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VIDEO ON FILM: VIDEO ESSAY, VIDEOGRAPHIC CRITICISM, AND DIGITAL
ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

by

TIAN LENG

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Video on Film: Video Essay, Videographic Criticism, and Digital Academic Publishing

by

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In the 2010s, an academic practice called “videographic criticism,” utilizing video essay creation and digital academic publishing, became a popular form of film criticism in the field of film studies. The emergence of such a videographic trend in academia and the existence of video essays in public video-sharing websites have made the task of justifying the scholarly values of video essays an urgent one. Through the analysis of the relationship between the video essay and the essay film, this study shows that the essayistic mode is crucial to distinguish videographic criticism from popular commentary. To understand the potentials of videographic criticism as an alternative academic writing method, this study also demystifies the advantages of writing with moving images and the changing role of a videographic critic as a video editor and a film critic. Finally, using the journal *in[Transition]* as a case study, my research investigates the functions of the peer review for videographic criticism and the labor of making scholarly video essays and offers means to further democratize the form in the future.

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Introduction

This thesis is about videographic criticism, or the video essay, which is a practice of scholarly writing/video creation that is supported by digital video and sound. The thesis does not mainly analyze specific video essays but reflects on videographic criticism in the forms of video and sound production, film criticism, and scholarly communication with a case study of *in[Transition]: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies*, a peer-reviewed digital academic journal on videographic criticism. The amalgamation of scholarly writing and creative video creation practices demands a study of not only the video essay's associations with avant-garde cinema (the essay film, to be exact) and popular commentary but also the video essay's operations in the academic and public spheres. My thesis investigates the epistemological and practical issues that beset videographic criticism today. What is the *essayistic* and the *videographic* in videographic criticism? What advantages can videographic criticism exploit in the medium of essay and that of film and video? What challenges do those videographic critics face in the digital age? My hypothesis is that videographic criticism can be distinguished from popular commentary.

My thesis is divided into three parts. Part I, "The Essayistic Mode and Film Criticism on Video," responds to the debate about the definition of the video essay and its relationship with the essay film genre, discuss the practices and functions of essay writing and voice-over with digital technologies, and aims to reclaim the essayistic as the essence of videographic criticism and as the key to distinguish it from popular commentary. In Part II, "The Videographic Thinking of Cinema," I survey reflexivity in the video essay by bringing in the concepts of medium specificity, remediation, and cinephilic fetishism and demystify the belief of the "filmic thinking" in making a video essay. My goal is to question the techno-determinist narrative that

describes videographic criticism as an innovative practice brought by digital technologies in the era of Web 2.0 and online video. Lastly, Part III, “Digital Publishing and The Challenges of Democratizing Videographic Criticism,” focuses on the materialistic beings of the video essay; understanding that the “immaterial” digital video essay represents the technical infrastructures and academic publishing networks supporting it, I investigate the production and publishing of videographic criticism and the impediments to the democratization of the form and propose changes that may benefit the emerging videographic community. The division between Part I and Part II does not indicate any functional difference between the essayistic and the videographic or between word and image; instead, I hope to illustrate a new kind of reflexivity in the scholarly video essay that is different from essayistic self-consciousness in the essay films or cinephilic reflexivity in popular commentary.

Although videos and films that reflect on films emerged long before video-sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo, scholars in the United States did not define videographic criticism as an academic practice until the 2010s. *in[Transition]*, the first open peer-reviewed journal on videographic criticism, was launched in 2014 and has played a crucial role in this practice’s growth in the field of film and media studies. Film scholars can use audiovisual media to criticize films and publish a video essay on the journal’s website. *in[Transition]* understands that the new form is more than the video essay itself and needs to be validated, so each submission requires not only a video essay but also a written component by the contributor. Additionally, the pre-publication open peer-review process generates two review essays that contextualize the video and prove it to be legitimate. After *in[Transition]*’s establishment, a summer workshop led by Christian Keathley and Jason Mittell began at Middlebury College under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2015 to teach participants how to criticize films

using moving imagery and sound. In 2016, the Digital Humanities & Videographic Criticism Scholarly Interest Group (DHVC-SIG) was founded within the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) to share resources and discourses about videographic criticism. Christian Keathley, a co-founder of *in[Transition]*, defines video essays as “short critical essays on a given film or filmmaker, typically read in voice-over by the author and supplemented with carefully chosen and organized film clips” (180). The published video essays in *in[Transition]* have proven that this definition does not apply to all video essays but at least a majority of them.

Although the history of the journal is short, the canon of scholarly video essays is large and diverse. Videographic critics continue to discover the new scholarship’s expanding multimodality and experiment with new ways to criticize films and create video essays using digital video technologies. The new form finds itself in the intersection of an academic realm and a public one. The task of self-validation dwells at its core, not only representing self-reflexivity in videographic criticism but also indefinitely postponing the closure of the central question: can videographic criticism produce and communicate new knowledge? It would be difficult to distinguish videographic criticism from popular commentary if one only examines videographic criticism as technological innovation. As an academic practice, videographic criticism is distinct from other cinematic and audiovisual forms that it resembles: the essay film, DVD commentary, online remix video, etc. Videographic criticism and popular commentary are much alike in several ways; both forms share the same sets of creative tools and techniques. The traditional approach to separate academic works and popular commentary is to examine the styles and their publishers. However, the ambition of videographic critics to make the form half art and half scholarship and their efforts to share video essays in video-sharing platforms make such a distinction much more difficult. Between videographic criticism and the essay film, a genre that

crosses documentary and experimental cinema, similar traits can also be found in terms of styles and techniques. Is the video essay simply the videographic trend of the essay film in the digital age? If the genealogy between the essay film and the video essay exists, how can we characterize the differences between the two self-conscious forms?

In the United States, videographic criticism has been discussed in the articles of *in[Transition]* and on several panels that were organized by the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), albeit many important studies have been made even before the establishment of *in[Transition]* in 2014, which opened the dialogue about it for scholar-practitioners. Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006), a book written almost a decade after the emergence of DVD, inspired the conversations about videographic criticism as a form of film scholarship. Mulvey explores the relationship between film temporality and spectatorship and relates textual analysis to cinephilic experience. In 2011, Christian Keathley, in the essay "La caméra-stylo," responds to Laura Mulvey's description of film critical analysis, and by drawing from Alexandre Astruc's concept of *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen, the use of the camera as a means of personal expression), argues that videographic criticism contains both critical and expressive parts and shows a fundamental paradigm for scholars to evaluate video essays. Since then, critical conversations unfolded around the duality of creativity and expressivity in videographic criticism.

In 2017, the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (which was named *Cinema Journal* at the time) published a series of essays about *in[Transition]*, most of which point to *in[Transition]*'s peer-review process as a vital part of videographic criticism that defines its scholarly values. Shane Denson argues that *in[Transition]*'s open peer-review process represents collective authorship between the author and the reviewers of video essays (141-143). Jason

Mittell, the founding project manager for *[in]Transition*, reflects on his involvement with the journal and reveals that his initial interest is in the experimentation of a peer-review model rather than video essays (137-141). While the creative process of a video essay is restricted to the video itself, the intellectual process extends to the written statement by the author and two peer-review articles by the reviewers. Drew Morton traces the varied origins of videographic criticism and finds “video essay,” as a synonym of videographic criticism, very problematic. Referring to Timothy Corrigan’s definition of the essay film and Bill Nichols’ documentary mode theory, he argues that the “essayistic mode” is only “one submode of videographic criticism” (131). Although Morton intends to untether videographic criticism from Keathey’s definition of the video essay and offers more possibilities for the new form, he does not realize that the essayistic mode itself resists categorization. Timothy Corrigan, who writes a book about the essay film, also divides essay films into modes according to Bill Nichols’ documentary mode theory. However, Corrigan admits that “categorizing essay films according to these modes is, admittedly, a slippery strategy since essay films invariably overlap and mix several of these modes or figures” (8). Either the “essay” or the “video” in the video essay would not restrain videographic criticism from multimodality but encourage to adopt and intersect various literary and cinematic traditions and methods. Film scholar Luka Arsenjuk identifies videographic criticism as a new trend of the essay film in the digital age. His critique of this videographic trend focuses on the technological and analytic potentials that become the “utopian promise” of videographic criticism (288). Not only does Arsenjuk raise important questions about the “quotability” of films and the function of knowledge in video essays, but he also points out the dominance of voice-over narration in them. Yet, before we deny the possibility that a video essay functions as an autonomous scholarly work without contextualization, I ought to expand the

examination of techno-determinism in the field of videographic criticism and the role of voice-over narration in the production of video essays.

Scholars and practitioners come to recognize multimodality within videographic criticism and reimagine audiovisual scholarships beyond the videographic. Not all the video essays on *in[Transition]* fit Keathley's definition (short videos with re-organized film clips and voice-over tracks) simply because the mission of the journal is to experiment with new audiovisual scholarships and test out new possibilities. New techniques and formats have been used by *in[Transition]*'s videographic critics, and they represent a variety of methods for videographic critics to engage with the film. Most videographic critics use basic video editing and voice-over techniques, but many others employ more advanced computer graphic skills and sometimes animation techniques. Issue 6.2 was presented as a special issue about "audiographic criticism," which focuses on audio and sonic studies. Many video and audio essays also exemplify intermediate and high levels of audio editing. Those "audio essays," in which moving images are absent, were published not in Vimeo but SoundCloud.² The audiovisual essays are simultaneously living in two realms: the relatively private space of an academic journal and the public one of video sharing networks. An *in[Transition]* video essay can be accessed either through the journal's website or its author's channel on Vimeo. It is hard to draw a line between the essays published in *in[Transition]* and some video essays (or podcasts) about films in popular online sharing platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud. Unlike popular video essays, academic ones are separated from the online commodity culture, so they do not need to be regularly posted to a channel to attract subscribers, advertisers, or patrons; rather, academic filmmaking and cinephilic communities are formed in universities and the journal. However, the separation between videographic criticism and other modes of filmmaking (online video,

mainstream entertainment, etc.) poses an imminent question: do we need a new way to metacritize video essays because the form needs to be further validated as serious research? Also, the practitioners of videographic criticism are foremost film scholars and film buffs, not professional video editors. They love films and try making films out of existing films by themselves, so videographic criticism still shares the same amateurism with the popular online video. They do not always incorporate professional filmmaking/audio recording techniques or archiving standards from the film industry.

