When I started studying film in the 1970s, I did not project myself into an era in which SCMS would turn 50. Neither did I anticipate that when it did, I would be even older than that. But here we both are.

In some sense, I view myself as an academic “test-tube baby,” because I was one of the first generation of newly minted film studies PhDs (“Yes, really,” I assured disbelievers, “I did get a doctoral degree in that”). In fact, I recall the precise moment when attaining such a distinction became possible. After getting BA and MAT degrees in English, I was teaching high school in New York City—motivated by post-1960s idealism about improving urban education (and limited by constrained career aspirations for women at that time). I was already interested in film and illegally borrowing movies from the Donnell Public Library to show to my students—boys enrolled in a public vocational high school. One day in the teacher’s lounge (amidst the usual disheartening conversations about hours remaining in the day, or days remaining until retirement), I picked up the New York Times and read that New York University was launching one of the first (if not the first) doctoral programs in cinema studies as a distinct discipline. I had already decided that I wanted to go on for my PhD and teach at the college level, so I read the article with great interest.

Like most educated young people living in Manhattan at the time, I had become an avid filmgoer—watching revivals at the Thalia, Bleecker Street, Symphony, or New Yorker theaters, attending the New York Film Festival, and going to screenings at MoMA. Of course, when I went to college, there was no film studies major and few, if any, classes in the area. While teaching, however, I had taken a few graduate film courses at Columbia University with Andrew Sarris, among others. In considering doctoral studies, I had also been investigating programs in English, but had, curiously, felt some reluctance about enrolling in them (despite my background in and love of literature).
In contemplating film studies, what attracted me, in addition to the subject itself (with its untraveled paths and scholarly new horizons), was its “maverick” status. I use this word with great trepidation as it has recently been tainted by contact with Republican candidates in the 2008 presidential election—but I mean it with utmost sincerity. There was something decidedly “tweedy,” “elite,” and “establishment” about the field of English in my mind—a traditional thrust that, frankly, alienated me (in part, because I was a first-generation college graduate and because the sixties had taught me to question canonical education). Quite simply, I felt (without any supporting evidence) that I would be more “at home” in film studies—because of my love of the medium, because of my desire to be an academic pioneer, and because I sensed that I would like the more unconventional people who chose it as their life’s work. Neither the subject nor my colleagues have disappointed me.

As a basically cowardly person, I like to think that I took some “risk” in pursuing a degree in film studies at the time. My conservative parents opposed my quitting a secure teaching job for a pursuit of the vagaries of an unfamiliar academic life (bad enough in a conventional field but unthinkable in a new and questionable one). I had always been chastened by their warnings but, for some reason, I ignored this one. From the present perspective, studying film back then was, in some ways, a lunatic pursuit. For the most part, we saw films only once: in a classroom, at a museum, at a festival, in a theater. Of course, the latter situation allowed for rescreening if the film continued to be exhibited. At NYU, Bill Everson (a dedicated professor) often allowed students to borrow his 16mm prints, and I can recall dragging heavy cases on the subway back to my apartment. As I think of it now, Bill was an extremely unusual collector in his generosity with his prints, and his complete trust in people returning them. I am sure he lost some and that others came back in damaged condition, but his open-door policy never changed. He also had some marvelous compilation reels—like the one that contained only Busby Berkeley’s production numbers—that I used in writing an early article about *Dames* (Berkeley and Ray Enright, 1934). I recall (or fantasize) that his living room furniture consisted merely of installed theater seats and that its walls were entirely lined with shelves of films. After all, Everson was a maverick’s maverick. As I now witness my students analyze movies in the comfort of their homes—using DVDs, videotapes, downloaded films, cable TV channels, iPods, etc.—I begin to feel like Abraham Lincoln, lecturing the young about how he “walked miles and miles to school . . .” And then there’s the research component: memories of rummaging through disintegrating, allergy-producing clipping files in libraries (now available in online newspaper or magazine archives), of searching for journal articles (now available online from JSTOR or Project Muse), of hunting for reliable production credits (now available online from IMDB), and of seeking missing library books (now available as e-books).

But I was a “test-tube baby” in yet another sense, and here is where my path intersects with that of SCMS. Early on in my career at NYU, it was announced that the Society for Cinema Studies was going to hold its conference there. While I’m sure I would not have applied to an out-of-town event, the fact that it was going to be at my home institution propelled me to do so. My paper on Jacques Tati’s *Playtime* (1967)—early work on my dissertation—was accepted. It concerned debates over the use of the long take versus montage and drew on film theory to critique Bazin’s faith in the long
take as being perceptually nondirective, as leaving an ambiguity of meaning. What I had not known was that this was the first SCS conference at which graduate students were allowed to be on panels, and that there was some hostility to that fact, as well as to the kind of theoretical approach students took in their work.

In tandem with the SCS conference was another at the City University of New York Graduate Center about the role of film in the university. At the last moment, someone realized (I assume with embarrassment) that no graduate student had been asked to participate in the proceedings and, because I had successfully delivered a paper at SCS, I was asked to do so. I had about a day to prepare and, despite the ensuing panic, pulled it off. I recall that one of the talks by an established scholar argued for film studies to retain its “amateur” status, drawing on the term’s roots in the word “love.” With what Bob Dylan calls, in the song “Back Pages,” “crimson flames tied through my ears,” I vehemently argued against this—not against passion for the cinema, but the tendency for traditional academics to “slum” in the field as a form of light entertainment, refusing film studies the weight of true scholarship. I had a chip on my shoulder then, and I still do now. Also, like others of my generation, I argued for the specificity of the medium and, based on the NYU model, called for there to be dedicated film studies departments. When I later was hired by an English department, I hoped that no one would unearth the talk before I got tenure.

In the following pages, some members of the Society (of various generations and specializations) offer their own thoughts on “SCMS at Fifty.” In considering the question of where the field goes from here, Rick Altman takes a backward glance at his own disciplinary formation and the changes in his (and others’) perception of what media scholarship entails. Janet Staiger, on the other hand, celebrates the “liberal-leftist tilt” that the Society has evinced from its earliest years. Fixing her sight on the checkered history of film studies within the American university, Virginia Wexman surfaces some of the difficulties faced by the field in the course of its inclusion and proliferation within the academy. Jaqueline Stewart, on the other hand, foregrounds some of the internal tensions that have characterized media studies around questions of race, class, and ethnicity as they pertain both to the Society’s membership and to the research and scholarship it supports in its conference and journal. Turning to issues of new media, Lisa Nakamura investigates digital technologies and the need for all media scholars (whether “born digital” or not) to familiarize themselves with the ontological, technological, and aesthetic dynamics of digital technologies—if not as objects in themselves—as means to comprehend more traditional forms. Focusing on the production, distribution, and economics of new media, John T. Caldwell urges scholars to view new technology not simply as related to corporate institutions, but as enabling “collective cultural activities and embodied social communities.” Finally, returning to a historical theme, Lee Grieveson discusses academic film study from the 1930s through the 1960s, a period that included the founding of the predecessor of SCMS in 1959.

Much has changed in film studies since the formation of the organization and my early years in the field. SCMS has become an organization that not only tolerates graduate students, but welcomes and supports them. And my entire experience with the Society (including some demanding years as its president) has only convinced me that my choice of academic area was the correct one. Certainly, in the intervening
years, film studies has set itself a broader purview, one that my own work reflects. Ironically (given my “separatist” talk as a graduate student), it was when I was president of SCS that the “M” for “Media” was added to its name—signaling not only a new era of interdisciplinarity but of intermediality as well. Clearly (to draw again on Dylan’s lyrics) both I and the field were “older then;” we’re “younger than that now.”

I n order to respond to the question “Where do we go from here?” it may be useful to remember how we got where we are. While what follows is more personal than universal, I suspect that many readers of Cinema Journal will recognize aspects of their own trajectory in mine.

As a French literature graduate student at Yale in the late sixties, I shared in the decade’s interdisciplinary impulse, strongly influenced by the healthy disrespect for established disciplines demonstrated by such currents as structuralism, semiotics, and narratology. My studies with Todorov, Genette, and others equally suspicious of traditional disciplines encouraged me to compare texts as disparate as Russian folk-tales, French fantastic novels, indigenous social practices, and… films. The knowledge that I brought to film texts came not from a discipline called “film studies” but from my training in semiotics, my familiarity with twentieth-century theater and art movements, and my reading in a broad narrative tradition that included epics, romances, short stories, and novels. I had film surrounded, even though I had not yet really penetrated into the film fortress. I was rich in cultural knowledge and analytical techniques that helped me to understand the cinema, but I had precious little access to the films themselves. Only rarely did I enjoy the luxury of consulting a 35mm print at the Museum of Modern Art or the Library of Congress. My early film knowledge thus depended almost entirely on one-time public projections by museums or festivals—including a glorious year in Paris, when my wife and I virtually camped at the Cinémathèque Française—along with the odd “classic” film shown on television. In the early seventies, the chance discovery of Blackhawk Films started me on the road to building my

Whither Film Studies (in a Post–Film Studies World)?

by RICK ALTMAN
own collection. My long-suffering Bryn Mawr students got used to the whir of my Super-8 projector sitting on a table in the back of the classroom.

When I came to Iowa in the mid-seventies I finally became part of a community that understood dedication to the study of film as its founding feature. Interestingly, however, the fact that the University of Iowa offered an MA and PhD in a discipline called “film studies” didn’t mean that Iowa recruited graduate students with solid training in film analysis, history, and theory. Given the virtual absence of undergraduate film studies programs at the time, we regularly accepted students who knew more about film production, English literature, or art history than about the history of cinema. Happily, my Super-8 copies were rapidly replaced by rented 16mm prints. But in order to build a substantial film repertoire, students still required the shared resources of course screenings, the Bijou’s regularly scheduled offerings, specially programmed retrospectives, and increasingly frequent televised film series. Like their instructors, our students became adept at taking copious notes while watching films, because we all knew that only in exceptional circumstances would we be privileged to see that particular film again. Only with the appearance of U-Matic 3/4-inch videotape recorders later in the seventies were we regularly able to preserve films for later viewing, and even then only with all the drawbacks of machines that were heavy and expensive and recorded only an hour per cassette. Even the simplest research need—such as checking the details of a print before publishing an analytical article—required a trip to the Library of Congress, MoMA, the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, or a West Coast archive.

During the sixties and seventies, the film studies bibliography was limited indeed. I remember writing an article on the historiography of American cinema, shortly after my arrival at Iowa, for which I read virtually everything then available on American cinema—an unthinkable task now. The eighties changed all that. Hand in hand, the development of videotape recording technology and a substantial market for books about cinema transfigured our discipline. During the eighties and nineties the availability of films on video not only expanded our corpus, substantially increasing the range of films covered, but also led to a new brand of film scholarship. Until the video-based increase of film availability, most film publications analyzed a single film or a small group of related films. Since that time we have seen more and more books based on a large corpus: genre studies, cultural studies, national studies, or studies of specific periods. The DVD revolution has further extended this phenomenon. For years now, each time I return to a familiar course, I find that the range of relevant available materials has grown exponentially. At first, early cinema was represented by no more than a few film prints available for rent or purchase, and then by a small number of collections on videotape or laser disc. Now we are experiencing an explosion of early film materials available on DVD, often accompanied by carefully selected music and explanatory notes of quite extraordinary quality.

Throughout the period dominated by videotape viewing, the number of American universities and colleges offering a major or concentration in cinema grew rapidly. Where once Iowa graduate students came primarily from related disciplines, we soon began to receive applications from students with stellar cinema credentials. Instead of
bringing knowledge of Shakespeare, Flaubert, and Picasso, our grad students now arrived knowing Metz, Godard, Welles, and much, much more. For many years, our students were all converts to cinema—from literature, history, philosophy, or theater—and they came with the well-known energy of converts. Like their instructors, they were firmly dedicated to an incipient field that we called “film studies.” In our professional organizations, our administrative contacts, and our daily language, we engaged in a self-conscious process of product differentiation. We wanted to make absolutely sure that everyone understood that “film studies” is a separate field unto itself, with its own technology, its own corpus, its own analytical techniques, and its own bibliography. This classical period of film studies lasted well into the nineties. It was marked by the self-confidence that grows out of—finally—gaining access to a broad range of texts, securing dependable institutional recognition, and settling on shared assumptions about the nature of the field, applicable to considerations as diverse as undergraduate and graduate education, book publishing, and tenure decisions.

Wouldn’t it be nice to stop here? What a success story! Poor relation makes good. Untutored and unsponsored, lacking recognition, access to primary texts, or even a basic bibliography, Master Film Studies works his way into proper society on an equal footing with established players like English literature, art history, and philosophy. But the story doesn’t end there. Over the past decade we have witnessed important new developments that require our attention if we are to have any hope of understanding where our field is going. For decades, it seemed that each new technology was part of an ongoing unlocking of film resources. From Super-8 and 16mm to U-Matic, VHS/Beta, and DVD, we never stopped increasing our available supply of films, thus reinforcing our claims about the importance of an independent film studies field. But other things were going on as well, hidden by the neat beginning-middle-end story of cinema’s triumphant enthronement in the academic pantheon. While we were concentrating on the extraordinary image and sound delivery opportunities afforded by DVD technology, others were putting up an increasing variety of materials on the Internet. Many of the photographs and early films I once viewed in archives are now available on the Web. The radio programs I once bought on cassette are out there too, along with a growing selection of television offerings. And now I can listen to early cylinders and disks to my ears’ content. Once I had to rely on friendly collectors or my own collection of early sheet music; now I just go online. As the years go by we will surely witness a veritable explosion of electronic resources, from scanned archives to streaming video and beyond.

