
The Video Essay: The Future of Academic Film and Television Criticism?

By Erlend Lavik

That the Internet has transformed film and television criticism (1) is readily apparent, though the ways in which it has done so are exceedingly hard to pin down. The most obvious change is simply quantitative: digital technology has made the maxim “everyone’s a critic” more nearly true than ever before. It is far harder to gauge the internet’s impact on the quality of film and television criticism, mainly because developments are so diverse and contradictory. Online criticism ranges from brilliant to banal, and it is as easy to argue that film criticism has never been better as it is to argue that it has never been worse. It merely depends on where we cast our nets and on what evaluative criteria we bring into play. What we can say for sure is that digital technology has a great *potential* to reinvigorate film and television criticism. The aim of this article is to tentatively explore what this potential consists of and how it can be realized. Of course, it is impossible to deal with such a vast topic at a general level. Film criticism is a sweeping concept, ranging from amateur blogs to newspaper reviews to dense scholarly studies that shade into film theory and film history. I will concentrate on the latter pole of the continuum, partly to make the discussion somewhat manageable, and partly because it is in the area of more academically oriented criticism that I think fulfillment of this potential is both most realistic and enticing. (2)

One of the obvious fortes of digital criticism is its flexibility. For example, unlike their print counterparts, most online critics need not worry about word counts or deadlines. They are also free to write about any film they want, not just theatrical releases, or to put to the test generic conventions and explore alternative writing styles, unconstrained by editorial policy. Interactivity is another frequently cited resource. Hypertext links can point readers in the direction of relevant background information, while comment sections make online criticism more like the first move in an ongoing conversation rather than a verdict from on high. Most importantly - and promisingly - online critics may incorporate in their work moving images and sound. The burgeoning genre of the video essay commonly employs edited footage from the films under analysis in order to enrich and expand the function of criticism: to shed light on individual films, groups of films, or the cinema as an art form.

The inability to quote their object of study has been a long-standing drawback for film critics. The predicament has been most famously, and perhaps enigmatically, expressed in Raymond Bellour's classical essay, "The Unattainable Text". For Bellour, the literary text occupies a privileged position due to "the undivided conformity of the object of study and the means of study, in the absolute material coincidence between language and language" (1975: 20). Unlike literary critics, film critics have not been able to replicate portions of works, but have had to cope as best they can, mimicking, evoking, describing, "playing on an absent object", as Bellour puts it (*ibid.*: 26). In this digital day and age, though, this is no longer the case. For the first time, there is material equivalence between film and film criticism, as both exist - or can be made to exist - simply as media files.

That final statement requires a couple of qualifications, however. First, film critics have naturally not been incapable of reproducing any cinematic attribute. Film is a multimodal medium, and its repertoire includes print critics' symbolic means of expression: the written word. Hence those portions of a film that consist of text are, to be sure, quotable. The problem is that text rarely, if ever, functions autonomously in the cinema. Certainly, when filmmakers started using intertitles in the silent era, critics could accurately quote movie dialogue - but not, crucially, its preceding and/or subsequent visual enactment (presumably the very reason such works assumed cinematic rather than solely literary form in the first place). With the introduction of sound, dialogue and performance were synchronized, throwing into relief the inadequacy of partial quotation (or more accurately, in this case, transcription). Print critics may still duplicate the literal meaning of the words spoken onscreen, but not the act of speaking itself, i.e. the *what* but not the *how* (except, of course, as always, through ekphrasis). (3)

Second, since the 1970s film scholars have occasionally made use of frame enlargements when performing close readings. While useful for some purposes - scrutinizing image composition or lighting schemes, for example - still frames can merely hint at some of the key characteristics of film as a temporal art form: camera movement, blocking, editing, and so on. As Kristin Thompson - who, with David Bordwell, pioneered the use of still images in scholarly studies - points out, frame enlargements were quite rarely used because "It took special equipment to photograph such frames: expensive camera attachments, color-balanced light sources, and the expertise to use both" (2006: n.p.). Thus, until DVDs made frame grabbing easy, most scholars persisted with studio-generated publicity photos as illustrations, which of course were useless for close analysis, seeing as they "did not reflect what really appeared in the film, since they were still photos taken on the set, often with different poses, lighting, and camera position" (*ibid.*).