My thesis brings up many categories in film and media studies and several approaches. While the historic center of it is in the 2010s, a digital age, I occasionally seek my answers by referring to the discourses about the essay films made with 16mm film stocks. Videographic criticism was born as an interdisciplinary practice attracting scholars from different research areas of film and media studies. Such diversity within the videographic community complicates the task of validating a video as a legitimate form of scholarship, and the risk of essentializing videographic criticism has been present since scholars attempted to name the practice; yet, the hybrid and multimodal nature of videographic criticism does not prevent me from examining what is common in its form and acknowledging that the meaning of a video essay, like any film, dwells not only in its content but also in its conditions. If all this sounds too general to understand videographic criticism, it is worth noting that my thesis has limits in the body of texts and sets of questions that it examines. There are other academic journals in the United Kingdom and Australia that publish videographic criticism and media practice. However, my thesis concentrates on only *in[Transition]*, the first open peer-reviewed journal on videographic criticism based in the United States, as a case study. In the United States, *in[Transition]* has become the main online hub for videographic critics to publish, review, and discuss video essays

on films. Since video essays cannot be distributed in print, the means of digital publishing seem to be the best choices. In fact, before its equivalent UK-based journal, *Screenworks*, moved to its first website in 2011, *Screenworks* had to distribute video essays in the form of DVDs along with printed copies of the *Journal of Media Practice*. The development of the journal *in[Transition]* was highly influenced by *Planned Obsolescence*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick's renowned book on the future of academic publishing. In *Planned Obsolescence*, Fitzpatrick loses faith in the traditional academic publishing models and calls for changes in the future of peer review, writing in the introduction that "those changes cannot simply be technological; they must be both social and institutional" (8). Not only does she suggest a "peer-to-peer review" model but also experiments with it within the book itself by putting the unpublished draft of *Planned Obsolescence* on MediaCommons, the same electronic publishing network that hosts *in[Transition]*, for reviews and comments. The journal and the website form the structure for the metacritical activities of videographic criticism, while the journal has become an example of innovative digital scholarly communications. The journal received the 2015 Anne Friedberg Innovative Scholarship Award of Distinction by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. After the journal's initial experimentation with digital and audiovisual publication, it has been considered less "risky" when videographic criticism is compared with traditional practices in film studies. (Edwards et al. 155-157). However, to further democratize the practice of videographic criticism in academia, the journal faces new challenges related to digital technologies, which support the journal's multimedia and interactive content, and at the same time, test its capacity of keeping the promise of bringing new opportunities, dialogues, and directions for videographic critics.

The Essayistic Mode and Film Criticism on Video

When Jason Mittell explains the peer-review model of *in[Transition]*, he sums up its purpose of the journal: “What we actually publish are the creator statements and peer reviews that strive to answer the question ‘How does this video function as scholarship?’ ” (Mittell 138). To prove videographic criticism is a serious study and to ensure the soundness of individual video essays, *in[Transition]* requires a written component by the author and two peer reviews to contextualize a video essay. The written component and peer reviews remain crucial to differentiate a scholarly video essay from a popular one. Mittell justifies the structure of *in[Transition]* and explains one important role of the contextualization:

As we began to plan, we realized that simple publication of video essays is not particularly necessary in the media ecosystem of the 2010s—many video essays had already been “published” via sites like Vimeo and YouTube, with broad circulation and usage among scholarly communities, and anyone with broadband could simply upload work. The key value that a journal could add is not through the video itself but through the supporting materials that frame each video as academic work. (138)

What interests me more about videographic criticism as scholarship is why a film critic chooses video over the written essay to criticize films and whether the video itself can be regarded as academic work. Scholars do not place all the critical power of a video essay in its context; for example, Catherine Grant discusses the comparative function of the split-screen effect used in video essays (“Déjà-Viewing” 3-7). However, popular video essays and remix videos on YouTube and Vimeo may apply the same techniques that are found in the scholarly ones published in *in[Transition]*. It seems that the intellectual value of a video essay gravitates

towards its contextualization. Is there any possibility that a video essay, as a stand-alone piece, can be evaluated as a scholarly one?

First of all, the terminology of videographic criticism remains controversial because of videographic criticism's synonym "video essay," which has been widely used in critical conversations. Not only the video essay but also the essay film is a genre that lacks definition. Luke Arsenjuk argues that,

What is at stake in the essay film is not simply the existence of one cinematic genre among others, but *the attempt at a generic conception of cinema*, a conception of cinema beyond or simply apart from its typical divisions. The fact that the film essay has no proper place within the conditions of cinema must have something to do with the essayistic desire to emancipate these conditions themselves. (275-276)

By contrast, Drew Morton denies the essayistic mode as the dominant mode of videographic criticism (130-131). He argues that the video essay is not the synonym of videographic criticism and being essayistic is not necessary for this practice. Instead, he attempts to explain videographic criticism's origins through documentary film theory. In his categorization of videographic criticism, he refers to Bill Nichols' documentary mode theory and attempts to locate many notable videographic works in those modes: expository, observational, interactive, reflexive, and performative. Although his strategy demonstrates multimodality within the practice, he takes videographic criticism out of academic settings and the context of the online video. The debate about the term "video essay" probably should concentrate less on its origin in cinema but more on the essay, which can define videographic criticism as an intellectual process and a scholarly form. I propose to center the essayistic mode in the definition of videographic criticism. By doing so, I do not intend to exclude some "non-essayistic" models but to envision

new directions for videographic criticism to retain intellectual virtues beyond *in[Transition]* and find its place, next to written essays, in academia.

Christian Keathley, in his essay “La caméra-stylo,” by drawing from Alexandre Astruc’s concept of *caméra-stylo*, argues that videographic criticism contains both critical and expressive discourses, and “the challenge for the ‘digital film critic’ is to situate herself somewhere in the middle of these alternatives, borrowing the explanatory authority of one and the poetical power of the other” (Keathley 190). On the one side of Keathley’s imaginary spectrum of videographic criticism is the poetic mode that resists interpretation (like an art form), and on the other side is the explanatory mode that aims to decipher films (like an analytical essay). His conceptualization of videographic criticism inspires other scholar-practitioners to search for a form of videographic criticism in the middle between the two modes. Morton admits the substantial influence of Keathley’s spectrum (Morton 131-132). His typology of videographic criticism inspired by documentary mode theory is an elaboration of Keathley’s spectrum. However, responding to Keathley’s definition, Arsenjuk points out that,

The essayistic is here replaced within a didactic model, academic and scholarly in its self-identification, which aims at pragmatically stabilizing the contradiction. The differentiation drawn by Keathley between the two types of contemporary videography, since it is taken as what grounds the possibility of knowledge, is despite its balanced appearance hierarchical in nature. (293)

The need to validate videographic criticism as a scholarly practice forces such didactic control over its artistic nature. The relationship between the poetic and the explanatory becomes oversimplified in Keathley’s characterization, which is based on the assumption that the explanatory and the poetic are two extremes on an axis: pulling away from the poetic mode, the

video essay gets closer to the explanatory mode. Overall, in *in[Transition]*, the video essay is restrained in the explanatory “frame” of supporting statement (or contextualizing essay) and peer reviews. The structure of the journal has already determined its nature as a form of scholarly communication, in which ideas, rather than emotion, are exchanged. The seemingly aesthetic experience of the video essay is anti-aesthetic in its core.

The essayistic does not conform to the explanatory, the poetic, or the mix of the two modes. Unlike the various modes of videographic criticism categorized by Drew Morton, the essayistic is not a mode of representation but a process of textual analysis and critical writing. Theodor W. Adorno argues that “not less but more than a definitional procedure, the essay presses for the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience” (70). The essayistic demands the videographic critics, the essayists, to situate themselves in the film-text, among the concepts. To understand the aim of videographic criticism and the intellectual experience of the essayistic, I refer to Roland Barthes’ *Image-music-text*. In the essay “From Work to Text,” in which the concept of the text applies to both written text and film-text, Barthes distinguishes the concept of the text from that of the work based on seven propositions: method, genres, signs, plurality, filiation, reading, and pleasure. The proposition that is most relevant to videographic criticism is “reading.” He argues that the work is “a site of consumption,” but the text performs reading as a play, an activity, or a practice. Eventually, the text reduces the gap between reading and writing (*Image-music-text* 161-163). Likewise, the film-work is consumed by a passive spectator, but the film-text invites a collaboration with the spectator to produce text and “play” with text.¹ The task of video editing and essay writing for a videographic critic is to both break down the film and create a new one.

What Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second*, a book about film spectatorship, has in common with Barthes' "From Work to Text" about "text" is the assertion that a text, or film-text, is fluid. Mulvey explores the relationship between film temporality and spectatorship and explains, in her concept of the "delayed cinema," that an "interactive spectator of textual analysis" is demanded.

