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the DIGITAL  
HUMANITIES

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# critical making

## DESIGN and the DIGITAL HUMANITIES

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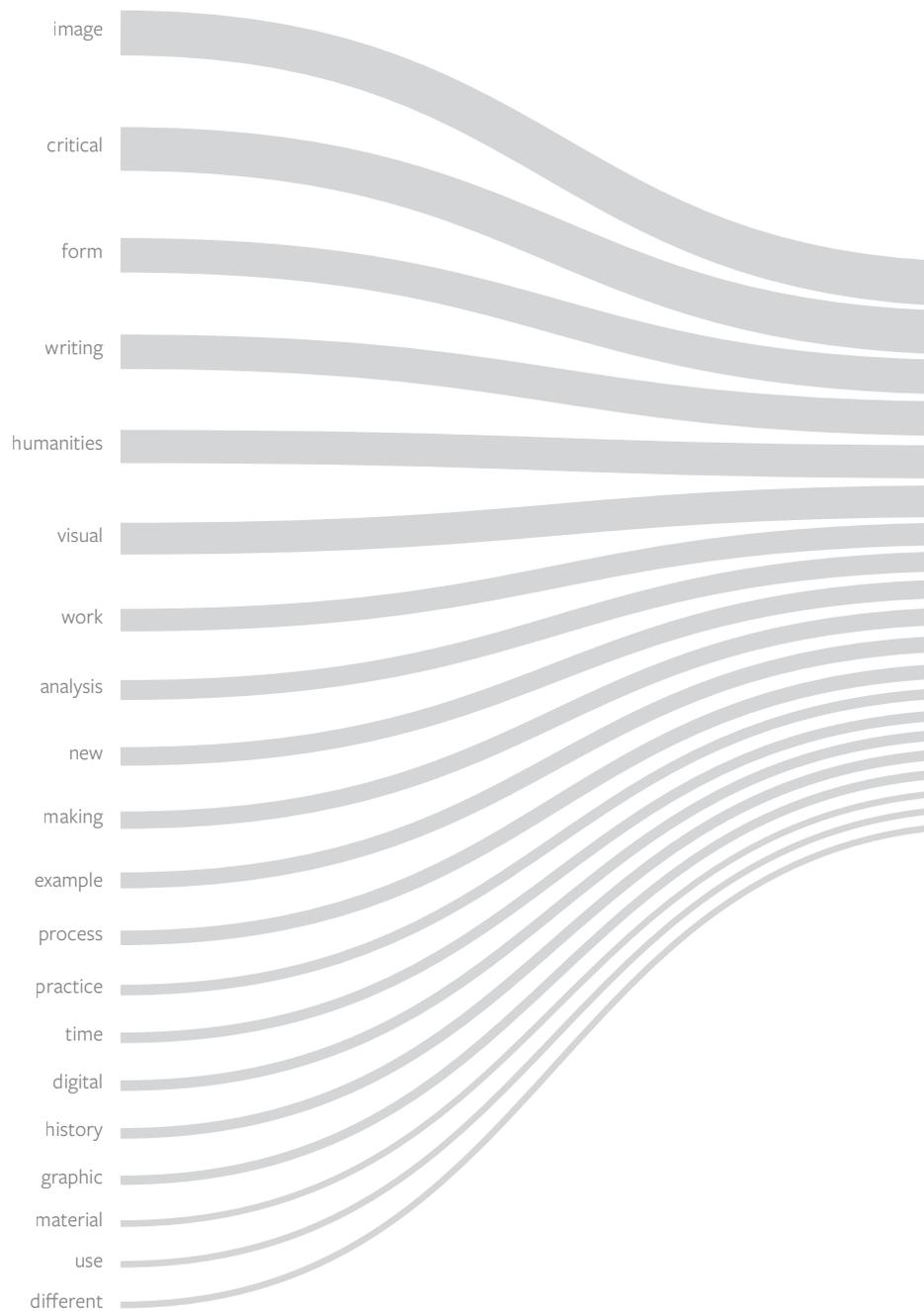
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# Writing Images and the Cinematic Humanities

Holly Willis

## Abstract

The histories of film and video contain a sub-history of media-based critical analysis undertaken through visual analysis, the integration of text and image, and the deployment of the artist's own body as a means of underscoring a critical stance. This essay explores four modes within this critical practice and makes a case for the cinematic humanities, or humanistic inquiry enhanced through the practices and modes of cinema, even as cinema continues to expand into what has been dubbed "the post-cinematic." The cinematic humanities include examples of critical visual work that integrate space, time, and the methods of design to produce new ways of knowing. The works created in this arena constitute a form of critical making that reframes the fundamental acts of the humanities through cinematic tools and allows us to reconsider our ability to re-search, re-frame, re-edit, re-contextualize, and re-write.

