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Taking stock: Two decades of teaching the history, theory, and practice of audiovisual film criticism

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Introduction

Recent years have seen rapid growth in the use of the digital audiovisual essay in teaching and research, including in film and screen studies.[1] This phenomenon has been fuelled by a number of interrelated developments: easier access to copies of films; increased availability of domestic computers and digital editing software; the spread of the internet and rise in popularity of video-sharing websites; and the ensuing proliferation of online audiovisual sampling, mash-up, and remix practices. The explosion in the quantity of videos made by fans, artists, scholars, and students has been accompanied by a steady flow of written commentaries on the topic and the establishment of numerous websites and academic journals devoted partly or exclusively to the presentation of audiovisual essay work.[2] It is easy to forget in this context how quickly and comprehensively the situation has changed and how different it was at the turn of the millennium. It is with this in mind that this article looks back at, takes stock of, and documents an experiment in audiovisual film studies that has been underway at the University of Roehampton for many years. As such it is intended as a contribution to the growing body of literature on the pedagogy of the audiovisual essay.[3]

I first introduced a video essay assessment component in an undergraduate film course at Roehampton in 1997. These really were *video* essays – for the first few years the students made their essays in small groups using a somewhat antiquated VHS editing control unit and submitted them on tape. In the early 2000s a number of students with the necessary skillset started producing their essays on DV tape instead. During this period I also began to explore the university's Pinnacle non-linear digital editing equipment and from 2002 students started using the software to make digital critical found footage audiovisual essays as part of the assessment on a number of research-based courses.[4] That year I designed a final year course titled simply Audiovisual Criticism devoted entirely to the history, theory, and practice of audiovisual film criticism which sought to harness the potential of the then emerging generation of digital editing software for the purposes of film analysis and criticism. In the documentation validated by the university in 2002 I summarised the aims of this course as follows: 'to introduce students to the theory and practice of audiovisual film criticism as an emerging discipline, and to the work of a range of key filmmaker-essayists who have used the audiovisual essay form to reflect on cinema';[5] 'to think critically about the notion of "essay"';[6] to reflect on 'how technological change in key areas such as videotape, telecine, the camcorder, digital video, and non-linear editing have altered our relationship to the archive and opened up new ways of conducting close textual analysis'; and to provide students with 'an understanding of the parameters and possibilities of audiovisual film criticism and analysis' in the age of new media.

This course formed part of a new undergraduate Film Studies programme that we rolled out from 2003. I was not aware at the time of any precedents or comparable pedagogical experiments being developed by scholars and teachers elsewhere.[7] While developing the course, everything – from its conceptual rationale to the technical infrastructure required to support it – had to be designed from scratch. Although teaching it in the first few years felt like flying blind it proved to be an extremely rewarding and influential adventure. It was first offered in 2005-2006 (thereby coinciding with the birth of YouTube) with 51 students and has been offered every year since.[8] In order to launch it we were very fortunate to recruit the filmmaker and artist Dalia Neis with whom I co-delivered it in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.[9] Approximately 600 students have now taken the course.

Theoretical underpinnings

The vision I had of the teaching space for the new course was inspired by the examples of Lev Kuleshov's workshop of the early 1920s, the film laboratory that Dziga Vertov had daydreamed about in his writings, and the Sonimage studio that Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville had established in the 1970s. With these illustrious precedents in mind I successfully made an institutional case for kitting out a special room with a dedicated server, a large screen to facilitate the collective discussion of work-in-progress, and twelve workstations running Pinnacle Liquid Purple Version 5 for networked professional digital editing.

The course's design was informed in part by the example of Kuleshov, Vertov, Godard, and Godard-Miéville, as well as by my own prior practical experience with Super 8 and video. In addition my doctoral study of Godard-Miéville's film and television work of the 1970s and my then ongoing investigation of Godard's later audiovisual essays (including *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 1988-1998), had left me in no doubt as to the power and versatility of video as a means for studying cinema history, conducting film analysis, and generating and communicating knowledge through image and sound.[10] The course also drew inspiration from Viktor Pertsov's 1926 proposal of the development of a new type of visual film criticism – films about films, or 'films-as-review' as he described them – that would draw on, quote, and combine pre-existing material and perhaps even turn films through re-editing into 'acerbic reviews' of themselves.[11] In addition it was nourished by landmark books by Jay Leyda, William Wees, and Patrik Sjöberg.[12]

The conception of the course was indebted to the writings of three key theorists: Raymond Bellour, Laura Mulvey, and Nicole Brenez. One of the conceptual starting parts for the course was Bellour's 1975 discussion of the immateriality, ephemerality, and 'unquotability' of the film text – 'The Unattainable Text', which offers a brilliant, prophetic discussion of the inadequacy of studying films through writing alone.[13] Bellour situates this problem through reference to that faced by critics of other art forms such as literature, painting, music, and theatre, before concluding with an evocation of a time when a revolution in film availability and technology might make possible a new form of audiovisual film criticism. His suggestion that 'the comparative backwardness of film studies' might eventually be superseded by a 'more imaginative, more accurate, and above all more enjoyable'

form of film criticism based on the quotation of image and sound is one that would resonate strongly with Audiovisual Criticism students equipped with tools more powerful than anything he could have imagined in 1975.[14]