The 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. Furthermore, 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. (146-147)

Does editing a new film on digital video distort the interpretation of the original? The idea of the "original" film is only an illusion that is constructed by the projector's mechanism (24 frames per second), the border of its frame, and the darkness of the movie theater. Mulvey proposes to eliminate "the absolute isolation of absorbed viewing" and let its historical and material context interact with the narrative (27). For videographic critics, the experience of the second viewing is not watching the film again in a cinema but laying the mp4 file of the film on the editing panels of nonlinear editing software. Whether pausing a movie using a DVD player remote or cutting up a QuickTime video file, videographic critics do not stay distant from the film; rather, they create new artifacts by interfering with the spatial-temporality and materiality of the film. The order, duration, frequency, size, and movement are no longer absolute. And the film is no longer viewed through a transparent glass: its grain, electronic noise, interlace flicker, negative film stock, and chemical stain can be exposed. Whether such an interactive analysis of

the film inclines to be textual, visual, or archeological, the goal is to overcome the singularity and superficiality of film criticism and participate in an intellectual process of producing new audiovisual text additional to the original text.³ A model of film criticism that involves both textual and extratextual analysis now can be supplemented with audiovisual tools like digital video editing software and audio recorders.

The encounter between the essayistic procedure and moving images is not new. The other impediment to the legitimization of the essayistic in videographic criticism is ironically what paved the way for it — the essay film. In Timothy Corrigan’s introduction to his book *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, he states that “the essayistic indicates a kind of encounter between the self and the public domain, an encounter that measures the limits and possibilities of each as a conceptual activity” (6). Referring to Corrigan’s definition of the essay film, Drew Morton argues that “the essay seeks to locate the universal in the personal” and videographic criticism does not necessarily have such a characteristic (Morton 131). Corrigan’s definition of essay films in general concentrates on self-reflexivity and subjectivity, but, in the chapter about “films interrogates films,” his focus is on the “encounter with and through another representational language or medium as a questioning of the possibilities and limitations of that discourse” (188). He categorizes the essay films that criticize films as the “refractive mode.” In Bill Nichols’ original conceptual scheme for the documentary, this mode is called the “reflexive mode.” Timothy Corrigan refers to Nichols’ scheme but renames the same mode to the “refractive mode.” One of his book’s main arguments that self-reflexivity is common to essay films conflicts with the name of this mode and may cause Corrigan to use “refractive” instead. However, the slight change in the name also indicates different approaches in the reflexive documentary and the refractive essay film. In physics, reflection is a light wave’s change of

direction when it bounces off a surface, while refraction (a light wave's detour from the original path) happens when the velocity of a light wave changes, especially when it passes through a barrier between two mediums.³ Reflexive cinema has the "mirror" device that reveal its own filmmaking processes; refractive cinema does not expose its own processes but questions its own representation through the interrogation of film footages. In Chris Marker's essay film *Sans Soleil*, Marker expresses his admiration for Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), which shares the same topic with *Sans Soleil* — memory. Marker intercuts his own footage of his San Francisco journey with stills from *Vertigo*. Through Marker's nostalgic lens, the storyworld of *Vertigo* eventually collides with the real world of Chris Marker's transnational journey. Marker aligns his perspective with that of Alfred Hitchcock in *Vertigo*, and through film on film, seems to offer a transparent window facing the world: "Hitchcock had invented nothing. It was all there." Yet, it is not the encounter between the self and the world (in this case, the interaction between the essayist and the city of San Francisco) that represents the essayistic mode in that segment of *Sans Soleil*, but the encounter between the self and the memories of the world in the film form. The essayistic mode in *Sans Soleil* searches into the ontology of film: film as memory. The shot-for-shot "remake" of *Vertigo*'s scenes using a 16mm film camera in a travellog-like film is Marker's analysis of *Vertigo*'s cinematography (mainly camera angles and camera movement), editing (rhythm and pace), and *mise-en-scène* (set and location). The presence of the film medium is not diminished but heightened in the process of making a film on film. Perhaps, no one other than Chris Marker understands better that both the essayistic self and the essayistic world are imaginary constructs in the film medium, and his journey around the world is never about going from the origin to the destination but going from an idea to another. Timothy Corrigan's theorization of the essay film is still useful for scholarly video essays about films. Videographic

criticism happens right at the barrier between the film medium and the video medium, and through a refractive function (in a conceptual way) and essayistic encounters, new ideas emerge among video and sound clips.

The essayistic mode in videographic criticism may share some of the same poetics and techniques as the essay film. The pragmatic question is, in what forms do videographic critics write essays with video? Although an essay film, or a video essay, can express ideas across different semiotic systems, it seems that the dominant form of essay writing in videographic criticism is not moving imagery or graphical text, but voice-over narration. The voice-over, not the text contained in it, was one of the least studied techniques in this scholarship until scholars suggested an alternative name for similar works done without video: audiographic criticism (Verma and Smith, *in*[*Transition*]). Keathley's definition of the video essay has demonstrated that the "voice-over" is most typical in videographic criticism. Voice-over is an important factor to distinguish videographic criticism from popular commentary. To determine the level of intervention that voice-over narration has on the video essay, I have to look not only at its text but also at its aural form. Barthes points out in "The Grain of the Voice" that the voice is "in a dual posture, a dual production — of language and of music" (*Image-music-text* 181). Therefore, the video essay may distinguish itself from written essay not only by its visual content but also by the form of voice.

Like in a word processor, where words can be copied and pasted, audio clips can be moved around in an editing timeline. To revise the "essay," the editor can record new audio clips directly into the editing software or through a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) and place them in the sequence. Video editing with voice-over tracks, an interplay of text, image, and sound, demands that all audiovisual elements perform upon each other at the same time. And it often

involves a collaboration between several applications: nonlinear video editing interface, DAW, and word processor. The “behind-the-scenes” stories of making video essays show that videographic critics do not always employ all those apparatuses, and the process of synthesizing video and audio parts is usually technically straightforward. The relationship between voice-over and video clips, on the most basic level, can be visualized in the editing “timeline” of a video project: channels of film clips over channels of audio clips. The flow of sentences pairs with the flow of images.

More than a pure reproduction of the original, a remix of video clips in video essays relies on the voice-over, whose critical power is essential to videographic criticism since verbal text is still dominant in the videographic scholarship. In fact, the voice-over itself is commonly practiced as a form of scholarship in the field of film studies. Film critics record voice-over narration for DVD commentary tracks or podcast episodes. “Show and tell” is one of the narrating/editing practices that a seasoned video editor would avoid in a documentary project but is the defining structure of DVD commentary. Doing “show and tell,” the editor or the narrator typically shows several video clips and describes the visual content using a piece of voice-over narration. The voice-over, in such an arrangement with the moving images, only scratches the surface of the film. Although a video clip in a sequence can provide more information when it is contextualized by the voice-over, it does not always need a piece of descriptive information, and its duration does not have to match that of the corresponding voice-over clip. Although it cannot be denied that the purposes of many video essays are informational and educational, “show and tell” exemplifies a technique that fails to justify the videographic form of film criticism. Commentary tracks of films, sometimes as audio clips extracted from DVDs, can be found on YouTube and SoundCloud without any visual content. They prove that voice alone

communicates information in commentary and moving images are external to voice as the signifier. To evaluate the criticality of a video essay, one should not assume a functional division between the visual and the aural content: moving imagery does not always remain enigmatic, while sound is not used solely to explain imagery. It is not moving imagery but the encounter between imagery and sound that becomes too complex for language to thoroughly interpret.

The voice-over of videographic criticism by no means should be downgraded from criticism to commentary. Timothy Corrigan refers to Michel Foucault's claim that "commentary yields to criticism" and explains that criticism in the essay film is more than glossing over the subject.

When commentaries yield to criticism, it generates a proliferation of interpretive points of views and positions theoretically unable to close the proliferations of discursive meaning. With the essayistic as the essence of criticism, this questioning becomes a critical thinking of discourse as that instability of discourse engages the experience of a self at the crossroads of aesthetics and the world. (188)

The essayistic mode in the video essay generates interpretative conversations about film and resists a closure to that intellectual procedure. It tends to dissect the film and at the same time avoid being didactic, but it is by no means a unified mode of the poetic and the explanatory mode that are proposed by Keathley, who argues that "explanation vies with poetics in a collage of images and sounds, words and music" (181). Keathley then concludes that spoken and written language powers the explanatory mode, while the imagery, sometimes withstanding the control of language, becomes poetic. There are cases in which language exists in visual forms: graphical text and gesture. The essayistic mode similarly should not be understood in the way that text and imagery surrender to each other. What matters the most is to look for the essayistic mode not in

the text alone but in all three semiotic systems: Barthes's matrix of image-music-text.

Alternatively, we could think about the apparatuses: German theorist Friedrich Kittler's matrix of gramophone-film-typewriter. The craft of the collage of images and sounds, words and music counts on us to overcome the "show and tell" of the voice-over and discover the true critical potentials of our digital and audiovisual tools in hand.

In a voice-over track, what accompanies the text is, of course, the voice. For sound in general, timber, frequency, and intensity determine the auditory sensations, while for the delivery of speech, it is articulation, pronunciation, dialect, tone, pitch, and projection that affect the quality of the voice-over. Can voice performance contribute to the "poetic" characteristics of a video essay's voice-over narration? Or can it make a video essay sound more didactic than its transcript may appear to be? Video essays with background noise or room echo are common among those in *in[Transition]*. The critical evaluation of a video essay often evades the discussion of the audio quality or voice performance of narration unless the voice-over narration stands out to reviewers. In Drew Morton's review for Sean Redmond's "The Ear That Dreams: Eye Tracking Sound in the Moving Image," one of the *in[Transition]* video essays about film sound, Morton's choice of words are interesting: "Redmond's script is incredibly dynamic," and Morton then writes that, "at no point does the voice-over feel untethered to the video track - they lean on and support one another poetically, economically, and clearly" ("The Ear That Dreams") In fact, Redmond's voice-over narration is "rough" in terms of voice performance and audio editing. The sound level is uneven, and room echo is evident; in general, the audio track could be edited for much better quality. Redmond's video footages are pixelated, so it is likely "rough" voice-over narration is a part of his "lo-fi" aesthetic choice. Nevertheless, Morton's review indicates that the conceptual synchronization of images and voice-over narration is a more

important factor than audio quality and voice performance in his evaluation of a video essay's voice-over narration.