This article has a digital component available at <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/writing-images/users/3330>

Keywords: analysis, cinema, humanities, typography, visual

## Introduction

In 1948, French film theorist Alexander Astruc published an article arguing that cinema had entered a new age, one in which the camera was freed from “the tyranny of what is visual” to become instead “a means of writing” (1948, p. 13). He dubbed this new age that of the “camera-stylo” or camera-pen. He went on to note that this metaphor of the *camera-stylo* is very precise. The term designates the ability of cinema to move beyond the “immediate and concrete demands of narrative” to become instead a form of writing that is “just as flexible and subtle as written language” (Astruc, 1948, p. 13). He looked forward with great anticipation to a body of cinematic work that would integrate the technics of writing and image-making.

Astruc’s essay, which has been cited repeatedly since its publication, struck a nerve: the desire to use images as a form of writing, and in turn to use writing to produce an image, runs through the history of cinema; indeed, other theorists and filmmakers have proposed similar terms that attempt to describe both the alliances and gaps between cinema and writing. French experimental filmmaker Agnes Varda, for example, proposed “cinécriture,” which has been defined as “filmic writing,” a form cinematic style analogous to style in writing (Smith, 1998, p.14). Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier also uses the word “cinécriture,” as well as “hieroglyphic editing,” in her analysis of filmmaking techniques that attempt to move away from mimetic representation to figural writing (Ropars-Wuilleumier, 1982); this form was perhaps best explored by Sergei Eisenstein in his interest in creating ideograms through dynamic editing techniques not dedicated to continuity but to the creation of ideas. In describing the collaging of images and words in the work of Jean-Luc Godard, Jon Conomos uses the term *vidéo-stylo*, with direct reference to Astruc’s earlier term (Conomos, 2001). In his book *Visionary Film*, P. Adams Sitney describes what he calls a “graphic cinema,” using the work of filmmakers Robert Breer and Peter Kubelka to suggest a form of cinema organized around graphic principles. And in *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy After New Media*, D. N. Rodowick uses the term “figural” to capture the melding of differing semiotic forms, writing, “In a larger sense, the figural defines a semiotic regime where the ontological distinction between linguistic and plastic representations breaks down” (Rodowick, 2001, p. 2). He continues, “This opposition, which has been the philosophical foundation of aesthetics since the eighteenth century, is explicitly challenged by the new electronic, televisual and digital media” (2001, p. 2). Finally, there is a growing body of work dedicated to intermediality, represented by scholars such as Joachim Paech and Ágnes Pethő, who investigate “the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the cinema,” as Pethő explains (Pethő, 2011, p. 1). In each of these instances, scholars are seeking a form of cinematic expression that exceeds both narrative and documentary, creating a form that is intermediate, figural — a meshing of the visible and legible.

While the era Astruc imagined never materialized in the way that he describes, there does exist within the history of cinema and video art a little-known sub-history of attempts to reimagine critical writing through a form of on-screen typography that troubles the generally strict boundary between the visual and legible; this imagin-

ing is also evident through explicit renderings of image manipulation in which we see the filmmaker — his or her body, shadow, or hands — in association with his or her materials; and it is apparent in films and videos in which the filmmaker’s voice is laid over the images, and the critique is heard rather than seen. In each of these gestures, cinema aligns with the impulse of both critical writing and design, and critical makers seek a form of inquiry and analysis that hovers in the space between word and image. They also seek a mode of expression that is similarly hybrid and, indeed, that blurs the boundaries between inquiry and expression, between thinking and making. The process proposes new forms of humanistic inquiry enabled through design and the cinematic, and contributes to the evolution of the digital humanities, dedicated to exploring a world in which “print is no longer the exclusive or the normative medium in which knowledge is produced,” and one in which “print finds itself absorbed into new, multimedia configurations, as the writers of *Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* proclaim (Presner, 2009, p.2). They also contribute to the “maker” culture developing within the digital humanities, an evolution exemplified by THATCamp, The Humanities and Technology Camp, as well as HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Sciences and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory), both of which embody a strong commitment to new forms of teaching, learning, and scholarly expression through practice-based uses of media.