For decades we found ourselves locked in an ironic but utterly foundational schizophrenia, where our evident desire to establish cinema’s specificity was mismatched with a theoretical base and analytical techniques borrowed from other disciplines. Now the elements have changed, but the scheme is no less schizoid: just when we have finally firmly established the existence and identity of our field, the range of available texts has proliferated. Where once our students arrived with broad knowledge of neighboring fields and a dedication to cinema, now they arrive with strong training in film studies, but an evident desire to move as far as possible beyond film studies. It used to be that I could count on film students to understand my classroom references
to Virgil, Austen, or Hawthorne (but not necessarily to Lubin, Thanhouser, or First National). Now I find myself fighting the inverse syndrome. They’ve heard of Shearer, Korngold, and Murch, but many of them have no idea about Delacroix, Braque, and Delaunay (let alone Goethe, Stendhal, and Gide).

What difference does all this make? One of the most important lessons I learned while writing my book on Silent Film Sound is that the historian’s greatest enemy is the hidden drift of terminology. When we come across a word that we know, we naturally assume that it means just what we normally understand today by that term. But just because the same term is used doesn’t mean that the semiosis is the same. What we now mean by “film studies” is a far cry from what we meant when we were fighting for recognition of the term, acceptance of the intellectual concept, and budgeting for the administrative unit. Back then, we worked hard to convince people that the cinema is so different from other forms of expression that it deserves its own place in both the intellectual and the academic world. Today, instead of purifying film studies, we do our best to find ways of integrating one cultural phenomenon after another into the discipline that some still call film studies—even if the sign on the door says “Cinema and Media Studies.”

In a nutshell, here’s where we’ve been, and here are some challenges I see for our future:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE BASE BROUGHT BY THOSE ENTERING THE FIELD</th>
<th>FILM ACCESS CHANNELS MOST OFTEN USED BY THOSE IN THE FIELD</th>
<th>AVAILABLE BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL GOALS SHARED BY FILM STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1960s and 1970s</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• training in literature, art, and/or other related fields</td>
<td>cinémathèque, museum, festival, and other public screenings</td>
<td>• theoretical and analytical models borrowed from other disciplines</td>
<td>• foundational schizophrenia—evident desire to establish cinema’s specificity, and to integrate students into the distinctive field of film studies, all while using a theoretical base borrowed from neighboring disciplines and typically applied to other texts beyond films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cross-disciplinary analytical techniques designed for varied texts</td>
<td>Super-8, 16mm, and other substandard prints for rent or purchase</td>
<td>• single-film or small corpus film studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>televised film series</td>
<td>• general film histories often based on single viewings and limited research</td>
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| **1980s and 1990s**                                 |                                                           |                        |                                                             |
| • increasing knowledge of cinema                  | dwindling importance of public screenings and film prints | increased publication of film-specific analyses | development of cinema-specific analytical tools |
| • dwindling knowledge of literature, art, and/or other related fields | increasing importance of videotape, laserdisc, and DVD formats | publication of large-corpus studies | institutionalization of film studies as a growing field |
| • mix of cross-disciplinary analytical techniques designed for varied texts and film-specific techniques derived from hands-on film analysis | | initial attempts at broad histories based on responsible viewing and research | |
The new century

• substantial knowledge of cinema (especially recent films)
• a wild array of interests stretching from familiar research paradigms to video games and beyond
• an increasingly unpredictable mix of theoretical backgrounds.

• DVD releases
• online materials
• decreased interest in film-specific analyses
• more and more large projects and multi-volume efforts
• increased cross-disciplinary publication
• continued integration of students into the discipline of film studies
• increased efforts to explode the very idea of film studies as a viable notion

Where does this leave us today, and for the foreseeable future? Frankly, as I see it, our situation is precarious indeed. What brought us together as a field, and sustained us for several decades as we eventually succeeded in our mission, was the desire to have cinema recognized as a powerful form of artistic, cultural, and economic expression, with cinema studies consequently recognized as an important, independent academic discipline. For decades, our mentoring activities have concentrated on initiating students into this film studies world. We needed to do this in part because of the disparate fields from which our students hailed. But now the situation has been reversed. Current students come to us already convinced that cinema studies is a strong, serious field of inquiry. Increasingly, our task thus involves training students to handle the plethora of materials that the Internet offers (a task for which we are ill-prepared, I would note, because our own film education stressed cinematic specificity rather than methods for handling the extraordinary variety of materials now available with a few keystrokes). Once centripetal (with film at the center), our task must now be understood as centrifugal. We must, I submit, begin to soft-pedal film specificity and turn instead to training students to handle the new nonfilm resources that now complement increased film availability. This of course means that we must train ourselves to make use of those resources.

When I teach silent film sound, to take just one example, I need to be able to show my students how to locate and analyze not just obvious materials like film scores, but also cue sheets, song slides, sheet music, cylinder recordings, melodrama staging instructions, theater diagrams, radio programs, and a zillion-and-one other resources that I am only beginning to discover. I need to offer my students a model for understanding cinema that is not itself limited to cinema. In short, in order to take full advantage of newly available resources, I need to forget what I learned and what I have been teaching for years.

It is only with some trepidation that I am willing to formulate the strong version of this position: we need to recognize that the film specificity model—however well it has served us—now lies squarely in our way. Once necessary to our very livelihood, the film specificity model must now be discarded. An entirely new task awaits us in the decades to come. Instead of training students to be film scholars, we need to show students how to creatively give up film scholarship in favor of something broader, something more in step with our new resources. It is time to abandon our disciplinary prejudices as film scholars. Welcome to the contradictory future of film studies in a post-film studies world.

*
Some Hopes of SCMS

by JANET STAIGER

Whenever I recount the history of my choice to study film and television, I always include a passage about film studies being “undisciplined” when I arrived at it in the early 1970s. Only recently having entered the academy in at least as widespread and visible a position as it was starting to have at that point, film studies was also benefiting from the concurrent explosion of continental theory: structuralism, semiotics, Marxist cultural studies, French feminisms. I am thus sure that those theories also attracted me, for the 1960s leftist, working-class progressive that I was (and hope still to be) found those discourses revelatory and compatible with my view of the social formation. Of course, I did find having to be nominated for membership in the Society of Cinema Studies (SCS) by Douglas Gomery in 1978 so that I could present a paper at that year’s conference to be a bit elitist, but at least it was not as selective as had I been considering joining in the 1960s when the original organization planned to restrict its membership to one hundred members. Still, other parts of the history of SCS have made me proud to be a member, now for thirty-one years. What I would like to share with my colleagues on the occasion of the Society’s fiftieth anniversary is a bit of its history that may be little known: the liberal-leftist tilt that it evinced from its earliest years.

Jack Ellis (Northwestern University), one of the four organizers of the Society of Cinematologists (SOC) in 1959, has provided us with a “Personal Recollection of the Early Days.” Ellis notes that besides himself on the organizing committee were John Driscoll (Pennsylvania State University), Robert Gessner (New York University), and Gerald Noxon (Boston University), with Gessner providing much of the guidance for the early choices in name and purpose. Ellis also notes the dilemma as to whether SOC should be a learned society or a professional academic organization, with it leaning toward the former until Gessner’s death in 1968, after which its members changed its name to the Society for Cinema Studies. Ellis mentions neither that membership

1 Stephen Groening’s timeline suggests the diminutive size of the field; in 1970, “the AFI listed 233 colleges and universities offering courses in film and 68 institutions with a degree program in film or a related field, including 11 with PhD programs.” “Appendix: Timeline for a History of Anglophone Film Culture and Film Studies,” in Inventing Film Studies, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 412.

was juried nor the early idea that the Society would be limited to one hundred members. Gessner took advice on the founding of the “learned society” from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), but SCS was not admitted to that organization until the late 1980s, with our first voting delegate being Richard Abel in 1991.

Among other activities associated with such organizations, SOC promptly held its first annual conference in 1960 at New York University where Erwin Panofsky was the keynote speaker. SOC also elected Panofsky as its first honorary member as part of that event. SOC also began publishing academic papers, with the start of *Cinema Journal* in 1961, at first an annual publication but shifting to two issues per year in 1968. In 1964, Gessner chaired a committee to establish vocabulary and film notation symbols (something that obviously was doomed to failure). In the early years, SOC worked with other groups to educate the public about film studies. September 22-24, 1964, in a joint event at Lincoln Center with the American Council on Education, SOC held a seminar on the study of film as a contemporary art, and on September 28, 1964, SOC and the New York Public Library (NYPL) hosted a symposium on the New York Film Festival, moderated by William Sloan (NYPL Film Librarian) with panelists Hollis Albert, Gessner, Arthur Knight, and Andrew Sarris, as well as Amos Vogel, who had founded the Festival the year before.

Like other learned societies, SOC wanted to acknowledge outstanding work (and achieve its own recognition in doing so). The Rosenthal Foundation, which had been providing literary awards through the National Institute of Arts and Letters for about a decade, initiated film awards in 1962. SOC worked cooperatively with the Foundation to vet these awards for five years, beginning that year. At SOC’s third annual meeting, it gave awards to Vernon Zimmerman for his film *Lemon Hearts* and to Tom Pathe for his original shooting script *The Candy Room*. The following year saw many submissions, including one by Emile de Antonio, for *Sunday*. The winner that year, however, was a New York University graduate student, Brian De Palma, for *Woton’s Wake*, described by Gessner as “audacious and joyous in cinematic effects, and in composition and editing its style is free and delightfully satirical.” The 1964 winners were George Houston Bass for an original script, *Bobby Butler*, Robert Shaye for a “lyrical experimental film,

3 Memorandum from Robert Gessner to Ralph Hetzel, n.d., in George Amberg Papers, Box B, Folder 4 (“S.O.C. 1964”), George Amberg Study Center, Department of Cinema Studies, New York University, New York, NY [hereafter GA papers].
4 Minutes, SCS Executive Committee, May 22-23, 1991, 7, personal papers of author [hereafter JS papers].
5 “Edwin Panofsky (1892–1968),” GA papers, Box B, Folder 50.
6 Groening, “Appendix,” p. 411, dates *Cinema Journal* to 1967, which is technically correct. However, annual issues of four to five papers of the *Journal of the Society of Cinematologists* began in 1961.
7 “Nomenclature,” GA papers, Box B, Folder 2.
8 Copy of letter to John Kuiper from unknown author [perhaps Gessner], n.d., GA papers, “Kuiper,” Box B, Folder 3; Flyer, (“S.O.C. 1964,”); GA papers, Box B, Folder 4.
Image,” and Martin Scorsese for the satirical film, What Is a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This? In 1967, at the end of the five-year agreement, SOC elected not to continue its relation with the Foundation.

Although the Rosenthal Foundation seemed dedicated to liberal expressions of art, the next venture into award giving was more explicitly aligned with that ideology (although I shall note more about this leftward slant below). In 1978, SCS announced the John Howard Lawson Memorial Scholarship Grant in honor of SCS Honorary Member Lawson, “to be presented to an outstanding student in scriptwriting.” As one of the most famous of the Hollywood Ten, Lawson represented a clear statement of the Society’s antagonism to anti-Communist crusades and attempts to muffle personal expressions of views. Unfortunately, this award did not last as part of SCS’s activities. The early years of SOC were not without several bumps. A minor, but typical one, was financial. In 1964, the Society was not in good fiscal shape, with funds mixed in with Rosenthal monies and journal distribution costs unbudgeted. Help from several of the central members righted the situation, and more planning for future costs was advocated.

A second bump displays the historical tensions between SOC/SCS and the University Film Producers Association (UFPA, now the University Film and Video Association, founded in 1947). In 1964, SOC considered joining a European-based association, the International Liaison Center of Schools of Cinema. UFPA belonged as a full member already, and SOC leaders believed that UFPA would support its admission as an associate member. At this point, only three SOC members were also members of UFPA. However, in summer 1964 a UFPA representative to the Center apparently blocked SOC’s admission on the grounds that the UFPA membership had not voted on supporting SOC’s admission. As SOC’s leadership calculated, SOC might be admitted the following year since the Center was facing requests for admissions by every US university with a film program, and SOC “can provide the scholarly contributions UFPA can’t offer.” As Gessner wrote in 1966 when the question of membership in the Center arose once again, Gessner believed that in 1964 the UFPA representative “suspected ‘a deal’ to replace the UFPA by SOC and was suspicious of ‘red alliances.’” After the initial roadblock, SOC leadership began to question whether it wished to align with the Center. For one thing, the ACLS, “the mother organization

12 Newsletter of SOC, 4, no. 1 (Winter 1967), GA papers, Box B, Folder 10 (“Cinematology/SOC”).
13 Flyer, n.d., JS papers.
14 Two newly elected officers resigned when they saw the books. Letter from Erik Barnouw to Council of SOC, 4 May 1964, GA papers, Box B, Folder 52 (“Steele, Robert”); Letter from “Steele, President Under Protest” to Gessner, May 31, 1964, GA papers, Box B, Folder 52 (“Steele, Robert”); Minutes for the Fifth Annual SOC Meeting, March 24–25, 1964, JS papers.
to which SOC should aspire for association,” refused travel funds to the 1965 Moscow conference because the ACLS did not consider the Center to be an international learned society.\textsuperscript{18} At the March 21–22, 1966, meeting, SOC took no action to accept the vote of the Center to extend SOC associate membership.\textsuperscript{19}

Here we have the customary conflict between SOC/SCS and UFPA: one aims toward the “learned society” with an emphasis on the criticism and history of films; the other is more directed toward those who teach the craft and skills of filmmaking. As well, SOC is being labeled as leftist, at a time when cold war ideology still produces rather material outcomes. This representation of SOC/SCS would continue through the decades, and its activities illustrate that attribution has merit.

