



Baby It's You (Lucy Dacus Edit)

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'Baby It's You (Lucy Dacus Edit)' adopts principles from the fanvid to analyse aspects of characterisation and narrative development in John Sayles' 1983 teen romance *Baby It's You*. It explores the utility of using imported pop songs in scholarly videographic criticism and tests certain conventions of the fanvid, namely the focus on the visual source rather than the music chosen to accompany it, and the tendency to erase the screen text's original music soundtrack.





Creator's Statement

'Baby It's You (Lucy Dacus Edit)' explores the characterisation of Jill Rosen (Rosanna Arquette), the female protagonist of John Sayles' 1983 teen movie *Baby It's You*, as well as the progression of the relationship between her and the film's male protagonist, Sheik (Vincent Spano). It does so by adopting principles from the vid, 'a fan-made music video in which preexisting footage (usually from television or movies) is edited to music . . . [resulting in] a new multimedia object that tells a story, creates an interpretation, stages an argument, and/or produces a feeling' (Coppa, 2022). My video strives to generate new knowledge about *Baby It's You*, about certain conventions of the vid, and about the possibilities of music's use in videographic criticism.

The vid has already attracted academic interest through the written and audiovisual work of Melanie Kohlen (2015), Lori Morimoto (2016), Jason Mittell (2019), E. Charlotte Stevens (2020), Francesca Coppa (2022), and Samantha Close (2023) to name only the scholars who, as part of their enquiry, have acknowledged the potential relationship between the vid and videographic criticism. In addition, the vid was a consistent point of reference in the 2017 *Cinema Journal* roundtable on remix and videographic criticism (Creekmur). Processing this material whilst making my video heavily influenced the form the final product took.

In its first iteration, my video consisted solely of the 'Jill' section. I have written about *Baby It's You* in my study *The Pop Song in Film* (2006), whose arguments I revisited as part of my meta-critical video essay 'The Place of the Pop Song in Academic Audiovisual Film and Television Criticism' (2022). The original intention was to immerse myself in the production of a vid about *Baby It's You*, without cross-referencing my writing, and then to reflect on the different kinds of knowledge effect produced through the written and audiovisual performance of criticism on the same object of study.

However, through engagement with the practice-based and written discussion about the vid, I became more interested in the claims made about the vid itself, and its possible connections to videographic criticism, and less concerned with its relationship to written criticism. In terms of the vid as a form, the expanded version of the video essay, as published here, was made self-consciously to explore the status of music within the vid. A fundamental assumption about the vid's soundtrack 'is that where pro music videos are visuals that illustrate the music, songvids are music that tells the story of the visuals' (Vidder Margie, quoted in Coppa, 2022). Despite the care with which music (usually song) may be chosen for a vid, it is ultimately there to enable an exploration of the show or film around which the fandom revolves. In other words, the vidder asks the question 'how does the song help me to investigate the show/film?' rather than 'how does the show/film help me to investigate the song?'

My adaptation of the vid format alters the balance between song, performer, and (in this case) the film text. Lucy Dacus is introduced as an embodied presence early on, not only through her voice and music, but also through her visual appearance. By the end, through a series of 'videttes', the video has become as interested in exploring her musical catalogue and persona as it is in investigating *Baby It's You's* protagonists.

Another convention of the vid is to silence the musical soundtrack of the show/film being explored. This results in visual, narrative, and occasionally vocal aspects of the show/film being privileged as the source of fascination, rather than its musical qualities. My video essay attempts to retain a focus on the music of *Baby It's You*. It does so in the (unvid-like, explanatory) introduction, using particular songs from the film and detailing how *Baby It's You* mixes period-setting music with anachronistic Bruce Springsteen songs. As I discuss in my writing on the film, *Baby It's You* deploys its songs in a sophisticated manner, sometimes aligning them in conventional ways to characters and narrative action and sometimes deliberately thwarting expectations.