The relatively small body of work surveyed here, although varied and dispersed across the entire histories of film and video, is significant now for numerous reasons: it asks designers to rethink the traditional hierarchy legislating the visible and the legible; it helps to reimagine the act of critical interpretation through the visual; and it suggests possible directions for uniting design practice and the digital humanities to imagine new forms of knowledge production. These are forms of critical analysis made visual. The integration of typography disrupts the seamlessness of narrative viewing, opening up a space for other kinds of vision perhaps best understood in the field of graphic design. Those works that overtly demonstrate the practice of image critique and recontextualization by showing the filmmaker’s hands or body within the frame call attention to the process of making and the haptics of embodiment. Rather than hiding the process, they reveal it, and in so doing, assert the significance of making and praxis. To cite the *Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* again, making is central to the digital humanities. The authors explain that they understand *making* “in the poetic sense of poesis, but also in the sense of design carried out in action” (Presner, 2009, p.8). In this way, critical video analysis models a form of practice for the digital humanities.

However, this practice is specifically cinematic. Through the diverse examples of critical video work, I will advocate for the exploration of the *cinematic humanities* — humanistic inquiry enhanced through the practices and modes of cinema — and even as cinema continues to expand into what has been dubbed “the post-cinematic.” it is advocated here. Understood in this context, the cinematic humanities includes examples of critical visual work that integrate space, time, and the methods of design not simply to conjure interesting experiences but, instead, to produce new ways of knowing. The works created in this arena constitute a form of critical making that

reframes the fundamental acts of the humanities through cinematic tools and allows us to reconsider our ability to re-search, re-frame, re-edit, re-contextualize and re-write.

Through an analysis of several iconic examples of critical visual analysis within film and video selected specifically for their embodiment of criticality, this essay identifies four specific modes of analysis:

- visual remix and audio commentary, in which artists integrate images and voice-over commentary to create multimedia experiences that destabilize the power of the visual;
- graphic writing refers to the use of text onscreen;
- the hand-made mode references the desire of critical makers to demonstrate their critical analysis by depicting their own hands and bodies within the frame of the moving image;
- and materiality and the reflective viewer is a mode that centers on explorations of the material forms of moving image production, and the ways in which a project can embody its own argument.

## Background

The background for this emerging genre of critical making within the context of cinema includes several diverse practices. One of these is film title design, which was re-imagined in the 1950s as designers brought new ideas to a previously moribund form. The earlier title designs that graced Hollywood feature films tended to merely announce a film's title and list its cast and crew with static title cards that did not contribute significantly to the film's story or visual style. Their design was inconsequential. However, a generation of designers that includes Saul Bass and Pablo Ferro understood that the integration of motion graphics, typography, and visual style could extend and enhance a film's overall meaning, and the design of these titles was not insignificant but could be extraordinarily powerful.

Bass, who moved from New York to Los Angeles in the 1940s, shifted with seeming ease from traditional, print-based graphic design to what is now called motion graphics (Kirkham 2011). Early in his career, Bass collaborated with filmmaker Otto Preminger, and they co-designed 13 title sequences between 1954 and 1979. Perhaps the most famous of these was for *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955), which featured a groundbreaking ad campaign centered on a graphic symbol of an arm, which gestures obliquely to drug addiction. The film's title sequence is akin to the graphic cinema of the 1920s; a series of white rectangles are juxtaposed with the credits, concluding with the abstracted image of an arm, which is underscored by a dramatic brass soundtrack. Bass was delighted with the reductive image, its metaphorical quality, and its sense of nuance; and the sequence as a whole, with its rhythms, pacing and music, deftly introduced the film's central conceit as well as its general sensibility.

