

Writing in Images and Sounds

In hardboiled crime/detective/gangster films of the 1940s, there is often a scene where one character confronts another and hints at something unstated and highly menacing, but awesomely present in the air – usually leading to the utterance of the classic line: ‘Do I have to spell it out in words?’ This excellent phrase often comes to mind when reading the criticism devoted to almost every art form: film, painting, music, theatre, TV, sculpture. Because the dominant assumption, operative for a long time now, is that we *do* need to spell it all out in words – that our responses to creative works are only genuinely articulated, and furthermore legitimated, when we put them into ordered, written, rational form. Writing as the meta-language that is able to describe, place and evaluate all the other, looser languages, like image and sound. The academic sector, in particular, has proved itself mightily resistant to moving beyond, or even questioning, this assumption.

There is a powerful disconnect occurring here. For in the universities at

present, more and more people are lining up to propose ‘practice-driven research’ doctoral theses – whether in the fields of creative writing, film/video making or more traditional media – that intermingle (not always comfortably, it must be said) written exegesis with newly produced art work. And yet, when push comes to shove, authoritative judgement – not to mention the criteria for academic job promotion – will always devolve to the written, printed word, with its long-established, weightily institutionalised protocols of elaborately explicated, self-justified argument. Preferably bound in book form.

One of the most intriguing interventions in this state of affairs has come, in recent years, from the art historian James Elkins, and his project *Writing with Images*. One should say: former art historian, because Elkins is using this project – which he is progressively [formulating online at his website](#) – as a way of bidding farewell to a career based on writing about art. He is disturbed by the subsidiary place that images (in reproduction) invariably play within the official discourse on art – especially given most art critics get into the game because of their deep love for, and absorption in, particular images as rich, multi-layered experiences or events.

Elkins’ response to this disjuncture is to explore what it means, firstly, to place text and images in proximity, in both conventional and unconventional ways – that’s the first sense of his title ‘writing with images’, where ‘with’ equals ‘plus’. But Elkins is also after something grander and more utopian: a way of letting images *themselves* do the work of writing, of analysis, of argument. For Elkins personally, the fruit of this activity will be a new kind of work, different to anything he has done before: a novel (its projected publication date is ‘around 2022’), containing very many images integral to it.

In the meantime, we have Elkins’ diagnosis of how art and writing do, and do not, go together. His assumption – proven by most books about art – is that images are placed, managed and thus tamed by writing protocols. Although they may well be the central subjects of the discourse, they are rendered as passive objects. Elkins is not merely talking, here, of the poor

quality of visual reproduction in many academic publications, the economic rationale which transforms most colour art into murky black and white, or the quaint system of referring to a 'Figure 1' to be found up the back of the book, or on some other page. (A reflex that some young PhD writers still dutifully reproduce in their bound manuscripts today, long after their laptop computers have allowed them to simply and elegantly include an image on the same page as their discussion of it.) He is evoking a particular, longstanding hierarchy of functions, where images are made to occupy the lowest rung: they serve simply as a mnemonic aid (if you happen to have seen the real artwork, or a better reproduction of it), an example of a concept, or the illustration of an analysis.

Against this, Elkins poses the possibility that images 'can actually *lead, divert or undermine* our arguments'. In fact, as he notes, they sometimes already do, despite the authors' best intentions: 'Images *already work* as arguments: resisting, speeding, slowing, affirming, contradicting and sometimes partly ruining the arguments that surround them'. He is drawn, for instance, to the essayistic fiction of W.G. Sebald, with its sometimes cryptic interspersing of images throughout the text. But ultimately, as he ruefully notes, 'there are still almost no texts in which images take on the work of argument' – or are allowed to do so.

