an surplus of meaning created through the implementation of a multi-media form of address. Keathley points this out in regards to Kogonada's "What is Neorealism?" (2013), stating that "this videographic piece effectively poeticizes its explanatory elements. The video thus works on two separate but interrelated tracks: the facts it gives us in the explanatory mode, and the atmosphere it creates as it poeticizes that information" (Keathley 2014).

This blending of sensibilities is not unique to "What is Neorealism?", as several digital video-essays can be viewed in this light; they feature voiceover narration establishing an argument, yet also create an "atmosphere" through choices made in editing and the addition of music. Both Christopher Heron's "The MDF Trilogy: Video Essay" (2012) and Benjamin Sampson's "Layers of Paradox in *F for Fake*" (2014) function in this manner: while both lay out a clear critical argument, the use of additional music or other formal techniques create an emotional atmosphere unique to their work. In contrast to what Keathley sees at work in "What is Neorealism?", here the atmosphere and argument aren't "separate," rather functioning together as part of each work's spectatorial address. Furthermore, the simple re-ordering of filmic material is bound to alter the meaning or emotional character of filmic material, thus any assemblage could potentially be argued as creating its own "atmosphere." Keathley pinpoints the divergent address of the Kogonada's video: "what we *understand* this video to be as a historical explication and what we *feel* it to be as a fiction carry very different qualities of force" (Keathley 2014). While it is arguable that the experiences of *understanding* and *feeling* cannot be so easily separated, what Keathley describes here is also significant as it in a sense explains the address of many video-essays – text, whether as part of the video-essay itself or as accompaniment, and images and sounds address the viewer on both a sensory and intellectual level, meaning that in most cases there exists a blending of modes.

Developments such as mechanical reproduction, the widespread availability and circulation of

images due to digital storage and distribution, postmodern pastiche, and collage or remix aesthetics, among others, broaden conceptions of the notion of creation in artistic practice. Increasingly the process of making art involves the direct quotation or reference of previously existing cultural products. From this expanded definition of artistic practice, it becomes clear that the digital video-essay brings to the foreground the creative impulse present in much criticism. The analysis of cinema often includes the bringing together of various works for contrast or comparison, meaning that a video-essay which performs this function using direct quotation often bears visual resemblance to works classified under the paradigms mentioned above. Until a codified set of formal conventions is developed by video-essays, clearly demarcating their intended function to be a metadiscursive one, the border between artistic creation and criticism remains undefined. One important way in which this murkiness has been mitigated is through the context set up by many of the creators of these works. Accompanying material, often in the form of a short essay, blog post, or collection of quotations and further resources, functions to anchor even dramatically abstract or “poetic” assemblages of images and sounds in language, as in the Martin and López example discussed above. These contextualizing gestures are significant because they undermine the temptation to approach video-essays as hermetically sealed works; instead, the aim is made clear that they be consumed alongside or in conjunction with other media. The blog post on Catherine Grant's filmanalytical that accompanies her audio-visual essay entitled “Establishing Split” features this disclaimer: “Please watch the above video essay before you read its **expanded transcript** below,” (bold in original) indicating an intention to orchestrate the spectator/reader's multi-media experience; furthermore, Grant offers an extensive list of further reading suggestions, placing her effort within a body of text-based scholarship.

The formal strategies employed by these works (see above) and the sites of exhibition remain quite varied: there are sites, such as “AudioVisualcy,” that are devoted to video-essays, but these works

can also be found on sites such as the *Sight & Sound* website, whose main focus is not the publication of video-essays, as well as located by simply conducting a search on YouTube or other video hosting sites. As such, there exists a certain vagueness as to what exactly fits and what does not. For this study, many works which exist among these hubs of activity were cast aside, due to their appearing more as a strictly list-like or “greatest hits” compilation rather than an analytical work. Yet even within the output of scholarly video-essayists there exists a large degree of variation: a remarkable amount of variety is found in the work of Catherine Grant, who uses the short digital film format for a number of experiments, but also in the work of prolific video-essayist Kevin B. Lee and academic Christian Keathley. Among Lee's large number of offerings appears “Every Fight in Wong Kar-Wai's THE GRANDMASTER, Ranked” (2013), and “The Best Films of 2013, All on One Screen” (2013), which, although seemingly different in intent, are presented in the same online venue as works offering more conventional scholarly analysis, such as “Deceptive Surfaces: The Films of Christian Petzold” (2012). Keathley's Vimeo page, alongside such densely analytical works as “Pass The Salt” (2011), features “50 Years On” (2012), a montage of clips whose exact intent remains unclear until one realizes that the soundtrack is John Coltrane's “My Favorite Things”. This diffuse focus is also reflected in the varying terminology used by the makers to credit themselves, which range from the straightforward (“written and edited” or “compiled”), to the bizarre (“fractured, layered, and decomposed,” or “written, edited and dreamed”). What all of this points to is the need for a clearer theorization of the form and its aims. For example, to be considered a viable form of scholarship, these works must be presented as such, and given a space reserved for such material – a more strictly curated site of exhibition. Whether this is possible remains to be seen, and hopefully the arrival of *[in]Transition* partially fulfills such a function. While the designation of a specific space may not resolve the tension between art and criticism displayed by such work, the establishment of a specific context for this type of scholarship might allow a greater familiarity to develop with its operations. Moreover, judging from the inaugural issue of

*[in]Transition*, which features lengthy introductory material alongside each video-essay featured, what is occurring is closer to the creation of a multi-media form of collaborative scholarship rather than a purely audio-visual variety.

This multi-faceted mode of address points to another tension exhibited by these works: that between the concrete symbolic world of written or spoken language and the sensory address of images and sounds. While both written language and images possess an affective dimension, the way that these effects are received by the viewer or reader is not the same. Written or spoken language must first be decoded intellectually before the affective content can be accessed. Images and sounds are understood on a sensory level, without recourse to a code (although there certainly exist exceptions, such as established formal conventions). This difference means that an address based on images and sounds possesses a certain phenomenological immediacy that language most often does not. There are certainly cases in which this distinction is blurred, for example, the tonality of voiceover narration, or the physical appearance of text may enter into the signifying structure of the language employed. However, these strategies are not the norm, and it remains the case that in most instances, language and images signify in a different manner. Barthes notes a tension between two views of the signifying capability of the image vis-a-vis language, stating that “there are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness” (269). Barthes' insight is relevant to the tension that both informs the need to offer essays or quotations in textual form as accompanying material, as well as the opposite desire to use a “pure” image-sound mode of communication.

Placing the recent interest in exploiting the digital video-essay as a mode of criticism within a broader context reveals the fulfillment of a wish whose lineage can be traced back as far as the 1960s

and 1970s, when filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard and scholar Raymond Bellour<sup>8</sup> highlighted the disjuncture between cinema and the medium in which it is traditionally analyzed: written language. If the current proliferation of digital video-essays are seen to respond to a desire, it is in part the urge to reintroduce something of the sensory, pre-linguistic dimension of watching a film into the analysis of it, to recuperate the cinephilic fascination with the images and sounds of cinema into the work of analyzing it. This desire can be discerned from a consideration of the works themselves, where the use of images alongside written material points to an attempt at a non-linguistic, sensory address, but also points to questions arising from the literature surrounding these works, which often returns to the issue of whether some recourse to written or verbal language is necessary.<sup>9</sup> The digital video-essay can then be positioned not as a “more meaningful” form of criticism, but instead one that attempts to return some of the sensory or emotional impact of viewing a film into its analysis, in the same form. Yet this address is one that can be curated to highlight relevant moments, or put into dialogue with other moments to create a montage forging new connections and considerations. Certainly, the technique of reworking pre-existing films is not a new phenomenon, as works like Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936) performed this same function decades ago; however, the process is made unprecedentedly more accessible with the arrival of digital technology, which allows cinematic works of the past to be available for viewing on a larger scale, and also provides a relatively simple means for constructing critical assemblages through the use of inexpensive computer software. In this sense, the poetic or abstract portions of these can be interpreted as an attempt to actualize the thought process or experience of close analytical viewing in material form, with the sensory address of the medium maintained. This materialization of the process of critical viewing is even made explicit in several works, such as

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<sup>8</sup> Bellour, “The Unattainable Text,” 1975. Interview with Jean-Luc Godard, in *Godard on Godard*: “Only literary criticism exists in its own right, because its object blends with its subject” (1968, p. 229).

<sup>9</sup> Discussed in Adrian Martin's “In So Many Words,” and Erland Lavik's “The Video Essay: The Future of Academic Film and Television Criticism?”

Richard Misek's *Rohmer in Paris* (2013), Kevin B. Lee and Girish Shambu's "Shooting Down Pictures #906: *The Woman in the Window* (1944 Fritz Lang)," and Kogonada's "What is Neorealism?", where VCR-type noises accompany rewinding or fast-forwarding of the image track, as if one was seated at home viewing the film, re-watching significant sequences. The presentation of these thus mimics what Laura Mulvey has called "delayed cinema," inscribing the process of analytical close-viewing into the text itself, or in Godard's words: "The commentary on the image forms part of the image" (Godard 1968, p. 230).

This points to a highly personal venture on the part of the creator, and thus leads to a third tension embodied by the digital video-essay, that between a laudatory cinephilia and an analytical impulse that seeks to demystify and effectively destroy pleasure and artifice. This aspect may in part explain why these works have not yet gained widespread mainstream currency, as the celebratory aspect exhibited by numerous digital video-essays can diminish the recognition of any critical insight that they may offer. The negotiation of this tension, then, may explain the divergence in approaches taken to some extent; some practitioners seem heavily invested in the utilization of formal techniques that dissect, rupture, and deconstruct the films under consideration, while others utilize little formal intervention beyond a re-ordering or selection of relevant fragments. The tension between cinephilia and analysis manifests itself in the body of digital video-essays via a tension between recognizing that what one is viewing is a form of audio-visual commentary, or, on the other hand, simply re-ordered fragments of the original film used for illustrative purposes, functioning much in the same way as still frame grabs or quotations of dialogue might in a written essay, yet containing no argument in themselves. The makers of these works appear to be caught between mimicking the format of a written essay and attempting to forge a critical language unique to the medium, or, as Catherine Grant phrases it, "should we be aiming to 'translate' the (often unspoken) norms and traditions of written film studies into audio-visual versions, or should we embrace from the outset that we are creating ontologically *new*

scholarly forms?” (Grant 2013). The answer, of course, is neither; there exists too much divergence among the works, and even single essayists oscillate between the two poles, thus indicating that this is a feature inherent to all such work to some degree. What is clear, however, is that the work must be identifiable as criticism, distinguishable from the countless compilation videos available online in order for their contributions to be discernible, let alone taken seriously.

### **A Multi-media Address**

In her “Curator's note” on *[in]Transition's* “Bergman Senses” (Thomas Elsaesser, Anne Bachmann, and Jonas Moberg, 2008), Catherine Grant mentions some important precursors to the digital video-essay, stating that she “wanted to flag up that one of the key and most fertile formal precursors of online videographic film studies (alongside the essay film tradition and DVD “extra” culture [Grant 2006; Hagener 2014], is precisely the experimental compilation film,” (Grant 2014) continuing on to cite the viewing process that these works elicit as an important similarity between the two forms. Grant's assertion is undeniably true, yet she doesn't mention the capabilities of online publishing, which in some iterations foster a mode of address remarkably similar to that of the digital video-essay as it is generally encountered: specifically, on a web page featuring accompanying text of some sort. What the format of online publishing, as well as the digital video-essay can accomplish is the formation of a multi-media address, in which still images, moving images, sounds, and text can be accessed in one space, allowing the author to orchestrate a viewer/reader's experience.

An outstanding example of this type of work that does not actually consist of a digital video-essay is Adrian Martin's “A Walk Through *Carlito's Way*”, published in the online cinema journal *LOLA* in their September 2013 issue. Featured alongside Martin's rigorous written analysis of a sequence from *Carlito's Way* (1993) are detailed sequences of still images from the film, a clip showing the entirety of the sequence in question, audio tracks featuring isolated extracts of the audio from the film, and a gif image that endlessly repeats a brief yet significant gesture made by Carlito Brigante (Al

Pacino). What Martin accomplishes here is the orchestration of an effective multi-media address; the key moments and sounds required for his analysis are laid out to correspond with the structure of his written argument, reminiscent of Catherine Grant's instructions for consuming her online work.

Martin's detailed use of film stills recalls Raymond Bellour's assertion that "the reproduction even of many stills only ever reveals a kind of radical inability to assume the textuality of the film" (Bellour 25), the vital difference being that Martin is actually *able* to introduce the material of the film in question into his analysis, even if the analysis does not take place in the cinematic medium itself.

Bellour compares the use of stills to "stopping at a sentence in a book to re-read it and reflect on it" (25); indeed, Martin pinpoints key frames using stills, evoking this process, but also includes the entire scene, accessible in the same space. This method bears an affinity with the principles of the digital video-essay: fragments of the work are selected, transformed and re-ordered in order to reveal something about the work, to bring key elements to the surface for consideration. Yet Martin does not do this by creating a self-contained digital video; instead, he embellishes a text-based approach to scholarship with the introduction of various media made possible by the format of online publishing. If reading written film scholarship often involves a type of memory game to be played, in which readers must draw on their own memory of a film (if they have seen it) in order to evaluate or understand the claims being made by the author, here Martin partially overcomes the need for such a game to be played by presenting the material under discussion. The mode of address enabled by the online format creates a level of immersion that partially circumvents the need to perform an active memory game while reading. Furthermore, what Martin's work reveals about the digital video-essay is the extent to which the encounter with these works often takes place within a context that is inundated with the written word, so that even works that feature little to no voiceover or captioned material are anchored to text in some manner. "A Walk Through *Carlito's Way*" makes clear that a consideration of digital video-essays must extend outside the boundaries of the works themselves to include the context in

which they are located, in order to gain an accurate picture of the type of scholarly work that these can be said to accomplish.

### **Comparison as a Formal Strategy**

Whether featuring text, voiceover, or taking a non-linguistic approach, an element that runs through the majority of the digital video-essays reviewed for this project is the emphasis on comparison as a formal strategy. As Catherine Grant writes in a Film Studies for Free blog posting accompanying her “Garden of Forking Paths? Hitchcock's *BLACKMAILS*”, the digital video-essay format allows for the creation of “A real-time space for comparison of... sequence(s)” (Grant 2012). Indeed, the format of the video-essay allows the material bodies of multiple films to share the same space, prompting the viewer to discern connections between films as the scenes play out, rather than having to rely on memory or still images. What the format allows for is simultaneous, rather than sequential, comparison; Donald G. Perrin describes the difference:

In sequential montage the meaning of each new image is determined by the *context* of what has gone before. In its temporal aspects, sequential montage is analogous to verbal language, where several elements in series determine the total meaning. Simultaneous images interact upon each other *at the same time*, and this is of significant value in making comparisons and relationships. (Quoted in Grant 2013)

Grant uses Perrin's assertion that “[f]or visual comparisons it seems axiomatic that simultaneous images are more effective than sequentially presented images,” (Quoted in Grant 2013) to argue for the value of “videographic intertextual film studies,” and she is certainly not alone in appreciating the value of this quality of the medium.

Indeed, this approach informs many of these works, whether comparing two films, such as Grant's “True Likeness: On *Peeping Tom* & *Code Unknown*” (2010) or Christopher Heron's “The Rodney King Tape in Cinema” (2012); the works of a single auteur, such as Matt Zoller Seitz' “The

Substance of Style” (2009) series, Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López’ “Screen and Surface, Soft and Hard: The Cinema of Leos Carax” (2013), or Thomas Elsaesser, Anne Bachmann, and Jonas Moberg’s “Bergman Senses”; or comparing material across a broad range of films based around thematic links, such as Nelson Caravajal’s “Moving Picture Mask” (2014), Vashi Nedomansky’s “Evolution of the Dolly Zoom” (2014), or Adrian Martin, Covadonga G. Lahera and Cristina Álvarez López’ “Scream Presence” (2012). The issue with this approach is identifying exactly what kind of scholarly contribution can be said to be made by comparing similar elements across films. Do the comparisons reveal something useful, or is it merely a sense of cinephilic pride that motivates many of these, a presentation of the ability to spot references or borrowed material? Indeed, the line between works that can be classified as “fan compilations” and those that offer genuine critical insight is often unclear. Catherine Grant characterizes “Bergman Senses” as “one of the earliest, most aesthetically and affectively rich, and *densely scholarly* sets of audiovisual film studies...” (Grant 2014 – emphasis mine). Yet one wonders exactly how “Bergman Senses” differs from, say, “Close-ups in P.T. Anderson” (Ali Shirazi 2014) or, for the sake of argument, “The Best of Tarantino - Compilation” a compilation created by Lucas Matias Cristalino and hosted on YouTube, both works composed of a series of clips grouped together without any discernible analytical gesture included, instead functioning mainly to highlight the author’s own personal taste. Is it because the former is compiled by known or celebrated scholars? Is it the exhaustive nature of the work? On a formal level, it seems as if there is not a massive difference, again pointing to the degree that the context of publication influences the reception or perceived value of such works; being presented in tandem with Grant’s laudatory introduction in the online context of *[in]Transition* lends the work a scholarly authority not afforded to similar works which languish on YouTube and similar sites, and demands that the work be taken seriously.