The second reference was Laura Mulvey's work on what she termed 'delayed cinema' and on the emergence of a new form of 'pensive', 'possessive', or 'interactive' film spectatorship that had been ushered in by the spread of VHS and DVD.[15] My development of the course was partly informed by an engagement with the various writings and conference papers that Mulvey produced on these topics in the early 2000s which culminated in her 2006 book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*.[16] Her argument that 'digital technology, rather than killing the cinema, brings it new life and new dimensions' and that 'electronic and digital technologies should bring about a "reinvention" of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia' chimed directly with what I was attempting to put into practice via the course.[17] As soon as the book appeared I brought it into use as a core text for the students. I also invited Mulvey to come and speak at Roehampton while the course was running for the first time. During her visit we discussed her book and the course and I gave her a copy of the handbook.[18] During her lecture she also showed a silent videographic experiment she had conducted on a scene from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) which we went on to discuss in our public conversation afterwards.[19]

Nicole Brenez's principal influence on the course lay in her formulation of the idea of the 'visual study'.[20] In a wide-ranging essay which moves from Yervant Gianikian, Angela Ricci Lucchi, and Al Razutis, to John Ford and Ken Jacobs, Brenez pursues a remarkable investigation of what is possible in the study of the image through the image. She starts from the fundamental question 'What can an image do?' before throwing out a stream of related questions that proved very productive as a means of generating discussion among the students: can an image 'explain, criticise, argue, demonstrate, conclude', and if so how? And in what ways does the visual study relate to the written study of images, the musical study, and the painterly study?[21] In addition, Brenez's pioneering exploration through curation of the tradition of the visual study at the Cinémathèque française between 1997 and 2000 provided me with numerous ideas of films and filmmakers for the course.

The syllabus

The twelve-week course was open from the outset to both film production and film history/theory students, including those taking combined honours degrees with another subject. It offered a systematic introduction to the history, theory, and practice of audiovisual film criticism which situated the possibilities of digital audiovisual essay-making within the context of the history of the development by critic-filmmakers of visual and audiovisual critical, analytical, and rhetorical techniques and strategies since the 1920s. What follows is an outline of how it was organised in 2005-2006.

Week 1: I presented the aims of the course and the concept of audiovisual criticism through reference to the history of found footage filmmaking and in particular the Kuleshov workshop; the visual and audiovisual history tradition of the 1920s and 1930s; the impact of television, video, and digital technologies on compilation work; and the engagement of independent artist-filmmakers with the audiovisual archive. The screenings included extracts from films by Esfir Schub (*The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, 1927), Henri Storck (*Histoire du soldat inconnu*/*History of the Unknown Soldier*, 1932), Joseph Cornell (*Rose Hobart*, 1936), Nicole Vedrès (*Paris 1900*, 1948), Bruce Connor (*A Movie*, 1958), Mark Rappaport (*Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, 1992), and Jay Rosenblatt (*Human Remains*, 1998). I also outlined the ideas advanced by Rappaport in the 1980s regarding the potential of video to revolutionise film criticism:

> I look forward to the day when [use of the VCR] will contribute to creating new hybrid works. Filmmakers will use scenes from older films in their works commenting on or contradicting the film being made, a kind of parallel work. One will be able to make cuts on your own VCR. You are watching Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession* with a blind Jane Wyman. You interrupt to cut in a scene from *Wait Until Dark*, about a blind woman with a different set of problems. Then a scene from *Johnny Belinda*. Jane Wyman again, again handicapped, but now she is mute. Cut to the *Spiral Staircase*, a film about a mute woman in jeopardy… There will be a whole new sub-genre of VCR-generated films. [22]

As Rappaport went on to demonstrate in a string of audiovisual essays (*Rock Hudson's Movies*; *Exterior Night*, 1993; *From the Journals of Jean Seberg*, 1995; *The Silver Screen: Color Me Lavender*, 1997) video offered a wonderfully supple tool through which to pursue his idea of spectatorship as a 'contact sport' that allows one to 'talk back to the screen' through the rewiring of pre-existing images and sounds.[23] The follow-up reading for this week

included the opening chapter of Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second* and extracts from Leyda's *Films Beget Films*.[24] The preparatory reading for the following week comprised Bellour's 'The Unattainable Text' and the opening chapter of Edward Small's study *Direct Theory: Experimental Film/Video as Major Genre*.[25]

Week 2 (Histories of Cinema through Cinema) was devoted to unpacking Bellour's 'The Unattainable Text' through reference to a range of audiovisual histories of cinema: *The Film Parade* (J. Stuart Blackton, 1957 [1933]), *Visual Essays: Origins of Film* (Al Razutis, 1973-1984), *Correction, Please, or How We Got into Pictures* (Noël Burch, 1979), *The Silent Revolution: What Do Those Old Films Mean?* (Noël Burch, 1987), *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (Martin Scorsese, 1995), *Fast Film* (Virgil Widrich, 2003), and *Film Ist* (Gustav Deutsch, 1998-2002). I also introduced Small's argument that experimental film and video constitute a form of 'direct theory' – i.e. film theory conducted, embodied, and articulated directly in image and sound.

