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Authors	Grant, Catherine
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On *Drill Team* and the Musicality of Videographic Criticism

Catherine Grant

Abstract: *An article comprising the videographic study* Drill Team *alongside a written framing of its film studies origins and comparative methodology. The video attempts a performative audiovisual adaptation of a chapter section from Danijela Kulezic-Wilson's 2020 book* Sound Design is the New Score: Theory, Aesthetics, and Erotics of the Integrated Soundtrack. *Drill Team explores both Kulezic-Wilson's specific (if uncertain) argument about the relationship between two films,* Beau Travail *(Claire Denis, 1999) and* The Fits *(Anna Rose Holmer, 2015), and her general argument in the chapter about the "composed" nature of the sound (and music) design in these and other modern or contemporary films, as well as about the capacity of these films, and film generally, to use modes of embodied experience as the substance of their language.*



Figure 1: *Drill Team*: *On* Beau Travail *and* The Fits (Catherine Grant, 2024). Screenshot and link to video essay.

> The existence of common features between music and film […] suggests that film is *potentially* very musical. This potential, which is of a composite, audiovisual nature, can be fulfilled and enhanced by employing different filmmaking strategies and devices such as the organization of the *mise-en-scène*, camera movement, movement within a shot, editing, sound design and music itself. Basically, any aspect of film's audio-visual texture that may invest the parameters of time, rhythm and movement with musical

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> qualities can be considered a carrier of the film's musicality. (Kulezic-Wilson, *Musicality* 183)
>
> [Audiovisual essays'] engagement with rhythm, pause, slowed down footage, mixing of sound and music, and the placement of text within the visual image, reaches for the musical potential of videographic criticism. (Greene)

Drill Team, the video essay embedded above, came about because I wanted to find an appropriately audiovisual—and *musical*—way in which to pay tribute to Danijela Kulezic-Wilson's inspiring and original scholarly writing on the musicality of narrative film. As well as constituting a remarkable contribution to film and film music studies generally, her brilliant understanding of these topics, which I first encountered when Liz Greene pointed me in the direction of her 2015 book on that subject, seemed to be unusually pertinent to a very particular category of film-scholarly filmmakers, among whose number I count myself, that is to say, those of us who compose or construct works of videographic criticism (video essays on films, television and other moving image and sound works using extracts from those media). As another of our number, Greene themself noted in 2022, when they responded to and cited from *The Musicality of Narrative Film* in their introduction to an audiovisual section on sound and music they curated for *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, "Kulezic-Wilson was not arguing for the use of videographic criticism in the presentation of scholarly research, but it is tempting to suggest that this mode of making is a natural ally to what [she] was hoping would be achieved in film studies."

Made very much in the spirit of Greene's remarks on Kulezic-Wilson's contribution to our discipline and its methods, *Drill Team* is a performative audiovisual adaptation (Grant, "Audiovisual Essay") of a chapter section from the latter's 2020 book *Sound Design Is the New Score: Theory, Aesthetics, and Erotics of the Integrated Soundtrack*. Bookended by two sets of short quotations from the chapter on "Musicalized Sound Design and the Erotics of Cinema", the first set accompanied by blended soundtrack audio taken from the opening credit sequences of the two films she is writing about (*Beau Travail*, Claire Denis, 1999, and *The Fits*, Anna Rose Holmer, 2015), the main part of the video remains caption- (and verbal commentary) free, alternating purely between single screen and split screen excerpts from those films, and enacting through its sequential and simultaneous montages a rhythmic comparison of audiovisual similarities and variations. The featured sequences were chosen because, while only a few of them were directly discussed by Kulezic-Wilson, they seemed to illustrate and expand upon her general argument in the chapter about the "'composed' nature" of the sound (and music) design in these and other modern or contemporary films, and about "the capacity of [these films, and film generally] to use modes of embodied experience as the substance of [their] language" (*Sound Design* 2, 7). In addition to the (auditory) sound-design arguments of my video essay, with the sheer number, precision and evident patterning of the films' graphic consonances and coincidences unfolding before our eyes, *Drill Team* hopefully also reinforces and adds significantly to the persuasiveness of Kulezic-Wilson's specific (if uncertain) argument about the relationship between the two films—that *The Fits* was "likely inspired by the formal discipline and sensuous elegance of Denis's film" (*Sound Design* 109).

For me, as well as a performative exploration of Kulezic-Wilson's powerful verbal lines of reasoning about the two films, *Drill Team* was also a conscious experiment in videographic musicality in the service of scholarly film criticism. In a similar way to how some of my earlier videos—for example, *Carnal Locomotive* (2015), *Rear Window Syncopated* (2016), *The Haunting of The Headless Woman* (2018) and *Fated to Be Mated* (2018)—use an external

musical track to help articulate a rhythmic and affective throughline to which visual material from films can be compellingly remixed, my editing together of sonic and visual textures drawn purely from the two films' sequences, each with their own beats and internal rhythms, also creates a new, composite film-text, one with its own "textures, composition, rhythm, movement, and flow" generated in the service of an affective and bodily kind of understanding (Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design* 8). As I have argued before in my own earlier writing on the sensuous methodologies of videographic musicality, these kinds of editing procedures can work "to explore and frame their own focused 'rhythmizations of perception', to forge purposive audiovisual experiences that are created out of and at the same time *convey* (in several senses of that word) some of the medium-specific syntheses at the centre of spectatorship" ("Film Studies").

In the conclusion to her first book, Kulezic-Wilson inspiringly wrote a passage that, beyond its original context and intentions, could easily serve as a concise but thoroughgoing manifesto for the use of properly musical methods in videographic film and moving image studies, and as a conclusion, also, to my presentation of *Drill Team*, the video I made in her memory:

> Looking for the musicality of film means opening channels for watching film audio-visually. It means allowing oneself to watch, hear, sense and process the experience without discarding intuitive revelations […]. Realizing the musical potential of film means aiming for rhythm, balance, a sense of inherent logic within or outside the conventions of formal structuring, a sense of flow and that indiscernible quality by which an artwork can affect us profoundly, so we can see the world and ourselves differently. (*Musicality* 185)

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Catherine Grant is Honorary Professor at Aarhus University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Reading, UK. She carries out her film and moving image studies research mostly in the form of remix-based video essays, and in writing about them. She also runs the Film Studies For Free social media platforms, and is a founding co-editor of the award-winning peer-reviewed journal *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies*.