Second-wave feminism is usually represented as well-enough organized for mass-circulation periodicals to discuss it by the late 1960s. *Women and Film* began in 1972. I am not sure when SCS’s Women’s Caucus began, but SCS leadership ensured in 1983 the election of its sixteenth and first female president, Vivian Sobchack (1985–1987), by nominating two women (and no men) for the office. When I was elected as the second female president (1991–1993), the Women’s Caucus was very active, as was the Graduate Student Caucus.\textsuperscript{20} The Task Force on Race,\textsuperscript{21} chaired by Linda Dittmar, began in 1988–1989 to address the lack of diversity within the Society. By spring 1990, the Gay and Lesbian Caucus had organized with Alexander Doty as chair.\textsuperscript{22} In November 1990, the SCS Executive Committee approved the proposal for the formation of the Latino Caucus and directed then SCS president Peter Lehman to talk with the Task Force on Race about initiating an African American Caucus and other caucuses as advisable.\textsuperscript{23} In November 1991, the Executive Council authorized funds to start up the Asian/Asian American Caucus.\textsuperscript{24} By then, a Coordinating Board on Race, Class, and Gender had begun to manage the caucus requests; this became the official procedure in 1993. That year as well witnessed the formation of the Caucus on Class and the Middle East Caucus.\textsuperscript{25} The April 30, 1992, SCS Executive Council minutes note my awareness of “public criticism that the Society is dominated by ‘political correctness,'”\textsuperscript{26} which certainly indicates the ongoing resistance to the explicit practices of

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Letter from Robert Gessner to Remy Tessoneau, March 31, 1966, GA papers, Box B, Folder 9 ("S.O.C. 1966"). Apparently additional actions by a UFPA member were directed toward Gessner that eventually led to a New York University faculty censure of Gessner’s chair. See Memorandum to “President John Kuiper” from Robert Gessner, April 11, 1966, GA papers, Box B, Folder 9 ("S.O.C. 1966"); Memorandum to [NYU] WSC Faculty from [NYU] Board of Review, October 19, 1964, GA Papers, Box B, Folder 21 ("Manoogian 1964").

\textsuperscript{20} Earlier I had served as secretary-treasurer from 1984 to 1986 and the Women’s Caucus had been active then as well.

\textsuperscript{21} Originally titled “Task Force on Race and Class,” the committee requested dropping “and Class,” which the Society’s Executive Council approved although with admonitions not to neglect the matter of class. Minutes, SCS Executive Council Meeting, April 12, 13, and 16, 1989, 5, JS papers.

\textsuperscript{22} Minutes, SCS Executive Council Meeting, May 25 and 28, 1990, 6, JS papers. Titles of the caucuses change over the years; I am using the initial titles.

\textsuperscript{23} Minutes, SCS Executive Council Meeting, November 17–18, 1990, 7, JS papers.

\textsuperscript{24} Minutes, SCS Executive Council, November 16–17, 1991, 11, JS papers.

\textsuperscript{25} Minutes, SCS Executive Council, October 1, 1993, 4, JS papers.

\textsuperscript{26} Minutes, SCS Executive Council, April 30, 1992, 7, JS papers.
SCS leadership to secure an appropriate recognition of the diversity of peoples with stakes in the study of the representations in film, television, video, and the Internet.

As I noted, I have been proud to be associated with the Society of Cinema (and now Media) Studies for many years. While numerous difficulties developed over the years, a consequence of varied agendas and the dynamics of any social group, SCMS and its individual members have been leaders in considering media as having a social impact as well as an aesthetic one (and both are important to consider as they affect each other). Although created as a learned society, it has never been stuffy—some rather vivid memories of confrontations in panels and at general membership meetings come to my mind. While it took a while for the membership to vote a change in its name to “and Media”—which occurred in 2002—the 1985 conference had 25 percent of its panels on television and new media topics. SCMS has respected the history of the medium, and while it still is rather Anglocentric, over the years its members have contributed scholarship on all of the cinemas of the world. That fact and its rather leftist tilt has made it a pleasure to be a member of the organization.

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Media Studies and the Academy: A Tangled Tale

by Virginia Wright Wexman

In 1982 Richard Dyer MacCann and Jack Ellis, past editors of Cinema Journal, wrote, “Cinema is unlike any other field of study. Its source material is shadowy, unsteady, indescribable. We are still searching for our best approach, our discipline.”¹ This characterization remains true of media studies today. The National Research Council still labels media studies an “emerging discipline,” even though courses on movies have been taught in American universities since 1915.² To what can we attribute this continued understanding of our discipline as amorphous and embryonic? At least part of the answer lies in the fact that media studies has historically been intertwined with numerous other subject areas. The realities of academic life, the


The protean character of our field itself, and the distinctive characteristics of SCMS have all contributed to this entanglement.

The choppy seas media scholars have encountered within academia are nowhere else as turbulent as in the university. Our field has been victimized in part because of its popularity; media is exploited by many but respected by few. As we know too well, a wide array of departments freely draw on film and media resources as pedagogical aids to prop up their bottom lines. Courses in fields like history, literature, and art routinely incorporate media materials like clips from movies and TV shows, documentaries, and entire feature films to make connections with students, to clarify key concepts, or just to give faculty members a break. The departments that rely most heavily on the engaging accessibility of media texts are those in foreign languages and literatures. These disciplines routinely use films and other media texts to exemplify pronunciation and idiomatic language usage as well as to attract students to their areas of study with course offerings that feature movie adaptations of great literary works. This phenomenon explains the growth of the film division of the Modern Language Association (MLA), which currently has more members than SCMS itself. Unlike SCMS members, many if not most MLA Film Division types teach film and media courses as a service to their departments while their major research interests are focused on traditional literary fields.

Because media texts bring together elements from many of the traditional arts, numerous disciplines can claim a legitimate connection with our object of study, including literature, theater, art, and music. Further, the constantly evolving nature of media has led to the application of an ever-expanding range of disciplinary approaches. The emergence of television studies in the 1950s brought sociology departments into the mix, and sociological methods have also driven numerous reception studies of cinema itself. Digital media forms have engaged researchers in engineering schools and computer programs, further complicating the potpourri of disciplinary approaches that characterizes our field.

Numerous commentators have celebrated the way in which the tentacles of media studies have reached across disciplinary boundaries to extract a wide array of methodological models. At the same time, however, this intellectual ferment has had practical consequences that have not always served the profession well. Even when media studies has managed to separate itself from more traditional disciplines, its institutional identity has remained inchoate. Top media studies programs exist today in departments with titles like Communication Arts, Radio-TV-Film, Visual Cultures, Screen Studies, Film and Broadcasting, English, Art History, Comparative Literature,

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3 For a fuller discussion of this practice, see my article “Film Across the Curriculum: Approaching Subject Matter as Text” in Teaching Undergraduates: Essays from the Lilly Workshop on the Liberal Arts, ed. Bruce Kimball (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 91–126.

4 This phenomenon has frequently led to the unthinking adoption of pedagogical practices that follow those of host departments with little regard for the specific needs of media study. For example, in many institutions, classroom contact hours for media studies courses follow the conventions of literature courses—three hours each week for each course—with no additional time allotted for in-class screenings.

5 See, for example, the introductions to Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, Reinventing Film Studies (London: Arnold, 2000), 1–4; and Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., Inventing Film Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), xi–xxxii.
and even Rhetoric. Moreover, media production courses are frequently found in departments separate from those housing media studies—or even in separate divisions or schools within the university. The escalating pace of technological innovation ensures that our hazy institutional profile will not become more sharply defined as the years go by. More than likely, future scholars of media will find it increasingly difficult rather than easier to settle into neatly defined slots within the academy.

The good news is that even as media forms and media studies methodologies proliferate, the study of cinema itself is likely to acquire an ever greater aura of cultural capital in the world of higher education. As new modes of communication and entertainment gain currency, older forms move up the cultural hierarchy: as moviegoing replaced theatergoing in the early twentieth century as a staple of mass entertainment, plays gained cultural cachet; the advent of television similarly bumped cinema up a notch in the artistic hierarchy. If video games and even television are still looked on askance as art forms in the academy, cinema, with its recognized auteurs and canonical titles, by now occupies an elevated perch, and it will likely continue its climb up the ladder of cultural prestige in the years to come—as will television and, eventually, newer entertainment modes. Such an evolution promises to enhance the stature of those who study media, but it will do little to alleviate the complicated disciplinary matrix in which we have long been mired.

To cope with their scattered disciplinary loyalties, many media scholars form multiple allegiances, cross-listing courses, locating their tenure lines in more than one department, and joining several learned societies. Long ago, media production teachers formed their own professional organization, the University Film and Video Association. Those housed in departments of art history, who typically focus on avant-garde and experimental works, may prefer the College Art Association, while researchers trained in sociological approaches are likely to choose the American Communication Association or perhaps the Speech Communication Association. Many scholars whose work is concerned with issues of race and ethnicity are attracted to the emphasis on cultural context offered by the American Studies Association or by the similar orientation of the many area studies groups in existence. By the same token, those interested in questions of gender and sexuality may feel more at home in the National Women’s Studies Association. Others sign up with the American Philosophical Association. Given this ongoing fragmentation coupled with the constantly shifting methodological protocols that characterize our discipline, it is scarcely any wonder that the National Center for Education Statistics has consistently backed away from attempting to count the number of PhDs granted in media studies in a given year.

Given the vicissitudes of academia and the constantly mutating nature of our field itself, it is unlikely that media studies will define itself as a completely distinct discipline anytime soon. But one way to compensate for this situation is through a strong, focused professional organization. Like other groups that make up the American Council of Learned Societies, SCMS exists not only to provide its members with camaraderie

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6 In response to the field’s disciplinary range, Cinema Journal has long featured a bibliography of “Articles on Film and Television in Non-Screen Journals.”

7 This lacuna has meant that it is impossible for SCMS to evaluate the state of the academic job market for media scholars as other scholarly societies routinely do.
but also to advance their scholarly interests. As a peer group organization, the Society has the power to legitimize the professional standing of those who study media and to define scholarly standards for the field. More than any other entity, SCMS can open avenues of prestige and recognition for media scholars within the academy. During my terms on the Executive Committees of the ACLS and the MLA in the late 1990s, I had ample opportunity to compare the culture of SCMS with that of similar groups in higher education. Every such group has a distinctive character. What follows describes the particular qualities that make SCMS a unique organization. In relation to other learned societies, SCMS remains ill defined: overly ambiguous in some ways, too narrow in others. Its difficulties stem not only from the inherently slippery nature of our object of study but also from the culture that exists within the Society itself.

The countercultural roots of many of the most active SCMS members have played a critical role in defining the Society’s habitus. The period that dominates what Dana Polan has termed the “heroic” history of the field occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, an era characterized by social upheavals and radical political movements. Many of today’s professors of media studies initially became cinephiles through their participation in the college film societies of that era. These organizations largely defined themselves in opposition to what they considered the stuffy and out-of-touch values of the academic institutions in which they flourished. Film culture, for many of these future scholars, was synonymous with youth culture. It included the leftist—and especially feminist—politics such an affiliation implied.

During this same time frame, the number of university film courses grew exponentially—from fewer than 300 in 1959 to about 7,500 by 1980. Most of these new course offerings were taught by new faculty hires; from 545 in 1963, the number of college film teachers had swollen to 3,126 by 1979–1980. Yet SCMS did not witness a corresponding growth spurt during this period; beginning with a coterie of 30 members in 1959, it had grown to only 356 by 1981—only about 10 percent of those then teaching university-level film courses. To be sure, this discrepancy was in part due to the fact that the Society restricted itself to invited members only during its early years. (Dudley Andrew, now a professor of film studies at Yale, was among those rejected).

But even taking this limitation into account does not fully explain the Society’s anemic membership roster. Many of the young Turks who entered the field during this period simply did not want to join an organization dedicated to the cause of professional advancement. To them, such a commitment implied a capitulation to the standards of what was then thought of as “the old guard” or “the establishment.” Eventually, most of the academics from the 1960s film generation did join SCMS. But the agenda they promoted was far removed from the one that animated the Society’s first members. A statement issued by the nascent organization in 1958 pledged that, “[b]y acquiring academic standards the film teacher, now often alone and isolated, could end his second-class citizenship in university faculties.”

8 For a full range of statistics on the number of film courses and teachers that existed during this period, see Michael Zryd, “Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America,” in Grieveson and Wasson, 182–216.
10 Quoted in MacCann and Ellis, ix.
counterculturally inclined scholars who took over the Society during the 1970s and 1980s saw themselves as opponents of any sort of class system, academic or otherwise. Such scholars saw their mission more in terms of trying to radicalize the academy than of trying to fit into it. Altruistic and iconoclastic rather than careerist and self-serving, these young mavericks fostered ideals that have held sway in SCMS ever since. Laudatory as the course of action fostered by this group has been overall, it has carried with it embedded contradictions both in terms of setting intellectual standards for the field and in the more quotidian realm of policy making.

In the intellectual arena the film generation that flooded into academia during the 1970s was committed to a politicized scholarship. Their work was informed by innovative theories imported from Europe that had largely escaped the notice of scholars in more established areas of study at the time. The group’s eager embrace of Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, and others positioned them as leaders in the humanities during these years, read and cited widely by others. Laura Mulvey’s concept of “the gaze,” in particular, became common parlance in literary studies and art history long after film scholars had pioneered the exploration of its analytic potential. While dignifying cinema studies as a discipline, these influential theoretical models also identified it with a particular wing of the academic world. In retrospect, the film studies scene during the 1970s has been the subject of widely divergent appraisals. Viewed by some as a golden age of conceptual breakthroughs and paradigm shifts, it has been dismissed by others as an ill-advised detour into a jargon-filled and largely incomprehensible theoretical briar patch. On one hand, Colin MacCabe has called Screen, the signature publication of the time, the most significant humanities journal to emerge during the post–World War II era. In a more cynical vein, Noël Carroll has opined, “Film theory played an economic role in legitimizing the formation of film programs. For what went by the name of theory was surely abstruse enough to convince an uninformed administration or a hesitant trustee that film studies was at least as complex intellectually as string theory, DNA, or hypotheses about massive parallel processing.”