Let us now pole-vault ourselves out of the rather staid art context in which Elkins is struggling to liberate something new. As in universities, things tend to change at a glacial pace there – if they change at all. To us, as cinephiles and film critics, what is glaringly absent from Elkins' account is, precisely, *cinema*, or indeed any form of 'audio-vision' such as TV or digital media art; these forms or media simply do not exist for him (it would seem), and nor do the decades of rich commentary on the type of *essay-films* made by Chris Marker, Agnès Varda or, in Australia, Ross Gibson. This is why, at the very least, we must immediately broaden the investigation Elkins has initiated by upgrading to it a *writing with images and sounds*.

Within this already substantial field, we want to draw particular attention to a relatively recent endeavour: what has been dubbed the *audiovisual essay*.

This is, essentially, the analysis of an audiovisual object (such as a film or TV program) using the resources of audiovision itself: treating the images and sounds, re-editing and remixing them, aligning and combining them in different ways within the mosaic of the digital, computer screen. The result is neither a conventionally explanatory documentary replete with voice-over commentary (of the type we frequently see on TV), nor a simple teaching aid of the kind that might bolster a typical university lecture. It is more like an audiovisual *collage* that demands to be experienced in its own right as a self-contained 'piece', somewhere between a work of poetic art and an act of critical analysis.

Some audiovisual essays are made by practitioners who are already established as artists or filmmakers; but, more often, they come from the ranks of people that, twenty or even ten years ago, expressed themselves in far less creative forms: teachers, critics, connoisseurs, fans. And that is how, personally, we both found our way to this format: through writing about films, but not as a mere supplement to or illustration of our writing. Rather, we (like many at present) have followed an intuition, a dream: not only does the audiovisual essay (which can be made quite modestly with relatively simple computer software) offer a new way of expressing an analysis, it also generates new sensations and emotions, an embodied, *sensual* mode of knowing; it creates a new, more intimate relationship with the audiovisual materials of cinema. And it brings us several, precious steps closer to a genuine appreciation of the techniques, challenges and secrets involved in any act of art-making.

However, as with the fledgling attempts at a 'new art criticism' which Elkins details (such as literary works by Susan Buck-Morss or Jean Louis Schefer), the current efforts (our own included) to 'audiovisualise' the essay still have some way to go before they realise their full potential. And, in particular, they often clearly take a step or two backwards, in an uneasy compromise-formation with, or obsequiousness to, the conventional, written, scholarly forms of criticism. So, rather than offering a full-scale, introductory survey of the field, we intend here to spotlight tendencies, indicate potentialities, and identify some problems.

Let's begin with an in-depth example from Portugal: Margarida Leitão's *Gestos do realismo* (*Gestures of Realism*, 2016). This is, for us, a work that seizes many of the most vital and radical possibilities of the audiovisual essay form.

This audiovisual essay uses three sources of material: images from Maya Deren's short experimental classic *At Land* (1944); from Roberto Rossellini's post-neo-realist feature *Stromboli* (1950), made during his years of partnership with Ingrid Bergman; plus music composed by Teiji Ito for a later Deren film, *The Very Eye of Night* (1958). There is no text printed on the screen, no voice-over narration. In order for *Gestos do realismo* to articulate its ideas, it depends completely on the audiovisual operations of *montage*, of editing. Here, 'writing an essay' must be understood as the forging of connections between chosen, precisely timed images and sounds – connections that are created sequentially (one fragment following another), simultaneously (through the on-screen comparison of two images), and (as Deren herself theorised this concept) 'vertically', from image to sound and vice versa.

By choosing to put together two films that belong to different historical traditions, this piece makes a bold critical statement. The dominant discourses that surround these particular films tend to situate them at opposed poles of the planet of cinema: the American avant-garde for Deren; Italian neorealism for Rossellini (amusingly, they do tend to receive the labels of 'mother' or 'father' of these respective film movements!). Deren is often discussed under the radar of feminist theory, anthropology, and those artistic practices – such as dance – that she fused with cinema; the collaborations between Rossellini and Bergman are sometimes defined in terms of a sadistic gesture on the part of the filmmaker, bringing the acting methods of the Hollywood star system into conflict with the real land, the actual people and the weighty traditions of post-war Italy, in order to provoke some revelatory shock from this collision.