The aural form and audio quality of the voice-over track matter less to videographic criticism than the content of speech, while subjectivity and the identity of the author are rarely mentioned in the discussions of videographic criticism. There are many possible ways to experiment with voice-over narration and create more effective arguments than the transcript of the narration may do. Chiara Grizzaffi, a co-founder of *in[Transition]*, warns against the standardization of voice-over narration and encourages a variety of creative strategies for voice-over. Grizzaffi also gives three examples of creative uses of voice-over narration among *in[Transition]* video essays to demonstrate that voice-over narration can make a complex argument in the short form of the video essay, be “flexible and versatile” in a single video essay, or have multiple narrators (“Let Them Speak!”) Many essay filmmakers and documentary filmmakers in the past have experimented with various modes of voice-over, although their works would not be considered to be scholarly. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967), the narration is performed as whispered speeches. *Sans Soleil*'s voice-over is in the form of letters sent to the female narrator by a fictional cameraman, Sandor Krasna. In the transnational essay film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989) by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Minh-ha staged Vietnamese American women to perform the translated interviews of women in Vietnam; the voice is heavily accented and subtitles on screen purposefully avoid clarifying the contents of voice. Through translation and narration, Minh-ha attempts to reveal the artificial construct of Vietnamese women as a result of Western spectatorship. Moreover, the voice-over has its own materiality, or what Barthes calls “the grain of the voice,” which indicates the bodily communication beyond the voice-over's linguistic sphere (*Image-music-text* 179-189). Marlon

Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989), with extraordinary intimacies of voices (tongues) and bodies, has exemplified the idea that the voice-over is no transparent text. Essay films and documentaries exert great influence on the voice-over narration in video essays. In Richard Misek's "The Black Screen," which is a video essay on "black screens" in cinema, Misek responds to Chris Marker's *San Soleil*, in which a female voice reads a letter by a male cameraman; "The Black Screen," instead, has a voice-over narration in which a male voice reads a letter from a female editor, slowly building connections between the ideas about darkness, darkroom, film editing, and female editors.

Videographic critics are not obligated to adopt those formal strategies from the essay film, but what those strategies that have been established in the past inform us is that we cannot deny the legacy of the essay film in videographic criticism. The video essay may not be the new trend of the essay film, and there is not a rigid boundary between them. Yet, the technological transformation from 16mm filmmaking for essay films to digital video editing and sound recording for video essays does not mean the two forms do not share some essayistic goals. The importance of an essayistic mode in videographic criticism is not to suppress the multiplicity of creative strategies for video editing and voice-over narration. The variety of voice-over approaches in essay films proves that the essay film is a genre-less genre, whose conventions of voice-over narration are worth being built upon and revised by videographic critics in the digital age.

We also need to consider the role of the author as the essay writer and the voice performer in videographic criticism because essayistic writing practices (on paper, by a word processor, or in video editing interface) and voice performance techniques have overlaying

effects on the text. Catherine Grant recalls the experience of recording voice-over tracks for her first video essay and relates that experience to film pedagogy.

Unsentimental Education tries very hard (possibly too hard) to hit a lot of the bases I'd covered in my years of teaching the film — re-presenting knowledge about it that I *already* knew. It also feels quite long to me now, at thirteen and a half minutes. Even its fairly sparse voiceover commentary (which, rather than pre-scripted, was at least largely improvised to accompany the re-editing — in other words, it was created as a kind of “antiphonal” response to what I was handling) seems too wordy to me now. (“The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea” 53)

In short, Grant finds herself between various roles: a teacher, a voice-over performer, and an editor. The video essay she made was not pre-scripted; otherwise, she would also be the “writer” of that video essay. Roland Barthes locates the intellectual in between the teacher and the writer: “Over against the teacher, who is on the side of speech, let us call a *writer* every operator of language on the side of writing; between the two, the intellectual, the person who prints and publishes his speech” (*Image-music-text* 190). The difference between the idea of the speech in Barthes' essay “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers” and that in the case of the video essay is that speech is no longer an irreversible form of expression but a digitally editable one. In the essayistic mode, the voice-over track is able to embrace both the flow of speech and the interactivity of essay writing while resisting the linearity that Barthes finds in the “teacher.” In contrast with a pedagogical technique, the voice-over for the essayistic mode does not function to present the knowledge that the authors/teachers already possess but to immerse themselves among ideas, images, and sound clips.

The Videographic Thinking of Cinema

Special Issue 6.2 of *in[Transition]* about audiographic criticism does not divert videographic criticism to a video-less practice or suggest an alternative approach for the audiovisual presentation of scholarly writing. Nevertheless, the affinity between videographic criticism and other literary and creative forms with the voice-over, such as radio and DVD commentary, does not firmly support moving imagery as the distinguishing component of videographic criticism in comparison with traditional film criticism. In many supporting statements of video essays about videographic criticism, moving imagery often seems to be supplementary to the voice-over. Why do videographic critics make a video essay on film in the first place? Is the choice of video as the medium for a scholarly and critical essay about film accidental to film criticism? Although, in the case of *in[Transition]*, videographic critics have to validate their video essays as scholarship by writing a statement and explaining their artistic and critical intentions, videographic criticism as videographic writing or “filmic” analysis in general remains a mysterious process. To understand the cinematic thinking of videographic criticism, I divide the process of making a video essay into three videographic stages: original film, digital manipulation, and video essay, because the videographic critics first situate themselves in the original film, alter it with digital technologies, and finally meta-criticize the scholarly video essays they create.

Laura Mulvey’s *Death 24x a Second* and Christian Keathley’s “La caméra-stylo” both delineate the origin of videographic criticism as the birth of a new textual analysis enabled by digital technologies. However, a techno-determinist account of its origin is not enough to explain its scholarly value or to benefit the potential development of the field because such a narrative fails to examine the transformative relationship between the film critic and the film. A techno-determinist view may hold that videographic criticism emerged in the early 21st century because

digital video technologies finally supported this new way of film criticism. To construct such a determinist narrative, Keathley explains that, “due to developments in digital technology, film scholars also find themselves in a position to respond to Astruc’s call – using new technologies to invent new audio-visual critical forms” (179). However, his argument does not acknowledge that digital technologies are shaped by the changing interactions between humans and film and digital media, and this new film criticism is built upon the expansion of film and media theories and research methods in other disciplines over the last few decades. In Sean Redmond’s “The Ear That Dreams: Eye Tracking Sound in the Moving Image,” he utilizes the eye-tracking technology to analyze the synchronous operations of looking at and listening to films. However, one of the reviewers, Murray Smith points out that the video essay and its statement do not mention cognitive film theories on which the video essay is based or recognize eye tracking as a tool of cognitive science. But, how does videographic criticism enter the equation when film research is advanced by the digital? Is it just the digital presentation of film research rather than a research method in its own right?

Videographic critics begin to reconceptualize the relationship between knowledge and digital video technologies. For example, Catherine Grant proposes the concept of “affective knowledge” by entangling psychoanalysis and mimetic and cognitive concepts of affect in moving images (“The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea” 54). Although it is undeniable that the production of affect allows the body to communicate with the mind, moving images in video essays function as imperfect signs that postpone the construction of meaning. Arsenjuk concludes that Grant’s notion of affective knowledge “seems to teach us very little, for it is either too full (due to the intense plenitude of the intimate and personal, ‘cinephiliac’, most likely unrepeatable, experience with the film) or too empty (due, perhaps, to our inability to feel

ourselves equally chosen by the filmic object in question)” (Arsenjuk 285). Videographic critics also defend their practice by directing the emphasis to the “quotability” of the video medium; the traditional analysis of film reduces it into language, while videographic criticism preserves the movement of images (“The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea” 49). Arsenjuk points out that the “solution to the problem of quotability” conflicts with the “the essayistic-analytical desire” (289). Nevertheless, the dilemma of quotability compels me to question the videographic efforts that are put into video essays and the real goals of video editing in videographic criticism. Does video merely work as quotation while audio contains critical analysis? If so, the innovation of the videographic scholarship would be proven to be the “uncinematic” or “non-videographic” thinking of film, since moving images are viewed as the medium-specific mean to realize the potentials of video.

In *in[Transition]*, the artificial split between the video (embedded video-playing window) and the essay (the “creator statement” column) has diminished the advantages of audiovisual quotability. Video essays often need to quote not only films but also texts from scholarly sources. David Safin’s “The Death of a Text” graphically displays many short and long quotes from books and articles and includes a bibliography at the end of the video, while the video essay’s “creator’s statement” does not have a bibliography (see fig. 1). Some other video essays have works listed in the statement but have a different list of cited works inside the video. In Kevin L. Ferguson’s “Volumetric Cinema,” the statement seems to be the “methodology” section of a traditional scholarly paper, while the video essay functions as the main body. In this case, the existence of the creator’s statement may suggest that some parts of research are better presented in the audiovisual forms, while others better remain in the textual form. Although videographic critics have written extensively in *in[Transition]* about the means of expressing

ideas with moving images and voice-over narration, they have not addressed the fundamental issues related to non-videographic elements such as texts in the innovative publication.

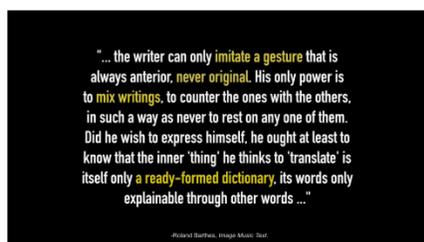
Videographic criticism may be advantageous for it can quote films without transcribing them into texts, but the form faces the challenges of incorporating the traditional components of a scholarly article such as bibliography and textual quotations in the video medium.

