THE CINE-FILES ISSUE 15 The Scholarly Video Essay • Fall 2020

The Critical Supercut: A Scholarly Approach to a Fannish Practice

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Discussions of video essays often place them on a spectrum, from the scholarly to the popular, with one end occupied by audiovisual scholarship or "videographic criticism" and the other by fan-based productions like "supercuts." It probably goes without saying that each end of the spectrum has different reasons for being, different audiences in mind, and utilizes different platforms for dissemination, the former often published in on-line peer-reviewed and professional journals and the latter circulated on YouTube and other social media. Although the task of distinguishing the former would thus seem to lead away from the latter, I am instead going to approach the question of what constitutes the scholarly video essay by discussing its relationship with the supercut. I am taking this unusual approach because, as I have become increasingly engaged in activities once primarily occupied by fans—that is, ripping and remixing film and media footage and disseminating my work within a larger participatory community—I've come to recognize the similarities between fan productions and the audiovisual work that I and other scholar/practitioners are creating, try as we might to disavow their influence.

Fan knowledge of film/media texts has long outstripped that of film/media scholars—despite our status as "experts"—due to practices of deep listening, looking, discussing, creating, and sharing. Such activities are, for fans, a dedicated labor of love to which they have brought to bear every technological means at their disposal, including slide projectors, VCRs, DVD players, and so forth.[1] Moreover, in fighting for the legality of their activities, fans have paved the way for practitioners of all stripes to begin creating audiovisual essays. Thanks to the efforts of the Organization for

Transformative Works (OTW), a US non-profit organization that advocates for fan activities, exceptions were made to US copyright law that justify and protect under fair use the use of licensed clips for noncommercial purposes.[2] Film/media scholars have only relatively recently entered the world of media participation long occupied by fans thanks to the lessened legal risks and increased digital accessibility of film/media texts and paratextual archives, user-friendly editing software, and on-line distribution. In the process, we have not only been initiated into some of the processes and practices that align with fandom, but also the kind of intimate relationship with our objects of study long cultivated by fans. It is, I have come to believe, in acknowledging the ways that scholarly and fan-based audiovisual practices are now coextensive with one another within the current digitally-networked environment that we can and, importantly, should begin to differentiate the distinct activities in which scholars are engaged.

Fans, Scholars, and the Supercut

The Supercut is the online audiovisual form that is, perhaps more than any other, associated with fans: those who maintain a passionate connection to a popular media text or texts; who assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents, often through participatory activities; and who experience social affinity and community around their shared tastes and preferences. Indeed, when the term was first coined in 2008 by American technologist and blogger Andy Baio for videos he saw proliferating on YouTube (still in its infancy at the time), he described it as a "genre" in which "some obsessive-compulsive superfan collects every phrase/action/cliché from an episode (or entire series) of their favorite show/film/game into a single massive video montage."[3] The video that originally got him thinking about the phenomenon was a two-minute montage of every instance of a character saying "What?" on the first three seasons of the television series Lost, and it inspired him to seek out and assemble a supercut-like list of other supercuts.

Baio's description conforms to the common understanding not only of who makes supercuts (fans), but also why they do it (obsession), as well as the stance taken toward the media object(s) of focus—fetishism, wherein a part is repetitively emphasized and enjoyed as a representative replacement of the (in this case, narrative) whole. Read in this way, the supercut would seem the antithesis of film/media scholarship, which is traditionally understood as an act of critical analysis by experts,

who are often assumed to maintain an objective distance from their objects of study and who employ established modes of rhetorical argumentation associated with the written essay. The dividing line between the two has, however, become less distinct as scholars have started to engage in audiovisual expression, and this is, I would argue, in large part due to the affordances of the digital tools that scholars now share with fans.