While Leitão's audiovisual essay does not deny the validity of either of these well-worn perspectives, it demonstrates that, sometimes, this received

knowledge acts as too narrow a margin, imprisoning discussion of the films, preventing us from seeing any further or deeper into them. *Gestos do realismo* demonstrates that there are strong connections between these two movies: in the way the female figures interact with the space; in the postures, gestures and expressions of their bodies; in the geometries that organise the shot compositions; and in the treatment of the scales between human bodies and natural geographies.

First, we notice a montage operation involving the global arrangement of the materials used. The films are displayed simultaneously on a double (or 'split') screen. *At Land* was originally a silent short, *Stromboli* has a soundtrack. However, the sound of Rossellini's film has been suppressed. Good criticism (whether in written and audiovisual form) is always defined by the choices it makes: it cannot cover everything; it has to concentrate on a theme, develop a thread. This means selecting some things and renouncing others. By withdrawing the sound of *Stromboli*, *Gestos do realismo* turns Bergman into a purely visual figure (as Deren is in *At Land*), defined more by her gestures and movements than by the fictional character's backstory or psychological struggle. Ito's minimal music (tightly re-edited by Leitão from the original 15-minute score) creates a new soundscape merging both films. When the rhythm of this musical piece starts to develop a faster, more percussive beat (3'45 in), its full potential for surprise and crescendo is revealed.

The double-screen arrangement used by Leitão is very common in audiovisual essays that seek to stage a comparison between two films. Some of these pieces follow what we call the *dispositif* approach, common to much contemporary 'moving image' art in galleries and museums: they select whole blocks of film, perhaps complete scenes; then they use a type of montage that focuses on the basic arrangement or *disposition* of these screens in the viewing space, with perhaps some minor editing operations (such as alteration of the original speed) to 'set the parameters' of the experience of simultaneity, but also leaving room for seemingly chance intersections between the screens to occur. Some pieces use this technique extremely well: [Catherine Grant's *The Marriages of Laurel Dallas* \(2014\)](#) and

Liz Greene's *Velvet Elephant* (2015) are two excellent examples that testify to the revelatory force and potential of this kind of approach.

Other pieces, however, choose to perform an internal montage, massively re-editing the chosen films (even if this work is not always evident for the viewer unfamiliar with the source materials). *Gestos do realismo* belongs to this second category. A close look at *Stromboli* and *At Land* reveals how these two films have been transformed in order to articulate their comparison, but also in order to create a piece that invents its own structure and choreography. *At Land* has been completely torn apart: Leitão uses images belonging to different parts of the film, without sticking to its original chronology – see, for instance, how the opening scene of *At Land*, in which Deren's body is swept by the waves, has been displaced to much later in the audiovisual essay (3'15-3'36). *Gestos do realismo* also proceeds by suppressing two essential aspects of *At Land* – its surreal multiplicity of both Deren as a figure (its many, simultaneously seen Mayas), and the spatial dimensions in which she moves – while crystallising what constitutes the centre of its investigation: the relation between the female's bodily gestures and the space around her. From *Stromboli*, Leitão uses mainly two sequences: Bergman's first visit to her husband's house, and the finale in which she tries to escape from the village by crossing the mountains that contain a steaming volcano. Here, the original development of both scenes is followed quite closely by Leitão; however, they have been internally re-edited, small fragments extracted from each. Therefore, this piece works with montage both internally (inside each screen) and externally (across both screens).