The advantages of cinematic thinking in videographic criticism reside not in its quotability but in its expressivity and have to be understood through the examination of the interaction between the videographic critic and the film. The practice of videographic criticism begins with a cinephilic urge to interact with the film. Like popular online videos on YouTube and Vimeo (fan-made trailers, commentaries, and recap videos), scholarly video essays are inspired by a larger remix culture on the Internet and partly consist of a cinephilic experience. In his book about the essay film, Timothy Corrigan mentions Barthes' conception of a "cinema situation," which focuses on the moviegoing experience and the movie theater. A cinema situation depicts the movie theater as a site of attraction and hypnosis ("Leaving the Movie Theater" 345-346). A cinema situation now is not necessarily associated with the physical space

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The Death of a Text

by David Safin — Saint Vincent College



The Death of a Text: The Transtextuality of Love & Mercy from David Safin on Vimeo.

Creator's Statement

To watch the 2015 biopic, *Love & Mercy*, from the perspective of a discerning authority of the work of Brian Wilson is to revel in the occasion to be a fly on the wall of the recording studio during the production of the landmark album, *Pet Sounds*.

To watch it from perspective of a loyal devotee of the life of Brian Wilson is to endure his personal struggles and eventual salvation thanks in part to the efforts of his eventual wife, Melinda Ledbetter.

To watch it from the perspective of a generalist fan of the sunny heyday of The Beach Boys is to possibly be dissatisfied at the omission of the themes more commonplace in traditional docudramas about musicians.

Figure 1. Still from Safin, *The Death of a Text*

of a movie theater and the public experience of moviegoing since movie theaters are no longer an essential stage in the process of film exhibition; films can be viewed on other screens too. Yet, the infrastructures of home video and streaming, which have not completely replaced the old infrastructures, promise a variety of new sensory experiences, provide new sites of attraction for cinephiles, and await the fetishism of remix processes. When a film comes home as a DVD disc or an mp4 file, the cinephile, who used to be a passive spectator, gains some control of the medium. Laura Mulvey witnesses the coming of “a ‘reinvention’ of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia” (160), which has been brought about by the technological changes in film exhibition and distribution in the late 1990s and the 2000s. A DVD player remote can pause, rewind and enlarge the film. Editing software can cut up a 2-hour film and export a 3-minute video from it. Screenshots of films are captured and distributed on social networks to mark special moments that can be interpreted with or without the narrative context. A clip of a film becomes the fetish object to be fixated by the cinephile (the voyeur), and the digital video technologies are the high-powered binocular the voyeur holds.⁴ For cinephiles, the cinematic self is defined by their own point of view in the artifacts they create. The original film itself has a point of view in both literal and figurative (or visual and verbal) senses: perception through a camera lens and “voice” through narration. Yet, the work of a video essay is not an exact reproduction of an mp4 file into an exported mp4 file.⁵ The fixation is not on the original film but the ideas behind it.

Between the original film and the video essay is the mediating apparatuses of videographic criticism, which is not the simple videographic digitalization and manipulation of the original film. Although methods such as 3-D and digitalization that are used in some video essays seem to be associated with the notion of “remediation” theorized by Jay David Bolter and

Richard Grusin, the theory of remediation emphasizes that the new medium “fills a lack or repairs a fault in its predecessor, because it fulfills the unkept promise of an older medium” and ultimately, by design, achieve immediacy, which is a state of being fully immersive into the medium (Bolter and Grusin 60). Bolter and Grusin use the example of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* to demonstrate the desire for immediacy: “In Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, the paradigmatic Hollywood film about the desire for immediacy, Judy’s body is remediated by Scottie as he dictates her clothes and even hairstyle and color in order to make her over into Madeleine” (238).⁶ With the yearning for the real that is eventually unfulfillable, Scottie becomes obsessed with the process of refashioning his object. By contrast, videographic criticism is more a deconstructive rather than reconstructive process of the original film, overcomes the initial fascination with the real that is behind the film medium. Videographic criticism emphasizes the reflection on the film instead of the imitation of the film. The video essay “Feeling and Thought as They Take Form: Early Steadicam, Labor, and Technology (1974-1985)” by Katie Bird, for instance, concentrates on the “Steadicam” technology that stabilizes the image frame of film for a moving film camera. Cormac Donnelly’s video essay “Pan Scan Venkman” presents the special experience of viewing the VHS version of the movie *Ghostbusters* (1984) and comparatively analyzes the shift of the film’s narrative perspective between the theatrical and home-video version (see fig. 2). Both video essays discover things hidden in plain sight and



Figure 2. Still from Donnelly, *Pan Scan Venkman* (6:15)

demonstrate how the films direct the ways we look at them, so their reflexive processes are meant to generate a distance between the cinematographic objects and the viewers.

The videographic critics understand that the gaze into their video essay is mediated by the historical and cultural subconscious mind just like the gaze into the original film is. Ironically, they have to achieve a kind of intimacy with the film they criticize while they maintain a distance between the cultural objects and the critics. Without such a critical distance, a video essay that sources its images and sound from the original work of art will reduce itself to duplicating what the original has already presented to the viewers, though one of the goals of videographic criticism is to quote the original. Furthermore, the videographic critics are not satisfied with their video essay being an excerpt, a summary, or a snapshot of the original. Drew Morton accurately identifies those popular online videos, which are commonly labeled as movie commentary, reaction video, and fan-edit video, as a part of “the ‘snack culture’ of the Internet” (133); Like movie screenshots and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) that are distributed in social media platforms, popular commentary videos about films are objects (and byproducts) that are created by fans and to be consumed by fans. A few video essays are intended to pay homage to the original films. “Intersection” by Catherine Grant, Chiara Grizzaffi, and Denise Liege is a collage created with clips and a soundtrack from Wong Kar-Wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Its Chinese title 對倒 (tête-bêche) refers to the Hong Kong novel that inspired *In the Mood for Love*, but the English title “Intersection” right under the Chinese title seems to be a misinterpretation of the Chinese title (see fig. 3). The idea of tête-bêche (a joined pair of stamps in which one is upside-down in relation to the other) could have been further developed in this video essay and reflected by its collaging method. “Intersection” was one of the very first video essays in *in[Transition]* and was meant to demonstrate to academics that videographic criticism

has the potential to express ideas with very few texts, but its ambiguous title and thesis fail to respond to its form, resulting in a fan-made style. Girish Shambu, in the review of the video essay, asks, “is there a connection to be made between *cinophilia* and *eating*?” The boundary between cinephilic remix and scholarly video essay is very thin, especially in the early development of videographic criticism. There is no rule yet that urges videographic critics to resist fanatic consumption and renegotiates the ways of looking and listening to the films. Most video essays now tend to be clear about their goals and methods. For example, one of the “eye-tracking” video essays in Issue 4.3, “Unseen Screens” by Tessa Dwyer, uses eye-tracking technique to illustrate the direction and misdirection of looking at films and achieves a unity between content and method.



Figure 3. Still from Shambu, *Intersection* (0:03)

The object of videographic criticism is film but its mean is the video medium. There is a myth of the “videographic analysis” or “cinematic writing” of its method. The notion of the “cinematic,” which has been widely used in academic and public discussions of film and video, is closely connected with the concept of medium specificity. From a medium-specific point of view, Jaap Kooijman, who also experiments with videographic criticism, tries to demonstrate the advantage of the video essay over a written essay (147). Kooijman refers to Catherine Grant, who claims that “unlike written texts, they [video essays] don’t have to remove themselves from film-specific forms of meaning production to have their knowledge effects on us” (“Déjà-

Viewing” 7). Grant implies that language, as a semiotic system, poorly interprets film even with the best adjectives, while the film can be quoted, and ideas can be expressed all within video. However, her argument is based on the assumption that film also functions as a single semiotic system like language. Proponents of medium specificity assert that “art forms are individuated by their physical media which also provide said art forms with norms of excellence that, in turn, are determined by the possibilities and/or limitations of their material constitution” (Carroll 29). Therefore, for the purpose of film evaluation, medium specificity implies that the extent to which the advantages of the film medium are exploited leads to the quality of being cinematic. For example, the screen ratio 21:9 (Twenty One by Nine), which was first developed for the CinemaScope anamorphic film format/process in the 1950s, now is often adopted by YouTube videographers to create “ultra-wide” videos even without anamorphic lenses. Those videos are tagged to be as “cinematic” partly because of their screen ratio refers to a process in the film medium but not in other media forms like television. In the current digital media culture, the word “cinematic” is often used for filmmakers to denote the traditional practices that result in a better and purer quality of films, while the term is used by video creators and producers of quality TVs who have adopted methods and tools from film industry to elevate the statuses of their audiovisual works. The term “videographic” in a medium-specific perspective would depict any video-specific characteristics of the video medium that could separate video from film or other media, and the aesthetic position of videographic criticism would be defined by the conditions and practices of the popular online video or the videotape. A video essay does not necessarily possess the look of deep-focused images that are common for traditional news gathering video cameras or exhibit any similarities with any everyday online videos on YouTube and social networks that are mentioned earlier. Either a scholarly video essay or a “fast-food”

popular commentary removes the audiovisual-text out of its original context (dark movie theater, full length, etc.) and places it in a new one: the academic journal and video-sharing platforms, so “videographic” does not distinguish video essays from other online videos. Additionally, putting a quoted passage as graphical text in a video essay would not be considered cinematic or videographic from a medium-specific point of view because quoting texts supposed to function better in written essays. In fact, many video essays in *in[Transition]* do put quoted short and long passages among video clips rather than in the contextualizing written statement.