Bass went on to create dozens of other title sequences. He worked with John Whitney on the groundbreaking graphic sequence for Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

(1958). With the title sequence for a film titled *Something Wild* (1961), he demonstrated the graphic patterns of everyday urban life. The title sequence for John Frankenheimer's 1966 film *Seconds* used disturbingly distorted facial imagery. While Bass is generally known for his transformative work in logo design, his invariably provocative and sophisticated motion work set the bar high for all title design to follow and offered an invitation to critical makers to consider the interplay of words, graphics, imagery, and motion.

Pablo Ferro was another contributor to the transformation of motion graphics, beginning with his work on commercials in the 1960s where he experimented with the quick cutting and kinetic camerawork that would become his trademark. His first title sequence was for Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* in 1963; it boasts the designer's now recognizable, skinny, hand-drawn lettering, as well as his deft use of visual metaphor. Ferro's hand-drawn lettering was typography designed to be looked at, to have effect, and to produce meaning in multiple registers.

Ferro is also significant to contemporary critical media in that he understood the possibilities of multi-frame visual communication. The designer employed the pacing and rhythms of music in his editing and shot design, which is perhaps most evident in his work on Norman Jewison's 1968 film *The Thomas Crown Affair*. Here, Ferro notoriously shattered the full-screen images showing a fast-paced polo game, breaking the single image into dozens of smaller frames to juxtapose close-ups, wide shots, and movement. The sequence is dazzling, and while Ferro says that he was inspired by magazines and their use of multiple images on a single page, the sequence references the then nascent visual language of the database. Rather than merely selecting a series of shots and showing them in linear order, Ferro's polo sequence maps all of the image possibilities across the screen, showing an array of options and telling the story by crafting a visual pathway through them. For our purposes, though, Ferro's technique suggests a form of visual analysis; through juxtaposition and association, we can make comparisons, view similarities, note differences, and assess the images before us.<sup>1</sup>

While Bass and Ferro were ensconced in the Hollywood film industry, husband-and-wife team Charles and Ray Eames, icons in the history of American design, made a tremendous contribution to the understanding of graphics-oriented film design in a collection of experimental design shorts starting in the 1960s. Linking the tools of graphic design to moving image communication, the pair deftly revolutionized information graphics in ways that continue to reverberate. The celebrated *Powers of Ten*, for example, made first in 1968 and subsequently revised in 1977, begins with a medium shot of a grassy picnic scene in Chicago. The camera then zooms backwards, moving away from the earth to show the contours of the city, then the planet, then

<sup>1</sup> It is precisely this image array and its potential for critical inquiry that inspired the creation of the Difference Analyzer by Steve Anderson; the tool, still a work-in-progress, is designed specifically to allow multi-frame analysis within a single frame. Users simply position a series of clips within a larger frame, designate start- and end-points, and run the sequences, allowing side-by-side clip analysis.

the Milky Way, until we are one million light years away. The camera next zooms speedily back to its starting point, continuing forward to delve into the interior of a man's body and the molecular world. While the film is riveting as the viewers sense the rush of weightless travel while trying to comprehend the vast immensity of space and time, it is also very instructive in demonstrating measurement. Indeed, the film-making team worked hard on the visual interface that documents the changing powers of ten, prototyping several different modes and studying how much information could be absorbed by viewers who were both watching the photographic imagery as well as the designed counting systems. *Powers of Ten* is the best-known film by Charles and Ray Eames, but in all of their work, the duo was dedicated to understanding the potentials of visual expression, not only in single channel forms, but in multi-screen installations and exhibitions that were groundbreaking.

If film title design offers one vector of investigation useful in contextualizing critical visual analysis, so too does video art and installation, which over the last two decades has often taken the history of cinema as its subject matter. Project after project borrows from existing films and genre conventions to create experiences of cinematic recontextualization. Perhaps the ur-text for this mode is Douglas Gordon's *24-Hour Psycho* (1993), which slows Alfred Hitchcock's famous film down, allowing an entirely different experience of it as a result. Other examples include the video art projects by media artist Jim Campbell that analyze existing films, and Kevin and Jennifer McCoy's *Horror Chase* (2003), a media installation that crafts an unending chase sequence using material taken from Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn*. As Ursula Frohne has remarked, "For artists of the post-cinematic era, cinema and film are not interesting primarily as examples of genres, but as a repository of visual raw material that floods the pictorial worlds of ordinary culture" (Frohne, p. 5). Similarly, Raymond Bellour has acknowledged the profusion of installation works that take cinema as their topic, writing, "By duplicating cinema and differentiating itself from it, the installations thus also make cinema enter into a history that exceeds it" (Bellour, 2008, p. 407).