Gestos do realismo can be described as constructing a very loose narrative that does not exactly belong to either of the films, but bears a relation to both. At the start, the two women, following a man, are relocated to a domestic, alien space that they explore with some reluctance. This first part of the piece is marked by a labyrinthine movement whose effect is enhanced by the double screen: the women cross corridors, trespass doors or entries, while looking around, discovering the houses' interiors. Subsequently, the women are shown advancing across mountains; here, the bodily gestures of

the women – struggling, crawling, falling – resemble each other, and so do the natural landscapes, full of obstacles and vertical slopes. Then, there is a brief lapse defined by the horizontality of the figures: exhausted, the women lie down and seem to abandon themselves to the land, their bodies caressed by the waves or the rays of the sun. Finally, they stand up and continue their march, as the piece arrives at its conclusion.

Gestos do realismo does not use montage solely to compare these films; rather, it creates many different layers of connection between them. Strong cuts and unexpected inserts – the close-ups (1'20), the sunrise and the waves (3'15), the birds (3'38) – transport us from one segment to another; sometimes, the mirroring of certain gestures (both of the performers and of the films) radiate an intense, physical emotion (see, for instance, the cut across two shots while the female bodies are raising at 3'48-3'56). There are subtle, figurative communications and concatenations: on the left screen, Deren raises her arm to protect herself from an imminent fall, but this movement also anticipates Bergman's fall in the left screen (2'29-2'34). Powerful semantic connotations are suggested: the images in which Deren walks while carrying stones are edited alongside a fragment of *Stromboli* in which Bergman still carries her suitcases (1'25-2'00). The geometries formed by the mountains and the bodies, the slopes and the horizons, draw a map of lines that converge or diverge, creating flights or collisions.

Montage as both a creative and argumentative tool is most often recognised in works that, like Leitao's, use the simultaneous, double screen arrangement. But *sequential* montage can also be used to the same end. *Don't You Recognise Me?* (2015) is an audiovisual essay by Stefano Notaro (made as part of a class we taught at Goethe University in Frankfurt) on Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976). In this piece, the centre of interest is shifted from the film's nominal hero, Trelkovsky (played by Polanski), to the shadowy, mostly absent figure of Simone, the previous tenant of Trelkovsky's apartment, who threw herself out the window.

The audiovisual essay concentrates on three elements scattered throughout the film, gathering evidence on: Simone's Egyptian obsession; issues related

with sexual behaviour; and questions of gender and identity. These elements become the three axes (soul, body, drives) of Notaro's interpretation – which is in tune with what has long been identified as one of the central concerns of Polanski's cinema: the fragility of personal identity. But it offers a specific and original distillation of this theme as it works itself out in *The Tenant*. According to Notaro, it is the convalescent Simone who, following Egyptian teachings, takes possession of Trelkovsky's person in order to escape the prison of her body and pursue her lesbian desire. By playing with repetition (the fall, the scream, the sentence 'Don't you recognise me?'), Notaro encourages the viewer to take on board a mode of creative deciphering that works by always adding something new to the elements that return over and over in the piece. And by inventing a new narrative that assembles and articulates these different, seemingly disconnected elements, *Don't You Recognise Me?* further demonstrates the rich possibilities of audiovisual montage.

As mentioned, many efforts in the loose and heterogeneous audiovisual essay field still cling to explanatory voice-over narration, as if to a life raft. There is nothing forbidden or inherently undesirable about using voice-over *per se*; as the films of Chris Marker or Robert Kramer have long shown us, a written/spoken narration can be as mysterious, suggestive and poetic as any other element in the audiovisual weave. But one of the problems we see in much contemporary work is an obsession with *doubling*, to the point of sheer redundancy: what is said or written on screen, and what is shown via montage from the works being analysed, enter into a mirroring relation marked by a strict equivalency. The conventional primacy and authority accorded to 'the word' is thereby inevitably reinforced.