Whatever the virtues or shortcomings of what has been termed Grand Theory, it is undeniable that this approach dominated the research featured in most conferences on film—and especially at SCMS—during this period. In recent years, a more diverse panoply of methodological paradigms has emerged. Yet orthodoxies remain. The continuing barrage of objections that have been voiced over the years about the marginalization of cognitive and Cavellian approaches within SCMS, for example, has persuaded me that the Society continues to privilege work grounded in progressive ideologies and French theory over that driven by less favored approaches. As a consequence, many distinguished scholars whose participation could raise the profile of SCMS within the larger world of academic culture have been irretrievably alienated and are no longer members of the organization. This situation reveals media studies as a field not just pulled in multiple disciplinary directions but also as one seriously divided within itself.


In the more day-to-day realm of policy making, too, the countercultural tenor of SCMS continues to assert itself. Students have been the major beneficiaries of the Society’s progressive mindset. The antiestablishment scholars who joined SCMS during the 1970s may have held the project of professional development in low esteem as far as their own careers went, but they took a less uncompromising attitude toward the careers of their students. In comparison with other learned societies of comparable size, SCMS can be proud of having sponsored an unusually full program of activities aimed at the professional and intellectual development of those new to the field. These activities include the student essay award, the dissertation award, and the minority student travel grant program. Student-centered policies, however, have at times clashed with other values. The Society’s efforts to expand its global reach by mounting conferences in Canada, England, and Japan, for instance, have repeatedly met with vociferous resistance from SCMS members concerned about the affordability of such far-flung gatherings for their students. The leadership of the organization has thus far been sensitive to these objections, making special financial provisions in terms of grants and inexpensive housing to subsidize student attendance at these international gatherings.

The concern SCMS has always shown about the needs of students has also meant that during the developing years of the Society the welfare of senior members of the profession tended to take a back seat. Many SCMS members view senior scholars as people who have already made their way through the academic maze to tenure and thus require little in the way of further support from SCMS. Thus, for many years the organization held back from awarding prizes to recognize outstanding research, service, and teaching achievements. The argument frequently advanced was that such prizes elevated some individuals at the expense of others. But other learned societies have long supported such awards—and for good reason. By conferring cultural capital on their most distinguished members in the form of peer-certified honors, professional organizations provide these scholars with justification for raises at their home institutions. Such honors also make it easier for the recipients to acquire resources for their departments, for deans are inclined to build on strength. In addition, awards from professional organizations like SCMS function to support the efforts of our most meritorious colleagues, as such recognition of meritorious colleagues enhances the stature of the discipline as a whole. In recent years, the SCMS leadership has bought into this rationale so that today conferring awards on senior scholars for outstanding achievements has become an accepted practice.

Other learned groups also reach out to senior members by designing programs that lure them to annual conferences. The timing of the SCMS conference in March

13 The historical emphasis on students within SCMS and its relationship to 1960s countercultural values is described in Zryd; and in Ramona Curry, “25 Years of SCS: A Socio-Political History,” Journal of Film and Video 38, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 43–57. A companion piece by Curry, “A Brief History of the MS in SCMS,” focusing on the struggles of women for recognition in the organization, was later published in Camera Obscura 63 (2006), 159–165.

14 Patrice Petro, the Society’s current president, has been an articulate spokesperson for the virtues of establishing an international profile for SCMS. Petro’s paper “Globalizing Cinema Studies,” presented at the Chicago Film Seminar in October 2008, made a strong case for the virtues of internationalizing SCMS while acknowledging the accompanying dangers of this project being perceived as imperialistic by scholars in other countries.
postdates the major activities surrounding employment, taking away one compelling motivation for tenured professors to attend. While many of our members have resisted the specter of SCMS turning into a job fair with all the stress and careerism such a gathering would entail, the result has been that senior scholars on hiring committees need not attend the conference to interview job candidates. So graduate students who do attend the conference sometimes find themselves reading papers to audiences made up largely of fellow graduate students—not a situation designed to advance their standing in the profession. Over the years, there have been numerous suggestions about ways to attract more senior scholars to the SCMS conference, from designing sessions around prize-winning books to sponsoring more invited panels. But none of these proposals has met with wide support. Here again, ideals having to do with equal opportunity has prevailed over more pragmatic considerations about the service major scholars can provide to SCMS by mentoring younger colleagues and raising the organization’s profile in the larger world of academia.

Because of the nature of our object of study and our distinctive cultural style, it is probable that SCMS will always stand a little apart from other learned societies. And within the world of higher education generally, our identity will in all likelihood continue to be defined by a tangled skein of media-related activities and approaches. So perhaps it is unrealistic to hope that our field can ever achieve a coherent identity. But not to turn our eyes in this direction is to consign ourselves to the status of a field that has not yet fully emerged. Tangible rewards in the form of resources and grants, not to mention the intangible benefits of recognition and prestige, hang in the balance.

The Scholars Who Sat by the Door

by JACQUELINE STEWART

Fifty years ago, the academic study of African Americans and the cinema was something of a double negative. Before film studies was institutionalized within the academy, issues of black representation, spectatorship, and filmmaking (if considered at all) surely seemed too marginal and sociologically oriented to warrant scholarly consideration alongside efforts to theorize the cinema’s aesthetic nature and distinctiveness. And before African American studies was formalized in response to black student activism of the late 1960s, the history of blacks and film must have appeared to be self-evidently trivial, pal ing in comparison to the foundational work of documenting black social struggle and enumerating black contributions to American society.

As in all early film writing, it was a diverse group of critics, journalists, and artists who penned the first explorations of “the Negro in
Film,” laying the groundwork for scholarly studies that would emerge decades later. Beginning in the mid-1910s, sharp critiques of mainstream and black-audience “race movies” were penned by commentators in the African American press; with the coming of sound, optimism about the emergence of a genuinely “Negro cinema” was expressed by contributors to the British journal Close Up; in the wake of World War II, a taxonomy of persistent black stereotypes from stage to screen was outlined by British critic Peter Noble; and the social progress signaled by a late-1940s cycle of “negro tolerance” films was met with skepticism by Ralph Ellison and V. J. Jerome.1 These writers—black and white, on both sides of the Atlantic—spoke from different cultural and professional backgrounds, and with varying degrees of methodological rigor. But in their efforts to address the significance of race in film history and aesthetics, and the significance of the cinema in African American experiences, they shared a concern to speak on behalf of African Americans who had long suffered misrepresentation and marginalization by the dominant film industry.

So by the time the Society of Cinematologists (SOC) was founded in 1959 to “give film study some visibility and dignity,” numerous tensions already existed that would continue to test the legitimacy of scholarly inquiries at the intersections of race and cinema over the next half century.2 The tendency to examine the content of “minority” images through lenses of social analysis and political critique (e.g., the negative function of stereotyping), for example, threatens to overshadow medium-specific questions about the cinema as a unique art form. New methodologies are required not only to work within and across multiple fields that are comparatively “new” (African American studies, Latino/Chicano studies, Asian American studies, ethnic studies, comparative race studies, cultural studies, visual culture, media studies, film studies), but also to situate the study of film among other, older lines of inquiry (literary studies, art history, cultural history). And, perhaps thorniest of all, who is “qualified”—by disciplinary training, research experience, and/or racial, cultural, political affiliation—to do such work?

Though it is not clear that the SOC founders ever discussed these matters explicitly, we can see in the organization’s more recent history that issues of race strike at the core of questions about how to define and practice film studies as an academic discipline. In this brief look at how principles of social and intellectual pluralism have been linked with aspirations for racial diversity within the Society (a discussion that deserves many more paragraphs and perspectives than I can offer here),3 I want to suggest that “minority”

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3 I am grateful to the many scholars who shared their recollections and views with me as I composed this piece. My discussion does not come close to conveying the multiplicity and complexity of the issues involved, nor does it give appropriate credit to the many individuals who labored to put race on the Society’s agenda; it merely points to the need for more extensive and systematic reconstructions of this history. For their time (and understanding), I thank Richard Abel, Todd Boyd, Diane Carson, Ramona Curry, Linda Dittmar, Peter X. Feng, Jane Gaines, Gloria Gibson, Terri Ginsberg, Chuck Kleinhans, Peter Lehman, Julia Lesage, Chon Noriega, Francoise Pfaff, Mark Reid, Michael Renov, Louise Spence, Janet Staiger, Don Staples, and Janice Welsch. Thanks also to Lucy Fischer for the invitation to contribute to this feature, and to Caitlin Waddell for her research assistance.
subjects—human and scholarly—continue to occupy liminal spaces in the field, and productively so. For it is the ways in which race pulls our attention toward the “outside”—to the realms of the social and political, to other disciplines, to extra-academic constituencies—that encourage film studies to examine itself, to inspect and redraw its boundaries, to “mic check” and discover who is listening. To make my own position clear: the recruitment and cultivation of scholars of color and scholarship on race must continue to be an organizational and fieldwide priority. But the success of these efforts should be measured not only by the validation of race questions through their incorporation into dominant academic discourse, but also by the more subtle pressures racial difference exerts from its watchful, marginal post near the entrance/exit of the room.

Questions about what counts as legitimate film studies, and who counts as a legitimate film scholar, increased in visibility and intensity with the evolution of the SOC, a “learned society,” into the Society for Cinema Studies (SCS, renamed in 1968), a “professional organization,” as the Society responded more directly to the unequal social relations structuring the academic study of film. An “old guard” of predominantly white male founders had sought to validate film studies by emphasizing the primacy and exceptionality of films as aesthetic objects to be studied via specialized methods (hence the scientific-sounding term “cinematology”). This group was increasingly challenged by “young Turks,” including numerous women scholars, employing a range of theoretical models drawn from other fields (psychoanalysis, Marxism, semiotics). Scholars in both groups occasionally broached topics of race in their scholarship. However, scholars of the younger generation tended to be more self-reflexive about their methods, expanding as they were upon the foundational work of the “old guard” and speaking to a broader range of intellectual and social movements. As a result, the “young Turks” often addressed more explicitly the critical and political stakes of exploring questions of difference in the cinema. Feminist film theory serves as the pioneering example within academic film studies of extending social and political activism into highly influential critical methods for exploring the ways in which films produce meaning.

The rise of feminist film scholarship among the younger group in the 1970s also serves as a key example of how a community of scholars could have a profound impact

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4 Inspiration for the metaphor of the door here and in the article’s title comes from Sam Greenlee’s novel The Spook Who Sat by the Door (1969; film adaptation 1973, d. Ivan Dixon) in which the CIA trains and hires an African American man for the purpose of displaying their adherence to affirmative action policies. The recruit, in turn, uses his marginal position to train in secret a black nationalist youth group for the purpose of engaging in antiracist guerrilla warfare.

5 Ellis, 107.

6 Ellis reports that SOC co-founder Robert Gessner “insisted on” the name, resulting in part “from his trip to Paris, where he had visited Gilbert Cohen-Séat and other ‘cinematologists’” (Ellis, 105). Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson write that the “French ‘filmologists’ had proposed to set in place a comprehensive methodological approach to what they termed the ‘science’ of cinema,” which supported the creation of university programs, film conferences, and the academic journal La Revue internationale de filmologie. This served as a useful strategic model for the burgeoning American effort to “support academic careers as well as bolster the expansion of university programs.” Grieveson and Wasson, “The Academy and Motion Pictures,” Inventing Film Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), xii.

on the field’s demographics and leadership. As Ramona Curry has shown, the numbers of (white) women scholars grew slowly but dramatically within the general membership of SCS from the late 1970s into the 1980s, and this presence continues to be reflected in the Society’s leadership ranks.\footnote{Ramona Curry has written two accounts of the Society’s development that outline “the crucial feminist vitality and labor that emerge in a history of SC(M)S.” Curry, “A Brief History of the Ms in SCMS,” Camera Obscura 63, no. 3 (2006): 161; see also Curry’s “25 years of SCS: A Socio-Political History,” Journal of Film and Video 38, no. 2 (1986): 43–57.}

The shift from the SOC to the SCS (from, in Chuck Kleinhans’s words, an “old boy network” to a “young woman network”) reflected organizational policy shifts from principles of exclusivity to inclusiveness.\footnote{Curry, “25 Years of SCS,” 56.}

As Curry has described, early efforts to establish scholarly standards through restriction (requiring application for limited membership slots, including proof of institutional affiliation and evidence of teaching or publication in film) gave way during the 1970s to calls for more open practices, significantly including increased female and graduate student participation as members, conference presenters, and contributors to the Society’s organ (Cinema Journal, formerly Journal of the Society of Cinematologists). The substantial growth of SCS during the 1980s positioned the organization to take on broad advocacy roles on behalf of the field and its membership (e.g., support for film scholars seeking tenure in longer-standing disciplines, securing teaching materials, advocacy of film preservation), further shoring up film studies’ position within academic institutions and humanist inquiry more broadly.\footnote{These efforts are described in Richard Abel, “SCS Past-President’s Report,” Cinema Journal 29, no. 2 (1990): 3–4. Abel notes that the Society reached “an all-time high of well over seven hundred members, nearly 20 percent of whom are graduate students.”}

But not unlike the outcomes of affirmative action policies in other institutional contexts, the increased presence and success of white women in SCS outstripped those of “historically underrepresented” racial minorities. By the late 1980s, “the continuing absence of minorities within SCS and the discipline as a whole [was] an issue for some leaders and members,” significantly including SCS’s white feminist scholars.\footnote{Curry, “25 Years of SCS,” 54.}

Following the logic of late 1980s/early 1990s multiculturalism, organizations of all sorts devised strategies to achieve diversity, to provide opportunities to historically underserved groups (e.g., professional development for “minority” scholars), while reaping benefits from the integration of new and varied ideas from previously ignored or suppressed points of view (e.g., complicating feminist critiques with considerations of how gender intersects with race). Ramona Curry captures the tensions generating and generated by such efforts within the academy when she writes that in the mid-1980s, SCS leadership faced the question of “[w]hether a true pluralism, in the sense of a real diversity of points of view, values and interests within the field, [could] in fact be combined with professionalization.”\footnote{Ibid., 56.}

The rub lies in articulating the relation between these efforts. In the case of SCS’s multiculturalist gestures, how exactly could work toward racial pluralism be linked to the kind of intellectual pluralism that might impact (transform?) the culture of the organization and the ongoing project of legitimizing the field as a whole?
Feminist work offered a hopeful model. A Women’s Caucus had been active within SCS since the early 1980s, formed in part to consider issues of gender inequity in academic hiring and promotion. The Women’s Caucus also served to keep issues of gender on the Society’s agenda and helped to shape the field, via conference workshops, panels, and Cinema Journal publications. However, there were no comparable spaces for discussion of the other categories of multiculturalist intervention: race and class. At the 1988 annual SCS meeting at Montana State University, president Richard Abel “noted the Executive Council’s concern that we continued to be a predominantly white organization and announced the formation of a Task Force on Race and Class.”