Third, not all films are available in digital format. Numerous cinematic works cannot be quoted even in video essays, if only for the simple reason that they are unavailable either online or on DVD. Fourth, if we think of a film's theatrical distribution as an "original", some aural and visual information may be lost or altered as celluloid prints are converted to digital files on a computer. There is no surround sound, for example; film grain is often removed; and the image will typically be cropped along the perimeter. (4) Still, for most purposes these are minor problems (and it is worth bearing in mind that literary critics are not able to quote all aspects of a book either: to appraise the quality of its paper, its layout, or font style, they too must resort to description).

The obvious advancement that digital film criticism offers is the ability to quote in order to illustrate and exemplify, to hold up for the reader fragments of the work as a shared frame of reference for the critic's observations and evaluations. The upshot of this facility is hard to specify at this stage. The video essay is still in its infancy, and has not coalesced into established patterns or forms yet. The label refers to sometimes widely divergent works. Matt Zoller Seitz's wonderful five-part analysis of the film authorship of Wes Anderson, "The Substance of Style", is a fairly conventional auteur study, tracing key influences on the director's style and themes. (5) However, rather than putting forward his argument as text, it is presented in the form of a voiceover accompanied by carefully edited footage from Anderson's work, sometimes juxtaposed by the work of the major artists that have inspired it. This allows Zoller Seitz to make his case with far greater economy, precision, and persuasion than a written piece with some frame grabs could hope to accomplish.

By contrast, Jim Emerson's video essay, "Close-Up", presents a very different approach to the format. (6) A collage of excerpts from classical films with no expository narration, it offers not so much a straightforward line of reasoning as an evocative meditation on the medium of film. With some modifications (if, no doubt, somewhat to its detriment) Zoller Seitz's essay could probably be adapted into a scholarly article; Emerson's, meanwhile, would not look out of place in an art gallery. These examples, though far from exhaustive, point up the scope of the video essay. As we will see, the format overlaps in myriad ways with a number of more established generic structures. The aim of the following discussion is partly descriptive - i.e. it attempts, in broad strokes, to provide an overview of the main genres with which the video essay intersects - and partly normative, i.e. it seeks to tentatively indicate some fruitful avenues for how the video essay may enhance film criticism.

One obvious point of reference is the so-called essay film, itself a notoriously elusive creature. Phillip Lopate calls it a centaur, "a cinematic genre that barely exists" (1992: 19). What he searches for, but struggles

to find, is the cinematic equivalent of the literary essay: an eloquent, personal attempt to work out some fairly well-defined problem or mental knot through coherent arguments that flaunts, traces, or preserves the act of thinking.

While I share Lopate's desire to see this fabled genre brought to fruition far more often, it is both too broad and too narrow for my purposes here. It is too inclusive because there are no thematic constraints. An essay film may deal with any topic under the sun; film criticism must be concerned with film. On the other hand, it is too restrictive, for Lopate seeks to describe a certain style, or tone of voice: elegant, probing, subjective, reflective, reflexive, and so on. The essay film assumes an intermediate position between avant-gardist and documentary practices. On the one hand, it is more accessible and less radically experimental than the avant-garde. For Lopate, the essay presents a reasoned discourse on a reasonably identifiable topic. Thus he finds it hard to think of a filmmaker such as Jean-Luc Godard as an essayist, as he is "too much the modernist [...] to be caught dead straightforwardly expressing his views" (*ibid.*: 20). While the essay form "allows for fragmentation and disjunction [...] it keeps weaving itself whole again, resisting alienation, if only through the power of a synthesizing, personal voice with its old-fashioned humanist assumptions" (*ibid.*: 21). Most controversially, perhaps, Lopate insists that an essay-film "must have words, in the form of a text either spoken, subtitled or intertitled" (*ibid.*: 19).

On the other hand, the essayist's rhetoric is invested with less authority than the documentarian's; it is less assertive, impartial, proclamatory, or didactic: "The text must present more than information", writes Lopate, "it must have a strong, personal point of view. The standard documentary voiceover which tells us, say, about the annual herring yield is fundamentally journalistic, not essayistic" (*ibid.*: 19). The documentary's typically omniscient mode of address is communal and collective. The essay, by contrast, invites us to adopt a more singular spectatorial position. It speaks to us as embodied individuals rather than as an undifferentiated mass. As Laura Rascaroli observes, the essay film's argument is less "closed", and its "rhetoric is such that it opens up problems, and interrogates the spectator; instead of guiding her through emotional and intellectual response, the essay urges her to engage individually with the film" (2008: 35).