Of the works using the comparative approach, Kogonada’s “What is Neorealism?” stands out

for its precise argument made using a variety of formal techniques unique to the medium of moving images. While just under five minutes in length, Kogonada's argument proceeds at a measured pace, overcoming the overwhelming nature of some video-essays that employ a similar approach. Moreover, Kogonada's work more generally is illustrative of several of the tensions characteristic of the digital video-essay form. Similar to the diverse nature of Christian Keathley's own video work, whose oscillation between cinephilia and scholarship is mentioned above, Kogonada's work exhibits both a scholarly impulse as well as a celebratory, compilation-based one. Works featured on the artist's website include short compilations such as "Kubrick // One-Point Perspective" (2013) and "Wes Anderson // From Above" (2012) consisting of similar shots from each filmmaker's work edited together into a montage and set to music. Kogonada's work has been published online in a number of different contexts, including the *Sight & Sound* website, "Audiovisualcy", and most recently, *[in]Transition*. "What is Neorealism?", originally published in 2013 but included as part of *[in]Transition*'s inaugural issue, is more solidly in the scholarly mode, alongside other works by the artist produced for BFI's *Sight & Sound* website such as "The World according to Koreeda Hirokazu" (2013) and "Linklater // On Cinema & Time" (2013), all featuring accompanying text penned by the author.

In "What is Neorealism?" Kogonada attempts to answer the question posed by the title via a comparison of two films: Vittorio De Sica's *Terminal Station* (1953) and David O. Selznick's re-edited version of the film, released as *Indiscretion of an American Wife* (1953). These works provide a useful way of comprehending the different choices in editing employed by an Italian neorealist director and an American producer intent on making the film marketable in a Hollywood context. While employing a fairly conventional structure – voiceover narration establishing an argument while images serve as evidence/illustration – Kogonada's extensive formal interventions separate "What is Neorealism?" from a vast number of digital video-essays that operate in a similar manner. Switching back and forth

between full, split and multiple screens, Kogonada establishes the divergence between the two edits mainly by presenting them alongside one another simultaneously, allowing the viewer to see the different shot lengths as they play out. A main component of Kogonada's argument is the extent to which shots are permitted to play for longer in De Sica's edit; as such, he freezes the frame in the Selznick version to emphasize cuts. This effect constitutes a halting of the movement of Selznick's film, while the De Sica version continues, lingering on the "in-between" moments that Kogonada argues are constitutive of the neorealist style. Other formal interventions, such as fast-forwarding and rewinding the images, are employed to emphasize the temporal disjunction between the two films. Consequently, what is most obviously revealed by this comparison is the different approach taken by each towards the shaping of cinematic time; while Selznick cuts the action short to "imply", De Sica allows the shots to "endure". Indeed, the amount of formal intervention illustrates the degree to which Kogonada is willing to dissect his objects of study, however, it is interestingly the Selznick version that is most consistently interrupted, emphasizing the maker's presumed preference for the Italian director's original version.

Another aspect that differentiates "What is Neorealism?" from many similar efforts is the tone and structure of the voiceover narration. Keathley notes:

Kogonada's narration does not strive for neutrality or 'aural invisibility'. The low, hurried tone of his delivery evokes a quality of contained urgency, as if he's sharing with us some secret, previously undiscovered, uncanny correspondence between two different films. This narration is not just read; it is performed in a subtle and carefully calibrated way, and this performance sets the tone of mystery, one not similarly achievable in writing, that is maintained throughout the work. (Keathley 2014)

Contrary to Keathley's assertion, and in contrast to the voiceover narration of other digital video-essays, Kogonada adopts a somewhat restrained pace. This unhurried rhythm shows a respect for the

temporal dimension of the medium, allowing the viewer to more easily digest the argument being made. Furthermore, the use of the rhetorical technique of an “experiment” -- what Keathley calls “fictionalizing' a historical event” -- and the tone of the speaker's voice recall the essay film tradition more generally, creating a clash between what is seen and what is heard that approaches the type of reflective engagement linked to the work of canonical film essayists such as Alain Resnais and Chris Marker. The rhetorical “what if?” technique immediately recalls a sequence from the latter filmmakers *Letter From Siberia* (1957), a cornerstone of the essay film tradition. The narrator introduces the sequence by stating that “[a] walk through the streets of Yakutsk isn't going to make you understand Siberia.” Instead, he argues that “[w]hat you need might be an imaginary newsreel shot all over Siberia.” At this point, the image changes to black-and-white, mimicking a newsreel style. As a lengthy series of images is shown, the narrator describes them as what he *would* show the viewer, for example, a series of images depicting outdoor shots of winter is followed by the statement: “My newsreel would begin with these images of winter, a long, white night that lasts half the year.” This technique of describing what one would see, as the viewer is seeing corresponding images, prompts a type of reflective engagement with the images. Do they correspond with the narrator's description? If so, then why frame this series of documentary-style images as imaginary, as a type of daydream-style digression? Kogonada's use of this technique certainly recalls its use throughout the essay film tradition, but it is dubious that a video-essay of such brief duration can engender the same spectatorial relationship as that fostered by longer essay films. *Letter From Siberia*, as well as the films considered in the following chapter, create an experience of viewing that alternates between the display of visual material, the subjective commentary of the narrator, and the insertion of breaks or pauses between disparate sequences, imploring the viewer to step in and actively reflect on how to connect the material presented. The combination of these elements that function to produce the effect of thinking through cinema are formal strategies that characterize the essay film as a distinct tradition. “What is

Neorealism?” fosters an essayistic atmosphere, lending a meditative quality to the material being presented, but stops short of offering a reflective experience. Nonetheless, as a digital video-essay using the comparative approach it succeeds in both arguing and performing a clear point, using the audio-visual properties of the medium to great effect.

### **Augmented Scholarship – Catherine Grant's Videographic Experiments**

Of the traditional scholars engaged in the creation of audio-visual scholarship, Catherine Grant assumes a prominence not only due to her own portfolio of digital video-essays, but also due to her numerous written works focusing on the phenomenon and its place in the discipline of film and moving image studies. Indeed, Grant has done much with her work online to aggregate and curate the diverse assortment of works published online into organized and accessible spaces, allowing the efforts of many filmmakers, bloggers, and scholars to cohere around sites offering a venue for dialogue and exchange. In her own writing, Grant often focuses on the degree to which the act of creating digital video-essays constitutes a valuable research activity, leading to the creation of new knowledge about the works themselves. In “Film and Moving Image Studies: Re-Born Digital? Some Participant Observations”, she writes: “My deep attachment to this form is not only due to its highly compelling qualities as a scholarly object, one that can easily be published and disseminated in innovative ways, but also because of its great potential as a research tool and process” (7). Regarding her work on her first videographic effort entitled “Unsentimental Education: On Claude Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes*” (2009), Grant elucidates how she came to view “videographic approaches as analytical, pedagogical, and *creative* research processes. The more I allowed myself to respond freely to the material as I was experiencing it through the audiovisual, spatiotemporal affordances of my editing programme [...] the more new knowledge about the film I seemed to produce” (Grant 2014, 3). This new knowledge, however, is not something that seems to be translatable into conventional written scholarship. Grant writes of a certain “strangeness” possessed by the object of her study, “one that neither I nor my

students had been able to account for effectively in words,” (2) elsewhere referring to the possibility of “attempting to retain the *feeling* of that charge in the new form of a transformative work” (3). She offers the assertion that making a digital video-essay becomes a way of materializing the knowledge gained from the process. But what exactly does this knowledge consist of? It is clear that Grant has fixated on the moment in question (an actor's direct address to the camera near the ending of Chabrol's film), and she acknowledges her cinephilic investment as motivating her work in this case. Yet it remains unclear as to how exactly this constitutes the creation of knowledge. What is undoubtedly at stake, however, is that the digital video-essay becomes a venue for Grant to re-present an affective dimension of the film that escapes written language. Her experiments with the form allow her to introduce a sensory address alongside her written work, permitting her to select and re-present the moments of the film containing the “charge” she speaks of. Undoubtedly, this is a personal endeavour, as other viewers might not experience the same emotional connection to Grant's “cinephiliac moment” (“Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea,” 2014). However, the multi-media address enabled by online publishing and the digital video-essay form allow Grant to plead her case. Following from this work, many of Grant's videographic efforts can be seen in a similar light, attempting to revisit key moments of emotional or sensory interest and present them in material form alongside a variety of resources published on her various blogs. The video-essay form enables this activity, yet when considered as stand-alone works their contribution to scholarship is perhaps lacking. Grant places her creation in the case of “Unsentimental Education” in a personal context, but in other cases, her works are presented as scholarly without the “personal” disclaimer. Yet the combination of similar abstract, “poetic” leaning works with other resources such as explanatory essays or even relevant quotations allows the total to unify into an immersive multi-media address, allowing for the sensory effect of moving images and sounds to function alongside conventional scholarship, adding an additional dimension to the consumption of this material.

While Grant positions “Unsentimental Education” in relation to her own previous work on the film, other video-essays of hers bear a similar relationship with the work of other scholars. “Rites of Passage: On Joan Fontaine in *Rebecca*” is introduced on Vimeo as “[a] video essay on the liminal moments of the protagonist of *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), played by Joan Fontaine.” If viewed as a stand-alone work, its scholarly function is unclear. The work consists of an assemblage of the “liminal” moments mentioned in Grant's introduction. Bereft of its original dialogue and instead backed with a selection from the film's original score, the video-essay depicts the protagonist framed in doorways, hallways, seated in cars, and other similar in-between spaces. The work certainly testifies to their ubiquity in the film, but does not go beyond simply showing a thematically organized montage of these scenes. Yet the end credits offer a hint at how one might understand the work's function; Grant includes a caption reading “Inspired by the scholarly work of Patricia White.” Indeed, on Grant's “Film Studies for Free” blog where the work was introduced, an interview with White is included amongst the many links to related scholarship. This offers the viewer/reader a chance to explore the connections hinted at in the video-essay and allows the work to function less as a freestanding scholarly work than as a companion piece to other, written efforts. In the case of “Rites of Passage,” the link between the work and its inspiration is not made explicit, only suggesting that there is a relationship between the two, Grant's video-essay offering an audio-visual companion to White's written work. Yet two other video-essays made by Grant make the association increasingly clear. Both “Refashioning the Femme Fatale? *Gilda* in Motion” (2011) and “Mechanised Flights: Memories of HEIDI” (2014) introduce their scholarly inspiration directly into the body of the video-essays, allowing the connection to become explicit.

“Mechanised Flights: Memories of HEIDI” is somewhat of an anomaly in Grant's oeuvre in that the work is presented on Grant's Vimeo page with a substantial amount of accompanying text, more so than what is contained on its accompanying blog post on “FilmAnalytical”. Part of the difficulty in

analyzing works such as these are the often disparate contexts that they circulate in. “Mechanised Flights”, for instance, can be viewed on Vimeo (where it is hosted), Grant's “Film Studies for Free” and “FilmAnalytical” blogs, and FilmIreland.net. While its entry on Vimeo is linked to from each of these spaces, it becomes difficult to grasp which site is its intended or primary site of exhibition, again pointing to the need for curated spaces devoted to the publication of such work. Basing an analysis of “Mechanised Flights” on its appearance on Vimeo allows for a clear context to be discerned which guides a productive interpretation of the work. Grant offers a series of quotations as well as her own introduction accompanying the video-essay. She states that “Mechanised Flights” “is forged from personal reflections on HEIDI (Allan Dwan, 1937), and uses refilmed, cropped, and re-edited digitised sequences from the black and white, and colorised versions of the film” (Grant 2014). Grant includes three quotations that inform the work, citing scholars Gaylyn Studlar, Anne Edwards, and Mathieu Macherey, the latter's words appearing within the video-essay itself. Indeed, the essay begins with Macherey's remark: “Shirley Temple un cyborg? C'est une hypothèse.” This statement alone offers an interpretive framework for Grant's work on the film; Grant's formal interventions include creating a stuttering effect, rendering Heidi's movements onscreen mechanical and disjointed, in this sense performing Macherey's assertion. Additionally, the film's sound has been manipulated with an echo effect, again giving the voices and sounds an inhuman, metallic quality. Yet this quotation alone doesn't explain the selection of scenes that Grant has chosen, or the decision to employ material from both the black-and-white and colourized versions of the film. However, when one considers the other quotations offered in the Vimeo description, a potential reading materializes, allowing what could be seen as an abstract assemblage to assume a scholarly function. Gaylyn Studlar is quoted, and a link to her “Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema” is presented, revealing something about the logic of Grant's choices. In “Mechanised Flights”, two dance sequences are depicted, both in color, as well as a third color sequence featuring Heidi singing, which culminates

in a brief shot of Heidi resting her head on an older-looking boy's shoulder. Following these shots is a black-and-white sequence depicting Heidi being tucked into bed by a grandfatherly figure. What is revealed by these, in conjunction with the thematic notion of girlhood offered by the reference to Studlar's work is the way in which Temple's persona in *Heidi* is divided between representations of girlhood and womanhood, creating a sort of split persona. The elaborately costumed song and dance numbers depict Heidi in make-up and grown up clothes, dancing with men and hinting at romance, while the final scene creates a stark contrast, as Heidi is depicted as being infantile. Grant's use of both colour and black-and-white emphasizes this disjuncture, calling attention to the difference in characterization through formal means. What Grant has done is to re-stage ideas present in existing scholarship via audio-visual means and with a personal dimension, adding an emotional sensibility to the words that the work shares space with. Again, Grant exploits the capabilities of multi-media forms of address, adding the immediate impact of images and sounds to previous discourse, allowing the assertions present within scholarship to be understood and reinforced through the eye and ear.

Grant's "Refashioning the Femme Fatale? Gilda in Motion" functions according to a similar principle as "Mechanised Flights", yet in the case of the former, relevant quotations are introduced directly into the body of the audio-visual work via scrolling text on screen. Called a "video primer," Grant describes the work on her Vimeo page as "a short audiovisual introduction to issues of gender, sexuality and movement in relation to Rita Hayworth's performance as Gilda in Charles Vidor's 1946 film" (Grant 2011). The video-essay consists of Gilda's nightclub performance of "Put the Blame on Mame", with quotations scrolling vertically overtop of the left-hand side of the image. This approach perhaps comes closest to Tom Townsend's naïve characterization of literary criticism mentioned above; a space is created for the re-presentation of both the original fragment of the filmic text, as well as relevant analysis of it. Grant displays impeccable timing in her use of quotations; as Gilda begins to perform the striptease that ends her number, subsequently causing the eruption of a chaotic scene which

prompts the intervention of Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford), Richard Dyer's insight characterizing the femme fatale “as the site of *jouissance*, that delicious but uncontrolled surrender to the libidinal which the hero both wants and can't cope with” (Dyer 1978) is displayed onscreen. By revisiting the work of Dyer and other scholars accompanied with carefully curated visual evidence, Grant offers the viewer a chance to engage in critical viewing practices, forging a connection between the text and relevant commentary in real-time. The end credits feature an extensive bibliography, thus reinforcing the aim of the work as a “primer,” a gateway prompting further investigation. If one looks outside the text of the video-essay and reads the post accompanying the work on Grant's “Film Studies for Free” blog, there exists many links to outside scholarship on the femme fatale and film noir more generally, again showing the work's possible function as an augmentation or re-staging of previous, foundational scholarship, infusing these works with a sensory dimension enabled by the video-essay and online publishing.

What Grant's audio-visual work accomplishes is manifold. Firstly, she uses the medium of online publishing to craft an immersive form of multi-media scholarship. Using the creation of digital video-essays in tandem with other forms of media, she allows these forms to work alongside one another in the same space. Secondly, Grant uses the form to augment or re-stage existing scholarship, whether her own or that of other scholars, adding an audio-visual component that addresses the spectator not solely through language but creates a sensory, affective experience as well. This proves useful in that it allows her to re-present the “charge,” or emotional interest she finds in certain work, yet alongside written material that anchors the images and sounds in more concrete insight. Thirdly, Grant's experimentation with the form is mirrored in her varied use of nomenclature: the names used include “video primer,” “immersive film study,” and “scholarly mash-up,” among others. This diversity indicates that the form has many potential applications, not solely existing as a way of replacing written scholarship. Grant's work can thus be seen as evoking several of the tensions inherent

to this mode of critical filmmaking, attempting to resolve these to some extent in various ways. The tension between language and the sensory dimension of images and sounds is mitigated by clearly indicating how her work relates to written scholarship. The tension between cinephilia and analysis is evoked by her clearly stating the negotiation of this in her “The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea?”, using the audio-visual as a way to investigate and analyze personal reactions to filmic material. Furthermore, Grant's devotion and contributions towards this practice have created spaces for publication and dialogue, fostering the growth of online digital video-essays and linking them with conventional modes of scholarly production.