As with the title design works noted above, this direction suggests strategies for visual analysis that can be extended in critical works that take design seriously as an element in the formation of the argument. In other words, rather than remaining explanatory, critical visual analysis can employ design principles to embody an argument.

Finally, the history of music videos has also offered myriad examples of typographic experimentation, as has the electronic poetry movement. The work of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, for example, consists simply of words on-screen to create time-based reading experiences that blur the lines among film, animation, motion graphics, and digital poetry. Similarly, in both electronic poetry and music videos, artists and designers set words in motion, using movement, scale, font, time, and other design elements to craft reading experiences that unfold based on the temporality established by the artist; the result is a very compelling form of reading that, again, can inform the work of critical visual analysis.

## Four Modes of Critical Visual Analysis

Critical visual analysis within the context of the cinematic can take many forms. Below are gathered examples of four specific forms from the histories of avant-garde film and video to suggest models for critical forms of moving image writing moving forward.

### A. VISUAL REMIX AND THE AUDIO COMMENTARY

In the first form, artists integrate images and voice-over commentary to create multimedia experiences that destabilize the power of the visual, helping call attention to the ways in which they are always part of a larger representational context. Sometimes the images are original to the project. Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1982), for example, is a 40-minute exploration of rural Senegal narrated by the filmmaker. In the film, Trinh actively queries her own role and employs a variety of techniques, including the repetition of key sentences in the voice-over, to ensure that viewers are aware of her presence. Her objective is overtly political and centers on disrupting the authority of representation by calling attention to what we see and how we see it. This gesture is not unique but contributes to a larger genre of essayistic film and video dedicated to investigating the nature of subjectivity, power and authority.

In a different vein, filmmaker Thom Andersen's 2003 film *Los Angeles Plays Itself* brings together clips from classic Hollywood features such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *LA Confidential* (1997), as well as less well-known clips — snippets from gay porn, for example — with Andersen's wry, idiosyncratic narration spoken in voice-over by Encke King. The voice-over ponders the city's history, musing on architecture, geography, and storytelling obsessions, and occasionally rants about particular irritants — the lack of geographic continuity in most Hollywood car chases, for example. Andersen has continued to make visual essays — his latest film is *The Thoughts We Once Had* (2014) — and their power is in the careful combination of image and voice. To be sure, the texts for both of Andersen's essay films would be compelling on paper; combined with the images, though, they become something altogether different as we attend to the performance of the voice over itself; the sound, texture, and personality of the voice; the incredible array of images culled from the history of cinema and the erudition they suggest; and the combination of voice and image, which produces new meanings.

While voice-over exerts tremendous control over the resulting project and can perhaps have the effect of closing down meaning, humanities scholars have tended to eschew voice, outside of the written voice, as a critical mode. These examples demonstrate the power of voice to inflect meaning and to bring forward the persona of the critical scholar.

## B. GRAPHIC WRITING

While it has been possible to integrate typography and moving images since the advent of cinema, the impulse to use text onscreen remains relatively rare, outside of the use of intertitles in the era of silent cinema and in the practice of title design deployed to introduce and close traditional narrative and documentary films. As noted earlier, there does exist a tradition of onscreen text within electronic literature, and the history of music video and avant-garde film and video is punctuated by often stunning examples of text onscreen. However, both the use of typography onscreen, and the critical writing about this practice, has remained fairly limited until recently, when a confluence of factors has contributed to an increase. In the context of critical making, James Benning's extraordinary film, *American Dreams (Lost and Found)* (1984), offers a masterful example of multi-register discourse and invites a form of combined reading and viewing that blurs the boundaries between the two that is highly instructive for the digital humanities.