This methodology seemingly joins two actions in a single gesture, bringing together the experience of watching fragments of a film, while listening to or reading a commentary on them. But often this relation becomes too literal, too narrow – and not terribly revealing of anything. For us, a piece such as Kevin B. Lee's *Manoel de Oliveira's Angelic Cinema* (2015) on the film *The Strange Case of Angelica* (2010), while doubtless containing some interesting observations, exemplifies this problem. The Chicago-based Lee

is regularly held up by aficionados of the audiovisual essay as the premier innovator and populariser of the field, but his work often appears to be torn between a creative urge and a concern over how best to communicate to the presumed 'average' film fan.

Here, Lee's verbal commentary virtually repeats what we see in the film; it constitutes an exact translation taking the form of a description. But this description is, in strict terms, unnecessary. Audiovisual essays should make us rethink the role of description in film criticism. We can no longer assume that the film-object is absent, that (as Jean-Luc Godard once complained of 'after-film' discussions) it is only *remembered* by the reader. Now, the 'evidence' (as Godard vividly called it) is right there in front of us, in our eyes and ears. We rarely – if ever – need to evoke, describe or summarise it, at least not in the same, old, often devious ways that film reviewers have always done in print, or on radio.

In another form of the audiovisual essay that is becoming very fashionable at present, voice-over description has been substituted by small segments of on-screen text containing telegraphic snippets of information, whose purpose is to focalise the viewers' attention on specific decisions (such as a camera movement, an actor's gesture, or the length of a shot). Another piece by Lee, *Cassavetes' Spaces* (2015), 'embellishes' a key sequence from John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959) in just this fashion. This remarkable sequence shows the before-and-after of a sexual encounter between a woman (Leila Goldoni) and a man (Anthony Ray), but Cassavetes' cinematic, formal treatment of the dramatic material is unusual: an abstract lighting scheme keeps 'redrawing' the space of the apartment from shot to shot, while an insistent use of dissolves that have no realistic purpose gives the whole event a suspended, dreamlike aura. We might even think, alongside the French scholar Nicole Brenez, that we are successively witnessing 'the subtle juxtaposition of different versions of the same scene, three possible responses to the same initial situation' (1). Lee's on-screen 'annotation' of the *Shadows* sequence, however, smoothes out and erases almost everything that is interesting and distinctive about it.

Some stylistic details are here usefully pinpointed: the temporal ellipses, the darkness in the shots, camera framings. But no overall system or logic is sought – and film analysis, whatever its form, lives or dies by virtue of those not-immediately-obvious logics that it can uncover (as Notaro did, for instance, in relation to *The Tenant*). For Lee, the *Shadows* scene is, more or less, a straightforward dramatic exchange; as he puts it in his accompanying statement, ‘thoughtful camera placement, framing and movement ... mark the ever-changing dynamics between the couple’. The ‘spaces’ Lee flags are physical but, above all, interior and emotional: as his running titles register them, they are the metaphoric spaces of fear, confusion, disappointment, loneliness ... In other words, everything in the scene is reduced to a conventional, normative register of emotion, and especially the imaginary emotions ‘felt’ or enacted by these individual, fictional characters. All cinema thus becomes ‘expressionistic’, but in a very limited sense: films exist to express, in bold strokes of framing and lighting, editing and movement, the inner emotions of their particular characters.

This prevalent approach in many audiovisual essays – a rather watered-down legacy of humanism in arts criticism – is largely due to the influence of one of the form’s pioneers, the veteran American critic Tag Gallagher. His own pieces in this vein (such as *A Speck in the Cosmos: Raoul Walsh’s Pursued*, 2016) take such ‘analytic expressionism’ all the way. For him, virtually every detail in a film becomes, through an omnivorous process of ‘projection’, either the way one character sees or feels about another, or the way that character views him/herself. But little else, no wider dramatic or socio-cultural ‘argument’ related to gender or any other social determination, no possible symbolic, philosophical or allegorical significance, is rarely at stake in these analyses, whether by Gallagher or his acolytes. We do not move to the critical level that Brenez calls ‘questions of figurability’. This means, rather than asking, ‘what is this character feeling?’, we should inquire: how can a film represent pain, or ecstasy, or social contradiction? How can it depict something that touches on vast historic phenomena, such as the Holocaust? And within which tradition of such depictions – Hollywood, the avant-garde, ‘trash’ culture?