Abel read portions of a letter from Linda Dittmar, one of numerous SCMS members advocating outreach to scholars of color. Dittmar recognized that such recruiting was difficult not only because the organization’s overwhelmingly white membership could be off-putting (“one must have a critical mass of minority participation”), but also, importantly, because of perceptions about the “kind of scholarly work SCS promotes.” She elaborated: “Many of the minorities I know who teach film do not necessarily publish in the area; often it is not their primary self-identification. . . . When they teach film they may do so not only outside film studies but outside standard film scholarship, too. They may pursue other questions and foreground the concerns of other disciplines.”

Dittmar’s comments suggest that despite SCS’s moves away from exclusionist practices, the organization’s work to legitimize the field of cinema studies—that is, its role in creating “standard film scholarship”—may have erected barriers against the types of film inquiry practiced by many scholars of color. And while a “critical mass” of white female scholars (from graduate students to experienced, published academics) seemed to be waiting in the wings with a critical language that would make their presence felt in the organization, the numbers of nonwhite scholars working on film were so low and scattered that efforts at racial diversity would require reaching “outside” of the field and its recognized disciplinary idiom and methods, by networking with scholars in other disciplines, and with people outside of the academy proper, such as filmmakers.

13 Minutes, 1988 SCS General Meeting, July 2, 1998, 4. Many thanks to Jane Dye, SCMS Administrative Coordinator, for finding this discussion and sharing the document with me.

14 Minutes, 1988 SCS General Meeting, 4.

15 Dittmar was not alone in her sense that “creative programming” at the annual conferences could attract more people of color to the organization. Chuck Kleinhans suggested (in Ramona Curry’s words) that “more American blacks and people from Third World countries would be attracted to SCS if the organization more consistently chose to represent concerns which range beyond academia (including, for example, issues of film production and distribution).” At the 1982 conference at UCLA, Kleinhans chaired a panel on “Independent Black, Chicano and Asian Filmmaking in Los Angeles” at which, according to Claudia Springer, “[s]everal Black independent filmmakers who were present gave their perspectives.” Janice Welsch and Michael Renov organized the plenary session at the 1989 conference around the theme “The Independent Black Cinema: Questions of Production and Access.” The session, chaired by Coco Fusco, featured scholars and filmmakers (Camille Billops, Manthia Diawara, Isaac Julien, and Billy Woodberry), and became a tribute to scheduled presenter James Snead, who died shortly before the conference. Other suggestions for outreach included the recruitment of graduate and even undergraduate students of color into the field, and the exploration of methods for funding their study. See Minutes, 1988 SCS General Meeting, 5; Curry, “25 Years of SCS,” 54; Claudia Springer, “Review of ‘Independent Black, Chicano, and Asian Filmmaking in Los Angeles,’” Quarterly Review of Film Studies 8, no. 1 (1983): 84; Program, 1989 Conference of the Society for Cinema Studies, 7; Jocelyne Denault, “Conference of the Society for Cinema Studies,” Canadian Journal of Communication 14, no. 3 (1989): 78; Abel, “SCS Past-President’s Report,” 4. Many thanks to SCMS Archivist Michael Zyd for sharing the 1989 conference program with me.
To attract a critical mass of “minority” bodies, it was not immediately clear what was the best course of action. For example, at the first meeting of the Task Force on Race and Class, a “town hall”-style discussion at the 1989 conference at the University of Iowa, several scholars, including a small but vocal group of scholars of color, expressed their desire for “race” and “class” to be decoupled in order to focus on race-based recruitment. SCS’s lack of preparation for accommodating such a bifurcation is reflected by the fact that the Task Force meeting was scheduled at the same time as the Women’s Caucus meeting, which was cancelled so that participants (many of whom had been strong supporters of the Race and Class initiative) could attend. The Executive Council resolved to defer questions of “class,” renaming the initiative the Task Force on Race.

As Janet Staiger reports in her contribution to this “In Focus” feature, a Coordinating Board on Race, Class, and Gender was established shortly thereafter to handle requests for the formation of caucuses. This move reflected a revised approach that linked numerous constituencies together (restoring a connection between race and class, and adding gender) while acknowledging distinct issues and approaches for different “minority” interests.

Indeed, the need to coordinate these interests emerged as members of various groups organized and voiced their own requests for the creation of separate caucuses. The caucuses were conceived as mechanisms for groups with histories of facing discrimination and marginalization (particularly within U.S. racial arrangements) to form communities, to have an impact on the organization (e.g., as pipelines for continued recruitment of scholars of color; as sponsors of conference programs) and, by extension, to influence scholarship in the field. But these caucuses have never been populated exclusively with members of the “underrepresented minority” groups designated by their titles; instead, they tend to function (as most of the caucuses do) as hybrids of identity-based forums and “scholarly interest groups” focused on particular topics of inquiry. For example, the Latino/Latina, African/African American, Asian/Pacific American, and Middle Eastern caucuses combine “ethnic studies” and “area studies” models to explore issues of racial marginalization and subject formation in the U.S. context, as well as national/regional media histories and cultures in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Some of these groups had already been meeting informally before the caucuses were established formally as part of racial diversity efforts.

We might ask, then, how successfully the formalizing and proliferation of caucuses and interest groups (with scheduled meeting times and modest budgets) have addressed...
the dual projects of cultivating racial and intellectual diversity. On the one hand, all Society members have an increasing range of options for focused scholarly engagement and community, including several focused on race/ethnicity/nationality. But on the other hand, members with multiple interests along these lines also have choices to make about where to invest time and energies. Scholars of color often have very hard choices to make, cutting across the multiple dimensions of our personal and scholarly identities (as suggested by the difficulties of organizing simultaneously around race and gender, or race and class). And what purposes do the race-based caucuses serve for scholars of color who may not work on race, or who may not link research and political agendas in the critical tradition of the early commentators cited at the start of this essay?

As a member of the African/African American Caucus since joining the Society in 1996 (and a former co-chair), I would submit that the racially defined caucuses face the daunting task of juggling multiple types and traditions of community building and advocacy. Never quite private, unified, or powerful enough to become “meetings of ‘wire-pullers’” controlling specific agendas within the Society (per the opprobrious meaning of “caucus” offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*), these groups suffer under the burden of too many pluralist objectives. We often struggle to maintain a sense of focus among ourselves and relevance among the membership as a whole. And as the Society’s most visible gestures toward racial inclusiveness, we routinely face reactionary charges of symbolizing “political correctness,” an accusation potentially bolstered by efforts to reach beyond film studies, or outside of the academy, to bring more people of color inside.19

In diversification efforts such as these by predominantly white institutions, the insider/outsider distinction is unwittingly reinforced despite the goal of breaking it down. We might do well to accept (rather than try to deny or resolve) this contradiction. While caucuses should generate leadership that places issues of race at the center of the Society’s agenda, we can also do important work from our marginal positionalties: as literal or figurative outsiders, racially marked scholars and topics can reveal the critical and historical oversights of the field and its strides toward professionalization. Put another way, “critical masses” of people of color in academic contexts are fleeting; the trick is to create self-reflexive conditions that keep race visible and meaningful even when few people of color seem (or choose to be) active on the inside. Substantial work on cinema and media is still performed by people of color beyond the orbit of

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19 One of the subcommittees of the Task Force on Race focused on “establish[ing] networking ties with other organizations as well as with individuals having no academic affiliation.” Abel, “SCS Past-President’s Report,” 4. Staiger identifies charges of political correctness with “the on-going resistance to the explicit practices of SCS leadership to secure an appropriate recognition of the diversity of peoples with stakes in the study of the representations in film, television, video and the internet.”
the Society or “film studies” proper, as Linda Dittmar noted twenty years ago, and as evidenced by caucus e-mail lists that reach beyond the Society’s membership. While gestures should continue to be made to include scholars of color working both within and outside of the field in the organization’s activities, it is crucial to recognize that these individuals and their work do not simply fill gaps in the field, or add to it. Rather, they call into question the social and intellectual bases upon which cinema and media studies has been built, including the development of its archives, methodologies, and institutions (academic programs, professional organizations).

Small in numbers and marginal by design, the Society’s race-focused caucuses are uniquely positioned to mobilize and theorize the insider/outside presence, and to describe what cinema and media studies looks like when it is viewed from the boundary, or within different intellectual and social constellations. One would hope that now that more scholars of color are teaching in film and media programs, the Society will never again find itself lamenting an “absence of minorities” within the organization. As the numbers of “minority” members grow (as they have over the past two decades), race should continue to draw awareness to both the center and the margins of the field, informing explicit critiques and agendas while serving as implicit reminders of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that structure the formation of every community and every academic enterprise.

The Society’s latest name change in 2003—to the Society for Cinema and Media Studies—reflects ongoing debate about how to maintain the field’s relevance through the definition of its object(s) of inquiry. I would argue that in order for the category of “race” to remain relevant within cinema and media studies, it needs simultaneous rearticulation as a mode of analysis for interrogating these objects, their place in academic discourse, and their meanings for the many communities still struggling for recognition. This requires that we reexamine the motivations and modes for pursuing racial diversity. We must also reexamine our inclination to measure outcomes primarily in numbers of colored bodies at the annual conferences, or papers on colored topics in Cinema Journal, rather than in the substance, usefulness, and influence of contributions made both within and beyond cinema and media studies. Perhaps a useful next step in this process would be a future “In Focus” feature in which the caucuses narrate their own histories as pluralizing agents, and lay out visions for their own futures in relation to the future of the field.

An early goal of the Task Force on Race was to “compile teaching and research aids [about race] for faculty and students,” and several conference workshops since 1990 have addressed this effort. See Abel, “SCS Past-President’s Report,” 4. Another successful model along these lines is the work of the Oscar Micheaux Society, a long-standing SCMS “Scholarly Interest Group.” Racially mixed in members and focused on the topic of early African American film history, the group has generated groundbreaking research, criticism, and debate that has been cited and taught widely in the broader contexts of film studies and African American studies.

by Lisa Nakamura

William Gibson’s 2003 novel *Pattern Recognition*, his first departure from the influential cyberpunk science fiction genre that he originated, imagines the rebirth of cinema engendered by digital media. Gibson’s novel pictures a post-YouTube media culture in which networked fans or “footageheads” obsessively view, share, and discuss an untitled piece of video called simply “the footage” composed of “one hundred and thirty-four previously discovered fragments.”

Importantly, this piece of avant-garde art circulates on the Internet just as Henry Jenkins predicts video will in a Hollywood gatekeeper-less environment. He stakes a claim for the Internet’s positive effects upon aesthetic diversity and quality. Similar to Gibson, Jenkins envisions an Internet that permits producers to circumvent the “cultural gatekeepers who have narrowed the potential diversity of network television or Hollywood cinema.”

This scenario is not an especially challenging one for film scholars. If a culturally important or extremely popular piece of serialized video with interesting aesthetic qualities, a filmic *mise-en-scène*, and human actors were to come to prominence on the Internet, it would not be difficult to write about it in the context of existing film scholarship. That has not yet happened, though I (like William Gibson) believe that it is only a matter of time until it does. Such “footage,” digital video that resembles older avant-garde film to such an extent that it is

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called footage in defiance of its existing as a digital signal rather than celluloid, would encourage scholars to employ the methods of textual analysis, industrial and historical research, and ethnographic audience studies and other reception studies that have characterized film and television studies until now.

But even if it doesn’t—even if born-digital video fails to produce a work of art and a cultural product comparable in scope and importance to cinema proper—we still need to study it in the meantime. The challenge that faces cinema and media scholars today is to learn some of the new visual languages that arise from popular digital moving image practices. Video games and Web sites are more forms of practice than they are texts, but they are rich, visual, moving-image artifacts and fecund sites of extramediation—though they may work directly to spin off television programs or webisodes in the way that Felicia Day’s Internet-native World of Warcraft series (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004–present) The Guild (2007–present) has done, they also provide the raw materials that artists, videographers, and amateurs are using to create moving image media. Video games, in particular, are finding wide usage as production tools for video and filmmakers. The resulting machinima (a neologism combining “machine” with “cinema”) videos employ the games as engines to produce narratives with sound, dialogue, story, mise-en-scène, seriality, and audiences: all the features we use to talk about film and television. As Michael Nitsche writes in the sidebar to his blog FreePixel, “FreePixel looks at video games as part of the moving image culture. Games are not movies. But games use moving image tradition in their presentation. That is why FreePixel offers a critical look at games and their expressive qualities that grow from the use of the moving image.”

I am not advocating that film and media scholars drop everything and weld their hands to an Xbox 360 controller or become one of the eleven million players of the Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game World of Warcraft, most of whom spend twenty hours or more a week killing monsters and rolling for epic gear with their friends in this virtual world. But those who do, even for a week or two, will be pleasantly surprised at how well the analytical skills honed by years of visual analysis serve them. They will also discover a surprisingly open field and relative lack of competition.