*American Dreams* brings together images of baseball cards related to the history of baseball player Hank Aaron, including images of the player and statistics related to his career, from its beginning in 1954 through its conclusion in 1976. The cards are presented one-by-one in chronological sequence, front and back; at the same time, we see and read hand-written scrolling text that slips from right to left along the bottom of the screen. This text draws on diary entries written by a man named Arthur Bremer from 1972. Bremer hoped to assassinate then president Richard Nixon. When he couldn't, he decided to target presidential candidate George Wallace that same year, instead, and the diary entries recount his thoughts during this time. Benning rewrote Bremer's diary entries by hand, mimicking Bremer's handwriting; Benning then created a long, scrolling text, which he photographed using an animation stand, advancing the text 1/8 inch for each click of the shutter. These two forms of imagery are accompanied by an audio track that features pop songs from the same time period as well as audio recordings of speeches made in that same 22-year span. Overall, the project represents a stellar example of hand-made filmmaking: Benning's precise work on the film, which pre-dates the digital tools, represents the exacting attention to process that not only characterizes the filmmaker's entire body of work, but underscores a history of making that extends well beyond the critical making movement coming of age currently.

The result of the combination of images, voice, music, and text in *American Dreams* is riveting. The hand-written text slides along quickly, making it nearly impossible to look away, even for a moment. It is almost as if we are being read as we read the film. At the same time, though, the baseball cards and statistics are intriguing. As participants in the meaning-making process, we become very aware of the skills necessary to attend to the four different semiotic registers. But we also come to recognize that meaning coalesces in the interstices as written word, image, song lyric, and spoken word align here and there to spark insights. And these insights seem to be our own, rather than being generated by the filmmaker. We experience meaning through the possibilities that are generated in the mix of information, and it is the

individual viewer/reader's own decisions and attention that will determine what insights are made.

This second mode has tremendous potential in the context of 21st century critical visual analysis, and designers have much to share regarding the significance of typography and its impact on meaning. Similarly, filmmakers have much to share about the creation of a temporal work that is more an event than a thing. As Johanna Drucker writes in an essay exploring concepts of materiality, "The aesthetic object offers its possibilities, not as a thing or entity, but as a provocation to interpretation" (Drucker, 2009, p. 13). She rejects the stasis connoted by "thing" and "entity," underscoring the ways in which they instead function to produce something else. She continues, acknowledging that the "provocation to interpretation" is certainly not unique to time-based forms, but occurs on the printed page as well. She writes

With such concepts in mind, we see the page, book, print, or screen space of text and image quite differently from the usual static presentation of thing, and see it instead as an active, dynamic field of forces and energies in dynamic suspension, acting on each other and within a frame of constraint, to produce the conditions a reader is provoked by in the constitutive act of reading that makes the text. (Drucker, 2009, p.14)

Benning's *American Dreams* presents us with this "dynamic field of forces and energies in dynamic suspension," and offers yet another vector to consider in constituting a critical visual practice within the cinematic humanities.

## C. THE HAND-MADE

The reflexive manipulation of cinematic materials onscreen constitutes a particular and relatively rare filmmaking trope associated perhaps most specifically with structural filmmaking in which the specific materiality of film is made the subject of a work. However, several filmmakers employ this trope not so much in order to investigate the material conditions of film or video, but to layer differing temporal and semiotic registers. Ágnes Pethő has described this layering of registers as "metalepsis," borrowing the rhetorical trope that indicates the melding of different story worlds within a single work (2010). While Pethő is interested in the combination of narrative and documentary worlds in the work of Agnes Varda, "metalepsis" references the ways in which filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Harun Farocki, and Su Friedrich call attention to their own voice, body, and critical stance by layering images of themselves or their forms of inscription with the images being investigated.

Perhaps the most evident form of this layering is seen in Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinema* that contains many images in which we see the filmmaker in conjunction with the cinematic imagery he is investigating in his 264-minute critical essay film. The film explores the history of cinema through the very specific attributes of the medium: through juxtaposition, montage, fast-motion, dissolves, superimposition, and other techniques. In addition to layering his own image into those he is investigating, Godard also uses typography and wordplay, adding an additional element of critique

(and often humor). With its incredible range of citations, as well as Godard's own knowledge of cinema, viewers experience not only Godard's critique, but the vastness of the subject at hand. We come to understand the significance of cinema in a profound way, but we also see it situated within a larger context. As James S. Williams writes, "By placing cinema in this expanded context Godard is not only trying to establish new links across different art forms, but also, in the very process to formalize the fundamental nature of cinema and what it 'alone' can achieve" (Williams, 2008, pp, 11-12). In this way, Godard's goal is very specific to cinema: He is expanding beyond its discursive traditions to comment on its vitality and role within contemporary Western culture. However, we can again imagine ways to borrow his method and critical gesture to further build a palette of tools for critical visual analysis.