In week 3 (Forms of Collage: Compilation, Juxtaposition, Superimposition) I used chapter 4 of Sjöberg's *The World in Pieces* as a way of situating audiovisual criticism in relation to the techniques of collage, montage, photomontage, *bricolage*, appropriation art, and assemblage art associated with twentieth-century movements such as Constructivism, Surrealism, Situationism, and Postmodernism.[26] Sjöberg's wide-ranging text also allowed me to introduce Craig Baldwin and Guy Debord together with the concepts of *dépaysement*, *dérive* and *détournement*. The seminar was devoted to a detailed discussion of Sjöberg's chapter together with an article on avant-garde approaches to audiovisual recycling by Wees[27] through reference to *Beginning* (Artavazd Peleshian, 1967), *Home Stories* (Matthias Müller, 1990), *The Film of Her* (Bill Morrison, 1993, 1996), *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, Harun Farocki, 1995), *Spectres of the Spectrum* (Baldwin, 1999), *Outer Space* (Peter Tscherkassky, 1999), and *collage d'hollywood* (Richard Kerr, 2003).

The following week (Spatial Analysis of the Image through the Image) was given over to a screening and discussion of Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son*, where I sought to encourage the students – in the light of Brenez's article on the 'visual study' – to consider Jacob's use of the projector and camera as quasi-scientific tools for the scrutiny and analysis of film and *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* as a compendium of the visual-critical techniques (reframing, altered motion, stilling, magnification) available to the

visual analyst. I also asked the students to read Pip Chodorov's short text 'Ridiculous! *Tom Tom* on video?', which paved the way for a discussion of technological reproduction and medium specificity, together with a reflection by Jacobs on his film.[28]

Week 5 (Repetition, Colourisation and Altered Motion) focused on Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's *From the Pole to the Equator* (1986) and their painstaking use of a hand-built analytic camera to preserve, dissect, and critique the contents of the decaying 35mm nitrate original of cinematographer/filmmaker Luca Comerio's compilation film of the same title through the use of variable slow motion, negative imagery, and colour tinting. In addition we explored Martin Arnold's bricolage of a similar homemade optical printer to analyse fragments of fiction films beginning with his treatment of a shot from *The Human Jungle* (Joseph M. Newman, 1954) in *pièce touchée* (1989); Godard-Miéville's use of videographic altered motion as an analytical tool in *France tour détour deux enfants* (1979); Godard's presentation of his ideas around the revelatory power of slow and saccadic motion in *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979); and Malcolm Le Grice's use of colour, repetition, and altered motion in *Berlin Horse* (1970). The in-class discussion of these works was informed by an engagement with an article by Scott MacDonald on *From the Pole to the Equator* and a study by myself of *France tour détour deux enfants* in which I relate Godard-Miéville's use of altered motion to pre-cinematic science, Vertov, and Walter Benjamin's concept of 'unconscious optics'.[29]

Week 6 (Sound, Music, Voice and On-Screen Text), the final week of screenings and discussion, was devoted to films that combine image and sound in non-normative ways and to the critical potential of sound, silence, and on-screen text in relation to still and moving imagery. In order to direct the focus onto sound I asked the students to read Walter Murch's forward to Michel Chion's book *Audio-Vision* where – in the context of a critique of the widespread subservience of sound to image in cinema and of the comparative lack of attention to sound in film studies – Murch outlines the impact of magnetic tape on the possibilities for the manipulation of recorded sound in the 1950s, which anticipated later electronic and digital sampling and remix practices.[30] I also asked the students to read Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov's 1928 article advocating a contrapuntal approach to image/sound editing.[31] We examined the ideas raised by these texts through reference to Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963), Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), Debord's *La Société du specta-*

cle (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1973), Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate* (1990), Bill Morrison's *Decasia: The State of Decay* (2002), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (mainly in relation to on-screen text), Augustin Gimel's *Fig. 4* (2004), Woody Allen's *What's up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), and Maurice Lemaître's *Le soulèvement de la jeunesse – mai 68* (1968). Last, I asked the students to reflect through reference to a 1947 article by Epstein on slow-motion sound and to Arnold's *passage à l'acte* (1993) and *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy* (1998) on the critical possibilities opened up by the manipulation of the running speed of voice, noise, and music.[32] The follow-up reading was a survey by Peter Wollen of examples of creative mismatches between sound and image.[33]

This same week the students also submitted a short written proposal for their audiovisual essay which formed the basis for a discussion of their project with the tutor and the rest of the group in week 8. In this proposal they had to identify which film(s) they would be working with and the conceptual and practical approaches they envisaged employing. Week 7 was devoted to a digital editing training session and weeks 8 to 12 to practical workshops which were supported by a technical tutor. For the workshops students were provided with digitised copies of half a dozen off-air VHS recordings of films which they had already viewed and started to research in their own time during weeks 1-7. At the end of the course each student submitted a 6-8 minute audiovisual essay on DVD (amended to 3-5 minutes from 2006-2007 and to submission as a digital file from 2012) together with a 1,200 word critical reflection in which they presented their aims and methods and situated their work through reference to some of the films and readings they had studied and to further key texts relating to subject of their essay. While I have regularly added to and updated the materials over the years, and we switched from Liquid Purple to Final Cut Pro in 2008, this fundamental structure has remained unchanged.