While the essay form can be very rewarding, it would obviously be unwise to consign digital film criticism to such a Procrustean bed. We can all agree that the video essay - or, if we want to avoid the restricting connotations of the latter term: *audiovisual film criticism* - would benefit both from more documentary and from more avant-garde practices. Indeed, it seems to me that, among academics, it is the avant-gardist

brand of audiovisual criticism that is most prevalent. For example, the recently launched, and tellingly titled, online journal *Audiovisual Thinking* (7) largely consists of experimental videos. *Vectors* is another online journal in a similar vein, promoting itself as “a fusion of old and new media in order to foster ways of knowing and seeing that expand the rigid text-based paradigms of traditional scholarship”. (8) While this work is highly varied and very hard to categorize, at least parts of it might be said to share some affinities with certain pre-existing, though somewhat marginal and interrelated, practices. Thus, some pieces appear to have a theoretical agenda, calling to mind the tradition of scholar-filmmakers like Noël Burch, Laura Mulvey, and Peter Wollen. Other pieces seem inspired by self-reflexive, avant-garde art engaging in political activism, recalling for example the efforts of situationist filmmakers like Guy Debord. Accordingly, Eric Faden, a prominent advocate and practitioner of multimedia-based scholarship, writes that “media stylos” or “critical media” (as he calls his video essays) consist of “using moving images to engage and critique themselves; moving images illustrating theory; or even moving images revealing the labor of their own construction” (2008: n.p.).

These efforts are interesting and rewarding, for there is no clear-cut line that neatly separates academic from artistic ventures in all cases, or at all times. Of course, most products and practices we encounter can be assigned exclusively and conclusively to one realm: It is either art or scholarship, and distinctions can be made comfortably enough, based on generic conventions, for example, or institutional affiliation. But it is also self-evident that there will be overlaps and limit cases. Most elementarily, artworks can be informed by academic theories or concepts (from philosophy, say, or narratology, or psychoanalysis), while an awareness and understanding of the craft that has gone into a work of art may sharpen scholars’ analytical and theoretical prowess.

Seeking out grey areas, exploring intersections and reciprocities, can be fruitful, and it swiftly demonstrates how random the boundaries between the arts and the academy can be. In some cases, artists and scholars appear, by and large, to engage in the same basic enterprise, except that they fall back on different modes of discourse. But this is hardly a revelation. After all, debates about the distinctions and interdependencies between literature and philosophy can be traced back at least to Plato. (9) It is, or ought to be, incontrovertible that the borderline between adjacent fields is not determined once and for all by the intrinsic features of the respective phenomena themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that the dividing line could easily have been drawn differently does not mean that it might as well be drawn anywhere. The ways in which we compartmentalize artistic and scholarly activities and creations are obviously not wholly natural, but neither are they completely arbitrary.

Over time, the two domains have developed mostly distinct, if occasionally converging, rules and habits. These conventions continue to evolve, of course, but there is considerable continuity, and the pragmatic partitions remain because they have been found to serve certain purposes quite well.

Consequently, while I would certainly not discourage audiovisual scholarship that approaches experimental and “performative” modes of inquiry and communication, this is not where I think the greatest potential of audiovisual film criticism lies. I find that it adopts too readily the conceptual abstractionism of the artistic avant-garde, and does not strive hard enough to preserve the particular competencies of film scholars as *scholars*: the ability to not just engage with complex thought, but to pull it into focus, and to articulate and communicate those ideas clearly. (10) I share Lopate’s desire to see more intellectually ambitious work that endeavors not just to get us to think – though there is nothing wrong with that, of course – but “also tells us what its author thinks” (1992: 20).

Of course, I share the concern of many video essayists that the audiovisual material should not serve simply as ornamentation, but ought to contribute something that mere text on its own cannot. I agree with Faden that many electronic journals simply replicate traditional print journals, only on a computer screen, “same dense content now only more difficult to read” (2008, n.p.). But I think he overstates the differences between print-based and multimedia-based scholarship when he writes that:

Traditional scholarship aspires to exhaustion, to be the definitive, end-all-be-all, last word on a particular subject. The media stylo, by contrast, suggests possibilities – it is not the end of scholarly inquiry; it is the beginning. It explores and experiments and is designed just as much to inspire as to convince (...) In a key difference, the media stylo moves scholarship beyond just creating knowledge and takes on an aesthetic, poetic function (ibid).