Harun Farocki has also used his own visual, embodied presence in conjunction with his images as a means of calling attention to his critical stance. Farocki, in his insistent focus on the mechanisms of contemporary power as they are instantiated through technologies of vision, repeatedly shows us that cinema is ever-present. However, he also, almost as insistently, makes us aware of his own presence as the critical voice producing the work we see and hear. This is perhaps most notable in the iconic images of his hands as they frame the image of a body of a woman before she is led to her death in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War (Wie man sieht, Bilder Welt und Inschrift des Krieges)* (1988).

For Godard and Farocki, it is not enough to speak over the images under consideration; they feel compelled to enter the visual registers themselves, to figure the body of the maker onscreen and to thereby undermine the illusory power of the cinematic, which tends to hide its mode of production.

#### D. MATERIALITY AND THE REFLECTIVE VIEWER

The final form of critical visual analysis centers on explorations of the material forms of moving image production and the ways in which a project can embody its own argument. Gary Beydler's deceptively simple six-minute film, *Pasadena Freeway Stills* (1974), exemplifies a form of this critical making dedicated to investigating the fundamental aspects of film as a medium. The film's first images show what appears to be an empty chair in a room. A man wearing a white t-shirt (it is Beydler himself) enters the frame, sits down in the chair, and raises a still photograph up to be viewed by the camera. He presses it against a piece of glass that until this moment has been invisible to the viewer. He continues this process, methodically repeating the action of raising a photograph, placing it within the taped frame on the glass, lowering it, and raising another photograph. Each photograph is a still from a filmed sequence shot on the Pasadena Freeway in Southern California; we see the dotted lane divider, cars in the near distance, and the trees that line the freeway. Eventually, in Beydler's recreation of that footage, moving from still photograph to moving images, we will travel through the freeway's well-known tunnels. And so, as the film progresses, the movement of the man's hands, raising and lowering the images, is cut out and the pace of the images within the box increases, such that the still images become the film; at the same

time, the man's body and hands appear to remain still. Having created the film within the film, the process reverses; the images slow and we once again see the hands doing their work, placing each image on the screen.

*Pasadena Freeway Stills* deftly demonstrates one of the fundamental conundrums of film: motion emerges from stasis, or rather, the appearance of motion emerges from the appearance of stasis. Further, our ability to perceive motion onscreen requires an occlusion. When we think we see motion, we are in fact only seeing stills, and the creation of the experience of motion requires ignoring how it is actually produced. We can witness this paradox in the pairing of the two "times" in the frame, namely that of the man in the chair, and that of the freeway captured in the still images. The images of the man initially appear to be in real time; however, as the focus of the film shifts from the man and his actions to the movement of cars within the secondary film, the real time imagery of the man is displaced. That section of the film becomes a series of stills, too, as the motion — the human action of placing each image up to be viewed — is now hidden, and what was motion becomes stasis, but a stasis that is only an appearance of stasis. The result is a film that is delightfully complex in its playful investigation of time, stasis, and motion and deftly enacts its thesis.<sup>2</sup>

A similar interrogation of film as a medium occurs in Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky's 14-minute film *Outer Space* (1999). To create the film, Tscherkassky appropriated imagery from a horror film titled *The Entity* (1981) by Sidney J. Furie. He uses the images to interrogate cinema at the turn of the century, at the moment when digital video threatened to annihilate film. The short film becomes not so much a horror film about the violence enacted on the body of a woman but the violence done to cinema. As some unseen power attacks the woman in the original, Tscherkassky turns that power toward the images themselves, which are embattled; the film's frames become visible, as do the film's sprocket holes and optical soundtrack. They are ripped, scratched, and destroyed in a pulsing frenzy of chaos and mayhem. We experience the destruction of cinema through an enactment of its destruction. Once again, the filmmaker creates a form of analysis using the tools of cinema to reflect back on the medium.