Noël Carroll rejects medium specificity theory and argues that the evaluation of art works, including films, should not be based on the distinctive features of the medium (44-46). Alternatively, Berys Gaut resists Carroll’s rejection of medium specificity and offers the revisionist concept of medium specificity that considers the “differential properties” that are “unique to groups of media” rather than one medium (Gaut 292). However, the medium-specific evaluation that Gaut supports is better described as the medium-conscious evaluation of art works. Gaut underlines the importance of material, device, and practice toward the evaluation of artworks, but his method of grouping media, which he names as “nesting” (Gaut 19), does not apply to film as it does to painting and sculpture because film should not be nested under the category of visual media. Film and video have been hybrid forms consisted of text, image, and sound (and maybe gesture). Even the early silent film should not be considered “pure cinema” and is not a purely visual medium because the so-called “silent” films did have music (live orchestra music) and text (screen titles). The medium “film” is artificially constructed by the synchronization of image and sound, the frame rate of 24-frame-per-second, and celluloid (which is, of course, absent in the case of digital film). Since videographic critics like Grant and Keathley have emphasized the “impenetrable” images in the video essay, the form of the video

essay is to be embraced as half artwork and half essay. First, a medium-specific perspective is not suitable to construe the aesthetics of the video essay. W. J. T Mitchell describes the current view of medium specificity:

[A] singular concept of the medium, a central feature of modernist aesthetics from Clement Greenberg to Michael Fried, is widely regarded now as a relic of the time when media aesthetics was a quest for purity – pure painting, music, poetry – and a rigorous avoidance of hybridity and multi-media interplay among the arts. (20)

It is possible to group painting and sculpture in the same group because they are both visual media and, if not same materials are not shared by both forms, similar practices may be found in them. However, for film, locating similar differential qualities in other visual or audio media to define the “cinematic” is a more trivial effort to evaluate the film’s sensory experiences or understand it as an art form than we could do for painting and sculpture. For the video essays that do not have audio or textual information, the action of stripping only the moving images out of the original film clip accentuates the lack of sound, proving creating video essays is still a multimedia process. If we direct our attention not to the aesthetics but the knowledge in videographic criticism, a medium-specific perspective cannot offer us the elevation from a sensory experience to an intellectual experience that is needed for a scholarly form. The original film is “decoded” through and then “re-encoded” through video editing and digital visual effects; the process remains opaque, and no new knowledge is gained. The term “videographic” that is about the video medium ironically denotes a less media-specific view of the practice of videographic criticism because the video medium has become a “fluid” medium. Its technological dimensions have changed over the past decades since digital video largely replaced analog video. The cultural values of video have also changed because of the transformation of

online video sharing and consumption and new models of video production and postproduction. If the video medium means anything that other media cannot not for videographic criticism, it is because video is multimedia and versatile.

Concepts such as multimodality and audiographic criticism indicate that the video essay/videographic criticism is an interdisciplinary practice that cannot be narrowly defined by sets of traits found in film. It is unnecessary and inappropriate to invent a grand theory that fits all the possible modalities and experiences for videographic criticism and understand all kinds of videographic processes of videographic criticism because a grand theory for film studies in general is equally utopian, but it is essential to consider hybrid approaches that can characterize the interactions between the visual, the aural, and the textual elements. If there is not a “film-specific” form of meaning production, what would medium-conscious practice and metacriticism of videographic criticism be like? How does the medium (or the plural, media) transform in videographic criticism? From which materials and apparatuses do videographic critics exploit advantages?

Alexandre Astruc, in his manifesto “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo,” envisions that, “the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language” (604). The *caméra-stylo* gravitates toward the function of expression rather than of mimesis in film. In 1948, Astruc witnessed the rise of 16mm film and television and realized that technological changes would bring everyone closer to the future of the *caméra-stylo*. Over fifty years later, Keathley professes that not only avant-garde filmmakers but also film scholars are ready to bring out new audiovisual critical forms because of the advancement of new digital technologies (179). Indeed,

digital video and documentary production methods and distribution channels have provided easy access of user-friendly tools to “everyone,” and the concept of the *caméra-stylo*, which might have seemed utopian in the past, has become more tangible than ever before. Speech, voice-over, or interview is the most salient component of many modes of documentary and the online video, but the realization of (or at least approximation to) the *caméra-stylo* in the documentary does not imply that the expressive function of films resides in the voice; images can express ideas, too.

The paradox of the medium of videographic criticism is that film criticism, in a traditional sense, interprets film with language, while the *caméra-stylo* in the digital age aims to equip digital video, especially its moving images, with the capacity of expressing ideas in the way that language does. One phrase, “speak for themselves,” repeatedly appears in the conversations in *in[Transition]*.⁷ Chiara Grizzaffi argues that “a voice may step back, be discrete, and let the images speak for themselves” (“Let Them Speak”). Matthew Campora points out that the video essay “seems to raise questions of [...] whether voice-over, on-screen text, or seeking to allow images to speak for themselves offer the best approach” (“Reclaiming Uncanny Spaces”). But in which ways can moving images speak for themselves? Can they self-criticize? Keathley’s definition of the video essay reveals that intellectual thoughts may emerge from the re-arrangement of clips from one or more than one film. The two most typical methods to arrange film clips from multiple films are montage and collage. Montage temporarily re-arranges clips, while collage spatially re-assembles them. The film segments may have a common theme such as “black screen” in the video essay “The Black Screen” by Richard Misek or have connections that are not immediately recognizable. In the 1920s, Sergei Eisenstein experimented with the method of intellectual montage to overcome realist representation and generate complex concepts with moving images. Catherine Grant argues that putting two

unrelated clips in one frame side by side has comparison effects (“Déjà-Viewing” 3-7). Although Grant’s use of the Freudian psychoanalytic term “uncanny” to describe the comparison effects further mystifies the experience of watching two films in the same frame and the notion of intertextuality in videographic criticism, it is undeniable that ideas can rhetorically transgress from one film clip to another. It is inaccurate to describe that film clips in video essays can “speak for themselves;” rather, film clips speak to each other and generate communicable thoughts. However, it is still unclear if intertextuality between two films is in the affective or sensory domain, and if thoughts generated by moving images attain the level of complexity and specificity for scholarly writings.

Videographic critics should take the precaution of avoiding techno-fetishism in the self-reflexive practice of the video essay. For many videographic critics, “videographic” is not only the way of presentation/writing but also the research method. Techno-fetishism, in the case of media practice, is the worship of audiovisual tools for their magical powers. In the essay “The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea? Videographic Film Studies Practice as Material Thinking,” Catherine Grant’s “material thinking” in her use of popular smartphone app “Vine” that captures 6-second videos exemplifies techno-fetishism in critical media practice. Her research on “Vine” is a kind of material analysis of video creation mixed with film criticism that concentrates on the façade of a popular digital video tool and platform. Her material thinking focuses on the tangible and perceptible materials but neglects the invisible materials of digital media and the fact that socio-cultural values have impacted the app’s algorithms and the resulting aesthetics. Grant celebrates the app’s critical and creative potentials constructed by editing templates, visual-effects (VFX) presets, and digital audio filters. She argues that her “cinephiliac videographic explorations are particularly generative when it comes to the working through [...] unconscious

spectatorial processes (“The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea” 57-58). Her method pays attention to the material apparatus producing the videographic artifacts, but her digital materialism allows the automatic machine to absorb and undermine interpretation as experimental films do. The knowledge in her “Vine” works is affective in its nature but is only a glimpse into the digital habits related to digital video. Unconscious processes and techno-fetishism contradict the purpose of videographic criticism to reflect and indefinitely postpone the significances of videographic objects.

For the metacriticism of video essays, language for a medium-conscious discourse is much needed to keep up with the rapid development of digital technologies. The self-justifying written component and the peer-review essays about a video essay should celebrate less of digital filters’ effects and recognize the traces of thoughtful reflection on the original film. The capability of separating the “content” of a video essay from external signifiers like visual effects filters and editing templates depends on one’s familiarity with the original film as well as those effects. However, not all of the “creator’s statements” of video essays in *in[Transition]* explain the theoretical and technical foundations and expose their research and editing methods. The ambivalence between interpretation and abstraction in the video essay has been manifested in Keathley’s foundational text “La Caméra-Stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia.”

But the incorporation of images into the explanatory text – especially moving images and sounds – demands an acknowledgment that such images, themselves quite mysterious and poetic, do not always willingly subordinate themselves to the critical language that would seek to control them. (190)

The strategy of videographic criticism is not to keep the moving images mystified and let the voice-over and contextual statement do the critical work. The reassembled images in a video

essay are not meant to be only illustrations and quotations that accompany the voice-over track; moving images in the video essay function as dynamic and malleable signs just like moving images in the original film do. Although those moving images may resist the traditional methods of interpretation in film criticism, videographic criticism is there to offer an opportunity and an alternative perspective to understand the aesthetic, cultural, and technological dimensions of films. Chilean filmmaker and writer Raúl Ruiz, in his book *Poetics of Cinema*, categorizes the early experimental filmmakers into two groups: filiationists and apparitionists. The filiationists “tried to “follow the threads of cinema back to its origins and to explain it in terms of existing disciplines: Chinese ideograms for Eisenstein, Western syntax Béla Baláz (who thought camera movements were verbs, camera angles were adjectives, and characters were nouns),” and the apparitionists “privileged experimentation, exploration, alchemical powers, and vertigo” (Ruiz 75). Videographic critics stand in between the “filiationists” and “apparitionists” ambitions and seek a form of experimental but scholarly editing in which moving images hold the equivalent expressive capacity as verbal text. Also, videographic critics search for models of visual communication that are specific to digital video. The bottom line is not to find a place in between the two directions but to understand that videographic critics are responsible for emphasizing the intervention with the original film because intervention and reassemblage, not duplication, are the means of expression.