### **The Pragmatics of Online Space**

A vital part of the interpretation or perceived value of the digital video-essay, as well as its status regarding copyright issues (the use of copyrighted material by works with a scholarly or analytical function is ostensibly allowed under fair use guidelines), has to do with the context in which it is presented. As such, a brief consideration of the spaces, such as *[in]Transition* and “AudioVisualcy,” in which this work is disseminated online becomes necessary. Through a consideration of a number of digital video-essays and the spaces in which they are found, it becomes clear that part of their unique appeal is the extent to which those both within and outside of scholarly circles are able to produce and engage in discussion surrounding these works. Given this, the prominent hub of activity online for the consumption of digital video-essays is “Audiovisualcy.” “Audiovisualcy: Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies” is a group on the online video hosting site Vimeo. The group has a number of moderators, including academics Catherine Grant and Christian Keathley, as well as prolific online video-essayists Nelson Caravajal and Kevin B. Lee. On the group's home page, a mission statement is given, stating that Audiovisualcy is “An online forum for video essays about film and moving image texts, film and moving image studies, and film theory.” Furthermore, the site includes a list of standards that videos located there are required to meet:

Videos published here

- 1) have an analytical, critical, reflexive or scholarly purpose;
- 2) fully attribute all sources used;
- 3) are made according to fair use principles;
- 4) are non-commercial in nature.

“Audiovisualcy’s” strongest contribution is its function as a central aggregator for this type of content online. Featuring some 390 videos and counting, the site includes works whose primary site of publication is elsewhere, meaning that Audiovisualcy exists as a vital central location allowing viewers to keep up-to-date with related content from all over the web as it is published. However, due to the inclusive nature of the site and the layout of Vimeo, there exist several drawbacks to Audiovisualcy as a site of exhibition for such work. A main concern is the lack of space available for accompanying material. While most videos feature a short description and creators may include links to associated materials hosted on other websites, having to navigate elsewhere makes the viewing of these a diffuse process, rather than integrating both text and audio-visual material into a single, unified multi-media address.

Despite Audiovisualcy’s professed mandate, the lack of accompanying material means that some works featured on the site do not have an obvious critical function. For example, Pablo Useros’ “Instructions for Filming a Train” (2014) contains no additional material besides a list of sources. “Instructions for Filming a Train” consists mainly of a triptych of frames within the frame playing fragments from four films. Featuring little text or formal intervention (beyond several freeze-frames), these fragments are assembled into a montage of shots featuring subway trains in motion, and various shots of passengers either boarding, exiting, or riding on trains. While engaging on a visual level, its critical function is uncertain. Is the filmmaker arguing for some kind of similarity across the four films used? This may be the case, but as the clips are not identified as they appear, it becomes impossible for

all but the most familiar with the source material to discern which shots are from which film, rendering any comparative function difficult to grasp. Additionally, Useros refers to “Instructions for Filming a Train” as both a “visual essay” and a “found essay,” further obscuring its function. While it is conceivable that the work could serve a critical or analytical purpose, the lack of additional material renders its value uncertain, thus signalling the need for stricter standards to, at the very least, ensure that these works adhere to fair use guidelines.

The recent arrival of *[in]Transition* serves to potentially remedy some of the issues faced by Audiovisualcy. On the online journal's “About” page, the editors state that “This journal is designed not only as a means to present selected videographic work, but to create a context for understanding it – and validating it – as a new mode of scholarly writing for the discipline of cinema and media studies and related fields.” Additionally, the editors acknowledge that other, similar sites exist, but claim that “none has yet received the disciplinary validation that is accorded to written scholarship.” Judging from the first issue, this process of validation is effected through both the implementation of a peer-review process, and extensive written materials by film and media studies scholars accompanying the works presented. The extent to which written material dominates perhaps dampens the strength of their assertion that the video-essay represents “a new mode of scholarly writing;” however, what is most important to the development of this form is the context that *[in]Transition* has established. The rigorous curatorial process and space of presentation ensures both that works will acknowledge sources in line with academic guidelines, and through the presentation of accompanying written material in the same space the works' function as scholarship is made clear. Furthermore, the inclusion of a comments section, similar to that featured on Audiovisualcy, may foster additional debate and maintain some of the democratic appeal of online platforms.

A detailed look at both the variety of digital video-essays available online and the spaces in which these works are found serves to dispel some of the assertions made in previous literature

surrounding the topic.<sup>10</sup> Firstly, the range of formal approaches utilized by these video-essays as well as the dependence that they often exhibit towards associated material prove that a tendency towards simple categorization is too superficial an approach; indeed, the works are more complex than a structure of two poles can account for, and the context of publication is a vital consideration as well, often expanding the function of the video work itself. Secondly, the audio-visual form need not be restricted to either translating the “norms and traditions of written film studies” nor an idealistic impulse to create “ontologically *new* scholarly forms.” Instead, what can be seen from examining the vast amount of digital video-essays online is the way in which online publishing allows for scholarship to take a multi-media approach, combining audio-visual and text-based forms (neither of which are *new*) to create a meticulously curated and immersive encounter for the reader/viewer (perhaps *user* may be the best term, due to the interactive component afforded by online spaces). What is new (relatively speaking) is the extent to which spaces can be established and manipulated to exhibit various forms of media, spaces that are easily accessible and capable of combining multiple forms within one interface. Whether this capability will lead to the formation of a new form of scholarship remains to be seen, but for the time being the work done by *[in]Transition* and other online journals reveals the possibilities created by the creation of a multimedia scholarly realm. As a final note, the impulse behind the adoption of these works needs to be examined critically, for lurking within these discourses lies a materialistic bent that can be perceived as containing an implicit threat to critical or intellectual activity, the work of thinking as opposed to tangible forms of production. This attitude can be perceived in the *Cinema Journal* teaching dossier referenced above, where an enthusiasm for the benefits of the medium, specifically the tangibility of a production rendered in images and sounds, outweighs a focus on the ideas that this medium may communicate. While the possibilities created by digital technologies

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<sup>10</sup> The main contributors to discourses surrounding the video-essay are Christian Keathley, Catherine Grant, Erlend Lavik, Kevin B. Lee, and Adrian Martin.

are exciting, the celebratory focus on the ability to “materialize” thinking processes exhibited by Grant, Keathley and others is perhaps short-sighted; as with written work, audio-visual criticism should be judged on the insights it provides and its merit as intellectual work, not simply lauded for its material presence.

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## Chapter Two – Essayistic Investigations: Godard, Rappaport, and Andersen's Journeys Through Fiction

In “Jean-Luc Godard, *Cinéaste* of Modern Life: The Poetic in the Historical,” Youssef Ishaghpour foregrounds the emergence of video as a catalyst for making the cinematic archive available for analytical re-assembly: “new video and image techniques... have altered the status of cinema and 'consigned it to history' as a single collection, outside time, of preserved elements available for juxtaposition, shuffling around, collage, manipulation and metamorphosis...” (136). Ishaghpour is of course referring to the project initiated by Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), an ambitious work produced for television, in which the director stages an attempt to, in the most simple terms, tell a history of the twentieth century using fragments of cinema: a history of cinema and the century. Using the availability of cinema's past, through the medium of video, Godard creates a four-and-a-half hour work whose formal strategy consists primarily of the use of complex montage; he combines cinematic quotation, his own footage, images of paintings and photographs, literary quotation, and the director's own textual intervention, delivered in the form of both spoken narration and titles displayed onscreen. The guiding principle at work in *Histoire(s)* is one of collision: following from a long theoretical tradition of cinematic montage, it is the collision of disparate elements that gives *Histoire(s)* its distinctive shape. This juxtaposition is not, however, something which occurs only on the visual plane. What *Histoire(s)* depends on is a dynamic interplay between moving and still images, sound, and written or spoken language, placed together in a non-linear fashion that requires an active, reflective process of viewing to decipher. These formal operations encapsulate what is at stake in the essay film tradition, in which the formation of a thinking address becomes a defining feature.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Corrigan, Timothy. *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Beyond its contribution as a work of film analysis or theory, *Histoire(s)* also points toward an understanding of a distinct mode of critical cinema, in which the cinematic archive is interrogated as evidence, and insight is created through the collision between a foregrounded, thinking subjectivity and cinematic images. The process of thought in these works is delineated through the dynamic interplay between word and image, often employing language in order to prompt a re-appraisal or investigation of the images in question. Furthermore, these works do so over a duration which either approaches or exceeds a traditional feature-length format, allowing for the insertion of reflective gaps, or pauses in the rhythm of exposition, which allow for the process of reflective engagement to develop. Drawing on theories of the essay as form and its manifestation in cinema, it becomes possible to locate Mark Rappaport's *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* and Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* as unique works of film analysis conducted in a mode dependent on the capability for cinematic quotation enabled by video, and furthermore, exploit the dynamic, characteristic of the essay film form, created by the collision between text and image in order to craft a specific mode of cinematic address. These films achieve further distinction from other modes of cinematic analysis due to the non-linear quality of the arguments made. Rather than employing a methodical approach, in which a thesis is established and developed through a linear stream of language with images serving an illustrative role, these works function as a meditation on a topic, using text and image interdependently. To understand the mode in which these films operate, it is worth first considering T.W. Adorno's conception of the essay form; subsequently, a look at the literature surrounding Godard's *Histoire(s)* proves vital to understanding their operations. These references allow for a conception of how *Los Angeles Plays Itself* and *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* stand apart as unique examples of film analysis, both distinct from the contemporary stream of video-essays distributed online, as well as more experimental found-footage

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works that eschew language almost entirely.

T.W. Adorno's "The Essay as Form" offers a radical conception of the essay as a form capable of engendering a unique mode of thought, one which proceeds "methodically unmethodically" to "interweave" an argument "as in a carpet" (161-162). The investigation of objects using this form is heralded as being capable of great political potential: "With regard to scientific procedure and its philosophic grounding as method, the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest consequences from the critique of the system [...] Doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised, in the actual process of thought, almost exclusively by the essay" (157). Adorno later bluntly states that "It is the critique of ideology" (166). In the face of criticism that labels the essay as a parasitic practice,<sup>12</sup> Adorno argues that the validity of the essay form lies in its singular capability to bypass positivist forms of rational thought that inhibit intellectual processes departing from strict linearity. The focus on a fragmentary or discontinuous process or structure is significant, as he sees this as being closer to life; he writes, "It thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over" (164). Furthermore, a strong thrust of Adorno's theorization emphasizes the falseness of claims to coherence, foregrounding the essay as a way to circumvent these pitfalls: "the need arises in the essay as form to annul the theoretically outmoded claims of totality and continuity, and to do so in the concrete procedure of the intellect" (164).

Adorno's laudatory description of the essay form works as a statement defending intellectual activity, the act of interpreting and questioning rather than blindly accepting. In the case of the films discussed below, the justification of such an activity becomes integral, as both *Rock Hudson* and *Los Angeles Plays Itself* ask viewers to read a body of film work against the dominant grain. For Adorno,

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<sup>12</sup> Adorno states that "The essay mirrors what is loved and hated instead of presenting the intellect, on the model of a boundless work ethic, as *creatio ex nihilo*," in contrast to the writing admired by "the academic guild" (151-152).

the necessity of such a process takes on a vital importance, as it is contrasted with the acceptance of dogma or blind faith in reason associated with the rise of Nazism: “The person who interprets instead of unquestionably accepting and categorizing is slapped with the charge of intellectualizing as if with a yellow star; his misled and decadent intelligence is said to subtilize and project meaning where there is nothing to interpret” (152). First published in 1958, still very much in the shadow of World War II, the entire piece exhibits a distrust of rational or empirical thought processes, which Adorno implicitly links with fascism. The mistrust of modes of thinking which do not adhere to methodical reason are commonly allied with ignorance; of the contemporary status of the essay in 1958, Adorno writes:

The hour is more unfavorable to it than ever. It is being crushed between an organized science, on one side, in which everyone presumes to control everyone and everything else, and which excludes, with the sanctimonious praise of 'intuitive' or 'stimulating,' anything that does not conform to the status quo; and, on the other side, by a philosophy that makes do with the empty and abstract residues left aside by the scientific apparatus, residues which then become, for philosophy, the objects of second-degree operations.

(170)

What Adorno seems to envision in this piece is a certain kind of essay, one that drastically departs from more established methods in order to free thought from orthodoxies that hinder the full exploration of objects. He writes: “By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy's secret purpose to keep invisible,” (171) presenting the essay form as a way of bypassing the subterfuge of the dominant ideological structure. Adorno calls for a particular process of investigation which ignores the demands of reason or urge to create a coherent and simplified totality. This type of investigation requires a close analysis of the object of examination: “the essay comes so close to the here and now of the object, up to the point where that object, instead of simply being an object, dissociates itself into those elements in which it has its life” (162). What

does this process reveal? In a passage from *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes a somewhat similar process of investigation, an “over-meticulous” and “repetitive” process that may allow the object in question to “release its illuminations.”<sup>13</sup> What Adorno hints at is similar; the essay's unorthodox approach leads to the rendering visible of elements kept hidden in the service of the dominant ideology.

This process becomes integral in view of the projects of both *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* and *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, which seek to find traces of something that mainstream ideological structures would rather keep hidden. How then might one harness Adorno's conception of the essay when writing about film, to “acquire[...] depth from penetrating deeply into a matter,” (159) when the object of study is inherently elusive, both by its relentless forward movement and by its non-identity with the writing that seeks to “polarize the opaque, to unbind the powers latent in it”? (170) The process of film analysis has traditionally been presented in written language, inherently different than the cinema it seeks to investigate. This difficulty faced by the film analyst seems to prohibit the type of essayistic inquiry sketched out above. How might a critic accomplish an essayistic affront to cliché and reductive causality when the very act of quoting a film in text is impossible? Here it becomes useful to consider those works which attempt to enact the essay form cinematically. Significant theoretical work has already been accomplished regarding the essay film, most notably with the arrival of Timothy Corrigan's *The Essay Film: From Montaigne to Marker*. Corrigan draws on the extensive literary heritage of the essay form in order to arrive at a specific conception of the essayistic as being constituted by “the intersecting activity of personal expression, public experience, and the process of thinking” (14). This focus on process recalls Adorno's thoughts on the form; indeed, Corrigan briefly references Adorno, noting that his relentlessly detailed description of the unique character of the essay

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 10

“offers one of the most resonant models of the essay as it looks forward to the essay film” (23). In theorizing how this form becomes expressed through the film medium, Corrigan offers a definition of the essay film as “(1) a testing of expressive subjectivity through (2) experiential encounters in a public arena, (3) the product of which becomes the figuration of thinking or thought as a cinematic address and a spectatorial response” (30). What comes through as essential to the essayistic encounter for both Corrigan and Adorno is the process of thought, the deep investigation of what an intellect experiences when faced with the public or objective. Indeed, Corrigan notes that “we find in the best essays the difficult, often highly complex – and sometimes seemingly impossible – figure of the self or subjectivity *thinking* in and through a public domain in all its historical, social, and cultural particulars” (17).

Corrigan argues that with the emergence of the photo-essay, “the visual itself begins to acquire the expressivity and instability associated with the verbal realm of the literary voice and now often becomes not oppositional to but an alternative mode of expressivity” (20). Pointing to a 1937 essay written by Henry Luce entitled “The Camera as Essayist,” Corrigan notes the “ability of the image to mimic or usurp the verbal subjectivity of the literary essay,” asserting that in the photo-essay “the construction of images can itself assimilate the role and language of the essayistic commentator” (21). In the essay film, according to Corrigan, the viewer is presented with a dynamic relationship of images and written or verbal language displaying “a world experienced through a thinking mind,” asking the viewers “to *experience* the world in the full intellectual and phenomenological sense of that word” (35). A cinematic investigation of film that approaches Adorno's complex sense of the form can be seen as one that presents the film or films in question as experienced through a thinking mind, the film in all of its dynamic complexity, experienced without the simplification or distortion that may result when evoked through a process of verbal description rather than direct quotation. Furthermore, the added expressivity of the visual adds a further layer of experience to the analysis at stake.