*Pasadena Freeway Stills* and *Outer Space* make their arguments by calling attention to the material qualities and technological workings of the cinematic, and in so doing, open up another avenue of critical visual analysis.

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2 The topic is also timely. Interest in the space between stillness and motion has expanded over the last decade as digital video has gradually replaced celluloid film, sparking renewed inquiries about the material specificity of each form. This is evident in the publication of several books on the topic, including Laura Mulvey's *Death 24 X a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, as well as the essay collections *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* co-edited by Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, and *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, edited by Eivind Røssaak.

## Conclusion

Each of these four gestures is dedicated to enacting new forms of visual critical analysis at the intersection of design, the cinematic arts, and critical making. There is still much to explore, however. For example, we might investigate new methodologies. Film scholars are now easily able to capture stills and video sequences and array them for analysis or make video essays. This practice alone points to new possibilities for workflow, and by extension, new ways for framing an argument and producing knowledge. As game designer Eric Zimmerman has explained, a common design methodology entails prototyping, testing, analyzing, and refining a work (Zimmerman 2003). This process sounds familiar within the humanities. In traditional, scholarly research and writing, we formulate an argument, test it against our evidence, compare our argument with other arguments, and continue on to hone and refine our thesis. However, what is key to the design process is that it often does not follow a linear order. Indeed, design often starts with a process of making; what is made is then tested, and perhaps then it is theorized. Then it is tested again, theorized some more, and so on. So the process is iterative, but more importantly, ideas emerge from the process of making.

This practice is of particular value in our current moment, one in which traditional academic disciplines are being rethought and revitalized through interdisciplinary cross-fertilization. This is also a moment when the critical methods of design are increasingly welcomed into the humanities. And it is a time when, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick has argued, the lines between the creative and critical are blurring (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

Looking to the future, the cinematic humanities invites us to imagine critical practices that are immersive, embodied, gestural, and virtual, and to engage in acts that integrate thinking, writing, coding, and designing, and to step into the making of moving images that continue to function as the dominant feature of the global condition. The move toward video-based scholarly work is but one step in a larger context of critical making; the models suggested by filmmakers and video artists engendered by the cinematic humanities, however, offer an instructive toolbox for others interested in this practice.

Within film scholarship, the video essay has emerged recently as a new critical form and, along with it, reflections on new forms of knowing. Catherine Grant has been one of the scholars in the forefront of creating these videos; she made *Unsentimental Education*, her first critical essay video, in 2009, and the process convinced her of the powerful process of working with the material itself. Writing about her experience in an essay titled “The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea? Videographic Film Studies Practice as Material Thinking,” Grant reflects, “It was the practical experience of having to work through, construct, and then convey or perform a meaningful analysis by re-editing the film for its making that completely convinced me of the merits of videographic approaches as analytical, pedagogical, and creative research process” (Grant, 2014, p. 53).

Grant, along with Christian Keathley, Drew Morton, Christine Becker and Jason Mittell, launched a journal designed specifically to showcase scholar videos titled *[in] Transition* in 2015, in collaboration with *MediaCommons* and *Cinema Journal*. The online journal brings peer review to the video essay and establishes a new set of terms for evaluating critical visual scholarship work. In an essay about this emerging form titled “La Camera-Stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia,” Keathley brings us back to Astruc and to the questions that opened this essay. Considering the future of video-based scholarly writing, he notes, “What that critical ‘writing’ — still in the process of being invented — looks and sounds like marks a dramatic broadening of our understanding of what constitutes the meaning of such terms as criticism and scholarship, supplementing them with features that resemble art production” (Keathley, 2011, p. 179). The cinematic humanities is core to this new form of critical making and production that Keathley is referring to with the melding of critical and creative, of thinking and making. Indeed, as what we consider the cinematic expands into the virtual and three-dimensional, we are invited to imagine future forms of criticism beyond the videographic, forms that might be gestural and immersive, that might take advantage of augmented and virtual realities, that might integrate the art and practice of crafting meaningful experiences of story, information, and knowledge into a new attunement with contemporary culture. This is the role for writing images and the cinematic humanities.

## About the Author

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