Digital Publishing and The Challenges of Democratizing Videographic Criticism

In Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 essay “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo,” Astruc imagines a future in which cinema expresses ideas with the help of new technologies. *Caméra-*

stylo is not only about production and editing but also distribution. Astruc emphasizes the accessibility of audiovisual materials and viewing equipment for the public in such an ideal condition. Digital video seems to be immaterial and becomes less expensive and more accessible to everyone in the 2010s. The practice of videographic criticism is influenced by the essay film genre and the cinephilic remix online culture but situates in an academic environment. Video essays are not distributed and exhibited like most essay films are, or regularly updated in video-sharing channels to attract “channel subscribers” like online fan-made videos. Scholars create video essays and publish them in video-sharing platforms and then in digital academic journals. Do the editing and publishing models of video essays enhance the democratic potentials of videographic criticism? Before the 2010s, videographic criticism would be considered a “strange hobby” rather than serious digital scholarship (Edwards et al. 157). The practice now becomes a norm in the field of film and media studies not only because the Middlebury workshop received more funding and recognition than before but also because innovative digital journals like *in[Transition]* have shaped what videographic criticism is in the United States today. Videographic criticism, an academic practice enabled by digital technologies, becomes a perfect experiment for the field of digital humanities because of videographic criticism’s multimodality facilitated by the digital and innovative research and presentation methods. The digital seems to promise to improve accessibility and knowledge exchanges. Yet, videographic critics’ experimentation with video creation, archiving, publishing, and peer review still faces new challenges against the democratization of the form in the digital era.

Jason Mittell acknowledges that Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s book *Planned Obsolescence* significantly influences the development of *in[Transition]*. Also, the technological affordances of MediaCommons, which collaborates with the Society of Cinema and Media Studies on the

journal, make the digital journal possible. Mittell confesses that his primary and original interest in the journal is peer review rather than videographic criticism (137-138). Through the metacritical processes of pre-publication open peer-review, reviews of reviews, and open commentary, *in[Transition]* partially adopts the “peer-to-peer review” model from *Planned Obsolescence*. In the “peer-to-peer review” model, Fitzpatrick recognizes the need to separate the function of credentialing from that of publishing and proposes “a post-publication process that focuses on how a scholarly text should be received rather than whether it should be out there in the first place” (32). *in[Transition]* still uses a pre-publication model, but the model should not be less advantageous regarding its ability to diminish “gatekeeping.” The video essays in *in[Transition]*, in the form of video files, are freely published on Vimeo or Critical Commons by their creators. Therefore, the first editorial pass of an *in[Transition]* video essay is not through the editors but through the contributor; a video essay has been published before it is accepted by the journal. The required written component accompanying the video essay represents a process of self-credentialing. In theory, the privilege and power that “gatekeepers” used to hold are shared with the contributors, who can prove their own scholarly works’ worth and explain their aims and justify their approaches. More importantly, the contributors are compelled to reflect on their own works when they are done, maintaining the high quality of submissions to *in[Transition]*.

Both Fitzpatrick’s “peer-to-peer review” and *in[Transition]*’s pre-publication model appear to promise more knowledge to be shared and less gatekeeping owing to the affordances of digital technologies. Fitzpatrick points out that “electronic publishing faces no such material scarcity [as print-based publishing]” (37). With a boundless amount of space in the world to store electronic texts, she could consider her post-publication peer-review model practical to operate

and eventually create a healthy and fair future for academic publishing. Likewise, the development of Web 2.0, whose framework features user-generated content and supports video sharing capacity, and the massive amount of storage space on Vimeo and Critical Commons, sustain the video-centric interactive community that *in[Transition]* is building. Unlike the early DVD distribution method of *Screenworks*, another videographic academic journal, sharing videos on Vimeo does not require any physical materials. Each video essay is hosted by its own author's channel on Vimeo, whose basic functions are free for its users. The other main platform, Critical Commons, is an online video archive established and supported by the School of Cinematic Arts of the University of Southern California. In Critical Commons, only contributors, who obtain permission from the website administrator to become "advanced users," are allowed to publish videos to the platform. Since the model of publishing and distribution is purely electronic and is equipped with the enormous capacity to expand the collection of video essays, *in[Transition]* is supposed to possess the advantage of easy access and an abundance of video works created by and for academics. However, with the perspective of an inclusive academic publishing network, either Fitzpatrick or *in[Transition]*'s editors fail to acknowledge that, regardless of the peer-review process, the electronic text itself is still biased. One of the reviewers of *Planned Obsolescence* points out that,

Unfortunately, Fitzpatrick does not fully interrogate her assumption that new media leads to new, non-hierarchical forms of interaction. We know that behind their sexless IP addresses and screen names nearly 90% of Wikipedia editors are men, and studies have shown that those who produce content for the web are of above-average socio-economic status. Though the web seems to facilitate a plurality—even a cacophony—of voices, its

apparent egalitarianism is in fact a reinstatement of the bad, old structures of domination. (Brienza 151)

For *in[Transition]*, the challenge to build a non-discriminating community of videographic critics relates with not only web technologies but also video editing, which is biased as well. Studies have shown a higher percentage of men than women reported making videos for required school projects, men reported higher levels of engagement in complex video-editing tasks, and men report higher computer confidence, which can lead to the creation of more videos (Vedantham 123-137). Although many universities are now providing software, hardware, and training for students and researchers to learn video editing and audio production, it takes an enormous amount of time to learn and to edit. Those whose socio-economic status would allow them to conduct such time-consuming activities in addition to their regular academic responsibilities have enough to experiment with videographic criticism.

Video editing and audio production as complex creative activities have been proved to challenge not only the creators of video essays in *in[Transition]* but also the peer reviewers, who are often videographic critics themselves. The reviewers are required to submit critical and constructive reviews reflecting on the video essay and the accompanying written component. Fitzpatrick argues that reviewer anonymity, which is typical for traditional academic publishing models, hinders the conversation between the reviewers and the author and a learning experience for the author (28). The open peer-review process of *in[Transition]*, instead, opens up the discourse between the reviewers and the author and potentially allows the reviewers to contact and make suggestions to the author prior to the essay's publication, since they have already known the author's name that is attached to the video essay. However, even with an open peer-review process, it is still practically difficult for *in[Transition]* to build an effective dialogue

over the technical issues of video essays. Maria A. Velez-Serna, who writes about her experiences of being both a videographic critic and a peer-reviewer for the journal, confesses that,

I was very glad not to have to revisit my video after submission, as that would have involved trying to book an editing suite (not everybody has a MacBook), scheduling scarce time with my coauthor, and dealing with the disarray caused by even a little trim or an extra insert. As a reviewer for Miriam Ross and Jonathan Mines's 3-D "Stereotowns," the tone of my suggestions regarding the video was much more tentative than those I made regarding the supporting statement. I was already primed to accept the audiovisual work on its own terms, as a groundbreaking experiment that had already pushed the boundaries of my technical competency. (144)

As a video editor, Velez-Serna recognizes that video editing is not merely simple cutting and inserting of clips but a complicated and often exhausting process that requires file organization, scheduling, collaboration, and revision. For many, the experience of video editing is bifurcated; one part of it matches what Laura Mulvey describes of the sense of confidence and liberation an editor has toward film: "the euphoria one feels at the editing table is that of a sharpening cognitive focus and of a ludic sovereignty" (193), and another part reveals less control and mastery. There are materialistic factors in videographic criticism that separate it from written scholarships. Acquiring and transcoding source footage, editing a video essay in a high-definition format, and adding sound and visual effects require a set of audiovisual equipment and a lot of computer processing capacity, which imply either stronger technical and financial support from institutions or higher cost of equipment for those who own the tools. It is also likely

that Velez-Serna's creative *caméra-stylo* writing in the editing suite is sometimes interrupted by technical issues related to editing software and hardware.

As a reviewer for others' video essays, Velez-Serna is aware of her lack of technical expertise in stereoscopic video and the significance of 3-D technology, which happened to be an uncommon topic within the *in[Transition]* community. In fact, videographic critics come from different backgrounds and often employ tools that have been experimented with in the broader field of digital humanities. Additionally, the expanding multimodality of videographic criticism has invited many academics outside the film and media studies and visual studies fields into this innovative community. It will not always be easy to pick peer-reviewers who have the right technical expertise for a video essay. Nevertheless, the growth in its community should not undermine *in[Transition]*'s peer-review process as a constructive one. The videographic critics who create the video essays need to document and explain the technical details in the written component of video essays, so the reviewers can provide more effective responses in return, building a conversation over not only intellectual issues but also technical ones. *in[Transition]*'s special issues, like "audiographic criticism" and "eye tracking," group video essays with similar methodologies and include more contributors, reviewers, guest editors, and readers to concentrate on those directions and associated technologies. Although special issues can rely on the power of the community to address technical problems in video essays, this kind of grouping or categorizing will eventually exhaust groups and sub-groups. In the long run, *in[Transition]* needs to expect more theorists and technologists to review and comment on pieces that can be considered as technically challenging.

While videographic critics celebrate the affordances of nonlinear video editing and Web 2.0, the preservation of video essays has become an urgent issue for the journal. As a matter of

fact, the preservation of digital publications, which may sound as immaterial as any other digital artifacts, faces a great challenge in academia now. Fitzpatrick recognizes that,

We have centuries of practice in preserving print—means of collecting and organizing print texts, making them accessible to readers, and protecting them from damage, all standardized across many libraries with frequently redundant collections. But it took centuries to develop those practices, and we simply do not have centuries, or even decades, to develop parallel processes for digital preservation. (123)

For *in[Transition]*, the “text” part that is on the MediaCommons website is archived by the New York University’s Digital Library Technology Services, but the “video” part depends solely on the authors rather than the journal. Each video essay is archived by its author if the author ever attempts to do so. *in[Transition]*’s “Call for Submissions” page requires all the videos to be uploaded to Vimeo or Critical Commons, but some of the published video essays mentioned above are not in those two platforms. For instance, the audiographic essays in the special issues were uploaded to SoundCloud because they do not have visual components. Miriam Ross and Jonathan Mines’s 3-D video essay “Stereotowns” was uploaded to YouTube because YouTube has a 3-D display mode, a function that Vimeo does not have.