A more recent example of this reductive, humanist trend has been provided by Jessica McGoff in her piece *Andrea Arnold's Women in Landscapes* (2016).

The choice of filmmaker here is commendable in that it resists the usual drift in the 'nerdier' YouTube genre of video essay toward Wes or Paul Thomas Anderson, Kubrick, Lynch, Hitchcock or Tarantino (with Sofia Coppola on stand-by as the token female). But McGoff's analysis is again confined to feelings, nothing more than feelings: one heroine is 'separated from her environment' (isolation), another is 'imprisoned' (captivity), a third is 'embedded in nature' (entrenchment). Arnold's landscapes offer 'the most vital way of understanding her lonely women'. The driving question of this short piece is 'what does loneliness look like?'. Which could almost be a 'figurability' question, except that it misses out on the opportunity, precisely, to investigate the rich iconographical history (in cinema and beyond) suggested by this loaded phrase, 'woman in a landscape'. This is precisely the issue that Margarida Leitão in *Gestos do realismo* does manage to 'de-individualise'.

In our opinion, the two approaches we have just discussed are taking the audiovisual essay along a regressive path. If we ask of a good written text that its construction is rich both in the insights it offers and in the form it takes, we must be ready to ask the same of audiovisual essays: that they exhibit and explore a genuinely audiovisual form. The pieces we have critiqued above, however, show little faith in the full range of productive relationships that can be established between the different elements of an audiovisual essay.

As indicated earlier, there need not be any taboo over language (spoken on the soundtrack or written on the screen) in the audiovisual essay. We believe there are still many ways in which creative and productive relations between text, voice and filmic fragments can be woven. One of the finest examples of this is *Pass the Salt* (2006) by the American scholar Christian Keathley, an analytical interpretation of a scene from Otto Preminger's courtroom classic, *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) (2).

This piece can be included under the rubric of what Keathley himself called the *explanatory* mode of the audiovisual essay. But, at every moment, it finds genuinely creative ways to practice a montage in which the film fragments selected enter into a productive relation with the voice-over commentary. These operations are not especially complex on a technical level; on the contrary, they are very simple but, through them, he practices what we could call a 'dual writing': different layers of the audiovisual essay work by supplementing each other, not just repeating or reinforcing each other, but adding extra ideas, connotations, subliminal meanings.

After its prologue, *Pass the Salt* begins with these words: 'There's this scene in *Anatomy of a Murder*, I can't help thinking about it. It seems pretty straightforward, but I can't help feeling that I'm seeing in it more than is being shown to me'. This introduces a dichotomy that is explored and enacted by the piece. The second sentence quoted can be interpreted in two ways (and neither choice is exclusive): the author sees more than is being shown to him because effectively there is a secret key to the scene that needs to be revealed; or he sees more than is being shown because he is projecting his own obsessions into the scene, entering in an almost surrealistic process of over-interpretation. The image that accompanies this statement is that of Biegler (James Stewart) looking at some framed newspaper cuttings about Frederick Manion (Ben Gazzara), the person accused of murder whom he is about to defend. This image, just like the statement made by Keathley, can also be read in two different ways. Biegler is not reading the headline of the newspaper, but the small print (which would be equivalent to the 'bits of business', the secondary actions that are not the dramatically central but which Keathley places in the centre of his exploration). This small print could indeed reveal a hidden truth, some important fact that might be overlooked, if one gazes only at the headline. But the Biegler's action of peering at the small print could also be merely the proof of his own obsession.