As a number of scholar-practitioners have noted, an entirely different relationship with film/media texts can be experienced simply by virtue of bringing them into software editing programs and breaking them down into their constituent components. Jason Mittell states it particularly well:

> In its DVD or streaming form, a film is a bound object that asserts its own coherence; we treat it as something with its own internal design, and traditional criticism is supposed to engage with the work on those terms through analysis and interpretation. But once a film is imported into video-editing software, it becomes something else: an archive of sounds and moving images. Importing a film into editing software enables a conceptual transformation that allows critics to see and hear it differently.[4]

Especially for scholars, whose stock-in-trade are words and ideas, thinking and working audiovisually can be revelatory, opening up new registers of meaning and new avenues of creative and critical exploration, as well as alternative modes of communication. Having such close proximity to and control over one's object of study produces the kind of textual intimacy and investment that has long been the purview of fans and—coupled with the ability to share via social media one's resultant discoveries and the insights they generate, however nascent—has contributed to the current expanded field of audiovisual inquiry encompassing fans, cinephiles, and scholars.

Although seemingly new, this turn of events was predicted early on by film scholar/practitioner Laura Mulvey in contemplating how the then relatively new technology of DVD might change film studies. Mulvey suggested that the ability offered by digital video players to slow down, freeze, and repeat film scenes at will would make it possible to unearth hidden meanings of equal value to the film lover/fan and the film scholar, drawing out the latent tendencies of one within the other in ways that would inspire "a new wave of cinephilia."[5] She would go on to note that while there is an inherent tension between the tendencies of the fan and those of the critic/scholar —that is, "between a cinephilia that is more on the side of a fetishistic investment in the extraction of a fragment of cinema from its context and a cinephilia that extracts and then replaces a fragment with extra understanding back into its context"—the seeming opposition between personal investment and

critical understanding would "inevitably be undermined by an imbrication of the two," for "there is always a personal edge to the mix of intellectual curiosity and fetishistic fascination."[6]

Mulvey's insights were prescient and, although what she imagined was a reinvigoration of textual analysis—which has certainly come to pass—the supercut represents the limit case for the extracted cinematic fragment that she describes. In the supercut, extraction is both process and output, a method for discerning and demonstrating deep patterns within and across film/media texts. While the practice of ripping and remixing media has analogue precursors, the sheer number of repeating examples assembled in the supercut is both enabled by digital technologies and a product of what Lev Manovich has called "database logic." Manovich famously claimed that digital technologies have made the database both the "center of the creative process" and the dominant "symbolic form" of our age, supplanting the narrative as the way we organize and "structure our experience of ourselves and of the world."[7] Since "the world appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records, it is only appropriate that we will be moved to model it as a database."[8] While the database does not, at least on the surface, seem like a conducive model for linear time-based media practices like video essays, the ability to break down film and media texts into an "archive of sounds and moving images" within software editing programs facilitates and encourages not only "database thinking," but also database-structured outputs, the kind of algorithmic cataloguing of analogous relations found in the Supercut.

In an essay on fan vidding, Danata Meneghelli suggests that there is a relationship between "database thinking" and fan-based thinking, as well as the activities of list making, collecting, and curating associated with fandom. Even when fanvids are narratively oriented, they tend to communicate via a shorthand based on the aggregation of beloved film/media fragments. The logic of the database is especially evident in what Meneghelli calls "associative fanvids"—in effect, supercuts—which "get rid of or bracket narrative … to focus on the detail, the single moment, the isolated gesture or word, the one element that is obsessively repeated through multiple variations."[9] She offers as an example the many YouTube fanvids listed under the category Period Drama Kisses, where clips of couples kissing from dozens of sources are assembled to a romantic pop song. If fandom is always marked by a degree of fetishism, then such vids "express fetishism squared" not only in their subject matter, but also in the fact that "the fragmentation of the object, which lies at the basis of fetishism, becomes enhanced, glorified, to become a real structural key."[10] Her description of the way that fanvids

function—via cycles "following one fundamental law: the return of the same"—could just as readily be applied to an algorithm that searches and returns the same output.