I do not think this adds up to a relevant distinction between print-based and multimedia-based scholarship. Rather, Faden arbitrarily maps the different means of expression onto different epistemological ideals and procedures, which seem to roughly correspond to the old – and admittedly hazy – distinction between continental and analytical philosophy. Thus, on the one hand, Faden’s description of the media stylo would be just as applicable to the work of many influential thinkers that formulated their ideas in the form of print: In *Critical Excess*, Colin Davis

points out that “What matters for Heidegger is the philosophical yield of his readings, not their critical persuasiveness” (2010: 24), while Deleuze “wanted to create something new through his encounters with [texts and films]” (ibid: 56); Žižek, meanwhile, “wavers between patient, scholarly coherence-building and outrageous leaps of the interpreting imagination”, and “relies more on assertion than argument” (ibid: 128). Harold Bloom wrote that “all criticism is prose poetry” (1973: 95), while Derrida preferred to say that he wrote “towards” rather than “about” texts (1992: 62).

On the other hand, audiovisual scholarship may of course adopt a more conventional and pedagogical means of inquiry and presentation, and I think there is much to be gained from exploring more carefully the possibilities offered by more expository – “documentary”, if you will – modes of audiovisual film criticism. And to be sure, there are examples. Another online journal, *Mediascape*, (11) has published some video essays whose rhetoric is more straightforwardly explicatory than interrogative or associative. Other web sites target a more general audience of cineastes. *Moving Image Source* (12) contains many video essays, predominantly by Matt Zoller Seitz, with clear trains of thought and voiceover narration to guide the viewer. Critic and filmmaker Kevin B. Lee (13) is another frequent contributor. Zoller Seitz also curates *Press Play* – a blog springing from *Indiewire*, a daily news site for independent filmmakers – which consists mostly of video essays.

However, the contributors to such web sites are rarely academics; they tend instead to be freelance writers, critics, or filmmakers. This observation is not offered as a form of critique, of course, but rather as an indication of the extent to which academics have been hesitant to explore audiovisual scholarship, except as an avant-garde practice. One recent and promising project is *Audiovisualcy*, (14) whose subtitle (*Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies*) and self-presentation (“An online forum for video essays about films and moving image texts, film and moving image studies, and film theory”) suggest a more scholarly profile. But while there are original contributions, it functions more like an archive, collecting video essays from around the Internet. Consequently, it largely resembles and replicates what is available on web sites like *Press Play*.

I want to emphasize that these are all valuable contributions to film culture, (15) so I hope I do not sound too critical or prescriptive when I say I believe the format can be put to even better use, at least from a scholarly perspective. First and foremost, I would like to see audiovisual film criticism offer more ideas, in greater detail and greater depth. Most of the efforts so far tend to be relatively short, usually somewhere around ten minutes. (16) It is a tall order indeed, of course, but it is possible to envisage audiovisual work as densely informational and intellectually

ambitious as a traditional scholarly article. (17) Certainly, recourse to visual quotations often eliminates the need for exposition, (18) but I also tend to agree with Lopate that – contrary to the utopianism of Alexandre Astruc’s famous 1948 article “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo” – the camera “is not a pencil, and it is rather difficult to think with” (1992: 19). Audiovisual film critics should not accept too uncritically the old filmmaking maxim *show, don’t tell*. Now, I certainly do not want to foreclose too hastily any avenues yet to be pursued; we should experiment with the genre and not try to settle in advance the best way forward. Thus I will simply assert that in my, admittedly tentative, vision for the most fully-realized audiovisual film criticism of the future, it is still text – whether written or spoken – which does the heavy lifting in opening its author’s mind to us.

There is an understandable concern that, having added moving images to its toolbox, audiovisual criticism ought to contribute or express something that mere text cannot. To be sure, the visuals should not simply serve as illustration, if by that we mean mere ornamentation. However, I fail to see how they could be “merely” decorative as long as they are sensibly selected and utilized. Imagine famous exemplars of historical-theoretical film criticism like Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” or Tom Gunning’s “The Cinema of Attractions” as voiceovers, accompanied by illustrative film clips: Perhaps it would not literally add new insights – it might, of course, but they would be hard to spell out hypothetically – but it would, I think, help get some of the authors’ points across with greater immediacy and precision, or make the texts accessible to a wider audience. It probably would not be worth the effort to visually illustrate these texts, but surely there are good reasons to think it would have added *something* of value.

