

Sensuous Methodologies

The Audiovisual Essay in Film & Moving Image Studies

Catherine Grant (University of Sussex)



VIDEOGRAPHIC FILM STUDIES

Creative, critical, performative film studies
practices of **reframing** or **remixing** film and
moving image excerpts



VIDEOGRAPHIC FILM STUDIES

... which are published/distributed online in digital **videographic forms** which situate themselves along a **spectrum** running from 'explanatory' through to 'poetic'.



... "[T]he repressed film culture that gave rise to film studies has returned with a vengeance."

Mark Betz, 'Little Books', in Lee Grieveson and Haydee Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 319-341.



On the space and time new digital affordances (e.g. DVD remote controls) seem to offer

“for associative thought, [for] reflection on resonance and connotation, [for] the identification of visual clues, the interpretation of cinematic form and style, and, ultimately, personal reverie.”

Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second* (2006), 146-147.

christian keathley
jason mittell

The Videographic Essay Criticism in Sound & Image

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A must-read for all scholars, teachers and video makers interested in using moving images to understand moving images. The book not only forms a blueprint for how to develop skills in 'videographic essay' production, but also provides a window into the future of film and media studies as a discipline. Including essential creative and practical advice by leading practitioners in the field, this book is sure to play a key role in the advancement of this exciting new approach to film and media studies.

— Richard Misek, University of Kent

Read a review of *The Videographic Essay* in [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#).

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The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image

Christian Keathley (Middlebury College) and Jason
Mittell (Middlebury College)

with contributions by Eric Faden, Catherine Grant and Kevin
B. Lee

View the videographic criticism produced by participants in the
[Scholarship in Sound and Image](#) workshop and discussed in the
book, along with related resources.

The last decade has seen extraordinary developments in the multimedia presentation of cinema and moving image scholarship via the form that is commonly known as the 'video essay'. What the finest examples of this videographic criticism have made clear is that such work allows for and even demands a different rhetoric than written film scholarship, which can in turn transform how we engage with and study cinematic texts. Some of the form's alternative rhetorical approaches to the traditional scholarly goal of producing knowledge were tested in summer 2015 at an NEH-funded workshop, 'Scholarship in Sound and Image', organised by Christian Keathley and Jason Mittell at Middlebury College in Vermont. There, fourteen international scholars gathered to experiment with the new form. This volume grows out of that workshop.

presentation of cinema and moving image scholarship in a form commonly known as the 'video essay'. What the finest examples of this videographic criticism have made clear is that such work allows for and even demands a different rhetoric than written film scholarship, transforming how we engage with and study cinematic texts. Some of these approaches were tested in summer 2015 at an NEH-funded workshop at Middlebury College. This volume grows out of that workshop. With special focus on the practice and pedagogy of videographic production, it describes the assignments that were designed to both stimulate work and teach technology. It also addresses issues such as the professional validation of videographic work and copyright and fair use. Also featured are original contributions by Eric Faden, Catherine Grant and Kevin B. Lee. This unique volume will be of great value to teachers, students, critics and videomakers. A companion page on the caboose site features videos produced by participants during the workshop.

A must-read for a scholars, teachers and video makers interested in using moving images to understand moving images, this book provides a window into the future of film and media studies and is sure to play a key role in the advancement of this exciting new approach to the field.

—Richard Misek, University of Kent

CHRISTIAN KEATHLEY is Associate Professor and Chair of Film & Media Culture at Middlebury College. He is the author of *Cinephilia and History*, or *The Wind in the Trees*. His videographic work has been screened at a number of international events.

The Videographic Essay

Criticism in Sound & Image

The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image

by Jason Mittell

Begin with "Videographic Exercises"

<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/videographic-essay/index>

THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY

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“ The essay freely associates what can be found associated in the freely chosen object. It does not insist stubbornly on a realm transcending all mediations. ”

T.W. Adorno,
'The Essay as Form' (1958)

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Practice and Theory in Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies

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*Winner of 2015 Anne Friedberg Innovative Scholarship Award of Distinction
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Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies, 3.3, 2016



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Quantum Haunting  from Kevin L. Ferguson  on Vimeo .