Reception

The course was an immediate success and students responded from the outset with great enthusiasm to it, many of them indicating that it had opened up entirely new ways of thinking about and engaging with cinema for them. Crucially the first year demonstrated that non-production students (i.e. those who were studying exclusively film history/theory and had no prior experience of digital editing) were in no way disadvantaged. At the

examinations board meeting at the end of the first year (June 2006), where the marks for the year were ratified, I showed a selection of the students' audiovisual essays to my colleagues and the visiting external examiners to give them a sense of the type of work that was being produced. Nobody present had seen anything like them before in an academic setting and there was a general consensus that the course was attempting something important and new. The external examiners Erik Knudsen and Catherine Grant were both very complimentary. This came as a relief. I had been a little apprehensive regarding their potential reaction since negative feedback from external examiners tends to travel quickly through an institution.[34] I need not have worried: Knudsen, who was the external examiner for the 'production' side of the film programme and moderated the course in its first year, enthused about its innovatory nature, saying that he had not come across anything remotely like it elsewhere. In his written report he went on to praise it under 'good practice' as a ground-breaking initiative: it 'brings together practice and theory in a provocative, exciting and stimulating way'. Comments such as these by the external examiners were crucial in legitimising the course in the eyes of the university. The following year (2006-2007) it was decided – since I had conceived the course as much as a historical/theoretical one as a practical one, and felt that it was important for it to be recognised as such from the outset – to send the course handbook and sample audiovisual essays and critical reflections for moderation by the 'history/theory' external examiner Catherine Grant. In her written report Grant echoed Knudsen's enthusiasm: 'I very much welcome the innovations of the Audiovisual Criticism module, with its interesting fusion of theory and practice methods.'[35]

The success of Audiovisual Criticism led to the development and introduction of a number of further cognate courses. In 2008 we moved it to the second year with a view to allowing students to pursue this type of work in their third year in the form of a year-long Audiovisual Dissertation where they research and produce a 'dissertation' in the form of an extended (8-10 minute) audiovisual essay accompanied by a 3,000 word written critical statement. This final-year option first became available in 2011-2012, when just one student opted to do it. The resultant film (*In Search of the Femonomyth*, Isobel Guyver, 2012), an excerpt of which is included in the sixth compilation below, was selected for the 2013 Lexi Cinema Student Showcase programme devoted to the best films made by London film students. Since that time the Audiovisual Dissertation course has grown rapidly in

popularity and a larger number of students now take it each year than the written dissertation option. In addition we went on to introduce the audio-visual essay as a form of assessment on several other undergraduate courses and in 2012 Chris Darke and I designed a new Masters course devoted to Essay Films and Video Essays, which we introduced in 2013-2014 together with an MA Audiovisual Dissertation option.

Examples of audiovisual essay work

Selecting audiovisual essays to illustrate this article has been a challenge. In the interests of both coherence and manageability I have restricted the selection to undergraduate work. The sheer number of essays that have been made over the years presented considerable difficulties nonetheless and these were exacerbated by the fact that in the early years the DVDs on which the students submitted their essays were returned to them at the end of the course, so I do not have copies of all of them. Please bear in mind when viewing the nine themed compilations to follow precisely when each work was made, since the students were often pushing at the limits of what was technically feasible at the time and developing audiovisual-critical forms and approaches that would only emerge later elsewhere, if indeed they have at all. There is no space here to discuss each essay at length so I shall simply provide a one-sentence introduction to each and then trust the work to speak for itself through image and sound.[36]

Compilation 1: A step into the unknown (2005-2007)

The audiovisual essays in this opening compilation are all from the first two years in which the course ran. It starts with Yoshito Darmon-Shimamori's *Cinema, The Art of Movements* (2006), in which he develops a variety of digital techniques (inspired in equal measure by Marey and Ja-cobs) for examining cinema as a machine for the decomposition and recon-stitution of movement. There follow clips from five further essays made in 2005-2006: Bhavna Wadhera's use of altered motion, superimposition, repetition, and sound editing in *My Life by Night* (2006) to explore the gen-dered dog/master metaphor in Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (1948); Kine Dahl's combination in *I Know What I Want* (2006), in a manner reminiscent

of what Gilles Deleuze described in terms of mathematical differentiation,[37] of material from two very different sources (*They Live by Night* and *Sex and the City*) as a means of generating questions, in this instance around the representation of gender relations; Helen Beeney's study in *A Reflection of the Female Image* (2006) of Agnès Varda's use of mirrors and frames to explore the representation of the female body and subjectivity in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1960); Sherida Denny's critique in *Whose Gaze?* (2006) of the fleeting representation of a black student in *Cléo de 5 à 7*; and Phillipa Wilson's poetic elaboration in *Butterflies* (2006) of the butterfly metaphor in the same film. In 2006, I sent the course handbook and a selection of the films to Nicole Brenez and the following year I sent her (among others) the film with which this compilation closes: Kieran Micallef's *Repetition in Nature* (2007). This remarkable essay, which Brenez described concisely as an 'ethnological work on the imaginary',[38] was selected for the experimental strand of the 2007 Exposures Student Film Festival in Manchester and subsequently for broadcast on Propeller TV.