Others would benefit more; say, Raymond Bellour’s renowned examination of twelve shots from Howard Hawks’ *The Big Sleep*, “The Obvious and the Code”. Formalist studies would obviously be a prime candidate: David Bordwell – who uses frame enlargements more extensively and skillfully than anyone to illustrate his observations – would profit immensely. Just imagine his analyses – of depth staging strategies, (19) of action sequences in Hong Kong films (20), or of intensified continuity in modern blockbusters (21) – with the added benefit of moving images, complete with side-by-side comparisons of films from different periods and traditions. Clearly, the benefits to film studies would be considerable.

All kinds of close analyses, whether hermeneutic or descriptive, would stand to gain: mise-en-scene criticism, for example, or statistical style analysis, or the interpretation of themes, symbols and intertextual references. Generally, it would make film criticism richer: not just more

reliable and verifiable, but more enjoyable and accessible as well. Traditional print criticism of the academic variety undeniably tends to place huge demands on, or faith in, the reader's visual memory. Sophie Fiennes' *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (2006) is an intriguing case in that regard. A 150-minute "documentary" in which philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek, embedded in the diegesis, pontificates on the meaning of individual films, and on the cinema in general, richly illustrated with clips, hints at how visual quotations may serve to exemplify and clarify ideas – even if the film reads more like a general introduction to Žižek's thought than an in-depth, concentrated examination of a distinct issue. (22)

Commentaries on DVDs by filmmakers, critics, and historians may also hint at some of the forms that digital film criticism can take, though this genre has a serious drawback: the voiceover is at the mercy of – or forever playing catch-up with – the film's linear, temporal unfolding. As Adrian Martin observes, this means that the voiceover narration tends to "coincide only loosely with the moment-by-moment flow of the film", making it "easy to more or less ignore the film and offer a standard lecture on its context, background information, director biography, etc." (2010: n.p.). (23) In the digital film criticism that I have in mind, however, text and image are carefully coordinated or "co-written". Thus, the video essayist can arrest the action, for example by freezing the frame, to develop a detailed argument about shot composition, or inserting footage from other movies as points of comparison.

Other familiar frames of reference for audiovisual film criticism are the academic lecture and the conference presentation, both of which typically combine the spoken word, moving and still images, and text in the form of bullet points or quotations. All of these elements could enter into the video essay as well, so one template for the genre is a lecture over which the presenter has full control. Delays, distractions, technical hiccups, digressions, nervousness, false starts, and lapses of memory can all be eliminated. Rather, the video essayist can fine-tune every detail of the presentation in order to present an argument with maximum precision and clarity.

So far I have concentrated on how visual quotations may enhance the kind of criticism and analysis that film scholars and students are used to reading. There can be no doubt that the ability to make use of moving images allows the critic to express ideas more accurately and vividly. The value of this should not be underestimated. Still, the greatest cause for excitement is perhaps the prospect that the visuals may push thought further. This is a tricky point to demonstrate, of course, though I will try to hint at what I have in mind by way of an example: In 2009 I wrote an article on intertextuality in the HBO television series *The Wire*

(2002-2008), noting that that the drug raid on Hamsterdam in the season 3 finale invokes Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by, amongst other things, using the same music (Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"). In short, I made the case that this parallel, when considered in the context of other references and analogies, establishes certain emotionally and ideologically charged associations that contribute to the *The Wire's* sociopolitical concerns. Having since started to experiment with audiovisual criticism it strikes me, when I see these scenes again, that there are additional semblances at the level of form that also merit consideration. To be more precise - though it is difficult to be too precise without recourse to the audiovisuals - the two attacks are similarly filmed in terms of sequencing, camera placement, and sound and image editing, the cumulative effect of which, in both *The Wire* and *Apocalypse Now*, is to create an intriguing contrast between the narrational and the moral points of view.

Although I was vaguely aware of these issues when I wrote the initial article, it never really occurred to me to fully think them through and include them in the study. Because I was creating a text-based analysis, I did not find this hunch worth pursuing. I intuitively sensed that, without the ability to quote the two objects of study adequately, it would have been too difficult and laborious to get my points across to the reader. And even if it were possible, it might not have been worth it, as it would probably have made the text terribly exposition-heavy and dull. Had I instead been composing an audiovisual piece of criticism, I am quite confident that I would have pressed on and explored these ideas in greater detail and depth.