An important example of a work which uses this approach to interrogate the cinema is Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. In *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, which is composed of a lengthy conversation between Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, the filmmaker refers to the trend of “poetic films” to reflect on the relationship between text and image in film. He states that with these films,

there would be poetry or text and then there was simply illustration. You take a poem or a text and you simply put photos or images on it, then you see either that what you've done is banal, that it's worthless, or that the image you add enters into the text and eventually the text, when the time comes, springs from the images, so there's no longer this simple relationship of illustration, and that makes it possible to exercise your capacity to think and reflect and imagine, to create (11).

What Godard points to here is a relationship between image and text that can be seen to inform his own *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. That the process of thought is mentioned in the above quotation is significant as this defines the essayistic as per Corrigan and Adorno's framework, and Ishaghpour's description of *Histoire(s)* works as a succinct paraphrase of Corrigan's third register of the essay film. Taken as a film work that makes an argument *about* film, Godard's *Histoire(s)* stands as a paradigmatic example of an essay film that interrogates cinema, and it is through the literature surrounding this work that a specific register of film analysis can be located. A significant criticism of the work, however, might be that the film is too abstract or difficult, packed with too many references and not enough straightforward exposition to be considered a work of criticism, that instead falls solely on the side of being categorized as a work of art. Such criticism recalls Adorno's thoughts on the suspicion directed toward the form: because it “does not permit its domain to be prescribed,” (152) “The essay... acquires an aesthetic autonomy that is easily criticized as simply borrowed from art, though it distinguishes itself from art through its conceptual character and its claim to truth free from aesthetic semblance” (153). What

Godard has created functions as a work of art, yet the work that *Histoire(s) du cinéma* does undoubtedly tells the viewer something about the films themselves, thus also operating as an analytical inquiry. As a pioneering example of the investigation of film through video, the work needs to be understood on its own terms, those distinct from conventional written forms of scholarship.

Daniel Morgan offers a lengthy analysis of *Histoire(s)* in his *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* that illuminates the work's unique function. There is perhaps some validity to the claim that the work is too difficult, too fragmented, and too chaotic to be useful in providing analytical insight. It is criticisms such as these, specifically those of Jacques Rancière, that Daniel Morgan counters in his discussion of *Histoire(s)* in *Late Godard*. Morgan convincingly establishes the film's validity as a work of film analysis, arguing that Godard does present a coherent argument in a fashion uniquely exploiting the “possibilities of cinema.” In Morgan's analysis of episode 1A of *Histoire(s)*, he determines that the main focus of the episode centres around what Godard presents as the ethical responsibility of cinema. As a result, the analysis conducted via Godard's use of quotation and manipulation of pre-existing films functions to make a specific argument about whether cinema of the twentieth century fulfilled or failed this ethical obligation. Morgan identifies a central claim of *Histoire(s)* as such: “Cinema opened up a mode of seeing that confirms the very existence of the world; it is less a recording of the world than a revelation of that world to a public as a projected film” (178). Thus with this capability to reveal the world to those that inhabit it comes an ethical responsibility, to do justice to this capability by transmitting or revealing crucial information and not avoiding the poignant issues of an era. The ultimate test of this responsibility, according to Godard, was the holocaust; indeed, he argues that cinema had an obligation to represent the horrors of World War II, inform the public of the events occurring in the camps whether through the guise of fiction or via documentary newsreels, “the dual project of preserving the horrors of the world and making them available to a public in a recognizable form” (185). Unfortunately, according to Godard, this was a task which cinema for the most part did

not accomplish.

Through the quotation and manipulation of cinema, Godard does offer an example of what it is capable of. According to Morgan, Godard presents Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) as an example of “what cinema can (and should) do: it takes a traumatic experience of war and transfigures it into narrative fiction, creating a shareable form through which such experiences can be taken up, absorbed, and perhaps understood by a broader audience” (186). An examination of Godard's treatment of *The Birds* in episode 3A indicates something of how this essayistic dynamic operates. A repeated intertitle reading “What is the cinema?” is flashed onscreen. An answer is given: “Nothing.” A following intertitle asks “What does it want?,” followed by “Everything.” A subsequent intertitle reads “What could it be?,” answered by “Something.” These titles are both interspersed with and superimposed on top of images from Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945), *The Birds*, and what appears to be newsreel footage of a concentration camp. The images from *The Birds*, depicting children running from a flock of violent birds, are invaded by an image of a bomber plane. Godard both flickers back and forth between the two images and superimposes one on top of another. This interaction of text and quotation forms an appeal to the viewer to make a connection, to follow the pattern of thought presented. Godard's personal intervention, composed of text, poses a question, and potential or vague answers are given in the form of intertitles and images. *The Birds* is given as a possible answer to the question of what cinema could be, instigating the viewer to reflect on the visual comparison made through the quotation and manipulation of images. Ultimately, the viewer must join Godard's process of thought and perceive what the filmmaker sees in Hitchcock's film. The functioning of this dynamic is integral to Morgan's assertion that it is through films like *The Birds* that cinema accomplishes its ethical mission. The interaction between language and image in episode 3A allows *The Birds* to be understood as “a form of thinking that is able to produce genuine historical knowledge through the images it creates” (191). Furthermore, the placement of *The Birds* between newsreel footage of the camps and a

black and white image of an unknown starlet's face function to locate Hitchcock's film as a kind of middle ground between documentary images of horror and pure visual spectacle. The blending of documentary and fictional elements through Godard's manipulation of *The Birds* supports this reading, indicating that a film of this nature has resonance as both a work of fiction and as a form of historical representation. If the images of fictional works are investigated as documentary evidence of something, they point to an attempt at using a filmed narrative to re-stage an experience of the horrors of war, instead of serving to efface these events, or to distract the public through entertainment.

While *Histoire(s)* may require effort to interpret, it overcomes the problems of writing about film in a way that transcends simply offering images to illustrate a spoken or written text, instead presenting images, sounds and words in mutually dependent interplay. The answers to the questions posed by the film aren't simply given through text onscreen or spoken narration; instead, they require an active involvement on the viewer's part to connect the material presented. Through the use of the direct quotation of cinema that video allows, *Histoire(s)* attempts to achieve the closeness and aesthetic unity that epitomizes the essay form as theorized above. Furthermore, it accomplishes something that text cannot do, presenting the film image in its entirety, not reduced by the act of description, instead “reflecting the object without doing violence to it” (Adorno 169). As Ishaghpour claims, “Every time an image appears a mass of connections, interferences and resonances spring up around it,” (25) yet these necessarily include both those that Godard creates through montage as well as allowing the viewer freedom to interrogate the image on their own, to forge their own connections in real time. *Histoire(s)* may incur criticism for “its lack of that solidity which science demands,” (Adorno 168) yet as Ishaghpour mentions, it functions to counter the rigid processes of method, demanding “on the contrary a history that rejects the idea of continuous development and uses a structure that accentuates fissures and jumps to liberate the unrealized forces contained in the past” (23). This general structure points to a specific register of essay films: those that approach the film images of the past as evidence,

transgressing the boundary between documentary and fiction; forge a dynamic, non-linear mode of address through the combination of text, image and sound; and seek to prompt viewers to rethink the relationship between cinema and historical reality, interrogating images in view of an ethical obligation to convey a specific reality.

In “Mark Rappaport's notes on *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*,” the director offers a lucid summary of the conditions informing the creation of his film, specifically, the perceived debt that *Rock Hudson* owes to an intellectual climate informed by critical theory. Rappaport contends that his film may not be indebted to specific articles or theories, but it certainly is indebted to theoretical approaches that have subsequently reached deep into our culture – questions of gender stereotyping, feminist and gay concerns about modes of representation, what an image means, and the different ways in which an image or words, or an image *combined* with words, can be read. Nor could *Rock Hudson* have been made before the invention of that quintessential surplus-capital leisure-time appliance, the VCR. (21)

Furthermore, the director indicates the necessity of the ability for cinematic quotation, a condition enabled by the aforementioned VCR: “The only effective way to confront and critique popular culture is by presenting it in the forms and images in which it first presented itself, not by providing a second-hand description of it” (22). Rappaport stages this encounter between word and image through the combination of a fictional persona and a series of cinematic quotations. Indeed, *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* is structured around an imagined premise: the creation of a Rock Hudson (Eric Farr) character posthumously leading the viewer through a curated selection of his work in order to reveal the presence of Hudson's sexuality throughout his work—a highlights reel of specific moments that indicate Hudson's real sexual identity bleeding into the fiction created by the films. The development of this persona represents the personal, authorial subjectivity that in the essay film performs the “thinking through” of the images presented. The strategy at work is similar to that of *Histoire(s)*: a re-appraisal

of the past, mining the images made available for close study by video in order to discover and present the evidence that they contain. At stake here is Rock Hudson's identity as a gay man; forced to keep his sexuality a secret due to prevailing societal attitudes of the epoch, the fictional Rock investigates the films that he appeared in as a way of offering "irrefutable proof" that this identity was in fact present and depicted in the films, people only had to be aware of what to look for. The collision between the thinking subjectivity and the film images here becomes literalized; Farr is superimposed on top of the film images so that they appear onscreen simultaneously, creating a material connection between the persona created by Rappaport and that which is found throughout the films. It is through the commentary provided by Farr that the viewer is forced to see the images differently, to re-examine potentially familiar images for traces of Hudson's homosexuality.

The motif of re-appraisal, or the mutability or capability of re-reading images is introduced early on in the film. Farr, playing the role of Hudson, remarks that actor Jon Hall's dive from *The Hurricane* (1937) initially inspired him to act, as the dive is shown onscreen. Farr then reports that "[y]ears later, I met a stuntman who told me he did the actual dive. I was bitterly disappointed to learn that it wasn't Hall himself. But by then I had already learned a great deal about the illusory nature of the screen image." As this statement is heard, the dive is shown again, prompting a re-evaluation of the already-seen image with fresh information in mind. Indeed, this brief sequence establishes the central strategy employed by the film: it asks viewers to re-read a selection of ostensibly familiar images. Farr continues by setting up the main tension informing the structure of the film. He offers the fact that the news of Hudson's homosexuality came as a surprise to the public when the actor's death of AIDS was widely publicized, however, "[w]hat I'd like to know is how come everyone didn't know by then. It's not like it wasn't up there on the screen, if you watch the films carefully." Despite this evidence, the public, due to the way in which Hudson was marketed by Hollywood, "insisted on seeing me as some kind of ideal embodiment of American manhood, no matter what happened on the screen." According

to Farr, Hudson was fully aware of, and even consciously presenting gay attitudes or behaviour onscreen; as he claims, “I of course knew, and understood better than anyone else the gay implications in every movie. In fact, I snipped these scenes out and would run them over and over again for my friends in the screening room in my house.” The establishment of this premise frames the film's guiding principle; Farr, acting as Hudson, guides the viewer through this collection of “home movies” as a way of making a case for the assertion that Hudson's identity was out in the open. By interacting directly with the images, Farr explicates their function as evidence, provoking the viewer to reconsider seemingly innocuous moments as possessing deeper implications. The images are presented as direct cinematic quotations for the audience to study, or, as Farr puts it: “[f]or your consideration: my sample reel.” Furthermore, as the film progresses, the evidence accumulates and the viewer is increasingly primed to read the images in a certain way.

*Rock Hudson's Home Movies* is loosely organized into four main sections, each employing a variety of clips as evidence supporting a general argument introduced by Farr. After the actor's introduction, the film focuses on the theme of marriage, male cruising, and Hudson's onscreen friendships with men. These points culminate in what Farr calls an attempt by Hollywood studios to “force me (Hudson) out of the closet”: a consistent use of comedy to “feminize” Hudson, most notably in Howard Hawks' *Man's Favorite Sport* (1964), which Farr argues serves as an extended metaphor for Hudson's offscreen double life. Each general argument is supported by the creation of a dynamic interplay between Farr's voiceover narration, screen presence, and carefully selected clips from Hudson's filmography, edited together to form a dialogue that supports the arguments made by the film through a process of repetition and accumulation.

A clear example of this dynamic can be found during the section which focuses on hidden instances of male cruising behaviour. Farr introduces this section with a brief monologue, beginning while the actor appears superimposed on top of a still image of Hudson. Farr's comments prompt the

audience to understand that the images must be re-evaluated according to certain principles in order for the fragments to serve as evidence of the historical reality (i.e. Hudson's sexuality) that they contain.

Farr argues that:

In guy-girl screen pickups, we know what to look for and listen to, because we're all assumed to be straight, and we're taught the conventions. When guys cruise each other onscreen, because it's so unacceptable in real life, we don't even notice it. It becomes invisible. What does it look like? Let's say it's a fandango of furtive glances, or glances that are held too long. Cryptic remarks, and innuendo-filled propositions. In the 50s and 60s, no one was paying attention. But I was.

This statement is followed by a series of clips punctuated by Farr's remarks, almost functioning like the voice-over commentary track common on today's DVD bonus features. Yet what brings this explication further into the territory of the essayistic is the use of freeze-frames, and pauses in the forward motion of the images, allowing the viewer time to reflect and consider the evidence presented. Rather than judging a fully-formed, linear argument, the viewer is invited to follow Farr's train of thought in the process of developing an argument, engendering an active mode of interrogating the image track in order to perceive the features hinted at by Farr. The actor's presence performs the role of presenting images for consideration, freezing the image at key moments to allow the viewer to investigate what they are seeing in order to weigh the validity of his claims against the very material that he is speaking about. This strategy, reminiscent of Godard's in episode 3A of *Histoire(s)*, takes the form of posing questions, then allowing a clip to play, creating a space for an alert viewer to seek answers. At the end of the section focusing on cruising, over a sequence from a film featuring Hudson meeting his grown son for the first time, Farr asks: "Parental concern, or brazen innuendo?", before repeating the sequence a second time. This segment is followed by another question; overtop of an image of Hudson suggestively stretching, his signature physique barely concealed in a loosely buttoned

shirt, then patting a young boy on the head, Farr asks: “Sexual come-on, or fatherly affection? You tell me.” What is significant is that Farr is not imposing a reading, rather, he suggests an alternative reading while presenting evidence to the viewer so that they may make up their own mind, an appeal for active reflection on the images presented.

The direct re-evaluation of images continues in a later scene, this time centred around the actor's death from AIDS. The sequence again functions through the combination of direct filmic quotations, the dialogue that these clips contain, and Farr's narration. The sequence begins with a scene featuring a conversation between Hudson and an older man. The man asks: “Did you get inoculated?” Hudson, initially unconcerned, appears surprised upon learning that the man thinks he should be immunized against plague. At this point, the image is frozen, a look of panic on Hudson's face. Farr's voice is heard, stating “[p]lague? If it were a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel or play, you'd probably call it foreshadowing. There were situations in some films that I would remember when I was sick and think, how ironic.” This statement ushers in a selection of scenes featuring the actor talking about sickness, various nagging symptoms, and death. Combined here, and following Farr's narration, the scenes attain a type of documentary relevance, appearing to depict Hudson becoming aware of the condition that eventually led to his death. The repurposing of these clips is taken further; in a scene from John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966), a doctor's words to Hudson are overdubbed with a voice stating: “[y]ou were a great star Mr. Hudson. Sorry it all had to end like this.” Farr follows this staged moment of death to offer a meditation on what it means for a movie star to die. Over close-up images of Hudson's youthful face, he states: “I would be young and beautiful forever, frozen by a machine that captures the soul, as well as your youth.” Demonstrating the implications of these words, Farr relates a childhood wish: that time could stand still, allowing Hudson to share the screen with Jon Hall. In a display of the afterlife that video offers, a sequence featuring clips of Hudson and Hall is edited to form a shot-reverse-shot pattern, creating an onscreen dialogue between the two deceased stars that fulfills the stated wish.

From these final sequences it becomes clear that the arguments made in *Rock Hudson* do not take a linear path, using the clips as illustration of an argument laid out verbally. Instead, it is through the complex, often playful, combination of direct cinematic quotation, clever editing choices, and the fictional persona played by Farr that the film's argument proceeds. Using these techniques, an appeal is made for the viewer to share the mode of perception offered by the film, to suspend disbelief, and think through the images along with Farr. It is through the collision of Farr's persona and the archive of clips made manipulable through video that this process becomes possible.

Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* operates according to similar principles, bearing several significant similarities to both *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*. *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is a video work consisting of a complex combination of newsreel footage, voiceover narration, Andersen's own original footage, and of course an innumerable number of quotations from feature films. Like *Histoire(s)* and *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, one gets the sense that the advent of video technology is a prerequisite for the creation of the work, as its elaborate montage betrays the need for both sophisticated editing technology and the availability of a library of film works. The first words spoken on the voiceover track, written by Andersen but read by Encke King, state: "This is the city. Los Angeles, California. They make movies here. I live here. Sometimes I think that gives me the right to criticize the way movies depict my city." These words are heard over a rapid montage of film quotations, identified by titles placed onscreen indicating the film title and year of production. This technique of citation indicates a departure from the methods of Godard and Rappaport, allowing the viewer to understand where the clips are taken from and perhaps better understand their original context. What immediately emerges from the opening narration is the personal nature of the work. Indeed, similar to the strategy used by Rappaport, where a persona is created in order to confront the material taken from films, Andersen also creates a persona represented by the narrator. A dichotomy is set up between the movies' perception and "our" perception; in this

case, a Los Angeles native, allied with the working class, who speaks in a measured, knowing tone, imploring viewers to ignore the mainstream film industry's representation of Los Angeles and instead share his. Here Timothy Corrigan's first two characteristics of the essay film can be identified: the representation of a subjective encounter with a public arena, in this case that of the images of Los Angeles created by the film industry. What also emerges is a specific attitude taken toward cinema. Andersen clearly wishes to distinguish himself from the “they” who make films, presenting a view of the role of cinema that resonates with Godard's; the idea that cinema, as a medium capable of producing images that correspond to reality in some fashion, has an ethical obligation. Morgan argues that for Godard, this correspondence takes the form of a “revelation” of the world to a public, in which case, the cinema has an obligation to do that world justice. In the case of Los Angeles, Andersen argues, cinema has failed, just as Godard claims cinema failed during World War II. While it is obvious that the stakes of the former task do not bear the seriousness of exposing the horrors of concentration camps to the world, the relationship between cinema and reality is consistently interrogated in both films. Both present cinema as having an ethical obligation to the reality it purports to reveal. In Andersen's case, he wonders “if the movies have ever really depicted Los Angeles,” when what he mostly encounters is a “betrayal of... (his) native city.”

Andersen's argument proceeds in a mostly straightforward fashion, yet despite its apparent linearity, the film evinces a sophisticated interplay between the voiceover narration, filmic quotation, and Andersen's own footage that produces the representation of thought or reflection. The general principle at work in Andersen's film bears an affinity with the strategies of *Histoire(s)* and *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*. These works share the common feature of interrogating fragments of cinema, in Andersen's case, searching for the traces of Los Angeles' real history within fictional works. Throughout these works, documentary evidence is extracted from fiction; Andersen notes that his examination of these images is conducted in order to “appreciate fiction films for their documentary

qualities.” Furthermore, while Andersen mines the fictional works of the past for traces of historical reality, he also reveals how the mainstream film industry shapes the reality that it draws from. For example, a McDonald's restaurant and road house occupy real space in the city, yet exist only for their use as film sets, and there exist ever present signs directing crew members to film locations. This dynamic indicates an interplay of the fictional and the real; indeed, Andersen notes that “Los Angeles is where the relation between reality and representation gets muddled.” Here Andersen introduces *A Muddy Romance* (1913), a Mack Sennet film whose plot is constructed around the real draining of a lake, and a building that was constructed for use in a film, later becoming repurposed for use as an office building. Later in the film, this intermingling is again evoked when the documentary nature of Andersen's own footage is revealed: he mentions that the Angel's Flight railway located in Los Angeles' Bunker Hill neighbourhood was destroyed shortly after he had filmed it, revealing the historical quality of these images.

What this brief revelation prompts is a reflection, perhaps redundant at this point in the film, on the documentary nature of all filmed images, that the images Andersen is creating for the purpose of his film enter into the same archival relationship with Los Angeles as the fictional works under consideration. While this capability of the medium is evoked for a specific purpose in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, the stark difference in character between Andersen's footage and the films he quotes prompts reflection on another vital capacity of the medium, what Morgan sees in *Histoire(s)* as film's “capacity to *judge*: it can determine what's important in the historical events it shows and, from there, how best to preserve and make them public as an image. This mode of judgment is what cinema calls thinking, what defines it as '*une forme qui pense*'” (187). This capacity is exhibited by the difference between what the film quotations depict of the Los Angeles landscape, and what is revealed by Andersen's own images, the juxtaposition of which displays the disparity of each judgment made. For example, Andersen employs a quotation from *Miracle Mile* (1989), depicting shots of Willie's Coffee

shop to illustrate the molding of reality effected by Hollywood cinema. In *Miracle Mile's* depiction, the coffee shop is brightly lit, open all night, and a number of people are standing out front, creating a vision of a thriving restaurant with radiant neon signage. Andersen's own shot follows, a static shot of the now-closed location, the lights turned off, no human figures visible. The same location is subject to two different judgments, one emphasizing potential spectacle, the other creating a dilapidated, empty effect. The collision created by the difference between the two shots creates a space for the viewer to reflect, to fill in the gap between the images with their own thoughts. The camera is capable of creating different modes of perception based on what is judged to be important. Here the viewer is allowed the chance to compare Hollywood's vision of Los Angeles with Andersen's vision, both trained on the same location, yet intent on capturing two very different effects.

The process of reflection or contemplation is triggered in *Los Angeles Plays Itself* through the dynamic interplay between multiple registers of expression: the montage of film quotations, newsreel footage, still images, newspaper headlines, Andersen's mostly static shots, and personal consciousness expressed through voiceover narration. Rather than strictly employing a technique of illustration, where the images serve to visually accompany an argument laid out by the spoken text, it is the dynamic relation between these registers that prompts reflection, both representing a subjectivity thinking and inviting the viewer to engage in the process of thought simultaneously. Andersen introduces this dynamic early on in the film. The sequence in question begins with the narrator stating, "if we notice the location, we're not really watching the movie." Over a series of clips from films depicting medium shots of characters in the extreme foreground of the image, the narrator argues: "movies bury their traces, choosing for us what to watch, then moving on to something else." Here the viewer sees this process at work in a clip from *52 Pick-Up* (1986), in which their attention is first directed at a man walking towards the camera, then abruptly ushered to a car crash behind him, the camera switching its focal point to reinforce the shift in attention. This process is described: "They

[movies] do the work of our voluntary attention, and so we must suppress that faculty as we watch. Our involuntary attention must come to the fore. But what if we watch with our voluntary attention, instead of letting the movies direct us?" As the narrator poses this last question, a series of shots from *Blade* (1998) and *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2001) appear onscreen. Both feature a character plunging out of the window of a skyscraper. While the clip from *Blade* features a mobile camera, following the plunging body in motion and directing the viewer's gaze, the second shot is static, allowing the character to fall out of the frame, subsequently lingering on the Los Angeles cityscape. This still shot allows for a moment of reflection, allowing the viewer to supply the obvious answer to the narrator's query, namely that in this case, both Andersen and the viewer shall voluntarily examine the images to uncover what they reveal about his native city. The sequence cues a process of thinking through the film vital to understanding its machinations. Just as Andersen has undoubtedly scrupulously interrogated these films, so must the viewer. As the film progresses, this process of scrutiny is rewarded by the continual appearance of the clichés that Andersen presents as endemic to the representation of Los Angeles in cinema. What Andersen accomplishes in this sequence and throughout *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is to provoke the viewer into thinking along with the film, proposing a way of thinking about movies and asking the viewer to follow along, a process of "testing ideas" (Corrigan) before a constantly changing series of moving images. This process is dependent on the aesthetic unity afforded by the investigation of film using the medium itself. Andersen presents a type of argument impossible to reproduce in written form, where the viewer must trust the author's judgment of the films at stake. Instead, through the use of quotation the viewer is able to judge them on their own terms, in their full aesthetic wholeness.

The development of this mode of thinking in relation to the filmic material presented is developed further in a later sequence of *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, in which Andersen delivers a crucial portion of his argument. If the crux of the film revolves around the idea that the film industry has

created a mostly phony image of “L.A.,” here Andersen presents a compelling explanation. While discussing the representation of suburban Los Angeles in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993), the narrator states: “Altman's condescension toward the outer suburbs suggests the difficulties Hollywood directors face in trying to make a contemporary film about Los Angeles. They know only a small part of the city. And that part has been tapped too often.” While this is heard, a shot from *Short Cuts* depicting a slow panoramic view from a Beverly Hills house is shown; perched above the city, the location is ostensibly a prime spot for observation, yet a mass of deck furniture and shrubbery obscures the camera's view, and virtually nothing of the city is visible. Here the film quotation both supports and expands on the narration. Through a “voluntary” examination of the image, one comes to understand that these directors are in a cloistered position. Isolated high above the “real” city, yet with the false impression of seeing and understanding, these industry types are in fact languishing in placid seclusion. This notion is picked up again during a subsequent discussion of Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Over a shot of Philip Marlowe (Elliot Gould) driving through what appears to be a private country club named Malibu Colony, the narrator says “How can I say this politely? It's hard to make a personal film based on your own experience when you're absurdly overprivileged. You tend not to notice the less fortunate, and that's almost everybody.” From the inside of Marlowe's car, the viewer sees the staff at work, followed by a group of women in gleaming white tennis outfits sauntering along, blissfully ignorant to their privileged status. The success of Andersen's argument is here dependent on the viewer following his process of thought, to confront, inspect, and reflect on the images from his perspective in order to judge the validity of his argument.

By “transgressing the orthodoxy of thought,” in Andersen's case, ruminating over the details of fictional works in order to extract some kind of documentary truth, he reveals traces of the underground, marginalized Los Angeles typically ignored or deliberately effaced by mainstream filmmakers. Standing in contrast to the fictionalized version of “L.A.” created by the Hollywood elite

exists a different city, a “city of walking,” populated by minorities whose presence has been erased by popular cinema. Andersen offers an introduction to a cinema that depicts this near the film's end, when he states that “there is another city, the real downtown, full of people who are apparently invisible to those who say it's deserted after working hours.” Here he offers examples of what he refers to as Los Angeles' neo-realist cinema, one which offers an elaboration of the world whose traces are barely evident throughout the Hollywood depictions of the city (with notable exceptions, such as *Double Indemnity* (1944)). In works such as *The Exiles* (1961), *Bush Mama* (1979), and *Killer of Sheep* (1979), viewers are offered a look into the city lives of underprivileged minorities whose existence is deliberately ignored by the rich, white upper-class responsible for the majority of cinematic representations of Los Angeles. It is through Andersen's thorough examination of fiction that the documentary evidence of this world is found, despite the dominant class's efforts to the contrary. As Andersen points out, the view that “nobody walks or takes the bus” is a rich white person's view, one that has been propagated by the mainstream media. Andersen's essayistic interrogation of these cultural artifacts operates to expose the traces of what has been hidden, namely, the people of downtown Los Angeles and the less glamorous suburbs and the often brutal realities of the lives that they lead.

In summary, Andersen's film functions as a piece of scholarship not unlike those found in text-based academic journals. He presents a coherent, well researched argument with substantial evidence from the films themselves as well as outside sources. Yet by placing his work alongside insights gleaned from *Histoire(s)* and *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, it becomes possible to understand all three films as occupying a unique register of cinematic inquiry. Distinct from the audio-visual criticism found in the variety of online video-essays as well as the found-footage work discussed in the following chapter, these films enact a confrontation between a thinking subjectivity and direct cinematic quotations, creating works that ask viewers to engage in a process of active reflection. This type of engagement with and contemplation of the films is both guided by the viewer's own subjectivity

and that of the consciousness represented by the films. While the acknowledgement of these accomplishments need not serve as a call to action, urging scholars to abandon the written word, the particular capabilities of the film essay must be recognized as a potent and productive way of interrogating the cinematic medium.

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### Chapter Three - Viewing Parataxis: Found-Footage Cinema's Analytical Impulse

When looking at moving image works that reflect back on themselves and cinema more generally in order to generate critical insight, it remains a daunting task to approach works that abandon text or speech entirely in order to function solely as an image and sound based discourse. While many works in the realm of online videographic work purportedly function in this way, it has been revealed that the written word is never very distant, providing an often inescapable means of structuring or guiding interpretation. Yet there does exist a tradition of work that merits inclusion in this study; often found under the umbrella of found-footage filmmaking, these works take advantage of the vastness and availability of the cinematic archive in order to produce dynamic assemblages of filmic material without the addition of written or verbal language. For example, consider Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010), a 24-hour loop consisting of fragments of countless films linked by their thematic focus on time, a work which exploits commercial cinema's tendency to efface the passing of time in order to make the viewer consistently aware of it through a meticulous re-arrangement of its fragments. Or, put more briefly, Marclay constructs a functioning clock from pieces of cinematic time. But is this clever statement all that this work has to offer? How might one explain the fascination with Marclay's *Clock*, a work that compelled some viewers (author included) to camp out for marathon viewing sessions? It becomes clear that works functioning along these lines, collecting fragments of cinema in order to craft assemblages often based on seriality, repetition, and intertextual dialogue have an analytical value. These works are capable of enlightening viewers through primarily visual means as to the machinations of the cinema, whether taken as a conceptual whole or isolated corpus of films, themes, or other groupings. What remains to be done is to conceptualize and trace this tendency, to pinpoint what these works offer in order to understand how they are capable of illuminating and analyzing the mysteries present in the play of light, screen, and sound. This may help clear up (to

revisit a concern from an earlier chapter) how Catherine Grant could conceive of such an assemblage as “densely scholarly.” (Grant 2014) how can one understand these works' capacity to generate knowledge about the cinema? This line of thinking is not meant to assume that criticism or scholarship is the intention or purported function of the works under consideration; rather, a process of recuperation is at stake. First, both Martin Arnold's *Pièce Touchée* and Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* (1969) will be examined as examples of found-footage works that employ material from a single film. Second, works that use material from vast bodies of cinema are considered, including Matthias Müller's *Home Stories* (1990), *Phoenix Tapes* (1999), and Candice Breitz' *Him + Her* (2008). Through a consideration of both the conditions necessary for the creation of these works and theoretical writing that sheds light on the unique function that these found-footage films can serve, it becomes clear that the work of these artists materialize a process of critical viewing and perform this process for spectators. The results are displayed in a visible manner, providing a mode of visual thinking that departs from the linearity of coded language systems. These works perform a process of delayed viewing as delineated by Laura Mulvey, and, following the thoughts of D.N. Rodowick, function as a mode of figural practice anticipating or articulating the contemporary era of images, in which forms of reproduction, simulation, and circulation have hypertrophied. Furthermore, these works perform an interpretation of their source material that aligns with a different conception of the term figural, a specific interpretive method delineated by Erich Auerbach, Adrian Martin, and Nicole Brenez, among others.

To start, two ideas prove vital to approaching this topic. The first is the increased accessibility to cinema's past that the emergence of video and later digital technology have afforded those working in this mode. This accessibility cannot be understated – although the capacity existed previously, the circumstances involved in the production of notable precursors such as *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* and *Rose Hobart* (Joseph Cornell, 1936) are far more exhaustive and time consuming than the present

modus operandi of artists who have access to digital versions of films and computer editing software.<sup>14</sup> The same technologies mentioned above have created a medium for images to circulate quickly and widely, and subsequently, in a screen-dominated culture, images, whether moving or static, have come to serve an increasingly expressive function. One need only note the explosion of image sharing computer applications such as Instagram or Snapchat, or the ubiquity of internet “memes” to understand how the (re)production and dissemination of digital imagery forms an increasingly integral part of contemporary communication. This transformation in the relation between word and image is considered at length in D. N. Rodowick's *Reading the Figural*, in which he uses the term “figural” as a “nomadic concept” (iv) in part used to describe “what the image becomes when freed from the opposition of word to image” (x). Rodowick contends that

The philosophical genealogy producing the Modern era divided the eye from the ear, such that the voice gradually insinuated itself into the place of thought. From the moment that written signs became the simple representation of phonetic sounds, and the voice became the emblem of thought present to itself, the eye began to inhabit a reduced space. The relation of reading to visibility took place as a peculiar displacement: the apprehension of the regular, linear continuum of print disappeared into the vanishing point of the flow of internal 'speech.' In contrast, the figural has exploded, fragmented, and accelerated regimes of visibility. This does not mean that the culture of the book will simply disappear though its forms may change. But its dominance has been displaced, and along with it the nature of our forms of thought, which [...] are inseparable from our collective experience of signs. (68-69)

Rodowick traces a form of thought distinct from those based in text or speech, tying this to the

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<sup>14</sup> The methods of production used by Cornell and Jacobs are described in Eivind Røssaak's “Acts of Delay” and William C. Wees' “The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars,” respectively.

increased circulation of images characteristic of the digital age. In relation to the works under consideration, as these eschew textual explication in favour of a visual address, this new form of thought proves germane, as “[p]ainting, photography, video, and cinema have long proved resistant to models of description and explanation derived from classical semiology” (46). As the function of images shifts increasingly from an illustrative to an expressive one, the emergence of critical film assemblages such as the work of Marclay or Müller is timely. The use of an image-based discourse to approach the “resistant” material in question can be viewed as an appropriate response to the change in “regimes of visibility” noted above. Furthermore, the use of cinematic language to meditate on itself acknowledges that there remains a component to the moving image that escapes written or spoken language. Stemming from these ideas is a sense that visual material, whether moving or static, increasingly comes to occupy a space which eludes written or verbal description, and the meaning of images as they are used points to vast amounts of other, similar images, rather than textual description.