Communication scholars, often the first to write about popular digital media practices such as chat rooms, advertising, and video games, tend to focus on issues such as media effects, addiction studies, or community formation, and are loath to take up these objects as visual artifacts and really read them. Scholars such as Henry Lowood of Stanford’s PlayOn research group study machinima made using World of Warcraft with attention to the social effects of video games but purposely disavow study of the “aesthetic aspect” of either machinima or the video game itself. This is a sad omission given machinima’s global distribution and cultural influence, and general coolness and interestingness, but it provides great opportunity for film and television scholars. In his

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4 http://gtmachinimablog.lcc.gatech.edu/.
excellent article “Storyline, Dance/Music, or PvP? Game Movies and Community Players in World of Warcraft,” Lowood traces the rich history of player-created video game movies, a history that parallels the development of the games themselves. He writes, “I am less concerned with an aesthetic evaluation of these movie projects than with aspects of World of Warcraft as social space, player community, performance technology, and intellectual property.”

Cinema Journal’s coverage of digital media has tended to focus on the latter, an area well trodden by scholars in other disciplines such as game studies and law at the expense of a skill set that it brings to the table that is uniquely its own—aesthetic evaluation.

Even those who know definitively that they will never want to write about any video game have incentive to spend some time with them in the spirit that they might watch film or television programs from other cultures, in languages that they do not know. Just as it is possible for a non–Chinese speaking film scholar to write about Chinese film, we might acknowledge the gulf of inexperience separating us from born-digital media, yet take it seriously as an object of study.

Let me clarify what I mean by “spending some time” with video games. Unlike other video-based media forms, such as television in particular, video games measure and display user performance. Academics with tender egos (and I count myself among these) dislike the idea of appearing less than expert at any screen-based pursuit, especially if they are public. The desire to be “good” at games rather than simply playing them to look at and experience them causes scholars to put undue pressure on themselves, and discourages them from trying because they “don’t have the time.” I don’t believe that time, however, is always the issue; scholars who would happily invest two or more hours watching Japanese reality television programs, telenovelas, or films well outside their realm of expertise might not as happily spend this amount of time playing World of Warcraft, Second Life (Linden Research, 2003–present), or Bioshock (2K Games, 2007, 2008), fearing that the performative aspect of these games would broadcast their lack of expertise. However, there are compelling reasons for film and media scholars to invest those bits of time.

Contemporary filmic narratives become more legible to the viewer who plays video games. Video games’ and other digital media forms’ mise-en-scènes, recursive narratives, visual styles, forms of dialogue, narratives of progress, and modes of interactivity have informed film and television programs for several years now, and will do so even more as media becomes more digitally convergent. Run Lola Run (Tom Tywker, 1998) has been described as a video game, its recursive retelling of the story through multiple lines mimicking the “choose your own adventure” logic of early interactive games. Battlestar


7 Robert Kolker makes a similar claim regarding film studies’ need to “shift back to the text and return to the seriousness and celebration of complexity, history, and politics.” Commendably, he extends this claim to the “television text, or the text of a video game or website, or the larger texts of medical imaging, of the interrelationship of film and painting, photography, and the graphic arts.” See Robert Kolker, “The State of Things,” Cinema Journal 43, no. 4 (2004): 91–93.

8 Marsha Kinder makes this case far more elegantly than I can, and expands it to include films such as Buñuel’s that can be productively understood in light of digital media technologies. See “Hotspots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever,” Film Quarterly 55, no. 4 (2002): 2–15.
*Galactica* (SciFi, 2004–2009), the current darling of many a serial science fiction fan, offers particular intellectual rewards to readers who have played video games, especially Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying games like *Everquest* (Sony, 1999–present), *Lineage* (NCsoft, 1998–present), and *World of Warcraft*. Players of these games will feel the series’ obsessions with respawning, and exchangeable bodies snap into place as they recognize them from their own experiences with avatars and multiple lives. Playing video games or spending time in a virtual world will help scholars learn about the images, narrative logics, and tropes of many post-1995 films and television programs.

*Cinema Journal* has published essays in this vein, but more scholarship on born-digital media needs to be solicited and supported. In this essay, I will do a brief review of this journal’s history in publishing digital scholarship, and argue for why more studies of born-digital media will serve the field.

There has been much crowing over the arrival of the first “born-digital” generation in recent years. Popular books such as *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* and *Generation Digital: Politics, Commerce, and Childhood in the Age of the Internet* affirm the existence of a new generation of users defined by media and technology use. Even digital culture’s critics concede the discreteness or specialness of this group in relation to media while decrying its value or lack thereof: *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* affirms the uniqueness of this group while characterizing them as lazy, shallow, and stupid.9 Siva Vaidhyanathan observes, on the other hand, that “college students are not as ‘digital’ as we might wish to pretend.”10 In addition, this group is rhetorically defined not solely by its possession of special knowledge, but equally by its ignorance or inexperience—the digital generation is associated as much with media devices and texts they have not used or heard of as by those they have. As the “Beloit College Mindset List” has been documenting for the past ten years, the Class of 2010 “has never seen Johnny Carson alive on television,” and members of the class of 2009 “don’t remember when cut and paste involved scissors.” Other generations have been defined by their never having used cassette tapes or vinyl records.

However, this year’s class is also defined in part by digital media consumption: Pixar and digital cameras have always existed for them.11 Their experiences with “born-digital” rather than transcoded-from-analog media, media such as Pixar and other CGI-produced films, video games, MP3s, and YouTube videos, replace—or at least stand in parallel with—their experiences with film. Theirs is not a crime of forgetting or fickleness, for you can’t forget what you have never known. Likewise, scholars who have joined SCMS within the past four years only know the organization as one that includes television and other media, such as digital media; they don’t know or remember it as a film-only organization. They are not exactly “born-digital” media scholars, but the name change has left that door open.


SCMS’s junior members are the beneficiaries of a change in the identity of the organization that started many years ago and was uneasily resolved in 2003. *Cinema Journal’s* content between 1995—the year the first commercial Web browser, Netscape Navigator, found its way into people’s homes and heralded the Internet’s utility as a medium for graphical and moving images—and 2008 covered topics such as new media and the war on terror, digital distribution, and questions of space in films using digital processes. Not all have viewed this as a happy change; in 2008, Charlotte Brunsdon wrote, “[I]nitially, television was inferior to cinema—and to older, more authentic (music hall) or prestigious forms (theater); now it is inferior to digital media, as well as having a bit of an identity crisis of its own.”

Yet despite the perceived trendiness or “sexiness” of new media, *Cinema Journal* has not simply embraced it as superior to film or television. During this thirteen-year period *Cinema Journal* published twelve articles, out of a total of 509, on digital media as a main focus of study, rather than as a tool for studying television and film or as a thematic concern within individual films or programs. The journal was relatively quick to recognize the impact of computers upon film scholarship—in 1995, *Cinema Journal* published an article by Ben Singer entitled “Hypermedia as Scholarly Tool,” summarizing the benefits of digital media such as CD-ROMs, hypermedia, scholarly databases, and hypertext for film scholars. Similarly, articles that referenced the Internet and/or digital media as a topic or theme within science fiction films such as Doran Larson’s 1997 “Machine as Messiah: Cyborgs, Morphs, and the American Body Politic,” contributed to the “rich tradition of cyborg- and android-film criticism that explores the ambiguous state of boundary wars between male and female, machines and humans, or human spontaneity and capitalist rationalization” but retained their focus on film and television criticism and history.

In 2004, the year after SCS formally adopted the “M,” the Spring issue of *Cinema Journal* included an “In Focus” section entitled “What Is Cinema? What Is Cinema Journal?” that reflected upon this change to the organization’s name and intellectual mission. Barry Keith Grant’s essay in this issue, “Diversity or Dilution: Thoughts on Film Studies and the SCMS,” expresses “concern about the consequences” of “SCMS’s new pluralism” and an assertion that “it is crucial to preserve the integrity of film studies as a distinctive discipline.”

There were seven articles in this section, two of which were about digital and new media in particular: Anna Everett’s 2004 essay “Click This: From Analog Dreams to Digital Realities” and Catherine Russell’s “New Media and Film History: Walter Benjamin and the Awakening of Cinema.” Everett’s was the first essay on digital media

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11 See “Beloit College Mindset List,” http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2009.php (accessed April 1, 2009). Many thanks to Harriet Green, reference librarian at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, whose ability to identify and locate this Web site showed me that the 1957 film *Desk Set* (Walter Lang) was correct: there is no doubt that librarians outperform computers at research tasks.
to appear in the journal that did not focus on digital media in relation to film and television copyright, fair use, and distribution, but rather as an object of study in and for itself. Her essay ended with an appeal to cinema and television scholars to maintain the field’s relevance in the digital age by producing scholarship on born-digital media. This argument may not be compelling to scholars who view the field’s purpose as the conservation of great works in older media. However, the appeal was distinctive from others that argued for more digital media in a bid to stave off irrelevance because it had a political stance—it specifically critiqued the “inability of new media technologies to break free of damaging ideologies and presumptions,” particularly those about race, as part of its call to scholars to put their shoulders to the wheel of digital media studies.15

In 2004, James Bennett wrote a blunt appeal to the readership of Cinema Journal: “It’s time for television studies to go digital.” He notes that simply transferring methods and knowledge from television studies to new media “repeats the sins of film scholars against television, which often took screen studies to TV, but only as a slightly less aesthetically interesting/worthy object of study.”16

Bennett is correct in reminding us that television- (or cinema-) centered methods for studying digital media will not work. Expanding the focus from film and television to born-digital media such as Web sites, games, and digital video in this journal as well as in the field generally honors the distinctiveness of born-digital media. It also lets those of us with training in race, gender, and ethnicity studies of media repair the mistake made with other media forms; rather than bringing these critiques to bear after the shouting is over, those with expertise in the fields of race, ethnicity, and media studies (such as Everett) can bring their expertise to bear on digital media while it is still in formation.

The reason to study digital media is not because it’s “trendy” or sexy—the bloom is off the rose, as the many young professors and graduate students trying to publish their work on digital media can attest. As Ted Friedman notes in his history of computing and culture, “There was a great Nintendo commercial in the 1990s in which a kid on vacation with his Game Boy started seeing everything as Tetris blocks. . . . The commercial captured the most remarkable quality of interactive software: the way it seems to restructure perception, so that even after you’ve stopped playing, you continue to look at the world a little differently.”17 The “Human Tetris”–style game shows in Japan (Tonneruzu no Minasan no Okage deshita [Fuji TV, 2006–present]), Australia (Hole in the Wall [Nine Network, 2008–present]), the UK (Hole in the Wall [BBC1, 2008–present]), and the US (Hole in the Wall [Fox, 2008–present]), among others, represent an unsuccessful extension of video game logics into television reality programming, but also herald a deeper visual shift toward video game conventions. Indeed, these extensions and shifts are required as part of the interpretive work and pleasure of viewing the film and television text. While, as Vaidhyanathan reminds us, not all kids (or adults) are part

15 Anna Everett, “Click This: From Analog Dreams to Digital Realities,” Cinema Journal 43, no. 3 (2004): 96.
of the “digital generation,” many of them come from a screen culture that assumes video game familiarity, if not expertise. Films and television programming are deeply imbued with these forms. Thus, scholars of film and television ought to understand born-digital media whether or not we wish to write about them. They are part of an imaging practice that is converging with what we have always called, by the most conventional definition, cinema and television.

Hive-Sourcing Is the New Out-Sourcing: Studying Old (Industrial) Labor Habits in New (Consumer) Labor Clothes

by JOHN T. CALDWELL

When the tools of production are available to everyone, everyone becomes a producer.1 Chris Anderson, The Long Tail

Brecht, meet Wired. We stumble all over ourselves to engage new media, digital platforms, and online fan activities—YouTube, MySpace, critical fan sites, social networks—as a next important stage in cinema and cinema study. Yet in doing so, we may be missing a valuable opportunity. Rather than viewing film and television as one disciplinary chapter being displaced by the “next digital chapter,” film and television can be viewed as resilient organizational cultures that prefigure both participatory media’s creative relations and its social practices. From this perspective, the industry may help guide online social networks to work their democratic, unruly wonders. This realization may be a tough pill to swallow. Yet I am not cynically dragging the old “industry” warhorse out of the barn as part of a familiar project: to underscore corporate resilience and final advantage. I am not talking about traditional ideas of ideological “recuperation,” that is, where industry serves as the bad guy again hijacking good resistant activities on culture’s fringes. I am instead suggesting that much of the cultural complexity, agency, and sociality we now find in online film and fan

media activities have also been unfolding for some time, decades even, in the very local cultures and work worlds of film and television production. This is why SCMS scholars, at this retrospective vantage point, would benefit by refiguring older models of industry practice, economics, and labor in order to understand current new media practices. Such a refiguring would allow us to go beyond certain utopian theorizations about new media, and to consider “digital media” on terms other than its own.

Several disciplinary assumptions guide my argument here. First, much can be gained in film studies by understanding media industries not just as corporate institutions, but as collective cultural activities and embodied social communities as well. Second, viewing “cultures of production” in this way in no way undercuts or prevents political economic analysis of industry. Far from it, my own critical fieldwork on production cultures largely confirms the insights of many contemporary political economists like Dan Schiller, Toby Miller, and others (about conglomeration, runaway production, post-Fordism, etc.), even as it underscores some of the sobering human consequences of recent economic changes. Third, film studies scholars can gain rich insights—about larger historical projects, political economy, and onscreen texts—through the material, grounded study of workers, their tools, and their work habits. Finally, I hope to draw out these notions by looking at production culture’s mirror image (or “flipside”) of the “participatory” fan culture—or “networked sociality”—that Henry Jenkins and others have so ably mapped out. It is around these linked cultural flipsides (production work and consumer work) that I hope to provide some historical grounding and parallels that complicate recent, optimistic claims about participatory media culture.

