Independent Studies: Videographic Criticism

Introduction: The "Research and Exhibition Artefact"[15]

Mandana Vahebi

Introduction

It is a fact that in writing about the cinema there is an inherent compromise in the process of analyzing audiovisual aspects. "Videographic Criticism" has paved the way for scholars to develop their arguments while maintaining the language of film. The second round of the Independent Studies course "Videographic Criticism," led by Kathleen Loock with assistance from Alissa Lienhard and Lida Shams-Mostofi, invited a new group of students to select a film and work with that film over the course of the semester to produce scholarly video essays. The final video essays were then screened for students and faculty members, followed by a discussion and comments. In the current issue of *In Progress*, we look at the practice of videographic criticism, the how-to and structure of the seminar, followed by a brief introduction to the student video essays published in this section.

Since the advent of user-friendly digital technology, experimenting with the digital essence of audiovisual media has become a popular research activity. Videographic criticism as a scholarly method addresses the blurred line between using videography as a method and as a means of communication, validating it as a research practice (Kiss 3). That is, not only as a means of presenting research findings, but also as a means of integrating it into the research process. As Daryl Scott puts it, "we could argue that the creative process is an integral part of practice research-creation, specifically when developing and understanding how research artefact generates new insights" (305). In other words, he states that "videographic criticism can act as a second ancillary artefact that explicates the theoretical and research production processes" (293). What struck me most about videographic criticism was the challenge of balancing personal opinion with objective analysis. For me, the nature of video essays, which present audio-visual arguments underscores the critical importance of balancing subjectivity and objectivity. This approach ensures a well-rounded argument that is mindful of how it is perceived by others. Of course, getting feedback and discussing it was a milestone in evaluating the reception of the video essays we made in class.

Our journey in videographic criticism began with our Independent Studies course, in which each participant chose a film at the beginning of the semester and that film was to be used consistently for all activities. The sessions lasted three hours each and were spread out to give us

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[15] The expression is borrowed from an article with the same name by Daryl Scott (see the citation).

plenty of time to work on our assignments. The course followed the Middlebury model, with a fixed structure and parameter-based assignments that are used in the "Scholarship in Sound & Image" workshop at Middlebury College, Vermont (cf. Keathley and Mittell). The first assignment was a "Videographic PechaKucha," in which we combined "10 video clips, each six seconds long, with one minute of audio" from our selected films and which helped us learn basic editing skills in the video editing software DaVinci Resolve. After each assignment, we watched and discussed our projects, starting in small groups, before moving to the entire class. This routine was maintained for all subsequent classes, which included watching and discussing the previous assignment, receiving a new assignment, and acquiring the necessary skills to produce the next project. Our exercises varied, including making a voice-over exercise, creating a videographic epigraph by adding unrelated text and effects to a scene, and creating a multi-screen composition using film clips from our work and that of our peers. Finally, after these exercises, we began to prepare our final projects, first creating abstract trailers and then developing them into more polished videos.

Throughout the semester, assignments were planned not only to teach us editing skills, but also encourage us to think critically about the use of appropriate techniques to support our arguments. We had the opportunity to participate in "Videography: Art and Academia," an international symposium on the "epistemological, political, and pedagogical potentials of audiovisual practices," which was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, held at Schloss Herrenhausen in Hannover from November 2-4, 2022, and organized by Maike Sarah Reinert, Evelyn Kreutzer, Anna-Sophie Philippi and Kathleen Loock.
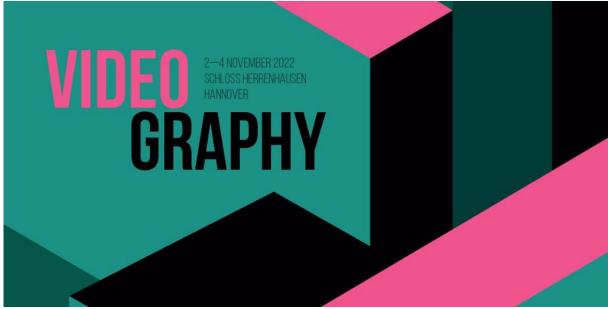

Figure 1. "Videography: Art and Academia. Epistemological, Political, and Pedagogical Potentials of Audiovisual Practices," November 2-4, 2022, organized by Maike Sarah Reinert, Evelyn Kreutzer, Anna-Sophie Philippi, and Kathleen Loock.

We are thrilled to publish student projects in the current issue of *In Progress*. The first three video essays revolve around trauma, each bringing their contextualized insight into trauma to the screen. First, Lida Shams-Mostofi's project analyzes the Elton John biopic *Rocketman* (Dexter Fletcher, 2019) and the aestheticization of the singer's trauma. Next, Shirin Shokrollahi's "Trauma Unleashed" explores the non-linear narrative and visual techniques in the film *Everything Everywhere*

All at Once (Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, 2022) and how they are used to represent the character's complex trauma. My own video essay "Traumatic Grief" highlights the skillful use of flashbacks and Free Indirect Discourse (FID) as a cinematic technique in *Manchester by the Sea* (Kenneth Lonergan, 2016) to blend the characters' traumatic memories with neutral representations. This is followed by Sadjad Qolami's voice-over exercise with footage from the Iranian film *A Separation* (Asghar Farhadi, 2011). Inspired by Michel Chion's concepts of empathetic and unempathetic sound in cinema, it focuses on the sound of a photocopier. Finally, Kerem Ak's video essay on the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Benh Zeitlin, 2012) analyzes the emotional and intellectual impact of the film's montage techniques and child's perspective on reimagining nature.

For some students, however, the final screening in the seminar was only the beginning of a keen interest in video essays. With Kathleen Loock's updates on what was going on in the international video essay community, Shirin Shokrollahi and Sadjad Qolami have been able to bring their work to a wider audience. Shirin's video essay "Veiled Frames," about narrating the unnarratable in Iranian cinema, received an honorable mention at the Adelio Ferrero Award (2023) and is a semi-finalist at the Phoenix Short Film Festival. And the final videographic project Sadjad made in the course at Leibniz University Hannover, "Separating Windows," was shortlisted for the final round of the Adelio Ferrero Award (2023).

We now invite you to take a look at the video essays and read the creators' statements. Happy watching!

Author Biography

Mandana Vahebi is currently pursuing a master's degree in the division of North American Studies at Leibniz University Hannover. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Arak University, Iran. Her academic interests span a wide range of fields, including cultural studies, transnationalism, poetics, affect studies, and media, film, and communication. In her current role as associate editor at the *In Progress* journal at Leibniz University Hannover, Mandana has applied her specialized skills in video essay creation to supply compelling and informative video content in the journal's latest issue.

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