In the videttes at the end of my video, I replicate this strategy, taking songs from the film, but placing them in different narrative situations to the original. For example, in *Baby It's You*, Springsteen's 'She's the One' features in the car chase sequence which results in Sheik leaving the city—and Jill—behind. In this context, the dynamic musical build-up in the first part of the song is used to support the increasing momentum of the on-screen action (the lyrics are generally indecipherable, drowned out by diegetic sound). By contrast, vidette #4 ('Making Up') uses the bridge of the song, not heard in the film, to complement, lyrically and musically, a depiction of the romantic intensity of Jill and Sheik's relationship. Visually, the intensity is created through a combination of superimpositions from *Baby It's You*, but also through a layering of rhyming circling camera movements from the film and Dacus' video for 'Addictions', both of which

depict characters (including Dacus herself) embracing. All of this is framed through a TV screen borrowed from Dacus' video for 'Brando'. This demonstrates the approach of the videttes throughout: to present the fundamental narrative beats of the film (indicated in the most basic fashion through my reedit of the 'Baby It's You' trailer in the 'coming attractions' section that precedes the videttes) through an aesthetic that supercharges the sensuous relationships between musical snippets and images and that encompasses the world of the film within the world-building presented through Dacus' music and associated visuals (an approach that is foreshadowed by the discussion of Dacus' visual artistry in another of the 'coming attractions' trailers).

This aesthetic approach is aligned with vidding practice, to an extent. The editing process of the 'Jill' section and the closing videttes is governed by principles associated with the vid, using 'all the information in a song—lyrics, melody, beat, tempo, instrumentation—as scaffolding upon which to build a montage that reveals (which is to say, creates) aesthetic and narrative patterns in the footage' (Coppa, 2022). The 'Jill' vid is presented self-consciously as a character vid, a recognised genre within vidding.

However, my approach is not entirely vid-like. The closing videttes are conceptually aligned with the album-long vid *Scooby Road* (Luminosity, 2005), as the final 'coming attractions' trailer intimates. This is a landmark piece of work, but precisely because of its uniqueness as a vid that expresses its fascination with its music at least as much as it does with its chosen screen text. Additionally, within the 'Jill' vid and the videttes, the compositional style and pace of editing does not necessarily match the typical look or rhythm of a vid (I am aware of the reductive use of the term 'typical' here). For example, the use of quite lengthy clips in the 'Jill' vid, as well as a simply-arranged split-screen, might suggest a more sober 'film analysis' approach, instead of the intensely emotive and affective style usually attributed to the vid. In the videttes, the layering of images associated with Lucy Dacus is obviously unusual, but the heavy use of stylised superimpositions more generally (including in vidette #4) may be considered more aesthetic than directly affective (here I am using the language of one of the initial peer reviews, albeit in a comment about a section of the video that has now been excised).

This betrays my position and experience as a film studies scholar, approaching the vid from the perspective of videographic criticism, and having developed a particular editing and compositional style within that environment. This is distinct from a vidding community that exists in a different space and is attached to particular screen text fan cultures. Whilst I hope that my video remains affective and has something to express about the vid as a form, it is ultimately a piece of academic videographic criticism, sitting outside of the vidding community or a particular fan culture and consciously incorporating framing techniques that are not associated with the vid. Beyond the

specific interest in the vid as a form, therefore, my video essay is also exploring the utility of using imported pop songs within scholarly videographic criticism, a practice that has not been common in video essay work published in academic journals to date.

Vidding, as has been well-documented, has historically been a female-led practice, with vids being made by women for predominantly female audiences. As a male academic, the framing techniques I have employed in my video essay provide an additional function in acknowledging that gender is another factor that positions me outside of this vidding community. At the same time, the increasing presence of Lucy Dacus (musically and visually) can be experienced as an orchestrated female takeover of the authorial point of view, with the additional twist, for those informed about Dacus, that this is a self-proclaimed queer voice, commenting on a screen romance that is presented as straightforwardly heterosexual. Whilst it is common for videographic criticism to source its music from the screen texts directly under critique, the importation of Lucy Dacus into *Baby It's You* offers an alternative (audio)vision, presenting a forced marriage between sounds and images that represents 'material thinking through synchresis' (Grant, 2022): an ethos underpinning vids made in fannish contexts, but also perfectly attuned to videographic scholarship's understanding of creative remixing as critical act.

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Biography

Ian Garwood is Professor of Screen Studies at University of Glasgow. He is on the editorial board of *Movie* and has published video essays and writing about audiovisual criticism in *[In]Transition*, *NECSUS*, and *The Cine-Files*. *Indy Vinyl*, his audiovisual and written research project on record playing in American Independent Cinema, won the 2021 Videographic Criticism award from the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies. He is particularly interested in the role of sound in videographic criticism and the use and production of video essays in a teaching context.

