

## Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies, 3.1, 2016



Welcome to the latest issue of [in]Transition devoted exclusively to peer-reviewed videographic work. The videos in this issue were all screened at a [special preview event](#) devoted to the academic audiovisual essay held at the annual [Essay Film Festival](#) (Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, University of London/Institute of Contemporary Arts, UK) on March 19, 2016.

As usual, each video is accompanied by a curatorial statement from the maker, as well as peer reviewer evaluations. We publish these peer reviews in the spirit of openness, to encourage scholarship as conversation, and to help our discipline establish a set of criteria for what constitutes valid and valuable scholarship in this emerging form. We invite readers and viewers to join this conversation in the same spirit. Just register as a member of the MediaCommons network and leave a comment in the thread at the foot of each entry.

[in]Transition welcomes submissions of videographic work for peer-reviewed publication in subsequent issues. To find out how to submit your work please click on the Contribute to [in]Transition tab above. To learn about new issues, calls for special issue submissions, and other news, please [subscribe](#) to our announcement email list! And follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#):

Catherine Grant  
Editor, [in]Transition 3.1, March/April 2016



Facing the Subject (On Observation)  
by Irene Gustafson



ADAPTATION.'s Anomalies  
by Jason Mittell



Kataskopos: The Extraterrestrial View of the Earth ...  
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The Spielberg Touchscreen  
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Mothers on the Line: The Allure of Julianne Moore  
by Cüneyt Çakırlar

ÇAKIRLAR, Cüneyt. "Mothers on the Line: The Allure of Julianne Moore", [in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies 3.1, March/April 2016.

Link to the publication:

<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2016/03/14/mothers-line-allure-julianne-moore>

Link to the audiovisual essay (part of the peer-reviewed publication):

<https://vimeo.com/136206933>

## Mothers on the Line: The Allure of Julianne Moore

by [Cüneyt Çakırlar](#) (/intransition/users/cuneytcakirlar) — Nottingham Trent University  
March 14, 2016 – 12:33



### mothers on the line: the [maternal] allure of julianne moore

from [Cüneyt Çakırlar](#) PLUS



[Mothers on the Line: the Allure of Julianne Moore \(https://vimeo.com/136206933\)](https://vimeo.com/136206933) by [Cüneyt Çakırlar \(https://vimeo.com/cuneytcakirlar\)](#)

[The above video contains some mature content. The below reports comment on the final, amended version of the video]

#### Review by Liz Greene (Dublin City University)

There is a lot to be said for this audiovisual essay. It is very well-constructed, with clear titling to sign-post the discrete sections that it encompasses. Appropriately chosen music smoothly bridges the transition from one scene to another, sometimes utilizing Julianne Moore's voice within the soundtrack. In the main we are looking at Moore, and Moore is worthy of such attention - Moore as mother, Moore as a sexual woman, Moore on her own within the frame, Moore as Moore. This audiovisual essay seductively pulls us in.

And yet, the range of material that this videographic essay draws from makes some of these connections problematic due to the span of Moore's career. Çakırlar is connecting Moore's recurring roles as the losing mother and the sexualized maternal figure, he draws from a range of films and diverse roles, and we see and hear Moore performing in a variety of work. From one film clip to another, as a mother to a sexually confident woman, sometimes with an overlap between these types/roles, but, and here is the thing, sometimes without an overlap. The compilation essay film can, and, in this instance, consciously does, collapse these performances, categories, and anomalies. And the star image of Moore facilitates such an approach. Moore's face, body, voice and movement allows for such a compilation and at times the segue between films is unnoticeable, even when genres and eras are at odds with each other. And yet, Moore's performances transgress an eroticized/maternal binary, often, she is seen on screen motionless, in an understated performance shining a momentary sliver of light into the depth of her characters. Through this stillness she also manages to remain slippery, difficult to pin down. Her performances exceed Çakırlar's argument, his reading of Moore undervalues the totality of her enigmatic screen presence. And yet, there is something here in what he is teasing through. The allure of Moore is without question. The recurring performances of maternal roles and as sexually transgressive women, who as a consequence, pay the price for such deviations (sometimes through violent murder) illustrate that Çakırlar's videographic essay is much more than a compilation piece, through the juxtaposition of roles, the scope and range of Moore's performative style becomes evident, and it is thrilling to see all of these performances together, it is an affective work on a star text, and yet...