Review by Shane Denson (Stanford University)

Hauntology, spectrality, ghostly agencies of a time “out of joint” – these Derridean concepts serve in Kevin L. Ferguson’s video essay “Quantum Haunting” simultaneously as a thematic focus and as a formal principle of construction. That is, the spatiotemporal “bleed” and the blurring of boundaries between here and there, now and then, are at once the object of Ferguson’s analysis (and of the films he looks at in this analysis) as well as the aesthetic effect or quality of its presentation: ghostliness describes



Curator's Note

Hauntology, or the spectral turn: while its brief moment of fashion as a bit of critical theory quickly came and went a decade ago, current popular cinema has yet to give up the ghost, foregrounding moments of spectral fascination that blur a formerly reliable division between the concepts of presence and absence. Jacques Derrida, punning on “ontology,” first coined the term to describe the lingering effect of Marxism on the West (“a spectre is haunting Europe” et cetera), but as Fredric Jameson explained later, hauntology nags our culture more broadly with the idea that “the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be” and that we would do well to attend to the ghost as a neither present nor absent figure of incomprehensible otherness. Thus, hauntology is not simply about a belief in literal ghosts, and Derrida’s recurring example, Hamlet’s lament that “the time is out of joint,” instead captures the deeply unsettling experience of a haunted existence.

Curiously, in recent popular releases like *Interstellar*, *Blackhat*, and *Ant-Man*, this not-here-but-not-gone haunting spectrality is associated with and arises from a kind of pop cultural quantum mysticism. Plot points about time travel, gravity, relativity, the atom, and higher dimensions demonstrate a renewed fascination with describing and explaining atomic and subatomic worlds and their relationship to our own from a semi-scientific point of view that conservatively attempts, but ultimately fails, to posit humanistic values of love, family, and memory as triumphant over the alienating science of quantum mechanics.

For instance, in *Interstellar*, the hero bends space-time in order to haunt his daughter from a higher-dimensional future and reunite with her. In *Blackhat*, the hacker “ghostman” enters a nuclear facility destroyed by a computer hacking that was visualized at the atomic level. In *Ant-Man*, the hero’s sacrifice for his daughter threatens to leave him haunting the subatomic world forever, like his predecessor The Wasp.

SIDE-BY-SIDE | UP-AND-DOWN

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TO TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA STUDIES**

<https://vimeo.com/161220866>

RICH (TEXT) OBJECTS?

”...a **hybrid form**—existing somewhere **between reading and watching**, like various **computer-related activities**—is part of what seems forward-looking about them. Developments in fragmented, mosaic forms of print criticism can be spotted elsewhere [...] What all these forms of criticism suggest is not merely a **less linear way of approaching film experience** but also a more **interactive methodology**.”

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
MOVING IMAGE SOURCE

UN/CONTAINED

<https://vimeo.com/93840128>

Beyond Tautology? Audio-Visual Film Criticism

Catherine Grant

Volume 40, Issue 1, January 2016

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0040.113>

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8

...that "necessary labour of description," once the "ekphrastic" domain of words alone...is inevitably changing its procedures or contours: ...it is the economy of critical word to illustrative image, the balance and weighting of their respective functions, that is slowly altering...

—Adrian Martin [\[1\]](#)

UN/CONTAINED: A Video Essay on Andrea Arnold's ...



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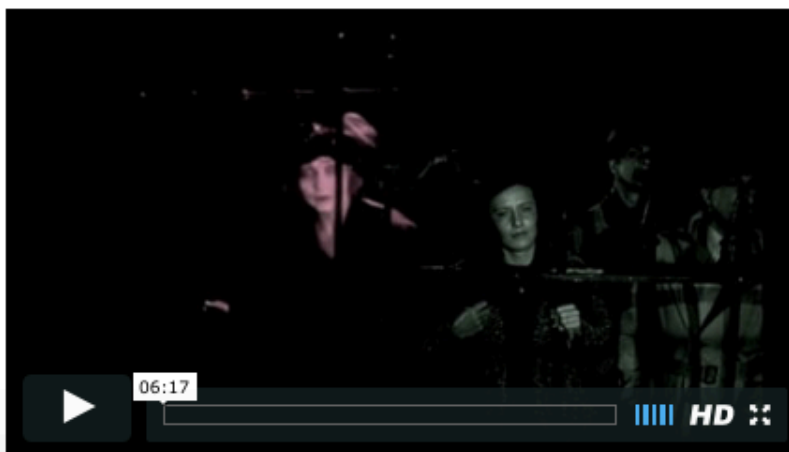
The Marriages of Laurel Dallas: Or, The Maternal Melodrama of the Unknown Feminist Film Spectator

By Catherine Grant

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I have formulated the field of feminine communication effected by the film screen, as allegorized by the lit window at the end of *Stella Dallas*, as a search for the mother's gaze.

STANLEY CAVELL¹

This double vision seems typical of the experience of most female spectators at the movies.

LINDA WILLIAMS²

The film's mysterious and ambiguous ending leaves us not knowing what the heroine has become and not knowing what to feel in the face of her happiness.