It is the database impulse as applied to audiovisual content—which Meneghelli aptly connects with the glorification of the fragment in the supercut—that draws the interests and practices of the scholar toward that of the fan. The embodiment of their overlap—and Mulvey's predictions about the renewal of cinephilia made manifest—is the scholar turned video essayist, Kogonada, one of the most successful practitioners of the supercut to date. Kogonada began as a film studies graduate student writing a PhD dissertation on Ozu, but he left the academy to begin making video essays and was subsequently hired by the classic film distributor Criterion. He has since specialized in artfully-composed supercuts that draw out the formal and thematic proclivities of the famous auteurs in the Criterion Collection, evident in titles like Ozu Passageways (2012), Kubrick // One Point Perspective (2012) Wes Anderson Centered (2013), and Hands of Bresson (2014). Although in this case, the fetishistic obsessions showcased are those of the filmmakers featured rather than the supercut maker, much like a fanvid, there is no exposition and images from different sources are held together by a musical backdrop chosen to draw out the affective content of each auteur's oeuvre. Kogonada has stated explicitly that in creating his work he leaves his academic hat behind and that his videos are intended as conversation starters, but his work is clearly informed by his academic training, and one can imagine them as the visual accompaniment to more extensive auteur studies.[11]

The question is: if Kogonada *were* so inclined, would his work be considered scholarly? Can a supercut be more than visual illustration or accompaniment to a written study? More generally, what are the scholarly potentials of the database logic that gives rise to such audiovisual forms as the supercut? In addressing these questions, it is helpful to differentiate criticality—that is, a critical observation and/or distinctly critical viewpoint—from scholarship and all it entails. Art, literature, film can all be critical, but they do not, in and of themselves, constitute scholarship. The supercut can also be critical; as a non-narrative database collection of repeating images/tropes/themes, it can be used just as much to compile evidence in leveling a critical judgment as in assembling a celebratory montage. Examples of the former have, in fact, been around since Baio first noticed the trend. In the same year that he coined the term, the first "critical supercut" went viral, a three minute-plus video compilation of clips from different reality television shows in which character/participants make the claim, "I'm not here to make friends" (also the title of the video) as a way of stating their

intentions to make all else subsidiary to winning the competitions on which their respective shows are focused. Like many more critically-oriented supercuts, the video draws out through repetition mainstream media's overused conventions, leveling in this case an implicit critique of the formulaic nature of the "reality" presented by reality television.

Still, the interpretive openness of most supercuts means that, whatever the intention behind them, they can be read in either critical or celebratory ways, and many both at the same time. This is, indeed, the case with the *Lost* video mentioned by Baio, which can be enjoyed simultaneously as a humorous nod to the show's convoluted narrative and a critique of its go-to method for explicating it. It is equally true for *I'm not here to make friends*. Although its creator, journalist and entertainment blogger Rich Juzwiak, told *Wired Magazine* that he intended it as a critique, his supercut readily plays into the fan cultures around reality television, cluing in the uninitiated to the genre's idiosyncrasies while providing its enthusiasts with a parade of the characters they love to hate.[12] As film and electronic arts critic Tom McCormack points out, the video elicits a stance somewhere between mockery and appreciation, rejection and mastery: "The compendium simultaneously draws attention to the proliferation of the generic expression while highlighting minor differences between iterations. We laugh at the ridiculous banality of Juzwiak's video even as we become connoisseurs; by the end we notice the idiosyncrasies in attitude, pacing, setting."[13]

Narrative framing—whether in the way clips are assembled, or through text-based information including the title and use of intertitles, or through voiceover—thus, becomes key in shifting the supercut in more critical, and potentially scholarly, directions. A prime example of how the same clips can be narratively reframed is mentioned in a discussion of supercuts by Kevin B. Lee in the video essay, What Makes a Video Essay Great? (2014). He begins by showing a series of scenes from a video essay/supercut entitled Women in the Works of Martin Scorsese (2013) by video artist Nelson Carvajal and published in the *Press Play* video blog at *INDIEWIRE*. The video was comprised of a series of scenes showcasing the female characters in Scorsese films and was intended as a tribute to the director. In the comment section, however, Dina Fiasconaro posted a link to her own compilation, originally intended as an accompaniment to academic research, entitled The Representation of Women in Martin Scorsese Films (2013). It uses many of the same clips as Carvajal's supercut, but frames them thematically with such intertitles as Male Gaze, Verbal Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Mental Illness. As Lee says, this different take on the same footage "was like

watching Scorsese films through a completely new set of eyes, where the depiction of women registered as a kind of ritualized misogyny hidden in plain sight."[14] Fiasconaro's thematic structuring provides a critical viewpoint, gesturing toward the ideological stakes in Scorsese's depiction of women. Like most supercuts, however, it remains largely observational and is presented as visual research within a broader scholarly inquiry rather than, say, the equivalent of a scholarly essay. Such works are, in and of themselves, still an important part of the audiovisual landscape not only for the insights they offer into particular film/media, but also for the dialogues they help generate, in this case, between practitioners with different investments, one industry-based and the other critical/scholarly.