Compilation 2: Altered motion and colour

The films in this compilation use slow and reverse motion to analyse movement and gesture and to investigate the interrelationship of colour, mood, and meaning. In *Chaplin as Dancer* (2011) Beth Thompson employs altered motion and a mirror effect in a wonderful motion study of Chaplin's balletic performance in *Shoulder Arms* (1918). In a similar vein in *The*

Dance (2009) Kerrie Griffiths employs slow and reverse motion, superimposition, and colourisation to study gesture, facial expression, and corporeal interaction in a short sequence from John Cassavetes's *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974). In *The Influence of Colour on Meaning in Documentary Film* (2014) Camille Poulet pursues an adventurous exploration of colour in relation to the articulation of meaning in documentary cinema. In *Méliès Kaleidoscope* (2015) Catherine Marshall, working in the tradition of Razutis, applies a vivid digital palette to material by Gaston Velle and Georges Méliès.

## Compilation 3: Medium specificity and instability

The films in this compilation investigate the nature and limits of digitised sound and image and the process of transmedial translation from the mechanical/chemical via the electronic to the digital. Hayley Dye's *Lumière Autopsy* (2009) uses a Lumière film of a fish tank as a point of departure for a reflection on medium specificity, through the construction of a playful catalogue of the blemishes affecting the image at the various stages of its reproduction. In *lumière.mov* (2010) Alex Buckingham was the first student in the course to experiment with datamoshing as a creative-critical method, in this instance in the context of a reflection on the differences between contemporary and early moving image recording processes. In *Third Prism* (2014) Josh-Fenwick Wilson uses a number of cancer-themed films as the basis for a stunning exploration of the impact of bugs and glitches on

the integrity of digital data. Note that all the 'imperfections' in these films are intentional!
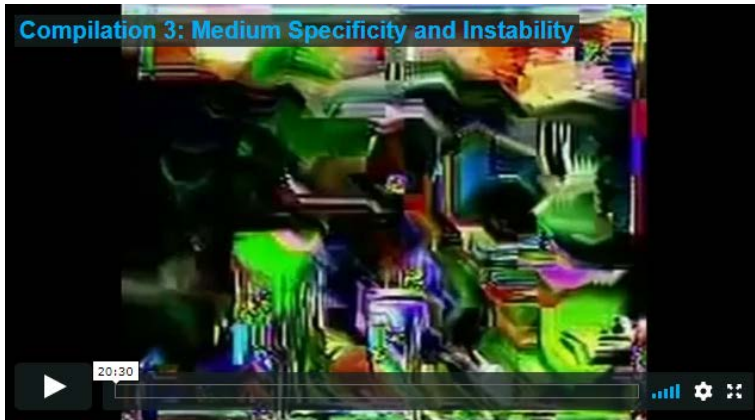
Compilation 4: Critical fictions

This compilation showcases examples of synthetic audiovisual ficto-critical essays created out of the combination of two or more existing fictions. In *KuleShow* (2010) Erlend Palm brings together Michelangelo Antonioni, Alfred Hitchcock, and Ken Loach in a playful staging of the Kuleshov effect. Working in the illustrious tradition of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in *Teresa* (2014) Fanny Kinsch makes use of altered motion and the Italian language to give substance and voice to the female character Teresa from Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973). In *Méliès vs. Post-Méliès Narrative Cinema* (2015) Tom Heffernan constructs a humorous court case (with the help of Fritz Lang's *Fury* [1936]) in which Méliès returns from the grave to sue all the filmmakers who came after him for employing his narrative innovations without acknowledging their debt to him.

Compilation 4: Critical Fictions

14:31

Compilation 5: Adventures in Sound

18:19
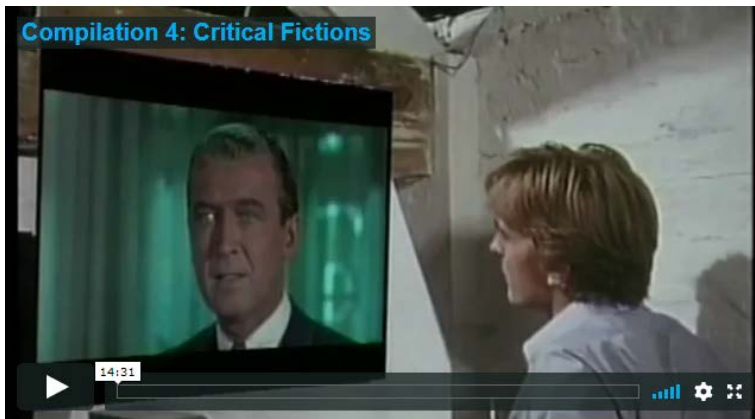
Compilation 5: Adventures in sound

This compilation is made up of a number of experiments in practice-based film sound criticism. In *Carmen I Love You* (2007) Joe Flory manipulates a short fragment of speech from Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954), turning it into a commentary on the fate of celluloid-based cinema in the age of electronic and digital reproduction. In *Music Without Sound* (2009) Alexandra Unwin reimagines Vincente Minnelli's musical *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) as a silent film. In *Melodica* (2010) Dorian Weiss creates a piece of *musique concrete* out of fragments of voice and noise from a short sequence of *They Live by Night*, which he then lays back over another scene from the same

film. In *Cherchez la femme* (2015) Hannah Sosna layers and blends female voices on the soundtrack in an exploration of the role of dialogue and vocal texture in the construction of the 'image' of women in classical Hollywood cinema. In *Robert Bresson and Musique Concrète* (2015) Daria Sevcenko explores Bresson as a sound artist by creating an audiovisual *musique concrète* composition from the raw, crisp sounds of *L'Argent* (1983).