#### Review by Jaap Kooijman (University of Amsterdam)

In his keynote 'The Persistence of Textual Analysis' at the 2014 conference of the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies (BAFTSS), Richard Dyer



#### Curator's Note

This audiovisual essay explores Julianne Moore's on-screen image as an unconventional maternal embodiment. Throughout her career, what has considerably marked Moore's star image is, I contend, not a particularly authentic signature in her acting style but the thematic and erotic investment in her appearances cast as maternal women of grief, ambivalence, transgression and detachment. My exploration in this video capitalizes upon this maternal erotic and treats it as the core component of Moore's persona. Through expressive use of editing and sound, the video operates within an expository poetic mode that appropriates the tribute/compilation format and tackles different analytical scales of sampling and audiovisual interpretation in star studies. The piece attempts to articulate a performative approach to expose the thematic continuities in Moore's performances of mothers (or mother-substitutes) and to queer the on-screen operation of her maternal image.

A crucial marker of Moore's star image is the affinity it bears with gay and lesbian spectatorship, or what Brett Farmer conceptualized as "matrocentric gay cinephilia" (2000:153). In post-1990s queer filmmaking, the maternity Moore's characters seem to (dis)embody had often been used to facilitate a genre-bending pastiche-effect with particular references to camp and/or melodrama-as-genre. Todd Haynes, for example, casts the actress as either an embodiment of camp maternal excess in *Far from Heaven* (2002) or a physically shrinking body of radical dis-identification in *Safe* (1995) which is "[deeply connected to the materiality \(and the metaphoricity\) of mothering](http://filmanalytical.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/uncontained-on-todd-haynes-safe.html)" (<http://filmanalytical.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/uncontained-on-todd-haynes-safe.html>)" (Grant 2013). Tom Kalin's *Savage Grace* (2007), however, sexualizes Moore's character as the manipulative incestuous mother in contradiction to the classical maternal melodrama's deferral of the mother's sexuality. Finally, Kimberly Peirce's remake of *Carrie* (2013) amplifies the tense mother-daughter relationship in the original movie and eroticizes the abusive, self-harming mother Moore performs.

These tropes of motherhood extend to a considerable number of films that do not invest in queer authorship, which also reflects Moore's ambivalent position and mobility as a star in the film industry. Glyn Davis suggests that the actress's "ability to move between different areas of production registers the crumbling of the distinctions between them [and] serves as a valuable index of the shifting nature of independent cinema in the US" (2011:22). This mobility turns the prevalent maternal erotic into a curious case to be explored in an audiovisual compilation form. The theme of sexual ambivalence and transgression in *Chloe* (2009) and *The Kids are all right* (2010), the sexualization of women grieving the loss of their children in *Don Jon* (2013) and *Boogie Nights* (1997), and the narration of maternal neglect, abuse and abandonment in *Freedomland* (2006), *What Maisie Knew* (2012) and *The Hours* (2002), do all address the female protagonist as a "mother on the line" i.e. a subject that transgresses the norms of motherhood/parenthood.

Appropriating the tribute form, this video interweaves Moore's appearances as mothers (or sexualized mother-substitutes) and complicates the moments of maternal affect in them. Through the very act of compiling a diverse sample of these performances, the audiovisual essay aims to provide 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. While the poetic mode in this work may be said to "evoke a subjective experience of spectatorship" and to function as homage or an enactment of fandom in its "attempt to incorporate as many exemplary moments as possible" (Grizzaffi 2014), the compilation's montage and thematic focus within its breadth of sampling accommodate an analytical impulse and exposes the maternal as the constitutive element of Moore's star image.

reminded us that the initial motivation to study stars – the star image and the star text – was to gain a better understanding of the film text. Recent work in Star Studies and Celebrity Studies seems to suggest that the focus has shifted from the film text to the star itself, in which the films are merely seen as part of the total star text, rather than as the prime objects of study.

On first viewing, the main focus of Cüneyt Çakırlar's audiovisual essay 'Mothers on the Line: The Allure of Julianne Moore' is indeed on Moore's star image, as is clearly pointed out by the subtitle. By connecting Moore's performances in seventeen films over a period of two decades, organized in three—seemingly linearly ordered—sections, the essay invites us to recognize the similarities and recurring tropes in Moore's performances throughout these different films. Here a productive comparison can be made to Pasquale Iannone's audiovisual essay '[A Note on Comedy Vitti Style](http://www.necsus-ejms.org/note-comedy-vitti-style-2015/)' (http://www.necsus-ejms.org/note-comedy-vitti-style-2015/), published in *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* (http://www.necsus-ejms.org/note-comedy-vitti-style-2015/) (Autumn 2015), which aims to highlight the skills of Italian actress Monica Vitti as a comic performer. Both essays can be perceived as tributes to the respective actresses, yet there is a significant difference. Whereas Iannone's video focuses primarily on the actress's performance (with parts of the soundtrack featuring Vitti commenting on her own work), Çakırlar's video aims, as is stated in the accompanying text, to show how 'Moore's image is ... not a particularly authentic signature in her acting style but the thematic and erotic investment in her appearances cast as maternal women of grief, ambivalence, transgression and detachment'. In other words, it is not (just) Moore's performance, but the 'allure' of her presence that marks her star image.