It is worth noting, however, that video essays like that of Fiasconaro have been published in the peer-reviewed journal, *[In]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image*. As Jason Mittell—who is one of the founding co-editors—notes, the journal was created "in the spirit of exploration and experimentation," and it tends to give preference to works that "produce a 'knowledge effect' composed of sound and image" over those that attempt to reproduce the traditional argumentation of scholarly articles.[15] The journal, thus, accepts a wide range of approaches to videographic criticism while using its open peer review process as both a guardrail and forum for discussing each work's scholarly merits. While the number of works that would fall under the category of the supercut is limited, those that do help to underscore some of the tensions in the question of what makes a video essay scholarly. An example is Cüneyt Çakirlar's Mothers on the Line: The Allure of Julianne Moore (2016), in which scenes from seventeen different films are assembled to draw out thematic continuities in Moore's performances of mothers or mother-substitutes. Like Fiasconaro's supercut, the clips are framed thematically with intertitles: I. UNION/DISSOLUTION, II. THE [MATERNAL] ALLURE, and III. KILLING, and the first two-thirds of the video are accompanied by the score from one of Moore's star vehicles, Todd Haynes' *Far From Heaven* (2002), intended as a sonic evocation of the expressive music used in classical maternal melodramas. In his Creator's Statement, Çakirlar contextualizes the video by articulating the unspoken argument around which it is organized, as well as situating it in relation to discourses within Star Studies. He is, moreover, careful to separate his work from more celebratory supercuts by emphasizing the unique contribution of such audiovisual explorations to the field, in this case providing "what a written scholarly analysis could not articulate as effectively: a condensed, affective experience of Moore's characters operating within the uneasy nexus of maternity and

sexuality."[16] In order to draw out the affective registers in Moore's performances, Çakirlar's video is more narratively structured than the typical supercut in addition to being thematically framed. Still, the constraints of the compilation/tribute/supercut form are flagged by both its *[In]Transition* reviewers, albeit for different reasons. Liz Greene, for example, suggests that despite the care with which the video essay draws out the unconventionality of Moore's maternal figures, the compilation still tends to "collapse these performances, categories, and anomalies" in a way that ultimately "undervalues the totality of her enigmatic screen presence."[17] Greene's concerns invite larger questions, not only about the critical limitations of non-expositional audiovisual forms like compilations/supercuts, but also about the trade-offs between audiovisual evocation and verbal/textual description, "knowledge effects" and knowledge production in videographic criticism, in general.

Perhaps no project has explored these questions as thoroughly as Ian Garwood's multi-modal, multi-format Indy Vinyl, which is organized around the nexus between the fan—in the form of the avid record collector—and the scholar—in collecting evidence to make an argument. A self-reflexive "audiovisual book" (the first of its kind) comprised of a range of "research fragments"—from an academic essay and explanatory video essay to a series of supercuts and social media posts—it examines record-playing moments in American Independent Cinema from 1987 to 2018, that is, through the shift from the analogue musical storage format of vinyl to the digital CD and beyond. Garwood describes how he initially approached the project with a "monographic mindset," which began with the scholarly question: in what ways has the recurring depiction of vinyl contributed to American Independent Cinema's identity as a distinctive film movement? As he progressed in the project, he began experimenting with audiovisual methods while also increasingly engaging with questions about the possibilities and limitations of audiovisual research and analysis.