Compilation 6: Voiceover

I generally advise students to approach the use of voiceover with caution since it is so often employed (especially on television, but also in much audiovisual essay work) unimaginatively and to the detriment of the expressive potential of the 'language' of images and sounds.[39] This is one of the reasons I incorporate a discussion of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov's theory of contrapuntal audiovisual composition and Wollen's reflections on the expressive potential of image/sound mismatches – to prompt them to think critically about how image/voice relations habitually operate and how they might be rethought and reconfigured more expressively. Nonetheless voiceover can of course be used effectively as in Denis Ogorodov's *Watch Miss Reflect Repeat* (2010), which offers a study of *Blow-Up* (Antonioni, 1966) through a combination of voice, still and moving imagery, on-screen text, and graphics. In *In Search of the Femonomyth* (2012) Isobel Guyver pursues a highly personal exploration of what a female version of Joseph Campbell's concept of the 'monomyth' might look like. Charli Adamson's *Thatcher's Britain* (2013) offers a comparative study of the represen-

tation of 1980s Britain through the cinema of the time and that of subsequent decades. In *Everything is Permitted* (2013) Joshua Whitelaw conducts an auteur study of the films of Nicolas Roeg (he sent this film to Roeg, who responded with a generous letter).

Compilation 7: Documentary/fiction

The films in this compilation combine fictional and documentary material in an exploration of the ontology of cinema. Carol Garritano's *Artifice and Illusion* (2013) uses superimposition to question any easy distinction between 'fiction' and 'documentary' in early cinema. In *Disclosure* (2014) Audrey Jean employs the standard 'Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead...' disclaimer together with crowd scenes from films from different eras as the basis for a powerful exploration of film, time, and death. In *The Dead End Kids* (2007) Stephanie Keen was the first student in the course to combine footage from their personal home video archive with fictional material as a means of reflecting on the interrelationship between (their) life and cinema. In *The Funny Side of War* (2011) Karis Searle employs altered motion and the insertion of archival footage to accentuate the powerful anti-war message of Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms*.

Compilation 8: Forms of composite imagery

This compilation brings together examples of the diverse (and often technically complicated) forms of composite imagery developed by students. In *Read Debord!* (2009) Oli Davis enlists Buster Keaton to assist him in a witty critique of the society of the spectacle. In *The Artificiality of the Love Narrative in Film* (2013) Nicole English interrogates the Hollywoodian depiction of love through the construction of a synthetic relationship between the protagonists of John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Ingmar Bergman's *Tystnaden* (*The Silence*, 1963). In *Reflet de l'amour* (2010) Michelle Remnant deploys a panoply of visual effects to magnify the sensuality and eroticism of Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934). In *Purple Suite* (2010) Christian Norvalls employs colour to connect shots of Scottie dreaming in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) with imagery of events from *Blow-Up* that, in the context of the new narrative, are plaguing his sleep. In her exploration of the cinematic representation of Africa *The Translation of African Culture to Western Audiences* (2012) Charli Adamson creates a memorable composite image out of material from the *Yeelen*(*Brightness*, Souleymane Cissé, 1987) and *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994). In *Through Space and Time* (2009) Drew Woznicki painstakingly grafts Keaton's head onto multiple bodies in a hilarious reimagining of the narrative of *Rancho Notorious* (Fritz Lang, 1952). In her study of the early dance film *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* (2007) Louisa Godwin creates a visual 'dance' of cropped fragments.

Compilation 9: Multiple screens and comparative montage

This compilation focuses on the use of split and multiple screens often in conjunction with other critical techniques. In *A Comparative Study of the Films of Buñuel and Coffin Joe* (2013) Louise Benedetto deploys a barrage of audio-visual-critical methods in an extremely original comparative study of the work of Luis Buñuel and José Mojica Marins. In *The Fragmenting* (2015) Angela Faillace makes simple yet brilliant use of superimposition to reveal the presence of the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train*, 1896) behind and within a shot from Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Slow Motion*, 1980). Alex Yerrell employs comparative split screen in *Masculinity, Fatherhood and Space in the Work of Shane Meadows* (2014) to chart formal and thematic concerns in the work of Shane Meadows. In *Mosaic* (2009) Lawrence Solon develops a cubist technique to explore the relationship between space and narrative in Keaton and Edward Cline's *The Balloonatic*(1923). In *A Thousand Sides* (2013) Roxane Girin combines altered motion, reframing, and split screen to dissect a short sequence from Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970) through reference to Deleuze's concept of the time-image.