Changing Production Labor Markets. Many Hollywood executives now complain that viable or profitable business models for film and television no longer exist. They alternately base their chorus of pessimism on “losing control of distribution,” the unrealistic and “industry-killing” demands of unions and guilds, and/or the ad hoc proliferation of technical platforms that prevent “monetization” of content once thought to be secure and proprietary. I have argued, however, that underneath these public complaints, the industry complainers have in practice adopted a profitable new business model. Specifically, the creeping, long-term goal of many contemporary media corporations now seems to be to acquire content for little or no cost, and to get everyone to work for free. Reactions to this spartan but opportunistic state of affairs vary widely—depending on whether one is an above-the-line executive dredging the outlands for user-generated content or a below-the-line film and television craft worker trying to stay employed and pay the rent.

The industry now talks out of both sides of its mouth. Even as some media conglomerates continue selectively flogging their old big-budget standbys (out front)—tent-pole pictures and A-list television programming—their sub-brands, basic cable niche networks, and online sites are finding ways (out of their back door) to encourage

consumers, fans, and users to either “add value” to or “produce” screen content for the conglomerate. Just as Hollywood responded to television in the 1950s, media conglomerates respond today: when in doubt, place your bets on all of the competing alternatives in play, then make the beneficiaries of those bets feed off each other. This schizophrenic posture means that a lot of the big ideas surging around digital and online changes have been ringing down the hallways of big-time producers and executives. Yet Hollywood’s take on participatory culture, networked sociality, and digital interaction with viewers is neither as visionary nor as enabling for production as key theorists like Henry Jenkins, Chris Anderson, Yochai Benkler, and others have shown it to be in consumer and marketing contexts. There is a dark side to all of this enlightened “sharing” outside of the network and studio walls—something that hits labor hardest.

In addition, much of this new participatory digital talk is quite familiar to the industry, and not nearly as unruly and radical to corporations as some theorists assume. Film studies would benefit by considering several examples of the current upside-to-fan/downside-to-labor dynamic that I’ve sketched out here. For this “In Focus” section, I’ll map the possibilities for analyzing this flipside dynamic through a series of four propositions.

**Hive-Sourcing Is the New Out-Sourcing.** Marketing tomes urge the cultivation of engaged online communities since this “hive” of motivated online fans and users can add great value to media sites. This “crowd-sourcing” or “hive-sourcing” is posed as an antidote to top-down corporate buzz-generating strategies that tend to stall. Scholars, in turn, take up the charge and probe the cultural implications of UGC (“user generated content”), uploaders, YouTube, and Wikiculture, but seldom consider how this flood of UGC and peer production impacts film and television workers. Although the hive is a vivid zoological metaphor, remember that bees are also unpaid drones. In fact, the corporate dispersal of creative and economic work to the hive represents only the latest stage in Hollywood’s steady march toward total “outsourcing.” Continuing a half-century trend—from the breakup of the studio system, the development of the package system, to contract outsourcing, to visual effects boutiques, digital sweatshops, and vast cadres of nonunion reality-TV workers who have absolutely no upward career mobility in Hollywood—executives fully recognize the genius of the hive. Even more so than contract outsourcing before it, the hive promises the Holy Grail of post-Fordist profitability: even lower overheads, greater externalization of risk, the elimination of costly long-term labor “entitlements,” and organizational and investment flexibility. Some corporatists would argue that this extreme new flexibility is essential for survival in the cluttered trend-obsessed industry markets. Mirroring this history is another arc that now feels more inevitable to many of the quarter-million film and television workers in Los Angeles: the steady, decades-old march from fully employed, to underemployed, to unemployed, to free or volunteer labor. The economic value of “free” or unpaid fan labor has generated much recent conjecture. Yet the economic value of “free” or unpaid professional labor has received little attention.

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Industrial Idea Theft as the Prototype for Textual Poaching. Jenkins’s influential 1992 book *Textual Poachers* provided a prescient primer and lexicon for the complex varieties of fan activities that were both creative and productive. Since the release of Jenkins’s book, I’ve realized that these same forms of “unauthorized” agency and cultural highjacking were fully at work inside the industry as well. Producers and workers, that is, poach, filk, mash-up videos, and circulate them off-screen in social gatherings as well—as unauthorized individuals and as small craft groups and associations struggling to survive in the industry. In some ways my own work, since that time, has mostly operated on what feels like the “dark side” (the industry’s subterranean cultural activities) while Jenkins’s work has operated on the implicitly “sunny side” (the enabling public side) of the industry-audience interface. Marketing specialists now fully embrace the perspectives and terminology of *Textual Poachers* and its more broadly social and cultural sequel *Convergence Culture* in their own commercial discourses, trade conventions, and business plans. The research framed by these two influential books has in fact provided a road map for corporations as they struggle to rationalize the increasingly unruly markets of the online and socially networked rules. As far as I can see, no other paradigm from academic critical film and media studies has been so extensively adopted, mined, and publicly deployed in the corporate sphere as Jenkins’s poaching and participatory culture paradigms. This is no small accomplishment.

What I’ve spent considerable time trying to understand in my own research, however, is why industry and worker poaching, hacking, social networking, worker-fan-fic, and spoiling have not received the same sort of attention from scholars or from the media corporations that employ these same “unruly” craft and professional workers. In my experience, the marketing specialists and corporate executives that so ably pursue and attend to the needs and nuances of fan-consumer poaching and networked sociality have little interest in the same kinds of unauthorized activities by workers inside their corporate walls. With few exceptions, the media industries that now obsessively research external, morphing, and unruly consumer markets show little interest in researching their own internal, morphing, and unruly labor markets.

I’ve begun to understand—through my fieldwork on aspiring writer “pitch-fests,” camera “shoot-outs,” editing “bake-offs,” effects “reveals,” and producer “hook-ups”—that the poaching-social-networking revolution in consumer culture has a long prehistory in four sanctioned and well-oiled industry practices and conventions: idea-theft, distributed creativity, work-for-hire, and the vast oversupply of workers and aspiring workers. Unlike practices in almost any other US business sector, the broad-based practices of serially “pitching” story ideas to producers and executives through short, intense meetings arranged by agents means that ideas for new screen projects that circulate around Hollywood dwarf by thousands of times the relatively few feature films and TV shows actually produced. In practice, nobody really “owns” the flood of pitched ideas until some studio, network, or production company actually contracts and develops the rare, lucky project. This means that a huge number of

5 There are, admittedly, a lot of management books that optimistically promote new and visionary forms of employee relations and institutional reorganization. See, for example, Lynda Gratton, *Hot Spots* (London: Berrett-Koehler, 2007). Workers themselves have mounted alternatives to the business press tomes, like Greg Costykian’s *Scratchware Manifesto*, http://209.120.136.195/scratch.php (accessed March 15, 2009).
hijackable ideas are in the air at any one time, ripe for picking, poaching, hybridizing, and reiterating by producers and executives when they inevitably borrow from this morass of other people’s ideas. Of course, the fact that writers in Hollywood have been legally defined as “work for hire” rather than “authors” has helped decouple ideas from “owners” in this pitch-driven free-for-all. But it doesn’t stop there. Once producers poach ideas from the vast aspirant-hive, they “distribute” the concepts to groups and socioprofessional networks that then brainstorm them into scripts, films, and series. The “writers’ room” is but one heavily rationalized example of this form of “distributed-then-harvested creativity.”

A dozen writers, working sixteen-hour days, collectively generate, shoot down, and hybridize the culled ideas into working form. Executive producers then dredge this story-idea pit for narrative and script elements from which episodes and series are produced. But the hiving and distribution doesn’t end there at production’s “front end,” since each script poached from the writers’ room is then sent out and broken down by all of the area heads and distributed among their own production departments’ “hives.” This distribution/harvesting continues until production’s “back end,” when the producing power structure artificially determines which executives will hijack “creative” credit for features or series actually created by hundreds of other lower-level workers.

**Hollywood as an Open-Source Movement.** The examples of textual poaching just described all unfold inside well-paid production sectors. Poaching gets even worse outside the signatory studios and networks, among the vast oversupply of underemployed and unemployed workers and aspirants. In these sectors the labor-hive is even more agitated, furious, and prone to poaching—and being poached. This frequently unfolds in venues ostensibly hosted to “teach” and “help” the underemployed “make it” in the industry. Theatrically staged “pitch fests” allow desperate ideaholders to give out their closely held pitches not just to celebrity agents onstage, but to hundreds of their registration-paying competitors out in the “professional” audience as well. Sound editors screen segments for employed and unemployed craft colleagues and reveal their secret recipes in “bake-offs” (à la Pillsbury and Betty Crocker bake-offs). The visual effects society does the same through their annual “reveals.” Equipment companies like Sony stage competitive “camera shoot-outs” from which they poach the best spec scenes filmed by participants with new Sony equipment for use in Sony corporate demo tapes. Studios host competitive weekend “shoot-outs”—manic, two-day short productions filmed by alienated below-the-line tenant workers on the lot—who want to be “discovered” as above-the-line candidates through on-the-lot screenings that end the “festival” weekend. Nobody pays for the profusion of new ideas that churn out of these dirt-cheap, industrial creative idea hives, although a rare few win “awards” or make “contacts” that might help them careerwise.

Rote denials to the contrary, various iterations of the concepts freely circulated in these venues inevitably wind up in someone else’s screen content. This is why I

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6 For a good introduction to some of these issues, see Felicia Henderson, “The Writers’ Room,” in *Production Studies*, ed. Vicky Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009).

frame Hollywood as an “open-source movement.” This source opening does not follow the collective DIY (“do it yourself”) sharing ideology that circulates around software development. Hollywood now opens up more of its backstage world to the public than ever before (through “making-of” documentaries, show-biz programming, DVD bonus tracks, directors’ blogs, etc.). At the same time, not coincidently, it forces its desperate workers and aspirants (locked in a protracted battle against each other to get work) to freely “open up” their own private intellectual capital to corporate employers. Sadly, this industrial strategy—stealing freely from workers to give freely to consumers—evokes the specter of a new “commercial commons,” a problematic free-for-all sanctioned by the therapeutic career discourses of “mentoring,” “enabling,” and “making it.”

**Un(der)paid Work in Production Culture’s Gift Economy.** Much has been made recently, by scholars like Yochai Benkler, of the shift from traditional forms of industrial and consumer capitalism (identified with “sales” and “old media”) to participatory “gift economies” (identified with “sharing” and “new media”). Economists now recognize that wealth can be generated through social networks that are driven by collective sharing among community members. Yet corporations in practice still struggle to find ways to “monetize” and “harvest” financial value from social networks like MySpace and “gift economies” like fan communities and YouTube (where creative work is “given away for free” on a massive scale). Some firms try to incorporate the kind of “peer production” characteristic of sharing sites “inside” of commercial organizations, but they face backlash when they impose payment schemes on users. Successfully making the transition to a gift economy means recognizing how other forms of “capital” drive the new social order beyond the “selfish rationality” at the foundation of classical economics. Specifically, personal motivations like reputation, career status, noncommercial artistic value, and mutuality can all be understood as nonfinancial forms of payment. Many individuals will in fact work productively to earn these highly subjective and symbolic forms of capital.

Oddly, media conglomerate marketing divisions try to understand, incorporate, and rationalize gift economies, apparently ignorant that the very same media conglomerates’ production divisions have been financially exploiting gift economies among workers for a very long time. Because of the oversupply of workers in the industrial hive described earlier, a vast culture of quid pro quo exchange has developed in film and television labor markets since the 1970s. This includes worker “donations” of free or discounted labor for both nonprofit and for-profit productions, which trained and competent professionals, not just aspirants, offer. Early on, the “payment” for donated work might come in the form of “points” (a small financial percentage of distribution if the spec project scores distribution). Now a pervasive, even more immaterial scheme is in play: payback in the form of “credits.” Still other professionals will work “below scale” or in trade-off arrangements on nonunion shoots to set themselves up as future beneficiaries of labor paybacks.

Several factors fuel these professional labor giveaways. First, the shift to contract “outsourcing” since the 1980s, in which studios off-load specialized work to digital boutiques, has meant that vast legions of nonunion animation, CGI, and VFX artisans
are regularly denied on-screen end-title credits for professional work. This discrediting is a matter of some concern, since credits are legitimizing tickets used to gain a digital artisan’s next job. Second, the career aspirations (and frequently the training for many on a set) typically reach far higher (producer, director, screenwriter) than the menial jobs that most actually perform on a set (gaffer, grip, second assistant camera, assistant director, etc.). Bitterness is acute, if you have a graduate degree in film studies from a prestigious university and years of experience but are still “pulling cables” on a set or “getting coffee” as a “desk slave” (aka producer’s assistant). The opportunity to claim creative above-the-line credit on an outside film means that many frustrated aspirants stuck in the lower labor castes will sacrifice their weekends and off hours to work for someone else. Although blue-collar United Auto Workers assembly line workers in Detroit don’t credibly aspire to the executive suite, an upward-mobility fantasy does rule Hollywood labor. The fact that almost everyone imagines he or she is overqualified for an unfulfilling present job fuels a willingness to offer others free work for points or credits. Third, the perceived cultural “illegitimacy” of low-budget commercial genres—like infomercials, reality TV, pornography, straight-to-video B films—means that many workers in those formats will sacrifice their meager rates to gain “legitimate” credit on more authentic “indie films.” For workers ashamed to use their real names on porn credits, or denied credits on reality or infomercials, films pitched with “Sundance potential” offer the worker long-shot odds of career redemption and advancement. This kind of nonpaid symbolic and cultural capital can be worth its weight in gold, at least for those who aspire to career identities way above their “normal” pay rate. Fourth, the “nomadic” ways that crews form, work, and move on to the next project impacts Hollywood labor’s gift economy. The short lifespan of productions means that workers on a set must look for their next jobs even as they start their current one. Crews morph and mutate as they move from job to job, and this spurs many to offer work in order to get work. Social “networking” and labor trading are as crucial for below-the-line workers as they are for producers. Finally, the growth of nonunion projects and runaway production of the sort that Miller and others have documented means that many craft workers work fewer days each year.\footnote{See Toby Miller et al., \textit{Global Hollywood} (London: British Film Institute, 2002).} The downward horizon of expectations dramatizes the present labor market as overcrowded and contested. The future looks bleak in the predictions and trade war stories of the underemployed, underappreciated, and/or underutilized workers on a crew.