In a related article, Garwood reflects on the scholarly merits of the six supercuts that he made as part of the project— four "simple compilations" and two "critical montages." As he notes, the simple compilations/supercuts are limited in scope, but they contribute to the larger project by demonstrating that "an exhaustive research process has taken place to identify relevant works," as well as providing a database of over one hundred movie record-playing moments from which to draw in more targeted investigations, both written and audiovisual.[18] He includes the full progression of compilation videos drawing from this same database in the spirit of "completism," a mindset

relevant to three aspects of the project: "the compulsive gathering of material typical of supercuts; the emergence of the record collecting completist as an American independent movie 'type'; and the expectations of completism in certain types of academic research."[19] Audiovisual outputs were especially productive for *Indy Vinyl*, according to Garwood, considering that music was part of his object of study, along with the sonic and affective experiences conjured through record-handling and record-playing moments and milieus. In considering the scholarly merits of the supercut, he notes that it is a research methodology that is not so dissimilar from "distant reading" practices within the digital humanities, in which "technology is used to analyse large bodies of artistic data, to discern patterns that would not be evident through the close readings of individual texts."[20] His views echo those of Jason Mittell, who argues that videographic works that employ computational practices or apply rules or parameters—whether set or arbitrary—in remixing film/media texts constitute a new mode of digital scholarship that is in alignment with other accepted digital humanities research practices—including text mining, cultural analytics, and distant reading. As Mittell puts it, such "videos clearly employ a software platform to computationally transform a cultural object and reveal its elements that would be hard to discern with an analog eye. Is there a better description of what DH methods do?"[21]

The supercut is, as Garwood demonstrates, the videographic form that resembles simultaneously: "the quantitative approach to large scale datasets associated with digital humanities," the obsessive collecting of the fan (in his project, the "vinylphile"), and the completist endeavors of the film/media critic/scholar. It is, thus, the audiovisual form in which the activities of the computer overlap with those of the human and the proclivities of the fan overlap with those of the scholar. Whether one thinks about the supercut as a database or a collection of images and sounds, it implies a process of aggregating and sorting that has no beginning and no end and that could continue indefinitely as long as there were new additional sources. Miklós Kiss raises questions about the form's creative merits precisely because it resembles an automated process; as he says, "In the near future there will be a simple software or app, feeding its algorithm with keywords and other elements of interest, which will automatically generate a perfect supercut of media content of any kind within a blink of an eye."[22] While such a process might be productive for the new avenues of understanding it opens up into film/media text(s), for Kiss—who is particularly interested in original expression—narrativity is essential in adding a "human factor" to the supercut's "playful but dull routine."

As I've tried to demonstrate, the supercut is not just a form of video essay, but a way of thinking fostered by digital technologies that is engaged by fans, cinephiles, and scholars alike. The onus is thus on scholar-practitioners to articulate what differentiates our supercut-like outputs. Like Garwood and Mittell, I recognize the generative possibilities of the database logic that gives rise to the supercut and its scholarly usefulness, particularly as a form of visual research and illustration. I am also, like Kiss, interested in how to achieve audiovisual creative and critical originality but, even more specifically, how to produce videographic works that are not just a supplement to a written essay, but a scholarly equivalent that utilizes the full palette of videographic tools available: image, sound, text, voice. Within my own pedagogy and practice, this involves engaging audiovisual and database thinking in order to make new discoveries and formulate my ideas and then elaborating on them within larger scholarly audiovisual analyses, a process that I detail in the next section.

The Supercut as Pedagogy and Scholarship

My investment in the question of what constitutes videographic scholarship comes not only from self-interested concern about advancement and promotion as a scholar/practitioner whose work has increasingly taken the form of the video essay, but also because I work with undergraduate students in a liberal arts college in the US, where there are established guidelines for scholarly writing. I teach a third-year writing seminar that all the majors in my department (Media Arts & Culture) are required to take, and I often ask students at the start of the course what they have been taught are the requirements of an academic essay in the arts and humanities. They invariably state something along the lines of the following: that it makes an original contribution to a larger scholarly conversation in the form of a contestable argument or thesis that is demonstrated via evidence uncovered through research and analysis. I recently began offering students in this seminar the option of making a video essay for their final project in lieu of a long-form paper, and I have tried to maintain the same standards, even as I've encouraged those who choose the video essay option to engage the form's more creative, processual, and non-linear possibilities, and to express their ideas through images and sounds in addition to words.