Review by Samantha Close, DePaul University

Garwood's "Baby It's You (Lucy Dacus Edit)" sets itself—and delivers upon—the immense challenge of (re)mixing the fan vidding and videographic criticism forms to make an unfolding series of arguments about the film *Baby It's You*, Lucy Dacus's music, and the place of pop music in media criticism more broadly. It accomplishes this through positioning Lucy Dacus as watching a series of short "videttes" in a theater that begin heavily focused on the media text but begin to incorporate more and more of her own voice until, by the end of the credits, she takes a bow alongside *Baby It's You*—much as scholarship on vidding has argued that fans are not merely "derivative" but artistic creators in their own right, an argument that videographic criticism sees extended to scholars.

One strength of the piece is that it makes a clear argument about formula (like the teen romance-come-coming of age *Baby It's You*) in media: it works because it provides a skeleton for viewers to flesh out with their own life experiences and emotions. Garwood gets here through a clever combination of a vidette that re-edits the film's trailer to highlight the familiar story beats and then following it with videttes that freely mix music, lyrics, still art, and footage to suggest the felt complexity and endless minute variation of these seemingly basic beats. Including an interview with Dacus's video and art director that explains their "worldbuilding" process highlights how this is an industry approach as well as a method of viewer response—building on the usage of the trailer, fundamentally an advertisement, earlier in the work.

Shift that argument a little and you see Garwood's on-going exploration of the utility of pop songs in videographic criticism, highlighted by using both Dacus's music and a number of songs from *Baby It's You*'s original (and iconic) soundtrack. Pop music is often accused of being formulaic, and scholars sometimes worry that incorporating it will limit their arguments to the song's lyrics. Garwood brilliantly and implicitly disputes this point by freely collaging together bits of very different songs, along with the visual elements, in a way that focuses critical attention on the feelings and affects described but only guides, rather than dictates, the scholar-audience's takeaway

meaning. A specialist on John Sayles, teen films, or the 1980s might see one thing, while a scholar of fan vids or queer studies might see something else. This critical ambiguity is an incredible strength of videographic criticism.

Review by Lori Morimoto, University of Virginia

Throughout the process of responding to reviewer feedback on his videographic essay, “Baby It’s You [Lucy Dacus Edit],” Ian Garwood has worked to bring his scholarly perspective into conversation with not only the form, but the feel, of a fanvid. The resulting work is a true—and quite literal—labor of love. One of the key characteristics of fanvids is their distinctly affect-driven articulation of image and sound. This is something that Garwood feels his way through, both by invoking the visual and aural presence of Lucy Dacus as her songs (her self?) inform our understanding of *Baby It’s You* and by experimenting with different ways to trouble the line between criticism and affect. In particular, the way Garwood builds on fanvidder Luminosity’s 2005 vid, *Scooby Road*—itself something of an experiment in fanvid form and meaning—offers a wonderfully productive dialogical engagement with Luminosity’s provocations.

When I give myself over to Garwood’s marriage of image and music, and particularly “the increasing presence of Lucy Dacus” throughout, I find myself savoring the criticism that her inclusion brings to bear on the film. I agree wholeheartedly with Garwood when he suggests that this presence “can be experienced as an orchestrated female takeover of the authorial point of view,” something that’s at once a powerful critique of both the character of Sheik (and, arguably, Sayles’s approach to him) and the film’s use of Bruce Springsteen’s music. In the preface to “Jill: A Fanvid,” Dacus’s music and lyrics overtake the cacophony of Springsteen’s “Born to Run,” and the images Garwood sets them against create an affecting—and affective—understanding of what it feels like to be Jill (what it feels like to be a girl) caught in the drift of Sheik’s masculinity. The juxtaposition of Jill’s many expressions and Dacus’s lyrics communicate more about her point of view than the film itself, caught between its protagonists, can.

When we get to the “Feature Presentation” and Dacus herself is placed in the position of spectator with images from her music videos—of herself, of lyrics (*thoughts*)—superimposed against clips from the film, we get an even greater sense of her specific point of view, of what it *feels* like to be a woman watching this (or so many other) films. This, to my mind, is what bringing a fanvid sensibility to bear on videographic criticism can, at its best, achieve: an *experience* of an intellectual argument, rather than just an explanation.