As research for a book project as well as for a video essay on *The Wire*, (24) I recently rewatched all five seasons of the series, and it struck me how potently the different means of expression shape thought. For example, with the audiovisual essay I am putting together in mind, other features of the show announce themselves as candidates for further reflection and analysis, such as acting, dialogue and delivery, and character complexity. Media scholar Anders Johansen has made a general observation that is pertinent here: "When I work with the same material in different media, I see it from slightly different angles. I do not search the archive in the same way when I am writing a book as when I am building a database [...] The medium is a means of investigation" (2011: 73 [author's translation]). In other words, different means of expression also constitute different instruments of contemplation. We use words, images, and sounds not merely to capture and pass on pre-existing and fully-formed ideas, but also as thinking devices. By confining film criticism exclusively to text and still images, we are simply not using every piece of intellectual equipment potentially available to us.

Admittedly, the proposals set forth in this article may be purely utopian. Criticism that is as rich in information, knowledge and ideas as an academic article, accompanied by carefully edited audiovisuals to illustrate and exemplify – all of it conceived as a single, cohesive intellectual enterprise – is obviously hugely challenging. For example, many scholars simply lack the practical know-how required to make video essays, though at least ripping DVDs and embedding clips in Keynote or Powerpoint presentations is becoming increasingly common. (25)

Of course, those who are proficient may still not find it worth the effort. Firstly, it is very time-consuming to extract all the clips, and then to edit them, before synchronizing the visuals and the text/voiceover so that everything comes together as an integrated, unitary argument. Secondly, there are few, if any, publication outlets for such work that bring the institutional rewards that would make the quest worthwhile. Particularly younger scholars who have not yet secured permanent positions – precisely those, it seems reasonable to think, who are most likely to possess the required technological skills – are expected to publish frequently and in prestigious journals. Both of these expectations would be hard to meet for devoted video essayists. To put it bluntly, then, there are simply few incentives to undertake serious audiovisual work for academics today (though it is also conceivable, of course, that swimming against the stream might be a wise – if rather riskier – career move for newcomers).

Copyright is another obstacle to audiovisual film criticism. Currently, copyright norms and regulations are confusing and poorly understood. Even though European legal systems give protection for the use of copyrighted materials for critical and educational aims, media scholars have generally not exercised their right to quote strongly enough. Universities and university presses, who ought to spearhead the digital rights campaign, tend to adopt absurdly conservative safety-first policies. This is regrettable, as it may lead to “a recalibration of the law itself towards a less permissive setting” (Jaszi, 2007: n.p.). In the US, the situation is somewhat healthier. Organizations like the Center for Social Media and The Electronic Frontier Foundation have lobbied intensely and successfully to defend the American public’s digital rights. Their efforts have been crucial in securing new exemptions to the controversial Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), as when circumventing copy protections on DVDs for purposes of criticism was made legal for film and media educators and students in July 2010. (26) In Europe, though, it is still illegal to bypass DVD encryption, even when it is done in order to create works that are wholly innocent. Thus, while it is permissible to use film clips in audiovisual film criticism, it is unlawful to get around the encryption that would make it possible to create said clips in the first place. Moreover, in the US fair use guidelines (27) have been created for

a number of practices, including for scholarly research in communication, (28) for online video, (29) and for teaching for film and media educators. (30)

Clearly, there are considerable practical and legal obstacles on the path to the brave new world of audiovisual film criticism. Still, the potential rewards are such that it is tempting to paraphrase Lopate's concluding remarks (1992: 22) on his centaur genre, half-text, half-film: I will go on patiently stroking the embers of the form as I envision it, convinced that the truly great audiovisual film criticism has yet to be made, and that this succulent opportunity awaits the daring critic of the future.

Endnotes:

(1) The rest of the article refers exclusively to film. This is merely to steer clear of awkward phrasings, however. It is simply implied that what I have to say about digital film criticism applies to digital television criticism as well.

(2) I am not suggesting that this kind of film criticism must be performed by academics, or be founded on scholarly conventions. Indeed, part of the promise of digital film criticism is that it may challenge the often overly rigid distinctions between "professional" and "amateur" practices. What I have in mind, rather, is measured and reflective criticism more generally - i.e. responses that are intellectually ambitious, informed by a profound understanding of the medium's expressive resources and history, and strive to offer up more than mere opinions and consumer guidance - of which academic film criticism at present is the prototypical example.