Conclusion

I have often felt that the work made by students in the Audiovisual Criticism and Audiovisual Dissertation courses includes original creative-critical methodological propositions and moves that deserve to be documented and

more widely seen. Besides being a tribute to their inventiveness and creativity these nine compilations offer a compendium of some of the audiovisual-critical approaches and techniques they have devised over the years. As I hope the compilations also demonstrate, my understanding of audiovisual film criticism has been very broad and inclusive from the outset, embracing everything from relatively prosaic normative forms to highly experimental ones (from the 'explanatory' to the 'poetic', to borrow Christian Keathley's terminology).[40] The majority of the students' work clearly sits near or at the poetic end of this spectrum which remains comparatively little explored or theorised despite in my view having by far the most to offer to conventional film and screen studies in terms of methodological originality.[41]

I encourage my students to think of their essays as singular, non-formulaic prototypes and to approach the formulation of their shape and structure in as open-minded, imaginative, and truly exploratory a way as possible. I tell them there are no rules when it comes to audiovisual essaying, adapting a celebrated exchange about cinema between the director (Jerzy Radziwiłowicz), script supervisor (Sophie Lucachevski), and cinematographer (Raoul Coutard) in Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* (1982). I also draw their attention to Ken Jacobs' unconventional exhortation to his own students to 'get lost, and get lost again' in the material they are studying.[42] When it comes to the making process I stress that technical polish is more or less irrelevant. Indeed in my experience the critical energy that flows through much of the best work is a product of a combination of preparatory research and thinking about the source material, a familiarity with the palette of critical and analytical techniques honed by critic-filmmakers over the decades, a boldness in the face of experimentation, a receptiveness to the unexpected perspectives and discoveries that audiovisual analysis throws up, and a willingness to disregard received technical and aesthetic norms.

Looking back at my experience of teaching audiovisual film criticism I am struck by the extent to which what started out as a local pedagogical experiment ended up having a much wider impact. This was partly via the external examiners. When I invited Catherine Grant back to the university in 2014 to present some of her own audiovisual essay work she began by generously paying tribute to Roehampton's pioneering role in the field. The Audiovisual Criticism course, she suggested, was as far as she was aware the longest established undergraduate initiative of its type in a Film and Television Studies context anywhere in the world and her own encounter with it

in 2006-2007 had been revelatory.[43] The course continued to attract admiring comments from subsequent external examiners. Coral Houtman, who began her term as external examiner in 2008, enthused about it in her first report and asked to use the handbook as a discussion document at her own university with a view to developing something similar there.

The concept of the course also circulated via the end-of-year screenings of selected work at venues such as Riverside Studies, BFI Southbank, and the Ritzy Picture House in London, as well as within the framework of London-wide or national student showcase screenings and film festivals. In addition visiting international students took the idea back to their home universities while others carried it forward into their studies at other institutions. Eve Dautremant-Tomas, who graduated in 2014 and went on to Masters study elsewhere, introduced the idea of audiovisual film criticism to her new tutor and successfully persuaded them to allow her to make an audiovisual essay for one of her assignments.[44] A number of former students have gone on to occupy professional positions that have allowed them to contribute to the broader development of the field. After graduating in 2015 Will Guy took up the post of Cinema Project Coordinator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and in this capacity commissioned several audiovisual essays, including a series of works by Cristina Álvarez López on the films of Luis Buñuel which accompanied the ICA's Buñuel retrospective in 2015.[45] Last but not least, one former student's engagement with the theory and practice of audiovisual film criticism has recently come full circle: having been among the first wave of Roehampton students to be involved in digital audiovisual essay-making in 2002, Denzell Richards went on (following MA and doctoral studies) to pilot the use of audiovisual essays alongside Keith Johnston at the University of East Anglia in 2014-2015 and is now back at Roehampton teaching, among other things, Audiovisual Criticism.

For my students

Author

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ments (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006). His writings have been widely translated and his book *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Indiana University Press, 2013) won the 2014 Premio Limina for Best International Film Studies Book. In 2016 he co-curated a complete Jean-Luc Godard retrospective for the British Film Institute.

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Notes

[2]   For a sense of the scale and range of this activity see the list of resources given at the end of Van den Berg & Kiss 2016.

[3]   See Keathley & Mittell 2016, pp. 5-23, and the articles on this topic collated by Catherine Grant at http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/resources/resources-for-teachers/(accessed on 3 March 2017). A history of audiovisual film studies pedagogy remains to be written. Such a study would need to explore the largely forgotten activities in places such as the 'Cinema/video' workshop established by François Albera and Francis Reusser at the École des Beaux-Arts de Genève (ESAV) in 1975, where students were tasked with carrying out a variety of practical re-editing experiments on selected films (email from François Albera to the author, 17 February 2014).

[4]   Media Presentation, Research Project, Mixed-Mode Dissertation.

[5]   I described audiovisual film criticism in this document as an 'emerging' (rather than as yet non-existent) discipline partly in the belief that it would emerge but primarily to reassure those tasked with scrutinising and approving the documentation, whom I feared might view the course as far too unorthodox within the context of Film and Television Studies as it then exist-ed.

[6]   For a succinct introduction to the various meanings of the term 'essay' I had in mind (from 'try' and 'attempt' to 'weigh' and 'swarm') see Starobinski 1985.

[7]   I learned much later that Janet Bergstrom launched an audiovisual essay PhD film analy-sis/methodology seminar at UCLA in winter 2004. This was apparently a low-tech initiative which relied at least initially on the use of a DVD player and tape recorder rather than comput-ers and digital editing software. The only other relatively early initiative in the teaching of a dedicated digital audiovisual film criticism course of which I am aware is one developed by Christian Keathley at Middlebury College, which appears to have been first offered around 2009 or 2010. Bergstrom & Stork 2012; Keathley 2012, 2014.

[8]   The first cohort of students in the new programme reached their third year (where they en-countered the Audiovisual Criticism course) in 2005.