After repeated viewings, I have to admit that, although I do recognize the allure of Julianne Moore that the audiovisual essay makes explicitly visible, the very notion of allure remains a slippery concept to me. If Moore's allure is not based in her performance, what are we really talking about: charisma, unconventional human figure, and/or just sheer effective casting? The video's poetic mode succeeds quite beautifully in providing a sense of Moore's allure, yet without fully grasping what such a concept eventually entails – which might be its point.

To me, the strength of Çakırlar's audiovisual essay lies somewhere else, namely in its visualization of Dyer's reminder that analyzing the star text adds to our understanding of the film text. By connecting these performances from seventeen different films, the video foregrounds how these performances inform each other and thus how Moore's star image works not 'regardless of the individual ideological operation of each film and its framing of motherhood' but actually helps to shape them.

## Feedback

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In other words, the compilation prioritizes not an eclectic supercut homage to Moore but a structured narration of tropes, thematic resonances and dissonances that her acting career has accommodated with reference to the drama of maternal attachment/detachment and desire. Video essays, as Creekmur also suggests, can "function, even if poetically, as forms of analysis drawing our attention to the kinds of concerns already familiar from more conventional film scholarship" (2014). Harnessing the personal/libidinal in various ways, the poetic tribute, as an essayistic mode of addressing, say, the cinematic construction of a star's sexual allure or charisma, can flirt with the expository and the analytical.

Alan Lovell argues that "film stars are improbable candidates for carrying out the ideological task assigned to them" (2013: 261). In his quest for an alternative framework in star studies, the scholar prioritizes performance and aesthetics over the demystifying ideological analyses of stars. Resonating with Lovell's argument, an audiovisual compilation, through its essayistic "openness" as text, bears the potential to give a critical account of stardom without a stable ideological closure of a "star-identity". As an alternative to conventional academic scholarship's attempt to contain stars discursively, the poetic exposition as a videographic register can produce new critical insights to the ideologically unstable and messy textuality of stars – by generating an audiovisual map of affects for their allure. In this sense, this work produces an erotic map of maternal affects in Moore's performances to demonstrate their collectively formative role in the overall star-text regardless of the individual ideological operation of each film and its framing of motherhood (as, say, misogynistic, feminist, queer, heteronormative, or homonormative).

I open the video with an anxious birth scene, which also opens Peirce's remake of *Carrie*. The piece then meditates, in an episodic manner, on various themes of mother-child attachment and maternal erotics by providing a rich selection of scenes from the films Moore acted in. In I. UNION/DISSOLUTION, the scenes of the happy mother-child union are followed by the dramatic moments of its dissolution through scenes of alienation, abuse, frustration, abandonment and grief. In II. THE [MATERNAL] ALLURE, the video first cuts to the sex scenes where Moore's maternal aura, or her "mothering" presence, is eroticized by means of cross-generational love and implications of incest (*The English Teacher*, *Don Jon*, *Savage Grace*, and *Boogie Nights*). These scenes are followed by the homoerotic encounters in *Chloe* and *The Hours*, which function as transgressive moments for the straight mothers Moore performs. In this section, the theme of sexual ambivalence and transgression is maintained by cutting to scenes from *The Kids*... where we see Jules, a "happily coupled" lesbian mother performed by Moore, and witness her confused reaction to the affair she is having with the "biological father" of her children. The section ends with a threesome scene from *Savage Grace*, which shows the mother in bed with her son and her best friend. In the final section III. KILLING, the erotic union with the mother dissolves again – this time with acts of killing, where the emotionally overwhelmed son/daughter attempts to kill the manipulative/abusive/disappointing mother.

Registering different forms of affect and excess, the soundtrack of *Far from Heaven* and the four films, namely Peirce's remake of *Carrie*, Kalin's *Savage Grace*, P.T. Anderson's *Boogie Nights* and Joseph Gordon-Levitt's *Don Jon*, function as central narrative motors in this audiovisual essay. While the mothers in *Far from Heaven*, *Carrie* and *Savage Grace* can be considered as objects of queer spectatorial desire, the grieving mothers in *Boogie Nights* and *Don Jon* (Amber and Esther, respectively) function as "sexed-up" mother-substitutes, or "MILFs", who, being phantasmatic objects of a projective male gaze, channel their unfulfilled maternal desire to new, sexual objects. The incestuous erotic of "mothering" embedded in these two characters is being literalized, if not queered, in Tom Kalin's powerful depiction of Barbara Daly Baekeland's complex incestuous relationship with her son in *Savage Grace*.