The second, related idea is dependent on revisiting Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Her conception of delayed cinema, and the interactivity and control now associated with digital modes of spectatorship provide an essential first step in conceiving of a theoretical model for approaching the work at stake. Mulvey begins her chapter entitled “Delaying Cinema” by offering a succinct summation of the activity of textual analysis, the process involved in “[f]inding the 'film behind the film'” (145):

In film theory and criticism, delay is the essential process behind textual analysis. The flow of a scene is halted and extracted from the wider flow of narrative development; the scene is broken down into shots and selected frames and further subjected to delay, to repetition and return. In the course of this process, hitherto unexpected meanings can be found hidden in the sequence, as it were, deferred to a point of time in the future when the critic's desire may unearth them. (144)

What Mulvey describes here is the process of investigation, enabled by technologies such as the VCR, DVD player and computer, involved in a close analysis of filmic material. Yet Mulvey's formulation also attains another importance when placed in dialogue with a tradition of found-footage filmmaking. The process of delay, repetition, and return offers a way of understanding the textual operations of the work of Müller, Jacobs, and a host of others: these works often employ fragments of cinema that are subjected to formal manipulations which perform the process described by Mulvey. Traditionally, such a process exists as an early step in the generation of written work. A film is dissected by a critic, and the meanings discovered are then communicated via text, translated into the “regular, linear continuum of speech.” However, what found-footage assemblages of cinema offer is an audio-visual representation of that prior step – how a film *looks* when subjected to a process of critical viewing. This method of communication represents a different form of address, and a unique mode of thought, one that departs from the regularity of written discourse described above by Rodowick. Certainly, a film employing spoken or written dialogue can also represent a mode of thought. However, due to the way in which language exerts a certain signifying authority, the images are often relegated to a subservient or illustrative role. This principle is exemplified in Chris Marker's *Letter From Siberia* (1957), where a brief sequence is shown four times, each time accompanied by a different narration, exhibiting the degree to which language affects the way in which images are perceived. What occurs with these works is altogether different; combinations of images are displayed without a text guiding reading, allowing for meaning to only be discerned through careful visual attention. No text dictates how the images are to be received; instead, the viewer must interrogate the images as they interact onscreen in order to recognize meaning. This method of address brings the eye back from the “reduced space” that it inhabited due to the primacy of written language, foregrounding the importance of the visual to thinking about the cinema; indeed, in the case of the works considered here, the analysis of cinema is rendered a visible process, allowing the operations integral to discovering “unexpected

meanings” to be *seen* rather than *told*.

The works collected on *Martin Arnold: The Cineseizure* (1989-1998) illustrate this operation. Each short film focuses in on small fragments of cinema, subjecting sequences to an extreme version of delay, repetition and return through optical printing, creating a stutter effect. The minute details of a single gesture are replayed again and again, transforming what might be passed over as inconsequential into something that appears wide open for interpretation, performing the detailed slowing down and replaying that can constitute close textual analysis. *Cineseizure* is a collection of three works: *Pièce Touchée* (1989), *Passage À L'Acte* (1993), and *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy* (1998). Out of these works, only the former exhibits a complete lack of spoken or written language. *Pièce Touchée* focuses on a brief 18-second long sequence from *The Human Jungle*, a 1954 Hollywood crime drama. The fragment consists of a typical domestic episode – a wife sits in her living room, reading a magazine, her husband enters, they share a brief kiss and conversation, and walk across the room together. Arnold's formal intervention consists primarily of a back-and forth stutter effect; the scene, in its perpetual jerky motion, is stretched out to a duration of sixteen minutes. Michael Zryd characterizes Arnold's “signature style” as “the technique of forward-and-back looping – images repeated in a kind of two steps forward, one step back pattern – [applied] to banal interstitial sequences from classical Hollywood films, propelling the character through a scene in stuttering slow motion” (“*Alone: Life Wastes Andy Hardy*”). Additionally, in *Pièce Touchée* a churning noise reminiscent of industrial machinery is all that can be heard on the soundtrack. The film's anti-illusionist message is easily discerned; the actors' movements, minutely broken down into a series of jerky fragments, appear strangely choreographed and artificial, such as the matching movement created by the husband's turning head and the turning of the wife's magazine pages, which Arnold repeats several times. Furthermore, his tendency to repeatedly flip the image along its horizontal and vertical axes reveals the extent to which the image can be subjected to an endless variety of manipulations; a rhythmic flipping

of a solitary shot of the wife becomes uncannily similar to a classic countdown film leader. Moreover, the industrial sound points to the manufactured quality of this and similar images; made to appear as natural snippets of American life, the industrialized conditions of their manufacture become evident.

As William C. Wees aptly notes, “This 'game of producing new meanings,' as Arnold has called it, is also a method of analysis and critique, a way of *finding* new meaning hidden behind the immediate, manifest content of Hollywood films” (13). Yet Wees does not expand on this principle, concluding that “[t]he result is an image drained of its Hollywood-manufactured aura and reduced to bits of information that can be reproduced and reorganized in any way Arnold sees fit,” (14) seemingly implying that Arnold has used the source footage as raw material that can be manipulated to serve whatever aim he pleases. Yet even when subjected to transformative intervention, such as the flipping mentioned above, the material still unavoidably reflects on itself, adding another layer to meaning which is already there. Following Mulvey, it can be understood that the signifying material is already concretely present among the images, and Martin's role becomes one of the archaeologist who reveals them. *Pièce Touchée* can be understood as a record of this process, depicting the critic's process of discovery but also visually performing that process for the viewer. Indeed, Arnold's formal strategies can be seen as an extreme example of delay, repetition, and return, making the miniscule details of a seemingly banal action evident. Consider the brief moment where the husband leaves the frame during the couple's extended journey across their living room. The wife appears alone, frightened, recalling a myriad of cinematic moments of domestic terror. Arnold's repeated flipping of the wife's lone figure adds a vertiginous effect, intensifying a brief moment of solitude. *Pièce Touchée* thus functions as a critical viewing of a brief sequence of cinema. As Zryd notes, Arnold's reworking of sequences from previous films bring the repressed aspects of Hollywood cinema to the surface. It is the *how* of this process that needs to be foregrounded, the way that the materialization and performance of a critical viewing process makes these readings available. Arnold's reworking of the original 18-second clip can

be understood as a visible enactment of Mulvey's statement: "by slowing down, freezing or repeating images, key moments and meanings become visible that could not have been perceived when hidden under the narrative flow and the movement of film" (147).

Following from this example, the works considered here can on a base level be seen as the representation of the experience or process of textual analysis, re-presented to viewers, or put differently, the representation of a mind thinking through a film visually, rather than through speech or text. Formal devices such as associative montage, slow-motion or stutter effects, and repetitive editing patterns present the process of close textual analysis visualized. Rather than reporting a selection of findings via a written or spoken text, these works reveal them to the viewer, and reveal the process involved in discovering them. Furthermore, the excess of signifying material present in filmed images means that this analytical process takes place in a different fashion than text, which translates meanings from visual material into coded language. In addition to the processes of recontextualization, détournement, or alternative reception often associated with found-footage practice, Mulvey's theorization of the act of film analysis allows these works to be understood as performing a process of discovery and revelation.

What follows from this simple conceptual framework is the proposal of a particular model of the film experience. Following Vivian Sobchak, whose formulation of the film experience foregrounds the film's role as "viewing" and "signifying subject," here the film must also be considered a consciousness, possessing "the agency of visual, aural, and kinetic experience" (51). Yet in the specific cases considered here, this viewing subject turns its "address of the eye" onto the cinematic products of the past, constituting a mode of cinematic thinking that reflects back onto itself analytically. What these film assemblages come to represent under this schematic is the activity of thought confronted with film images – a mind analytically thinking through the images of cinema. This mind is then presented to the viewer, who in turn can think alongside, in conflict, or in tandem. The film functions

as a thinking consciousness, presenting a way of seeing the material at stake, presenting the interconnections, associations, and ideas revealed through the process of delayed spectatorship in an audio-visual mode: a mode of digressive, associative, fragmented and non-linear thinking unique (perhaps) to the medium. As well as offering a specific way of seeing the world, these films offer a specific way of staging an encounter with cinema.

Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* (1969) offers an extended example of a found-footage film that works in an analytical mode; rather than, as William C. Wees summarily states in "The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films," simply "[a]ppropriating and recontextualizing mass media images" to "challenge and offer alternatives to the conventions and clichés of the dominant media," (4) *Tom, Tom* reveals what is at stake in the construction and operation of the most basic of cinematic functions. Wees argues that the "process of appropriation and critique involves extracting images from the spatial-temporal and narrative continuity in which they were originally embedded and through which they acquired their original, intended meaning(s) and placing them in new contexts shaped by new intentions and new, unconventional artistic techniques" (3). While this general reading of the operations of found-footage films may be in part accurate, part of what makes *Tom, Tom* engaging is the way in which the formal interventions employed promote an analysis and understanding of what is involved in the creation of the original context in which the source material existed. Consequently, Wees' reading of the function of found-footage works proves limiting when applied to *Tom, Tom*. Firstly, Jacobs' film has a self-professed pedagogical function, tying in with the filmmakers' academic career. Jacobs' states that "*Tom, Tom, The Pipers' Son* exemplifies my teaching. A film is shown usually without any introduction. Instead of promiscuously going on to the next, we work at it. Finally, it's shown again straight; there's now a wild rush of newly familiar subtleties. Students learn what it is to know a film" (quoted in Zryd 250). Indeed, that is what *Tom, Tom* essentially does. Taking the original 1905 Biograph film as a starting point, it plays the film

in its original state, followed by a lengthy analytical section consisting of a variety of formal interventions to the image track, and concluding with a repeat of the original film. As Michael Zryd notes, *Tom, Tom* is “perhaps the most celebrated example of an experimental teaching film. Its form literalizes a standard way in which educators teach films in a classroom: show a film, discuss and analyze it, and then watch it again to see how analysis reveals new qualities about the film” (255). This bookended structure also serves to distinguish *Tom, Tom* from the other found-footage works under consideration – the original source of the material is presented alongside Jacobs' manipulated versions, allowing whatever interventions he makes to reflect back on the film in its original state.

However, what Zryd fails to focus on is the fact that this analysis takes place silently, solely through the play of images. How then might its analytical function be understood, if the film lacks the “discuss[ion]” integral to the classroom process of analysis? A look at the circumstances of *Tom, Tom*'s production may help. As Michele Pierson explains in the introduction to *Optic Antics: The Cinema of Ken Jacobs*, *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* was “[m]ade without the use of an optical printer, Jacobs projected the original *Tom, Tom* on a translucent screen and refilmed it” (14). Thus, part of what *Tom, Tom* concretely documents is Jacobs actively watching the film. This process is described in more detail by Eivind Røssaak in “Acts of Delay: The Play Between Stillness and Motion in *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*”:

Two people actively took part in the production of the film: a person operating a projector behind the screen (Jacobs), and a camera operator (Jacobs and his friend Jordan Meyers) in front of it. Jacobs used an RCA home sound-projector with a hand-controllable clutch that allowed for slowing and even stopping the film. Jacobs directed the activities and edited the material in postproduction. (99)

What becomes clear from this description is the notion that Jacobs was orchestrating a process of delayed spectatorship that predates the development of technologies such as the VCR and DVD player.

The operations of delay, repetition, and return form the analytical section of *Tom, Tom* and are thus re-presented upon viewing the film. Jacobs' interventions on the original *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* include playing the image in slow-motion or freezing it entirely, zooming in on sections of the image or panning across the screen, operations which replicate the act of close, analytical viewing. The insights gained by this detailed process point in two major directions. The first involves the narrative action of this obscure, pre-classical film. In a great degree of the literature focusing on *Tom, Tom*, much is made of how Jacobs brings previously unseen details of the film's action to light in a type of archaeological gesture. For example, Røssaak describes Jacobs' contribution thusly: "He goes right to the core of the films' narrative and focuses on the pragmatics of plot: highlighting, pedagogically, two somewhat hidden details – the mysterious exchange between a boy and the juggler (what happens here?) and a cardinal event, a boy is given the pig" (100). This expository function, presenting details that may go unnoticed is certainly a function of the film, but *Tom, Tom* also goes beyond simply informing the viewer that there is more to the original film than they might have thought. Another reading of the film points away from its content and towards its interrogation of the cinematic medium itself. As Michele Pierson writes, "Throughout most of the 1970s and into the 1980s, [P. Adams] Sitney's analysis of *Tom, Tom* as an important, if complex, example of structural film, was especially important for the development of a critical vocabulary for engaging with the formal challenges of the film" (14).<sup>15</sup> Pierson herself dismisses this reading, foregrounding the film's primary function as an "archaeological uncovering of the riotous plenitude of early cinema" (15). Yet part of what makes *Tom, Tom* so fascinating as an analytical film is the interplay between a focus on the narrative operations of its source material and the apparatus that makes this source material come alive.

In "Recycling, Visual Study, Expanded Theory – Ken Jacobs, Theorist, or: The Long Song of

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<sup>15</sup> In *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, Sitney states: "Because of the directness of the mechanism he employs, *Tom, Tom* must be grouped with the structural films..." (344).

the Sons,” Nicole Brenez offers a reading that points toward the dual function that *Tom, Tom* serves. Using the framework of the “visual study,” a form that “involves a direct, face-to-face encounter between a 'ready-made' image and a figurative project which comments upon it,” (161) Brenez offers a summary of Jacobs' strategy: “Jacobs studies the integrality of filmic movement: movement in the image, movement of the image, and also movement of the celluloid support” (164). Brenez develops this thesis into a taxonomy of the movements that Jacobs studies, arguing that “Jacobs detects the profoundly *unformed* nature of the cinematic imprint, which is conventionally taken as faithful and analogical” (165). Her reading provides a lens through which to view *Tom, Tom*, and importantly, offers a way of resolving the split in focus characterizing other literature, which often seeks to focus on either form or content to the exclusion of the other. For what emerges from viewing the film with Brenez' thoughts in mind is its function of revealing the radical contingency or fragility of cinematic operation. Indeed, much of the film's duration is devoted to a play between the recognizable and abstract based on the degree of zoom, or speed of projection employed. As Sitney contends, Jacobs “transformed an old American Film into a modernist work, not by re-editing it and showing through a filter but by re-photographing it at different speeds, accenting the grain, and indeed performing a series of operations on it...” (331). At several points in the film, the screen depicts abstract patterns of light and darkness, yet these quickly become recognizable figures when the focus is sharpened, or Jacobs' camera zooms out, or the speed of projection is increased. In this meticulous investigation, Jacobs does reveal details that escape notice when viewed at regular size and speed, but this process also resonates more generally; what he ultimately displays is what the photographic image is composed of, and how the movements required to make images recognizable are exact and very easily disturbed. By playing with the frame rate, focus, and zoom, Jacobs makes evident what is required in order for cinema to work as a medium, the variety of operations that are required in order to transform patterns of light and darkness into discernible, recognizable figures. Any slight change in the conditions of viewing render

content unrecognizable, exposing the interrelation between content and the form that seeks to capture it, but also exposing cinema as a delicate operation, contingent on multiple factors working in tandem in order to produce a convincing illusion of reality.

Yet *Tom, Tom*, for all its brilliant and close “visual study,” is culled from one source, clearly indicating its point of departure. The later found-footage works of Müller, Breitz and others operate in a decidedly different manner, representing a unique approach to the audio-visual investigation of cinema. While still functioning as a performance of critical viewing or a “visual study,” these works also tap into another aspect of the critical process. Mulvey states that “[t]he process of repetition and return involves stretching out the cinematic image to allow space and time for associative thought, reflection on resonance and connotation, the identification of visual clues, the interpretation of cinematic form and style, and, ultimately, personal reverie” (147). These mental operations become material in later works that draw footage from a multitude of films, visualizing a process of associative thought based in images. As both the works of Martin Arnold and *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* draw their material from a single film, an understanding of their operation can be gained through the concept of a performance of the act of delay, repetition, and return; a critical mind thinking through the images of a film text. However, films such as Müller's *Home Stories* use material from multiple films, editing footage together to form assemblages based on similarity, seriality, and repetition. The mode of thought characteristic of this form of address falls under what D.N. Rodowick calls the “figural,” following from a shift in the character of representation effected by the emergence of new technologies. As Rodowick explains, “[w]herever analog information is replaced by the digital, the copy is disordered by simulation, and wherever physical distribution is replaced by electronic storage, retrieval, and retransmission, there one will find the figural” (49). In part, what Rodowick describes is an exaggerated version of the changes affecting the circulation of images caused by the advent of mechanical reproduction. Furthermore, the character of the figural as Rodowick delineates it bears a

striking resemblance to the textual operations of a number of the found-footage works under consideration here, tying their mode of address to the contemporary moment.