[9]   A number of other scholars subsequently brought their expertise to the delivery of the course: Chris Darke, Gillian McIver, Denzell Richards, Muriel Tinel-Temple, and Michael Uwemedimo. It also benefitted greatly in the early years from the support of the Assistant Dean, Jeremy Ridgman, and the convenors of the Film Studies programme, Catherine Lupton and Paul Sut-ton.

[10]   Witt 1998, 2013.

[11]   Cited in Tsivian 1996, pp. 337-338.

[12]   Leyda 1964; Wees 1993; Sjöberg 2001.

[13]   Bellour 2000, pp. 21-27. Unsurprisingly, Bellour's article has since become a central reference in contemporary discussion of digital audiovisual film and screen studies.

[14]   Ibid., p. 21.

[15]   Mulvey's thinking on these topics developed Bellour's work on stillness and spectatorship (Bellour 1987, 1990). Some years later Christian Keathley drew independently on the same key texts by this same pair of theorists (Bellour and Mulvey) to frame his discussion of audiovisual film criticism and cinephilia in the digital era (Keathley 2011, pp. 176-177).

[16]   Mulvey 2006. Two conferences were particularly helpful in giving me an insight into Mulvey's developing ideas: the Films Beget Films symposium that she organised with Ian Christie and A.L. Rees at the Royal College of Art, London, in 2002, where I contributed a paper on the au-diovisual cinema history tradition; and the Politics of 'Visual Pleasure' 30 Years on: The Work of Laura Mulvey event organised by Georgina Born at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 2005.

[17]   Mulvey 2006, pp. 26, 160.

[18] Laura Mulvey, 'Seeing the Past from the Present: Cinema in the Age of New Technologies', Centre for Research in Film and Audiovisual Cultures research seminar, University of Roehampton, 15 February 2006.

[19] Mulvey discusses this experiment in Mulvey 2006, pp. 172-173. In March 2014 a remixed version of it was published in the inaugural issue of *[in]Transition*: http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2014/03/04/intransition-editors-introduction (accessed on 13 February 2017).

[20] Brenez 1998, pp. 313-335. I initially used the abbreviated English version of this text (Brenez 2000) that was published in a special issue of *Exploding* distributed by Re: Voir with the VHS of Ken Jacobs' *Tom Tom the Piper's Son*. I later substituted a longer revised version translated by Adrian Martin (Brenez 2011).

[21] Brenez 2000, pp. 25-26.

[22] Rappaport 1994, p. 40. Rappaport is quoting here from a text he had written in 1985. This passage is not included in the abridged version of this article published in English in *Film Quarterly*.

[23] Rappaport 1996, p. 17. Jonathan Rosenbaum was among the first to recognise that Rappaport's practice marked 'a fascinating new direction for film criticism', one that 'potentially could (and should) spark a media revolution' (Rosenbaum 1992, p. 59).

[24] Mulvey 2006, pp. 17-33; Leyda 1964, pp. 9-21.

[25] Bellour 2000; Small 1994, pp. 1-11.

[26] Sjöberg 2001, pp. 208-260.

[27] Wees 2004.

[28] Chodorov 2000; Jacobs 2000.

[29] MacDonald 1993, pp. 112-212; Witt 2004.

[30] Murch 1994.

[31] Eisenstein & Pudovkin & Alexandrov 1985; Bresson 1985.

[32] Epstein 1985.

[33] Wollen 2003.

[34] In the UK system external examiners from outside the home university are appointed to moderate the work produced by students, confirm that marking has been carried out rigorously, and attest that the programme meets national thresholds.

[35] This was some years before Grant became involved in this field herself. She would go on to become an enthusiastic and prominent advocate of digital audiovisual film studies and a prolific maker of audiovisual essays.

[36] The only change I have made to the originals is to regretfully remove passages of music in a handful of cases.

[37] Deleuze 2005, p. 174.

[38] Email from Nicole Brenez to the author, 5 December 2007.

[39] The use of voiceover by audiovisual essayists has been the subject of considerable recent discussion. See for example Garwood 2016, Van den Berg & Kiss 2016, Grizzaffi 2017, and Álvarez López & Martin 2017.

[40] Keathley 2011, pp. 180-181.

[41] For a defence of the scholarly value of this poetic mode of audiovisual essaying see Grant 2013 and Álvarez López & Martin 2014. For a more sceptical recent assessment which argues instead

for the cultivation of 'a new generation of videos that *respect academic conduct*' (original emphasis) see Van den Berg & Kiss 2016.

[42] Jacobs 2000, p. 5.

[43] 'Way before I thought I'd have anything to do with this [audiovisual film studies]', as she put it, the course had been 'instrumental in showing me something I didn't think was possible'. Catherine Grant, 'Now with Rhythm and Timing: Reflections on Online Digital Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies', Centre for Research in Film and Audiovisual Cultures research seminar, University of Roehampton, 27 February 2014.

[44] Eve Dautremant-Tomas, *Robert Bresson's Cinematography in Haneke's Der siebente Kontinent*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxpXkHcNTc4 (accessed on 13 February 2017).

[45] Álvarez López's audiovisual essays together with Guy's introduction to them are available on the ICA website: https://www.ica.org.uk/bulletin/surreal-frames-three-video-essays-luis-bu-uel (accessed on 13 February 2017).