In order to amplify the complexity of what Moore's star image incorporates as the drama of maternity, I used Elmer Bernstein's score that was created for the original movie soundtrack of *Far from Heaven*, Haynes's pastiche of the 1950s women's film. Spanning the two main sections of the video, the deliberate repetition of the score acts as a "sonic citation" and mimics the expressive use of music in classical maternal melodramas to match the on-screen emotional excess. This is to create a performative continuity, friction and confusion between the various forms of excess that Moore's maternal image enacts and what melodramas conventionally register as excess. The performative friction I attempted to construct here between visual and sonic registers resonates with Michel Chion's notion of "forced marriages between image and

sound" (1994: 188-9). In the first half of the piece, the pathos of mother-child union and that of its dissolution appear to sit harmoniously with Bernstein's score and its allusion to the melodramatic soundscape. However, the score continues when Moore's maternal persona is being visually eroticized and sexualized (with implications of incestuous desire, sexual ambivalence and/or of female homoeroticism): Bernstein's moments of sonic drama and climax are "forced" to amplify the sexual pleasure and desire of Moore as the amorous mother/mother-substitute on screen.

The maternal characters that Moore has performed in various production registers of cinema have appealed to diverse audiences. This video attempts to locate that multivalent maternal allure in a poetic audiovisual form. My exploration resonates considerably with what Richard Dyer emphasizes in his [recent review](http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2015/12/29/success) (<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2015/12/29/success>) of Jaap Kooijman's video *Success*: the potentials of videographic modes in contemporary star studies to "insist on ... allure in the face of critique" and "to critique affect by means of affect" (Dyer in Kooijman 2016, my emphasis).

#### Bio

Cüneyt Çakırlar is a lecturer in Communications, Culture and Media Studies at Nottingham Trent University, UK. His research practice has focused on transnational sexuality studies, erotic/exotic in visual cultures, and trans-regionalism in contemporary art practices. He taught on queer aesthetics and film at UCL (UK), Bogazici University (Turkey), Istanbul Bilgi University (Turkey) and Koç University (Turkey). He has published articles in *Critical Arts*, *Paragraph* and *Screen*, and a co-edited volume, *Cinsellik Muamması [The Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey]* (2012), focusing on cultures and politics of sexual dissidence in contemporary Turkey. Çakırlar also translated Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* into Turkish (2014). His most recent research focuses on Werner Herzog's documentary filmmaking, MILF/DILF stardom, and the aesthetic in the Bersani-Dutoit collaboration.

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#### Comments

- [Elif Akcali's](#) [JM AS A MOTHER](#) (/INTRANSITION/2016/03/14/MOTHERS-LINE-ALLURE-JULIANNE-MOORE#COMMENT-66) [picture](#) ([/intransition/users/elifakcali](#)) — [Kadir Has University](#) April 03, 2016 – 02:24

To me this audiovisual essay is less about JM herself than the "maternal characters that JM portrays". Despite the seemingly effortless grouping of the common themes that JM's characters' central conflicts are based upon (using images from 17 films!), the video also reveals the range in which these "mothering" characters differ, such as erotic, aggressive, and affectionate, which

evidently, regardless of the films' subjects or genres, says something about both JM's choices of roles as a performer and the industry's typecasting her. I find the allure to be embedded in "JM as a mother", and I find this allure lying in its complexity. I especially like the mix of audio and sound over the selection of shots: Bernstein's music evokes immobile characters deep in thought, and directs the attention to their interiority, while we watch JM move, and explicitly voice that interiority, making the video poetic, disturbing and thought provoking, all at once.

**A TRULY MOVING AND POETIC** ([/INTRANSITION/2016/03/14/MOTHERS-LINE-ALLURE-JULIANNE-MOORE#COMMENT-68](#))



by **Daniel Massie** ([/intransition/users/danielmassie](#)). — The university of Stirling  
April 05, 2016 – 13:29

[/intransition/users/danielmassie](#)

A truly moving and poetic video essay - elegantly structured and composed, and richly layered. The sequencing, use of music, and pacing really accentuated the scope of Moore's career and reinforce the thesis. With a very convincing accompanying text, and incisive reviews I agree with, and am inspired by, this essay's ability - and willingness - to situate itself within a new avenue of star studies. For my own research this approach is of great benefit, both in its willingness to re-neogiate how we view an actor's body of work, and similarly how one establishes a corpus of films for study. One a personal level seeing Moore's work unpacked this way is so rewarding, entertaining, and fascinating. Within the essay's consideration of Moore's (performative) appeal and allure in an abstract and theoretical way, I find its form and breadth of (specific) analysis to be an alluring appeal in and of itself. As a self professed Moore devotee, cinephile, and 'actressexual' it is very exciting and gratifying to see research as contemporary and alive as this on this platform and treated with the respect and academic sincerity it undoubtedly deserves.