WILLIAM ROTHMAN³

I made "The Marriages of Laurel Dallas," my comparative study ([above](#)) of the cinematic build up to two tear-jerking moments—one long enshrined, and much argued over, in maternal melodrama studies—shortly after I saw the silent version of *Stella Dallas* for the first time. I had always assumed that the two earliest film adaptations of Olive Higgins Prouty's 1922 novel, from which the sequences in my video are drawn, would be quite different from one another in their *mise-en-scène*; I knew, at least, that they were made on either side of the divide between silent and sound cinema. I was also familiar with the view of film historian Christian Viviani, expressed in a footnote to his chapter "Who is Without Sin? The Maternal Melodrama in American Film, 1930-39" (in Gledhill's *Home is Where the Heart Is*): "King Vidor's [1937] film follows quite faithfully the plot of Henry King's [1925] version. Only their very different approaches help distinguish between the two films."⁴

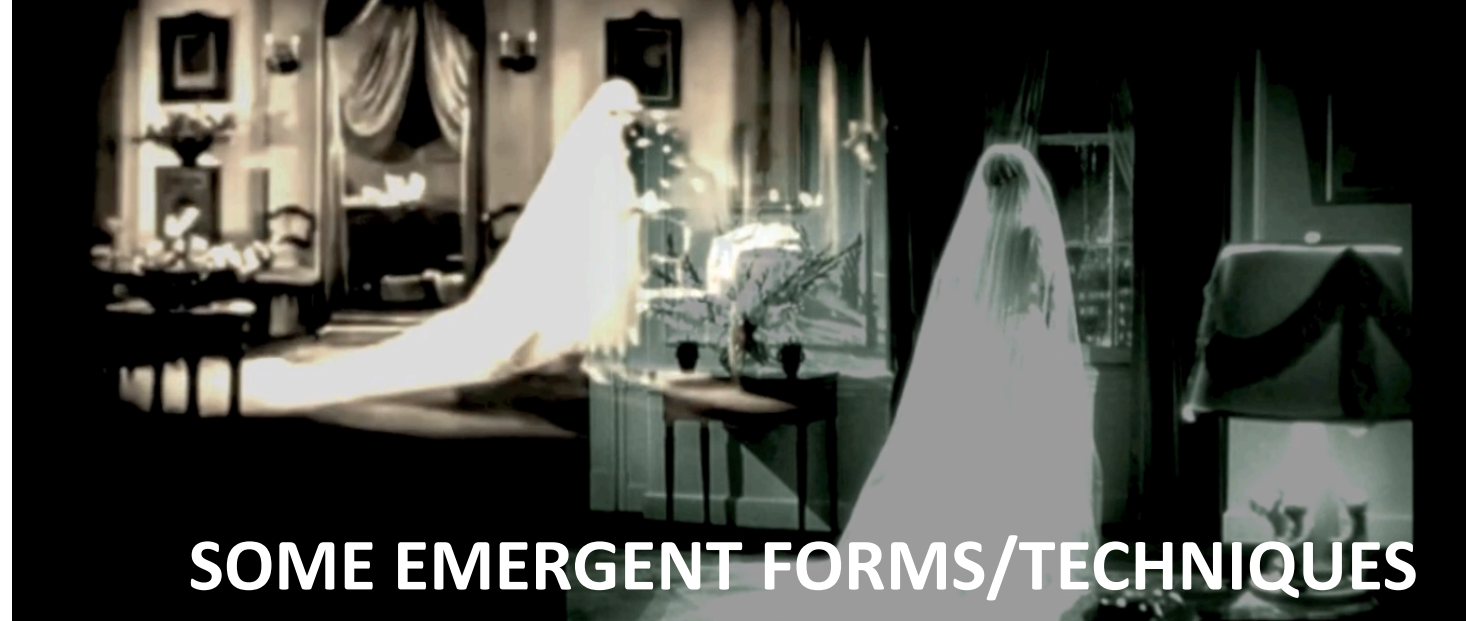
It's hardly unexpected, of course, that the two *plots* should be similar. The films are relatively faithful adaptations of the same novel, not just key members of the same cinematic genre, the 1925 film, in Viviani's assessment, "an initial milestone" that played a "precursor role" in the "maternal melo";⁵ the heroine of the second film "an archetype"⁶ of maternal decisiveness and energy, as well as suffering, as played by Barbara Stanwyck. Like Viviani, in her rich and fascinating 2011 comparison of the novel with King and Vidor's films, Diane Stevenson⁷ also particularly flags up the differences in approach between these three versions of the *Stella Dallas* story. So, when I finally saw the silent adaptation recently, I don't think I was prepared for what I then experienced as uncanny similarities between the endings of the two films. It was this *affective experience* of the analogous narrative and aesthetic choices of the two endings that was especially compelling to me, hence my video about (at one and the same time) it and them.

The Marriages of LAUREL DALLAS

<https://vimeo.com/95910530>

**A GIRL
LIKE I**

<https://vimeo.com/192340183>



- Voice/narration over film excerpts
- Text commentary or quotation over film excerpts
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