So, in this segment, Keathley is playing with the tension between two possibilities: firstly, there is something hidden in the movie that the director has put there (and you, as viewer, must discover it); secondly, there is

nothing there and you, as a viewer, are inventing it. *Pass the Salt* nurtures these two possibilities in equal measure, keeping both options open and playfully oscillating between them all the time. It is precisely this approach that gives the piece its singular tone and structure.

Later in the piece, when Keathley identifies the two characters of the scene with the two main positions of an ancient philosophical debate, their separation is emphasised through montage. In the original scene, these two characters are together in shot the whole time; the scene is filmed in a single take, virtually static except for some small reframing at the beginning. But when, in *Pass the Salt*, Keathley comes back to images from this scene, he separates the characters: he zooms into the image, and intercuts from one portion of the frame to another. This allows him to express, in visual terms, the different positions for which (according to his interpretation) these characters stand.

A good example of the use of quotations provided on-screen is provided by *Uncanny Fusion* (2014), British scholar Catherine Grant's half of a collaborative project undertaken with Keathley on childhood cinephilia and what psychoanalysts in the D.W. Winnicott tradition call 'transitional phenomena' (3).

In this audiovisual essay, Grant links two films that she saw at different moments of her life and reflects on the ways they affected her; this primal connection, however, leads to other discoveries, other associations between the films that are beyond her strictly personal experience. At the end of the piece (2'25-3'35), Grant joins two, re-edited scenes that take each place in a museum, and interweaves them via quotations from psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas concerning the unpredictability of 'aesthetic experience', the way such experience is lived and remembered. These quoted passages do not only illuminate and enhance the emotion that the two scenes enact (but do not explicitly articulate); they also help to create a chain between the experiences of the female characters in these museums and Grant herself as a film spectator taken up in a particular aesthetic experience.

What we have wished to demonstrate with our analysis of examples is that, even in audiovisual essays that use voice and text, it is not only or primarily *there* where the thoughts and ideas of the work lie. If montage is used creatively, its operations are doing the process of thinking, of writing, of articulating; and words (written or spoken) are just one further element in the mix. Paul Valéry once said of his poetry: ‘If I am questioned; if anyone wonders (as happens quite peremptorily) what I ‘wanted to say’ in a certain poem, I reply that I did not *want to say*, but *wanted to make*, and that it was the intention of *making* which wanted what I *said*.’ (4) In the same spirit, we should inquire into audiovisual essays by figuring out not so much what they *say*, but rather what they *do*, what they enact or perform.

We believe, ultimately, that what gets called ‘research-based art’ (or ‘art-based research’) should not be hived into its own little, precarious box, whether in publishing or the academy. Intellectual work needs to be creative; and much creative art imparts powerful knowledge. The audiovisual essay is one of the contemporary, hybrid forms that stands at these crossroads. James Elkins, for his part, claims that, in the attempt to ‘write with images’ (in all senses of that phrase), we ‘can turn our truth claims into rhetorical figures, our references into tropes, and our facts into fictions’. The *vice versa* also applies: rhetorical figures can become truth claims, tropes can be made into references, and fictions into facts. Changing our initial movie genre reference from *film noir* to classic Western, we find another indelible line more in keeping with our own time. In place of the hardbitten retort ‘Do I have to spell it out in words?’, the heroic or villainous cowboy, helplessly facing the barrel of a gun, prefers to draw: ‘Do I have to draw you a picture?’ Sure – and remember to add a soundtrack, too.

Works Cited

Nicole Brenez, *Shadows de John Cassavetes* (Paris: Nathan, 1995)

See Christian Keathley, ‘*La Caméra-stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia*’, in Alex Clayton & Andrew Klevan (eds), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 176-191.

After viewing the video, we recommend consulting the complete project by

Grant and Keathley, titled 'Childhood Cinephilia, Object Relations, and Videographic Film Studies', in *Photogénie* (2014).

Quoted in John Gibson (ed.), *The Philosophy of Poetry* (London: Oxford, 2015), p. 177.