Whether students choose a written paper or video essay for their final project, I have found it productive to scaffold their work with a series of four exploratory video essay assignments focused

on a single film/media text or series of their own choosing. The assignment sequencing is inspired by the "Middlebury method," as described by Jason Mittell, Christian Keathley and Catherine Grant in *The Videographic Essay*, but I changed the first assignment from a Pecha Kucha to a Critical Supercut as a way of ushering my students into a process of close observation and reading.[23] I have found that undergraduates often either don't know where to begin when conducting a film or media analysis or they have, from the get-go, set ideas about what they think and want to say. In the past, I have suggested that the former group begin with something in their chosen media object that snags their attention or produces a kind of mental itch they find themselves asking questions about, and I have encouraged the latter group to replace their fully-formed opinions with questions about which they don't yet know the answer. The Critical Supercut is intended to help jumpstart both processes; it asks students to search for a repeating pattern or theme in their film/media object and to produce a short (1-2 minute) supercut in which it is foregrounded. The pattern can be formal, narrative, or thematic, and it can focus on image, sound, or voice, but it needs to open up a deeper understanding of their film/media text, which students are asked to articulate in a written creator note. There are only two constraints in the assignment: no individual clip can be longer than 10 seconds and no audio can be used from outside of their text (they are, however, allowed to move audio from one place to another).

In the process of producing their supercuts, students gain the kind of textual familiarity with their media objects that doesn't always occur at the undergraduate level. They also make discoveries that inform their ongoing work in the class, which is progressively steered towards the final long-form film/media analysis. On occasion, the supercut itself becomes the foundation for a student's final project, as was the case with a former student whose media object was Mike Nichols' 1967 film *The Graduate* and whose work serves as a helpful illustration of the supercut's pedagogical potential. The student, Dana Stopler, discovered a repetitive "fish bowl" theme in the film—in the form of fish tanks, pools, and windowed enclosures—which she underscored in her supercut, {Tanks in the Graduate}, using as accompaniment the primary song in the film's soundtrack, Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence." In her creator note, Dana suggested that the fish tank theme contributed to the film's emotional backdrop of suburban malaise by reinforcing the circumscribed and insular environment from which the lead protagonist, Benjamin, attempts to escape. This is, in and of itself, a worthy critical observation, but students were required to take the observations they made in their video essay assignments further by turning them into questions that would lead to scholarly research,

and then to follow up their research with closer analysis. In Dana's case, this process ultimately helped in the formulation of a thesis and contribution to a larger scholarly conversation.

While doing research, Dana realized that her fish tank discovery had bearing on an ongoing scholarly debate about *The Graduate*'s ending. In the final scene of the film, Benjamin and his love interest, Elaine—whom he has just convinced to abandon her fiancé at the altar—jump onto a school bus after running away together. After sitting down at the back of the bus, their triumphant smiles quickly shift into ambivalent expressions whose meaning has generated ongoing discussion and disagreement among both critics and audiences. As Dana would later note in her final paper, an interpretive clue to this scene is offered by the very last shot of the film, which shows the back of the school bus looking very much like a fish tank. She elaborates on this in her final paper, suggesting that, "although *The Graduate* demonstrates transgressive moments," especially that of the final scene, "the repeated use of water and fishbowls, nevertheless, reveals a cyclical narrative of entrapment that co-opts that which the central protagonist seeks to transcend."

Dana's argument—that the final shot of *The Graduate* gestures toward another cycle of entrapment—might very well have been made in a video essay. Indeed, one can easily imagine it taking the form of the countless "Ending Explained" videos currently populating YouTube. What

separates such videos from the kind of scholarly endeavor I ask my students to engage in is the necessity of answering the question, "so what?" Why do we care about the ending of *The Graduate*? This question necessitates thinking through and being able to articulate the significance and stakes of one's research, and it requires a justification that extends beyond the scholar's cinephilic pleasure or investment in the text. For an undergraduate like Dana, the contribution to a larger scholarly conversation, in conjunction with well-crafted audiovisual analyses, would be more than sufficient justification for creating a video essay in lieu of a final paper.