Rodowick asserts that “the figural is meant to describe a distinct mutation in the character of contemporary forms of representation, information, and communication” (49). Relating this transformation to digital forms of transmission by quoting Michel Foucault, Rodowick specifies the importance of seriality in this formulation:

Resemblance belongs to the era of representation. It is governed by an originary authority, an authenticating model that orders and ranks all the copies that can be derived from it. Conversely, the similar is unleashed in a temporal continuum without origin or finality. Governed only by seriality, the similar multiplies vectors 'that can be followed in one direction as easily as another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences.' (67)

What follows from this formulation is a way of understanding the gestures made by the work at stake. Due to the access granted to filmmakers by the digital or analog storage of cinema's past, found-footage assemblages offer an exposition of the figural relations evident throughout bodies of film works, employing a visual mode of thought to render these similarities visible. Rather than working from the “originary authority” of a single film text, these works often employ a mode of address wherein analysis of an image takes place by reference to associative chains of other, similar images. Rodowick asks: “What new 'elements' – as concepts or possibilities of thought and imagination – will be created?” (69). The change in the nature of critical investigation between precursors such as *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*, which clearly works from an originary referent, and later works such as *The Phoenix Tapes* (1999), which abandon the original narrative context of the works in question, illustrate the shift from resemblance to similarity; furthermore, they represent a different mode of thinking about cinema, where reference to other, similar works becomes integral to the process of understanding.

Before examining these works, however, it is worth noting that the term “figural” or “figure” has also been used in a variety of other academic literature, using the term to denote an altogether different conceptual terrain than Rodowick. Indeed, Adrian Martin's short book entitled *Last Day Every Day: Figural Thinking from Auerbach and Kracauer to Agamben and Brenez* traces the lineage of this particular term from earlier usages in the work of Siegfried Kracauer, among others, to its current incarnation, mainly found throughout the work of scholar Nicole Brenez. From Martin's attempt to discern exactly what Brenez means by her usage of the term, it becomes clear that it encompasses vast terrain. Martin never exactly arrives at a succinct definition; as he states, “[i]n her work, quite deliberately it seems to me, Brenez never defines the concept of figure in any direct, simple, clear way” (7), ending his book with a somewhat cryptic email from Brenez that in a sense undoes the work that Martin performs throughout his book in attempting to clarify the concept. Nonetheless, in the work of Martin and others, there does exist aspects of the figural which are helpful in gaining a clearer conception of the unique analytical function that these found-footage assemblages offer.

Near the conclusion of *Last Day Every Day*, Martin offers three ways in which figural thinking can be conceived of in relation to artistic production and criticism. The first is a particular historical form of scriptural interpretation delineated by Erich Auerbach in his 1938 essay entitled “Figura.” Tracing a variety of usages of the term throughout history, Auerbach primarily focuses on the meaning of figura as a form of interpretation. Auerbach states that “*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relation between the two events is revealed by an accord or similarity” (29). Expanding on the last point, he explains that “[o]ften vague similarities in the structure of events or in their attendant circumstances suffice to make the *figura* recognizable; to find it, one had to be determined to interpret it in a certain way” (29). In order to explain the historical purpose of such a method of interpretation, Auerbach adds: “At all events the aim

of this sort of interpretation was to show that the persons and events of the Old Testament were prefigurations of the New Testament and its history of salvation” (30). Yet there exists another stage – these events, tied together by virtue of similarity, are incomplete, pointing towards future fulfillment. Auerbach summarizes this relation:

Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event. (58)

Thus, put simply, figura refers to the relation between events, based on similarity, that refer to one another, but also to something beyond that is yet to come. The second of Martin's conclusions posits the figural as a particular type of artistic practice, or process of thinking informing artistic creation, that “beyond its historical moment, remains always latent, possible, virtual – something that rises up, in new forms, sometimes surprisingly” (26). Here Martin identifies Jean-Luc Godard, Douglas Sirk, and Josef Von Sternberg as purveyors of “weighty figural styles” (27). Martin explains this in the case of the latter, whose 1930 *The Blue Angel* uses figural ideas as “a purposive artistic schema: quite literally, a procession of figures... laid out in repetitive configurations of plot and pictorial diagrams of entrapment, circularity, or itinerary-like sideways-mobile progressions” (22). The third, according to Martin, is “vigorously pursued by” William D. Rott in his “For Criticism,” and involves placing figural interpretation as integral to the act of criticism, which serves the function of the act of judgment that fulfills or redeems the figural relation: perhaps that “something else” that both events refer to. As Martin puts it, “[c]riticism is what fulfills the work of art, raises it up, redeems it – and also completes it, finishes it off, closing it down in the finality of the figural circuit as Auerbach first traced it. Or is the closure so very total, after all?” (27). What Martin is likely referring to is Rott's assertion that “if on

one level the figure is fulfilled in the text, on another the text itself (and thus the figure) is fulfilled only in its interpretation. If the artist *acts* as God the Creator, the critic, as much or more than the artist, *comprehends* something in the manner of God the Adjudicator” (“For Criticism”). Yet, as is clear from the longstanding critical fascination with countless canonical texts, this points to a perpetually continuing chain of fulfillment; consequently, as Martin's question implies, this act of comprehension does not constitute a final judgment.

Strongly related to these conceptions of figural thinking, as well as the principles undergirding the found-footage work in question is Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927-1929), which, although initiated well before the technologies that Rodowick implicates in the explosion of the figural, operates in a similar manner, indicating that perhaps a shift toward such an image-based mode of thinking took root far earlier. Comprised of a series of 79 panels featuring hundreds of photographic reproductions of artworks, Warburg's *Atlas* functions as a performance of art history, abandoning text completely in order to trace a lineage of figures through the use of photographic collage. Similar to the concept of the figural as sketched out by Rodowick, *Mnemosyne Atlas* operates according to a principle of similarity; each panel features a constellation of reproductions illustrating similarity and association across wide expanses of history. In Philippe-Alain Michaud's *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, he identifies the link between Warburg's collage practice and cinematic montage, uniting both as an image-based mode of thinking. Michaud states: “[u]nder the intersecting light of texts and films, a shift occurs in the order of discourse that will lead us to see cinema less as a spectacle than as a form of thought and to see art history as practiced by Warburg as research directed less towards a knowledge of the past than toward its reproduction” (40). In both Warburg's *Atlas* and the work considered here, there exists a performative impulse. Instead of translating into language ideas issuing from the combination of images, whether united through collage or cinematic montage, the guiding principle is one of collage, allowing images to resonate based on similarity or juxtaposition without the imposition of a structuring

text. This principle allows for the development of a process of thought based on series of images, exploiting connections among material experience visually and not a mode of thought based around a voice. Indeed, Michaud describes Warburg's process of arrangement as something akin to the montage aesthetic characteristic of found-footage assemblages: “In arranging the images on the black cloth of the panels of his atlas, Warburg was attempting to activate dynamic properties that would be latent if considered individually” (253). The panels function as a visualization of a type of mental activity; similar to the way in which a found-footage work such as *Pièce Touchée* can be seen as representing a mind performing the process of delay, repetition, and return essential to the textual analysis of cinema, Michaud understands Warburg's collage work as “a composite construction conjoining a physical experience of space and certain mental operations (associations, memories, repetitions, focalizations) [...] [the panel] is developed like an interior monologue; it is the chronicle of thoughts and associations that went through the historians mind as he worked” (258). These thoughts and associations are presented in visible form, addressing the eye's capacity to recognize similarity and difference among images in order to present an analytical visual experience.

Thus, *Mnemosyne Atlas* constitutes an early, non-cinematic example of an image-based, figural mode of thinking, and the insights developed by Michaud shed light on the project initiated by these cinematic works: an attempt to stage a performance of cinematic analysis that renders visible a variety of mental operations. Michaud certainly recognizes *Mnemosyne Atlas'* affinity with avant-garde cinema; indeed, he offers Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) as Warburg's closest companion.<sup>16</sup> Yet *Histoire(s)* employs text to a large degree, and Godard's own presence is foregrounded throughout, marking a significant departure from the project initiated by *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Many of the insights generated by Godard's film stem from the collision of text and image, a defining feature of a tradition of essay filmmaking that André Bazin termed “horizontal” or “lateral”

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<sup>16</sup> In *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, p.262

montage.<sup>17</sup> As Warburg's *Atlas* is summarily described as “the project of founding an art history without a text,” thus representing “a critique of the supremacy of language in the genesis of meaning,” (272) the work in fact bears a greater resemblance to the critical work performed by the found-footage assemblages considered here. Just as the advent of photographic reproduction enabled the flattening of multimedia forms collected and juxtaposed in Warburg's panels, technologies such as video and digital storage enable the relatively easy creation of cinematic assemblages. Both projects are united in their movement away from language and into a mode of thinking based on images and a form of address based on visibility. Furthermore, Michaud also notes how the project initiated by *Mnemosyne Atlas* problematizes the position of the artist vis-a-vis the historian as well as the creator as subject more generally. He offers two consequences of Warburg's method of performing art history:

the 'despecification' of discourse (indeed, this precise separation between the poet and the non-poet does not seem at all possible to me), which makes it possible to recharacterize the metadiscursive discourse of the historian or the philosopher as a form of authentic poetic expression; and an implicit critique of the philosophy of the subject: the author is less the master of his words than he is a receptive surface, a photosensitive plate on which texts or images surging up from the past reveal themselves. (260)

This model of authorship and artistic practice offers a way of viewing the works made by filmmakers primarily viewed as artists rather than critics; the recognition that metadiscourse can constitute artistic expression vital to understanding work that may be approached primarily as poetic expression rather than analytical insight. Additionally, the image of a “photosensitive plate” resonates nicely with the concept of a thinking cinema: the consciousness that a film presents, whose series of images function as thoughts or chains of associated ideas. In light of these conceptions of the figural, how then can the found-footage assemblage work performed by films such as *Home Stories* and the *Phoenix Tapes* be

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<sup>17</sup> In “Bazin on Marker,” 1958 – translated into English 2003.

considered? These works, exploiting *figures* present across multiple film texts in serial form, organized into systems of similarity and repetition, function as forms of figural interpretation, yet a specific type that both discerns figures and forms a figural discourse themselves through the image-based mode of address that they represent. As was established regarding *Tom, Tom* and the works of Martin Arnold, these function as a performance of the critical process of delay, repetition, and return, but also function as a figural performance of figural interpretation.

Matthias Müller's *Home Stories*, a celebrated and widely written about example of found-footage practice, exemplifies how this process works. Comprised of fragments of a number of Hollywood studio productions edited together to form a sequence depicting domestic terror and escape, *Home Stories* exploits the repetition of gestures, actions, and similarities of character, framing, lighting and mise-en-scène to construct a form of metanarrative. Each shot is extracted from its original narrative context and inserted into the loose narrative of *Home Stories*. On the surface, this gesture can be taken as an act of re-appropriation, but interestingly, *Home Stories* also reveals how visual similarities resonate across specific film texts, demonstrating the extent to which these similar sequences recall and speak to one another, how the process of close viewing necessarily involves an interaction with a wide variety of films. *Home Stories* shows how conventions repeat themselves and signal to one another, forming a web of associations; indeed, Müller reveals the extent to which films haunt one another, and visual and narrative codes and conventions complement and refer to one another across a wide body of work. As their sources are united primarily by genre, Müller and Schaefer provide insight into the way that genre conventions operate in the process of viewing. As visual codes are established and recycled, part of the way that genre films are understood by viewers is contingent on familiarity with previous works. *Home Stories* performs this aspect of spectatorship: it visualizes the associations made with other, similar material that become integral to understanding the codified operations of genre cinema.

Based on a different organizational principle than the one informing *Home Stories*, Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet's *Phoenix Tapes* illustrates how a re-edited assemblage of Alfred Hitchcock's corpus of film work can function both as a performance of the process of analytical viewing and a figural form of visual thinking. Produced in conjunction with the Oxford Museum of Modern Art's 1999 exhibition *Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, the *Phoenix Tapes* are comprised of an assemblage of fragments culled from 40 of the director's films, and organized into six discrete chapters. What this structure accomplishes is to focus each assemblage around a general thematic principle, providing viewers with a loose means of forming an interpretation. Yet despite this structure, the *Phoenix Tapes* features no other additional text or dialogue beyond what is found in the original films. The chapters vary from relatively straightforward montages based on similarity, to slightly more abstract segments. Pointing backwards to the project initiated by Warburg's *Atlas*, the *Phoenix Tapes* also functions as a performance of figural thinking. However, unlike the *Atlas*, which only approaches or evokes cinematic montage, the *Phoenix Tapes* offers a performative cinematic consciousness, making use of the motion, sound, and fixed duration that the *Atlas* lacks. Rather than a panel of images, dependent on the viewer's travelling gaze to connect them, cinematic montage presents images successively and with a fixed order and duration, this operating as a discrete consciousness engaged in a forward-moving process of thought.

The first two chapters of the *Phoenix Tapes* exemplify this approach, forming a complementary pair: first focusing on the large-scale world of Hitchcock's depiction of landscape and setting and subsequently the smaller-scale realm of objects, hands, and text. Additionally, through the use of editing these chapters strip Hitchcock's oeuvre of one of its defining features, virtually negating the recognizable faces of stars from the images. Chapter one of the *Phoenix Tapes*, entitled "Rutland," consists mostly of a series of landscape shots, separated from each other by portions of black leader. The work leaves an immediate impression of isolation or eeriness; indeed, what the viewer is

confronted with are Hitchcock's settings, mostly devoid of character or dialogue. This process of selection serves the function of extracting something vital from the images; removed from their position within narrative, these locales which in their original context are so pregnant with suspense, significance, or symbolic value are transformed into something banal, lonely, and anxiety provoking. The human figures that do escape Müller's exacting shears are never shown close-up; instead they are mostly depicted with their backs turned, standing around in an unsure manner, or walking away from the camera, framed in high-angle shots. The almost still landscape shots coupled with the segments of black leader lend this first assemblage the fragmentary character of a home slide show, typically presenting quotidian fare such as family vacation snapshots, further removing the images from the context from which they came. Foreboding music is coupled with the sound of footsteps, contributing to a sense of ominous anticipation that is never satisfied. "Rutland" presents a series of shots that accomplishes a performance of Hitchcock's dynamics of space, a general sense of anxiety issuing from the uncertainty of location depicted. As the figures, minute when compared to their environment, navigate these isolated expanses of space, there exists a repeated sense of unease not dependent on any specific event, running through *North by Northwest's* (1959) iconic cornfield sequence to the empty facade of apartments from *Rear Window* (1954). In each, a minute flicker of life briefly stirs – Roger O. Thornhill (Cary Grant) dwarfed by unfamiliar rurality or Lars Thorwald's (Raymond Burr) cigarette – a miniscule hint of human activity obscured by an empty, large expanse of uncertain space. A particular analytic lens is employed here, ignoring what is arguably most memorable about the source material in favour of a meditation on the particular linkage between physical space and uncertainty employed throughout the director's work. Yet as assembled here, unlike the original films, this suspense is never satisfied or resolved: the viewer remains in a perpetual anticipatory state, restaging, over and over again, the mechanism by which this effect is achieved.

Chapter 2, entitled "Burden of Proof," marks a stark contrast to the guiding principle evident in

“Rutland.” While the first chapter is primarily concerned with setting, “Burden of Proof” narrows in on the importance of micro-activity: the play of text, objects, hands, and the actions resulting from their combination onscreen. Again, no faces are shown, instead, a series of images revolving around the manipulation of significant, memorable objects, yet removed from the narratives in which they signify. Across a large variety of films there are collected instances of repetition, the close-up movements of hands concealing keys, breaking glasses, holding knives, and so forth, revealing the extent to which the narratives of a number of Hitchcock's films turn around small objects. Yet removed from these narratives, the effect becomes one of empty pantomime: the gestures, devoid of purpose or linkage to human figures, seem overly ornate and contrived. An associative principle is at work – objects and gestures recur, such as the aforementioned series of hand gestures as well as close-ups of newspapers, phonebooks, and telephone dials. Furthermore, the repetition of similar, narratively significant gestures reveals how uniquely cinematic these techniques of exposition are, emphasizing the extent to which Hitchcock's films allow story events to unfold on a minute scale, only accessible in close-up format by the film camera.