(3) See Adrian Martin's [contribution](#) to this issue of *Frames* in which he discusses *ekphrasis*.

(4) For a detailed comparison of frames captured from DVD and frames

photographed from celluloid, see Kawin, 2008.

(5) See

<http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/the-substance-of-style-20091109>.

(6) See

http://blogs.suntimes.com/scanners/2007/10/close_up_the_movie_essay.html.

(7) See www.audiovisualthinking.org. The journal is not dedicated to film criticism, but describes itself as “the world’s first journal of academic videos about audiovisuality, communication and media. The journal is a pioneering forum where academics and educators can articulate, conceptualize and disseminate their research about audiovisuality and audiovisual culture through the medium of video”.

(8) <http://vectorsjournal.org/journal/index.php?page=Introduction>

(9) For a useful overview of the ancient quarrel between literature and philosophy, see chapter 1 in Davis (2010).

(10) Research is not a popularity contest, of course, and public perception should not be allowed to dictate findings or methodologies. But given the severe crisis that the humanities find themselves in today, it seems wise to make a concerted effort to reach out and reconnect with the public at large. Video essays could well be a useful way for film and media scholars to reach audiences that do not seek out the kinds of highly specialized academic journals and books where most studies are published. It is doubtful, however, that uncompromisingly experimental efforts will realize this potential. That is more likely to alienate tax payers further, exacerbating the image problem that the humanities suffer from, as excessively cloistered and esoteric.

(11) See <http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/>.

(12) See <http://www.movingimagesource.us/>.

(13) See <http://alsolikelife.com/shooting/>.

(14) Online at: <https://vimeo.com/groups/audiovisualcy>.

(15) Fine individual efforts include Benjamin Sampson's visual study of Steven Spielberg's *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, available from http://la.remap.ucla.edu/mias/ben/index.php/Main_Page; Catherine Grant's "Unsentimental Education: On Claude Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes*", available from <http://filmanalytical.blogspot.com/2010/06/unsentimental-education-on->

[claude.html](#); Steven Santos's audiovisual essays on Robert Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and Fritz Lang's *M*, available from <http://vimeo.com/channels/127338>; and Matthias Stork's two-part essay on what he calls "chaos cinema", available from http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/video_essay_matthias_stork_calls_out_the_chaos_cinema.

(16) There are some longer pieces in which different facets of a broad topic are published in installments. One example is *Press Play's* "Magic and Light: The Films of Steven Spielberg", which consists of six discrete chapters, some of which are even further divided into separate parts.

(17) What I have in mind is something akin to Richard Misek's *Mapping Rohmer: A Research Journey Through Paris*, an excerpt of which was presented at the Remix Cinema workshop in Oxford on March 24, 2011. It is shown in its entirety [here](#) in this issue of *Frames*.

(18) A nice example is Kirby Ferguson's "Everything Is a Remix" series. For example, part two manages, in just under three minutes, to sum up the numerous sources of inspiration for George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) more clearly and persuasively than many an article could. See <http://www.everythingisaremix.info/everything-is-a-remix-part-2/>.

(19) See for example Bordwell (1997).

(20) See Bordwell (2000).

(21) See Bordwell (2002).

(22) Of course, audiovisual criticism need not function as stand-alone creations, but may usefully supplement (or be supplemented by) print-based work.

(23) There are ways around this problem, however. See Rosenbaum (2010). For more on the practical challenges of DVD commentaries, see Bennett and Brown (2008).

(24) This video essay “Style in *The Wire*”, together with a text which discusses its making both appear [here](#) in this issue of *Frames*.

(25) As is information about how to go about it. See Mittell (2010).

(26) See two other significant discussions of ‘fair use’ and copyright in this issue of *Frames* by [Steve Anderson](#) and [Jaimie Baron](#).

(27) Such guidelines have no legal authority, but they have often proved highly useful, as they specify what practices and procedures agents in some creative community – aided by input from legal experts – consider fair. For example, the Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use has made it far easier and less risky for documentarians to use copyright material in their films. See Aufdeheide and Jaszi (2007).

(28) See http://www.centerforsocialmedia.orghttp://framescinemajournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WEB_ICA_CODE.pdf.

(29) See http://www.centerforsocialmedia.orghttp://framescinemajournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/online_best_practices_in_fair_use.pdf.

(30) See <http://digital.lib.pdx.edu/resources/SCMSBestPracticesforFairUseinTeaching-Final.pdf>.

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