What is common to all the essays in *in[Transition]* is that they are all self-uploaded and self-managed by the authors. Jason Mittell, the journal’s project manager, admits that “these videos are self-posted by the creator, so they are in charge of their archiving. I realize this is far from best practice” (Crofts and Nevill 294). Digital video seems to be “immortal” when compared with celluloid film, which may suffer from the inevitable chemical decay even in a properly controlled environment. But the reality is that digital video has many potential risks of degradation and loss too: broken and unrecoverable hard drives, broken Vimeo links, unreadable

video file formats, highly compressed videos with poor image quality, etc. *in[Transition]*'s editors receive Vimeo links from the contributors/authors and, if any of the video essays are published, embed the link in the webpages for those video essays. If the authors delete the videos from their Vimeo channels or replace them with other videos without changing the link, the readers of the journal would not see the original videos that have been peer-reviewed. The history of the other media practice journal *Screenworks* has shown that even more archiving risks for such a digital journal may be present. After the end of its DVD distribution model, *Screenworks* had to migrate twice from one website to another mainly because the editor's faculty appointment changed and the access to website administration was lost (Crofts and Nevill 291-292). Similarly, the sustainability of *in[Transition]* depends on its collaboration with MediaCommons, the hosting and maintenance services from New York University, and the faculty appointments of its editors and manager.

The difficulties in digital video storage and preservation lie largely in cost. In a 1994 Microsoft advertisement, Bill Gates sits on the top of two piles of paper, which are as high as trees in the forest, and demonstrates the capacity of a CD-ROM in his hand: "This CD-ROM can hold more information than all the paper that's here below me." So far, hard disk drives (HDD) and solid-state drives (SSD) have almost replaced CD-ROM, and they have become much easier to use and less expensive to store a larger number of files than we could do in 1994. Likewise, storing digital video files has become easier and cheaper too, but hard drive failures and other errors causing data loss require those who archive digital video to regularly back up and maintain their hardware. As an alternative solution, low-risk, fast, and safe cloud-based backup services for video can be costly for individuals. If the journal does not store, host, or archive those videos,

universities should provide offline and cloud storage for scholars who practice videographic criticism.

The standards for video essay creation and self-archiving have yet been made for the videographic critic community, since scholars and practitioners are still searching for new digital tools. But, thinking about archiving early has proven to be necessary. The situation of data loss caused by Vimeo being out of business may sound too distant now. However, Catherine Grant shared the experience of experimenting with creating “vines” with the Vine smartphone app in 2013. Vine.com, a popular Internet video creation and hosting service owned by Twitter, features a six-second short video format. The service was officially shut down in early 2017. As of 2019, the official “Vine archive” website became no longer available to its users. There is also a trend of using amateur-level video editing software such as iMovie and Adobe Premiere Elements. The notions of freeze-frame, repetition, return, close-up, and juxtaposition mentioned in Mulvey’s book are simple editing tasks that can be completed in any non-linear editing software now. Amateur-level video editing software like iMovie usually have short learning curves than the advanced ones. The title of the guide for the iMovie editing app on iPad, “Everyone Can Create Video,” summarizes the user-friendliness of video editing software in the 2010s. Catherine Grant claims that “how straightforward it was to do all this, given the relatively user-friendly digital format-conversion and editing software that nowadays is available for free with many computers or online” (“The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea” 52). However, many applications as well as smartphone editing apps are not designed with good file organization features and long-term compatibility with previous versions. Fitzpatrick underlines that “planning for the persistent availability of digital resources as part of the process of their creation will provide the greatest stability of the resources themselves at the least possible cost” (125). Unlike a self-contained text

document, a typical video editing project has both “project files” and “media files.” the project files store the editing operations, while media files are the video, sound, and graphic files that are associated with the project. An editor should follow standardized procedures to organize his editing projects rather than blindly relying on the software’s user-friendliness before the software becomes intelligent enough to assist the editor with all archiving procedures. I do not intend to discourage videographic critics from experimenting with new, popular, or amateur video tools and platforms but argue that using them requires video creators to practice good archiving strategies and locating archiving resources such as reliable cloud or offline storage, as early as they start to create the video essays.

Digital technologies offer some unprecedented possibilities for videographic critics to write with video and audio and to build an online community such as *in[Transition]*. It is a still working progress to discover multimodality in videographic criticism and to validate the digital scholarship, but issues related to video creation need our immediate attention. Now, having entered a new phase of the digital age, universities need to provide training, facilities, technical support personnel, and funding for scholars to practice audio production and video editing. Video creation should not become an elite academic activity, and it is important to ensure that scholars have more opportunities to experiment with digital video tools and have paid time to complete complex video editing assignments.

Conclusion

The reflexive proposition of the videographic thinking of cinema and the utopian union of film criticism and media practice drew my interest in videographic criticism in the first place, and the

contradiction between video essays between being artworks and video essays being critical writings urged me to dig into its universe. Given my background as a professional video editor and a graduate student in Film Studies, I was skeptical of an academic filmmaking practice that was created by groups of film academics/amateur video creators and was legitimized by the same people. However, I was not pessimistic about videographic criticism, though my analyses above may appear otherwise. I do not intend to assert that, given its short form and the limitation in expressing complex thoughts, videographic criticism can only offer film scholars an opportunity to test their ideas in audiovisual forms and engage with the public before longer and more concrete works culminate in written formats. Although the audiovisual forms may not have revolutionary effects on film criticism, they do transform the ways scholars analyze films, “write” essays and publish their works.

The extraordinary intimacy between a film and a videographic critic challenges the traditional brief that the critic stays distant from the audiovisual object. The innovation of the new textual analysis that Laura Mulvey discusses in *Death 24x a Second* shows us how digital technologies shape our understanding of film-text, or audiovisual text in the case of videographic criticism, which invites the viewer to actively engage in the essayistic reflection on images and sound and the co-production of meanings. The debate about the origin of videographic criticism is central for the future development of this practice. The “genre-less” nature of the essay film genre forestalls a continuity between the European essay film canons in the age of 16-mm film (and videotape) and the new trend of videographic essays in the 2010s. The effort to produce a general definition of essay films or video essays destined to be fruitless because they dwell in the margins of experimental cinema and documentary cinema. When the essayistic mode and the term “video essay” are occasionally challenged by the practitioners of videographic criticism, an

epistemological inquiry into the “writing” processes becomes ever imminent to us. I realize that the reconceptualization of the relationship between the essay, the essay film, and videographic criticism is among the most critical endeavors to advance our theoretical understanding of *caméra-stylo*, camera as a way of intellectual expression, in the digital age.

The myth of videographic criticism as a new kind of film criticism enabled by cinephilic remix culture and digital technologies, especially web 2.0 and digital video, needs to be replaced by an alternative narrative that resists techno-determinism and techno-fetishism. As a research method, videographic criticism exploits the elasticity of the video medium and changes the spatio-temporality of the original film, revealing what is hidden by film as a technical and cultural medium. As an audiovisual writing method, videographic criticism attempts to achieve the ideal of *caméra-stylo*; through voice-over narration and video editing, videographic criticism encourages essayistic encounters between images, sound, and texts and initiates an intellectual process that can qualify the video essay as a scholarly one. Therefore, the real advantage of videographic criticism, in comparison with traditional academic writing, dwells in the flexible and fluid video medium. The contextual statements, peer reviews, and the websites of academic journals construct the external but artificial boundaries between videographic criticism and popular commentary. To become a scholarly form distinct from fan-made remix for cinephilic consumption, videographic criticism needs to develop and refine its internal scholarly values through essayistic reflexivity and videographic thinking and writing.

For *in[Transition]*, its experiment with an open peer-review process provides further contextualization for the video essays and form an interactive and collaborative relationship between the author and the peer-reviewers. However, it has its own limits and requires modifications in the future to ensure the peer review can generate dialogues about videographic

criticism and digital technologies that are more constructive. Also, the journal, the contributors, and libraries should take the responsibility to develop and standardize low-risk and affordable archiving methods. Towards the future of *caméra-stylo* and digital publishing being the norms in academia, we need not only continuous creation and validation of videographic criticism but also enough resources for training and tools, equal and open access, and better preservation strategies across academic institutions.

In the past decade, the development of videographic criticism was influenced by popular commentary in many forms. Now, scholarly video essays share the same space on the Internet with popular online videos. The journal's strategy to justify a video essay's scholarly values in the contextual components impedes the advancement of the video essay towards an autonomous scholarly practice. The separation between a video essay and its contextual components may seem impractical now, but the journal's poor archiving methods have already shown how fragile the physical connection between a video essay and its contextual components is. A video essay can easily lose its connection with its context and the attached scholarly values if the video essay alone cannot function as a scholarly work. As videographic criticism becomes norms for academics, we can expect *in[Transition]* to transform from serving as the boundary, frame, and context for scholarly video essays to taking more advantages of the public video-sharing platforms and engaging with a wider audience outside academia.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes explains that the notion of “play” can be understood as a musical term, like “practice.” Here, “film-text” does not equal “film text,” which is commonly known to be the “content” film that is studied as if it is written text.
2. Each video is required to be uploaded to Vimeo or Critical Commons prior to its submission to *in[Transition]*.
3. “Medium” here can be any matters, such as air or water. And of course, I intend to use the definition of refractivity in physics to illustrate an effect in cinema and essay that happens when “light” passes through the barrier between film medium and video medium.
4. It is a reference to *Rear Window* (1954) directed by Alfred Hitchcock.
5. “mp4” is a multimedia container file format.
6. Bolter and Grusin uses the example of *Vertigo* through their book *Remediation*. The reference to *Vertigo* in *Sans Soleil* is also mentioned earlier in Part I of the thesis.
7. See statements and reviews for video essays “The Black Screen,” “HANNIBAL: A Fanvid,” “Let Them Speak! Against Standardization in Videographic Criticism,” “Observe-Engage-Adapt: Hulot's Method in Playtime,” and “Reclaiming Uncanny Spaces: Australian Landscapes from the New Wave to the New Indigenous Cinema.”

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