The first two chapters of the *Phoenix Tapes* offer assemblages of visually or thematically similar material, edited into montages based primarily on serial repetition. Firstly, this gesture displays the interrelation existing throughout the director's work, how ideas conveyed visually are returned to again and again. This recurrence of gestures, objects, and dynamics of person and place function as a form of figural interpretation along the lines of Auerbach and Martin. Collected in this fashion, it becomes evident how these gestures exist in an intertextual dialogue with one another. Alicia Huberman's (Ingrid Bergman) poisoned coffee from *Notorious* points forward to the sleeping pill-laced coffee from *Frenzy* (1972), both existing as separate film events, yet both referring to or recalling one another. In the figural structure, these fragments assume the place of connected events, incomplete in a sense, pointing towards a “something else.” The availability of similar images, both in a general sense as a

result of the proliferation of images characteristic of digital media circulation, but also made material through the *Phoenix Tapes*, points to the repetitive nature of Hitchcock's image repertoire, the way in which concepts are revisited and revised. According to the figural structure, these sets of relations point to a type of fulfillment. In Auerbach's sense, this fulfillment arrives on the day of judgment, but in a secular sense has been interpreted by Routt as the critical interpretation that completes the work. Yet that is not the only method of interpretation that the figural structure affords. What becomes evident from watching the *Phoenix Tapes* is the way in which these related image events point to a greater entity, the figure of Hitchcock: the consciousness, or visual thinking that runs throughout his body of work. This relation becomes actualized through the associative links, depicted visually throughout the *Tapes*, that run throughout the director's work, indicative of a larger entity that informs each individual film, but is not contained by any specific one. Rather, what becomes evident is the degree to which the films contain stages of ideas, or figures, subject to variation and revision throughout Hitchcock's oeuvre.

An interesting formulation pointing to how one might consider this gesture is offered by Warwick Mules in "The Figural as Interface in Film and the New Media: Review of 'Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media' by D. N. Rodowick." Drawing on the work of Routt, Mules notes that "[r]eading the figural is to read the past in the present; to read with the 'pastness' of the text as a prefiguring of something beyond what the text says in its normative, denotative mode of signification. All texts have figures, since all texts have a past, or at least point to a past as the very materiality of their signification" (par. III). Mules' characterization of figural analysis sheds light on aspects of the work performed by the *Phoenix Tapes*. Laid out in repetitive fashion, the *Tapes* display how the above process occurs, how the events of Hitchcock's films point to other, similar events, past and present, through his entire body of work and beyond. The film visualizes the 'pastness' that these events contain by depicting the similar, connected events that they refer to; however, as all of the films

used occupy the past, the connections point forward as well, as the single events of a film point forwards to similar future events as well. This interconnectedness becomes part of their signifying power. For example, in the third chapter of the *Tapes*, entitled “Why Don't You Love Me,” scenes depicting the mother/child relationship from a number of Hitchcock's films are intercut with one another based on a repetition of similar visual actions and phrases. The effect of this montage is the development of an audio-visual portrait of an archetypal Hitchcockian mother figure that exceeds what is presented in any single film. By placing scenes from *The Birds* (1963), *Psycho* (1960), and *Notorious* (1946) into dialogue with one another, edited with continuity techniques that allow shots from each film to seamlessly interact, the traits of each film's mother merge with each other, creating an image of a controlling, sinister figure operating within and beyond the films. Additionally, by adding fragments of Dr. Fred Richmond's (Simon Oakland) analysis of Norman Bates' (Anthony Perkins) relationship with his mother to the compilation, the insights relayed in *Psycho* reflect on circumstances depicted in the other films, displaying the interchangeable nature of these representations.

Christa Blumlinger notes that the films of Matthias Müller “present themselves as ruins due to their fragmentary and discontinuous nature” (69). This emphasis on the ruin, remains left over after neglect or destruction, recalls a passage from Adrian Martin: “In Kracauer’s account of Benjamin, the earthly world, ‘*obscured and obstructed,*’ must be ‘smash(ed) in order to reach the essentialities. [...] The present of ‘living constructs and phenomena’ in Benjamin seems ‘jumbled like a dream, whereas once they are in a state of disintegration they become clearer’” (17). Müller, working with the fragments of films gleaned from a process of destruction or disintegration, uses the pieces to then present significant relations running through vast bodies of work, compiled in order to make those relations clear. In *Home Stories*, according to Blumlinger, the fragments, rearranged as a “catalogue of motifs,” (69) serve to “reveal... the mechanism of the dramatizing effect,” (71) showing “how strongly conventionalized these presentations in classical cinema are” (73). Additionally, this reading can also

illuminate what is at stake in the *Phoenix Tapes*, where the assemblage of Hitchcockian ruins allows for essential strategies of representation to be visually discerned. Looking at Blumlinger's insights through the lens of a figural set up, the serial assemblages refer to one another, but also to a larger ideological or social structure informing the production of these classical works. Yet while obviously this is not a particularly new concept, the way in which this analysis is performed is unique, exploiting visual similarity amongst a wide range of fragments of cinema to produce a *visible* understanding of the thinking that informs these images.

Candice Breitz's *Him + Her* operates in a similar fashion to the *Phoenix Tapes*, culling material from a variety of feature films in order to make a compilation based on repetition, seriality, and similarity. But while the *Phoenix Tapes* functions as a type of auteurist analysis, *Him + Her* is distinguished by its dual focus on two Hollywood stars, Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep respectively. *Him + Her* is a multi-screen installation work whose primary site of exhibition is the contemporary art gallery, but is also viewable on the artist's website. The work is composed of two panels featuring seven screens organized into three columns, exhibited in separate rooms. Clips of each star are edited digitally to remove any background or extraneous material from their source films; the end result is a multitude of clips featuring each star framed by a black background, and the central focus becomes their performance. Breitz constructs her work so that clips of each star form a type of dialogue with one another. The spatial arrangement of the installation allows for multiple images of each actor to appear simultaneously, and each of the seven screens alternates between complete blackness and an image of the star, appearing in a variety of different configurations. This layout emphasizes the effect of dialogue, as the images can interact with one another simultaneously rather than successively; indeed, multiple iterations of Streep or Nicholson may appear at the same time, often creating the effect that the images are speaking to each other. The actual content of each star's dialogue is loosely organized thematically. In *Her*, for instance, Streep's topic of conversation focuses mainly on issues

concerning relationships with men: the trials of marriage, father issues, disappointment, divorce, infidelity, and the sacrifices that her characters make. What resonates throughout these depictions is the extent to which issues, phrases, and gestures repeat themselves across the actor's vast career. Organized thusly, Streep's unique performances throughout countless films become part of one master performance. Due to the inclusive title and the everyday nature of the content, *Her* could be understood as pointing outwards from the films themselves and becoming something that refers to a kind of archetypal or conventional female experience. The description featured on the National Gallery of Canada's website foregrounds this reading, stating that "Over the course of viewing, the work's protagonists undergo a transformation from iconic faces recognizable through the characters they play, to gender types attributable to the words they say" ("Candice Breitz: *Him + Her*"). Yet it is arguable whether this transformation actually occurs: do viewers actually forget who is speaking in reaction to what is being said? Regardless, both *Him + Her* also refer to a general aspect of the star as a phenomenon; the tension between character, actor, and celebrity persona that find their locus in the star's image. Similar to the blending of narratives evident in *Home Stories*, where conventions of mise-en-scène and performance allow for films to bleed into one another through a process of association made visible, Breitz materializes the way in which a star's performances bleed into one another, the baggage of other performances following them throughout their career. In a figural set-up along the lines of Auerbach, these various performances, by virtue of similarity, refer to one another across filmic texts, perhaps only finding fulfillment in the type of expansive exegesis of star persona compiled by Breitz. But more interestingly, what Breitz approaches with *Him + Her* is something that exists in the gap between character and star, the space between absorption in a film's narrative and the recognition of a celebrity who comes complete with their own set of characteristics attained through previous roles and real life, here depicted through an actualization of the type of associative, analytical thought that comprises a critical process of viewing.

Breitz's configuration also bears a striking resemblance to another type of figural interpretation delineated by Adrian Martin. Martin quotes Paul Ricoeur's formulation of human maturation, which includes a passage stating: "The figures in a dialectical teleology are not final causes but meanings which draw their sense from the movement of totalisation which carries them along and pushes them ahead of themselves" (4). Martin uses Ricoeur's formulation

to focus, cinematically, on the specific kind of movement that Ricoeur proposes: a movement in stages, a kind of staggered movement, with milestones all along the way. These are the figures, these pit stops of Being (station to station), and the individual becomes, takes on, comes into, some particular stage of his personality of her destiny – except that this identity or destiny is never fixed in advance. (4)

The sense of development in stages, or figures, clarifies the movement of a star's persona through the stages of films as represented in *Him + Her*. Furthermore, this becomes increasingly clear when depicted visually, as both stars appear at different ages or states of maturity as they inhabit different characters throughout each installation, making tangible a sense of movement. Later in his book, when discussing Nicole Brenez's analysis of John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959), Martin contends that "the shadows of Cassavetes' film – 'silhouettes, contours, obscurities of form' – are studies, works in progress, people or situations or relations constantly under construction, this reminiscent of the earlier definition cited just above, the figure as that which 'forever remains to be constituted'" (9). From this perspective, the collection of guises captured in Breitz's installation forms, in a sense, a constellation of visual essays: attempts at depicting something that are never fully satisfactory, always necessitating subsequent attempts. It is here that *Him + Her* connects strongly with the *Phoenix Tapes*, in that both serve as a record of multiple attempts to capture something that, by virtue of its continued repetition, remains forever out of reach. This gesture results in a visual catalogue of similarity that always points to something larger, a chain of attempts, no single one definitive.

Nicole Brenez reminds us that,

Etymologically, 'theory' signifies *defilé*—the contemplative gaze of the spectator at what passes before his/her eyes. And, at this level, there is no greater discipline than cinema—this discipline of syntax and parataxis—to reflect upon, practice, and experiment with the question of *défilement*, the modes and forms by which every kind of phenomena (frames, shots, motifs, thoughts, affects) are joined, linked, fused, stratified, sedimented, discerned, and appropriated. (172-173)

Here Brenez offers a visual conception of theory, which finds in cinema its medium of expression. It is this conception of *défilement* that the work of Müller and Breitz acts upon, generating insight through the seemingly endless re-coordination of visual material. Addressed to a “contemplative gaze,” these assembled fragments prove powerful, operating on a different principle from analyses conducted through verbal or written means. What these works achieve is a mode of address that seizes upon the image-saturation of contemporary culture in order to make meaning; put differently, the found-footage film communicates via an overwhelming abundance of visual materials, yet re-organized according to a principle of similarity and repetition. From the experience of viewing these assemblages, something is gained: the relations among images resonate, but also what these images lack. The result becomes an indication of what the images hint at, in short, the figural relation points ahead to fulfillment. The found-footage work considered above functions to make a critical process visible, allowing viewers to confront an analytical consciousness thinking through images. As habits of media consumption, communication, and artistic creation change, and more and more time is devoted to interaction with a variety of image-bearing screens, the relation between culture and a variety of imagery evolves. The assemblages of pre-existing cinematic fragments considered throughout this chapter represent an attempt at making sense of this excess of visible material, articulating an increasingly prevalent mode of thought, or relation to a visual world, that escapes attempts at verbal expression. What results is an

endless play of images, responding to the culture of the screen on its own terms.

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## Conclusion

Starting from the concerns expressed by Bellour, Foucault, Godard, and others, the principle guiding this project was the general question: if it is currently a relatively simple process to produce analyses of cinema using the medium itself, utilizing the capability for direct quotation and a spectatorial address that conforms to the medium under consideration, why is such an approach not yet commonplace? Consequently, what do the existing examples of such work have to offer, and do they expand ideas of what constitutes film criticism? In order to gain an understanding of the answer to these questions, a wide net was cast in order to consider a broad variety of audio-visual criticism, expanding the scope of previous studies in order to include works from a variety of different contexts, both in terms of their date of production and circumstance of exhibition or publication. From this study, three main conclusions arise regarding each area of activity considered. There need not be only one strategy employed in order for such work to be considered productive; indeed, there exist benefits to a number of distinct approaches. What does unite the works considered in this thesis is that there must exist a willingness to accept their strategies as deserving of attention.

The first approach identified exists in the current range of video-essays appearing online on sites such as “AudioVisualcy,” *[in]Transition*, “KeyFrame,” and a variety of others. There are significant benefits to this variety of work, including its accessibility, and the fact that many of these sites include sections devoted to commentary, allowing for dialogue around the works to develop. Yet the main benefit that can be identified from a broad survey of these online video-essays is the degree to which the internet has fostered the capability for a unified multi-media experience to exist, combining the immediate affective quality of sound and image with the more concrete signification of language, without one being subordinate to the other. Video-essays can be accessed in the same space as still images, written essays, and links to further scholarship, allowing for the analysis of film to achieve an

immersive quality that is unprecedented. Furthermore, something of the emotional impact of cinema can be relayed to spectators as a direct quotation alongside written work, no longer subjected to the medial flattening of entirely text-based works. Through the combination of these available elements, arguments can be tailored in countless ways, employing audio-visual material to imbue written work with an immediate affective dimension. What this reveals is that the boundaries between media forms are increasingly dissolving in online platforms that combine multiple modes of expression, and one is increasingly able to craft works that employ various media forms in tandem. The digital video-essay is very much a part of this phenomenon, which remains fertile ground for experimentation; multi-media works such as Adrian Martin's "A Walk Through Carlito's Way" point towards the capabilities that such an address affords.

The variety of video-essays that exist online, however, are almost entirely of a relatively short duration. Yet outside of the context of the internet there are examples of works which conduct analyses of cinema audio-visually, doing so over a period of time that approaches or exceeds a feature-length duration. The question then becomes, do these works inhabit a different register? Are there unique benefits to such works? The films discussed in chapter two create a spectatorial experience distinct in character from the variety of video-essays found online. The temporal structure adopted by works such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, and *Los Angeles Plays Itself* allow time for meditation, as time to digest the material being presented is programmed into the body of the films themselves. Here the mode of operation falls under what has been characterized as the essay film, a type of cinematic practice that extends principles of the essay form into an audio-visual manifestation. A look at the principles informing *Histoire(s)* enables the establishment of a unique paradigm evident in audio-visual criticism. Here the defining features include a foregrounded subjectivity, the dynamic interplay of language and image, and a rupture of the boundary between fiction and documentary modes, where in each case, fictional images are investigated for their potential value as concrete

documentary evidence. In these works, the insertion of gaps or pauses in the flow of images and sound form an appeal to the spectator, asking viewers to actively reflect on what they have seen and heard, to connect the disparate elements presented by the film, and to actively question the meaning of what they have seen. The result transcends using images to illustrate claims being made through language, instead employing them as a crucial ingredient in a dynamic collision of fragments.

Yet there also exists a tradition of filmmaking that departs from both the above strategies, virtually abandoning the written or spoken word entirely. There exist several found-footage filmmakers that use mainstream cinema as their source material, crafting works that manipulate pieces of films to create a variety of effects. There is the approach taken in Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* and Martin Arnold's *Pièce Touchée*, both of which subject a single film to a process of close analysis using formal techniques such as slow-motion, degrees of zoom, reverse motion, and so forth. The results can be interpreted as a visible representation of a film subjected to a process of close analytical viewing, made visible for spectators. There also exist found-footage works such as those produced by Matthias Müller and Candice Breitz that take the performative element a step further, introducing the series of associations to other, similar filmic material that arise during the analytical process. These connections become visible in complex montage works such as *Home Stories*, *Phoenix Tapes*, and *Him + Her*, which reveal the repetition of similarity evident across large bodies of film work, but also reveal how the signifying structures of films unavoidably include resonances from other, similar works. While the analysis of cinema may not be the primary, intended meaning of such works, it remains that they are capable of generating genuine insight, unavoidably reflecting back onto their source material, and as such should be recognized for their contributions in this area. As Phillipe-Alain Michaud contends regarding Aby Warburg, the act of criticism can be seen as genuine artistic creation; consequently, the critical insights generated by the work of these artists should not be overlooked in favour of whatever personal expressions exist in their films. As the online realm allows works such as

these to be accessed relatively easily, these found-footage assemblages should be included amongst the discourse surrounding audio-visual criticism.

In summary, the multiple approaches to the study of cinema conducted through audio-visual formats provides a way of producing knowledge about the cinema that is not possible using the written word. The ability for direct cinematic quotation coupled with the formal capabilities of the medium allows for the creation of an expanded notion of what exactly cinematic analysis can consist of. Rather than knowledge laid out in language, *telling* readers what to think, these works form an appeal for knowledge to be gained through audio-visual experience, letting the activity of the eyes and ears come to the forefront. It remains to be seen whether more scholars will adopt such an address, or whether audio-visual criticism will be left on the fringes of serious discourse; however, as the dominance of the screen as a destination for all media becomes more entrenched, it seems unavoidable that the nature of scholarship will continue to change as a result. As such, the establishment of dedicated spaces for the dissemination of audio-visual criticism is necessary in order to fully reap the benefits of the knowledge that they offer.