In my own work, I attempt to take the insights gleaned from audiovisual analysis further, beyond both the frame and whatever film/media text(s) I am examining, in order to shed light on larger critical interests and concerns. And I have found that doing so requires striving beyond a "knowledge effect," in which interpretation is left open, toward knowledge production and the articulation of an original point of view or argument. It is the latter that puts the video essay in league with the written essay—even as it makes its points differently—while also more directly reflecting the essayistic tradition that dates back to Montaigne, in which the "thoughts of a thinker" are traced and shared. Moreover, the combination of audiovisual exploration and traditional scholarly inquiry has the potential of taking the scholar-practitioner where neither activity, by itself, would lead. As an example, I offer my first published video essay, a critical supercut entitled Fembot in a Red Dress (2015).[24]

The video essay began with a fannish observation about the frequency of artificial females wearing red dresses in science fiction and fantasy films/media and a search to track them down. I began by assembling what I found within a video editing timeline and, had I turned those clips into a supercut, I have no doubt that it would have had fan appeal, while also producing the kind of knowledge effect hinted at by the still image series below:

Each of these examples recalls earlier Hollywood feminine tropes like the blonde bombshell, pin-up, and especially the "lady in red" or femme fatale. The conclusion that one might draw is that these are artificial updates of well-worn (and outdated) gender roles, man-made creations catering entirely to stereotypical male fantasies and related fears. A number of scholars have, indeed, made this claim and there is, of course, truth to it. What makes this a particularly instructive example, however, is that this seemingly self-evident reading runs exactly counter to the conclusions I reached after engaging in a process of scholarly research and audiovisual analysis. What I suggest instead is that, while the human "lady in red" serves as a shorthand form of female sexuality intended to produce the reflex swivel and ogle of the male Gaze, the "fembot in a red dress"—in pretending to be that which she is not—instead "produces some critical distance from the scenarios she appears in and the automatic unconscious responses she is supposed to trigger." Because these figures often appear in scenes in which they elicit the same response as a human female while reminding the viewer they are artificial, they throw into relief both the constructedness of femininity and the programmatic nature of the male response to it, as well as the cultural tropes and scenarios that reinforce both.

The above conclusion was reached in a process that combined cross-disciplinary scholarly research and an extended audiovisual analysis and, through this dual process, I was able to express that which I could not have accomplished through writing alone. As I state in the Creator Note that accompanies the video essay in *[in]Transition*, where it was published, "Although the narration relies on exposition to relay background and historical information, it was written and recorded in stages while I was sorting through and editing footage, and it was intended to convey the sense of a personal analysis in-progress integrally tied not only to looking, but also to feeling, especially in relation to the affective and aesthetic encounter with a 'red dress."[25] Significantly, I reinforce my argument and the ubiquity of the "woman in a red dress" trope at the end of the video essay with a fast-paced supercut-like montage of red dress-wearing women culled from the endless supply returned by a google search. The database thinking of the supercut is also integral to my video essay making process, more generally. Whenever I start a new project, I create separate tabs in the editing software, each dedicated to a specific theme or pattern that I notice while sorting through the film/media footage. Each tab has a timeline onto which I drag associated clips, so that I end up with a series of supercut-like collections that both provide insight into my sources and from which I can pull in assembling my final edit. While this approach enabled me to create moments of cataloguing, visual comparison, and thematic analogy in *Fembot in a Red Dress*, it was ultimately used toward a larger

analysis, which showed how the kind of obsessive collection and reworking that we associate with the fan supercut has also been used both cinematically and culturally to collect, disassemble, and reassemble that other cinephilic object, the female body.

It is, in short, not only in recognizing what database thinking—encouraged by digital editing and condensed in the supercut—can do for scholarship, but also what scholarly activities can draw out from the database, that videographic criticism will develop more fully as a scholarly enterprise.

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Some of the ideas presented herein were originally delivered as a paper at the symposium "Videographic Criticism: Aesthetics and Methods of the Video Essay" organized by Kathleen Loock and held at ACUD-Kino, Berlin on June 21, 2019.

1. Pam Cook, "Labours of Love: In Praise of Fan Websites," *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 1 (July 2012), http://framescinemajournal.com/article/labours-of-love-in-praise-of-fan-websites/.

2. Alexis Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," *Cinema Journal* 48, No. 4 (Summer, 2009): 130-136.

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