Part of the genius of the Hollywood system—and one reason many other U.S. industries aspire to mimic Hollywood’s corporate structure—is that it has profitably exploited industry’s outsourcing and poaching practices together with labor’s gift economy for several decades. This produces a “dues-paying culture” of the worst kind, in which the pain of unpaid work now is justified as a ticket to upward mobility later.\footnote{On the “dues-paying culture” see especially Erin Hill, “Hollywood Assistanting,” in \textit{Production Studies}.} Hollywood production’s gift economy is based on mutuality, quid pro quo exchanges, social networking, and a great deal of free work provided on a “spec” basis. These industrial habits might at first evoke the new participatory social networks revolution-
izing consumer culture. Yet they also cultivate a formidable pairing: the long-standing capitalist principle of (endlessly) “deferred gratification” among workers together with the “flexibility” and “mass amateurism” that theorists hail in the new “knowledge economy.”

Networked Mutuality or Zero-Sum Game? Labor Questions in Film Studies.

The legitimacy, fairness, and economic value of “unpaid fan labor” has been the subject of much recent concern. Yet I am more concerned about the legitimacy, fairness, and economic value of “unpaid professional labor” caused by “unpaid fan labor,” user-generated content, and peer production. Likewise, “intellectual property rights,” “fair use,” and sharing by fans have generated considerable comment; yet I am more concerned about the intellectual property rights of workers, who have long had their creative ideas strip-mined and ripped off by producers, networks, and studios, and who now face the loss of any remaining syndication rights due to the fan sharing “revolution.” Finally, the creative and “aspirational” needs of fans and fan communities (many of whom now want to be recognized and valued as creative artists by media corporations) have been lauded in recent articulations of the new social networks. Yet I am as concerned with the “aspirational” needs of underemployed and underutilized professional workers—including the legions of well-schooled “manual” and “craft” workers who have long sought recognition that they too are creative artists who merit at least threshold authorship rights. Given the stressed workforce currently being outsourced and displaced by the media conglomerates in their rush to monetize fan activities and peer production, the new networked sociality looks a lot less like a mutually beneficial gift economy to me than a zero-sum game. At this rate peer producers in fan communities will arguably attain the same abysmal status as the outsourced production workers before them, while outsourced production workers will finally achieve the economic end-state of peer producers in fan communities who have made working for free fully acceptable.

Part of the problem is that media scholarship and commercial marketing research alike (strange bedfellows indeed) tend to use a binary model of media industry and culture. In it, industry’s above-the-line producers interact with consumers to produce entertainment and economic value. Unfortunately, this model simplistically conflates “industry” with “producers”—a thin stratum that comprises only industry’s “executive crust”—and completely ignores an important third leg of the industry-culture stool: production workers. The marketing executives I have talked to show resignation but little concern for the production workers their own industry is downsizing, outsourcing, or displacing; downsized workers are seen as old media dinosaurs that inevitably need to be replaced by the newer (and less expensive) viral social networks. Yet scholars, with a different “bottom line” than marketers, would do well to reconsider labor as a crucial category in critical film and media studies research. After all, production workers, their tools, their environments, and their habits are fundamental forces that generate the screen content and narratives we devote the lion’s share of our time and energies to in SCMS. Yet we as scholars seldom grant these grounded, material work practices the kind of complex agency they deserve.

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In 1957 and again in 1958, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) brought together a number of university teachers to discuss the “teaching [of] film as an art form” and its place within the university. At the second meeting, the decision was taken to form a professional association, to be called the Society of Cinematologists (SoC). In “acquiring academic standards” through this association, the “isolated” university film teacher could, founding president Robert Gessner argued, “end his second-class citizenship in university faculties.” In this way, professional association would gather together faculty members across diverse departments, united now in their focus on film, and thus hopefully bring these faculty the professional advantages of “citizenship” (visibility, tenure, promotion). Citizenship might in turn be parlayed, through the persuasion of university administrators, into the formation of programs and departments for the study of the cinema along the lines of established academic disciplines in the university. Gessner’s naming of the society was mindful of this project, for it sought specifically to bring the “right scholarly and scientific tone,” and thus a “move in the direction of dignity” for the study of cinema that would uplift the cultural status of the production of knowledge about cinema and foster its acceptance in the university.

Language marks off the borders of disciplines, which are in some respects epistemic speech communities. “Cinematology” drew explicitly

1 Jack C. Ellis, “Ruminations of an Ex-Cinematologist,” Cinema Journal 24, no. 2 (Winter 1985): 49. In describing and explaining the early history of the Society of Cinematology, and its place in the formation of a discipline, I draw in part on Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, “The Academy and Motion Pictures,” in Inventing Film Studies, ed. Grieveson and Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), in particular xii–xiii. This piece is for Haidee, who started me thinking about the history of disciplines, and whose work is so important to that project; and for Peter and Lora, who keep asking annoyingly hard questions about the premises and goals of the production of knowledge about cinema.


on the “filmology” movement in France that had proposed to set in place a comprehensive methodological approach to what the filmologists termed the “science” of cinema.4 Gessner had visited Paris in the postwar period (the first of many Americans in Paris drawn by the study of film and newfangled, fancy theories); the alliance with filmology bypassed or overrode the belles-lettres criticism and cinephilia widespread in the Paris of Cahiers du cinéma and the Cinémathèque in favor of a more rigorous, “scholarly,” and “disciplined” formation of knowledge and expertise. “The cinematologist is a scholar rather than a journalist,” the Christian Science Monitor observed approvingly in 1960, “a theoretician, rather than merely an articulate spectator.”5

Gessner and the cinematologists were fighting, his 1968 obituary in Cinema Journal noted, for the “recognition of cinema study as an autonomous discipline.”6 A professor in the English Department at New York University, Gessner had taught a course on screenwriting in the Extension Department as early as 1935, and he had developed a lecture series on “History and Appreciation of the Cinema,” using the films from MoMA’s influential circulating library, that had by the late 1930s mutated into a for-credit course in the English department (“The Cinema as Literary Art”).7 Gessner attempted to establish a four-year program at NYU in the postwar period.8 Later, when canvassed for a report on the study of cinema in universities in the mid-1960s by the American Council on Education, Gessner argued that all film classes must contribute “to the rhythmic visualization of emotions and ideas.” Otherwise they would not be “germane” to the discipline.9 Gessner was proposing that the new “discipline in cinema” would be grounded in close formal analysis of the “unique characteristics” of what he called, in an essay in the first issue of the Journal of the Society of Cinematologists, “the exclusive language of cinema.”10 In doing so, Gessner was influenced not only by the filmologists but also by the “new critical” methodology central to English departments from the postwar period that focused attention on “intrinsic” literary properties to the exclusion of “extrinsic” historical “context.” The formalism of “new criticism” helped the professional consolidation of English, transcending historical philology and linguistics, giving it a definable object of study (the “literariness” of the text) and methodology.11

4 The filmologists had initiated university programs and conferences in France and started the publication of the journal La Revue internationale de filmologie from 1947. See Edward Lowry, The Filmology Movement and Film Study in France (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), in particular 4–5.
8 Cinema Journal 7, no. 1 (Fall 1968): 1; Ellis, “Ruminations,” 49; Polan, Scenes of Instruction, 343.
would in turn inform the idea that film could constitute the grounds of an autonomous discipline that would be properly housed in a university department and supported by a professional association. The dynamics of the questions about ontology and film as language and art would continue to resonate within that discipline.

Gessner and the cinematologists participated in, and concretized, a shift in the conception of the study of cinema, of what kind of knowledge such study would generate (and what it would not). Most importantly, there was a shift way from social science paradigms that had initially dominated film study (up until the early 1930s, let’s say, prior to the formation of the Film Library at MoMA in 1935). Cinema study would claim for itself a place in the humanities, defined in the modern research university in the early through mid-twentieth century as nonpurposeful, as otherworldly (and this was precisely the definition that had earlier been given to cinema itself as its place in the public sphere was circumscribed in the early twentieth century). The editors of Cinema Journal (renamed in 1968, from the earlier Journal of the Society of Cinematologists) noted that while the “social implications of cinema” and the “scientific aspects of film production and audience analysis” would be “never far from our thoughts,” the journal and professional organization it served “shall probably emphasize film as an art and the criticism of it as one of the humanities.” Film study would become part of the “liberal arts,” distancing itself from the mass culture debates of the 1950s and the fearful anxieties about the mimetic and politically deleterious effects of film as manifested in the House Un-American Activities Committee investigations of Hollywood. The social sciences would happily wave goodbye to cinema study, but would remain invested in media and communication, and this would inform the flourishing institutes and programs of “communication studies” in the immediate postwar/cold war period (financed in part by private foundations and the government, addressing principally radio and television and only tangentially cinema). The schism between communication/media studies and film studies would remain.

Alongside the shift toward the humanities, the Society was also marking out a space specifically for film study as opposed to film production. The place of production in the university was the remit of a pre-existing professional association, the University Film Producers Association, which had been set up in 1947. Members of the UFPA would,

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13 On the definition of the remit of the humanities, see, for example, Bruce Kuklick, “The Emergence of the Humanities,” in The Politics of Liberal Education, ed. Darryl J. Gless and Barbara Herrnstein Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 201–212; on the shaping of the social function of cinema, see Grieveson, Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).


15 The prevalence of arguments about the deleterious effects of mass culture in the 1950s, shared by the Frankfurt School and a host of American cultural critics and public intellectuals (not to mention HUAC), surely impacted the way cinema was conceived as an object to be studied. Jonathan Auerbach has suggested this intellectual context led to the virtual erasure of cinema study from American Studies, which developed in the postwar period and expanded in the 1950s but rarely engaged with cinema. Auerbach, “American Studies and Film, Blindness and Insight,” American Quarterly 58, no. 1 (March 2006): 31–50.

at times, comment disapprovingly on the efforts to create film study as a university discipline;\textsuperscript{17} the tensions between production and study, sometimes housed in fractious departmental units, continues. Certainly, for the broader public, “film study” as a description of a profession and occupation is a puzzling way of saying filmmaking. If I had a pound, even a dollar, for every time I have been asked if I make films, I would now likely be an ex–cinema studies scholar, thinking about things other than professional associations, disciplinary histories, identities, and their material and institutional articulations.

If the first, wobbly steps for the Society and (in part) the discipline it imagined started in the offices of MoMA in the late 1950s, the material infrastructures of disciplinarity followed close at hand. The \textit{Journal of the Society of Cinematologists} began in 1961, publishing papers from the Society’s annual conferences that had started in 1960. Journals and conferences enable the sharing of knowledge and research practices among faculty, creating spaces for the building of scholarly communities and a disciplinary identity. Other organizations and institutions participated in the growth of cinema study in North American universities and dovetailed with the formalist and liberal humanist conceptions of the nature of the study of cinema pursued by the cinematologists. The Commission on Academic Affairs of the American Council on Education began a report on the “study of motion pictures in colleges and universities” in May 1964 that was supported by a grant from the main trade organization in the film industry, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Preliminary results were discussed at the Lincoln Center arts complex in New York City in September 1964, including material gathered through discussions with university administrators, teachers, students, and a survey of classes taught at colleges and universities. Later, in October 1965, a conference was held at Dartmouth College, and the Council published a report in the \textit{Educational Record} in 1965 and a book in 1968.\textsuperscript{18} Gessner was, as I noted above, quoted approvingly in the report.

Three central assumptions guided the study and the reports: “(1) motion pictures are a major, contemporary, artistic expression; (2) their cultural value lies far beyond pure entertainment; and (3) higher education, as part of its continuing responsibility in the broad field of the arts, should contribute to the development of a more informed and discerning film audience.”\textsuperscript{19} What was (and is) a “discerning” audience? Certainly it was an audience that could “appreciate” the new art cinema, and its ripple of new waves, and that could accept film as art. This stance underpinned the initiation of a study on the study of cinema undertaken by the National Council of Teachers of English in collaboration with Teaching Film Custodians, a nonprofit arm of the MPAA developed in the 1930s to foster the study of cinema in schools, colleges, and

\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, Robert Steele, “A Personal Reaction,” \textit{University Film Producers Association Journal} 17, no. 4 (1965): 19–24.


\textsuperscript{19} Stewart, “The Study of Motion Pictures in Colleges and Universities,” 35.
universities. *The Motion Picture and the Teaching of English* was published in 1965. The book, predictably, imagined the study of cinema as a formalist endeavor akin to new critical practices. “Work up a vocabulary of film analysis,” the book advised students, and “begin to analyze a short film as carefully and thoughtfully as you would a poem”; in this way, study should focus on “the unique characteristics of film as an art form,” of “film as film and not as sociology.” Likewise, the creation of the American Film Institute in 1968, as an offshoot of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, further established an institution guided by principles about the import of film—what President Lyndon Johnson described as “the 20th Century art form.”

George Stevens and actor Gregory Peck were among those on the committee who went to talk to college and university students about film study.

Yet all this muttering about “discernment” was clearly tinged by earlier conceptions of the way study could break what had been called the “emotional possession” fostered by movies. Indeed, the National Council of Teachers of English’s first foray into imagining film education back in the 1930s was taken precisely in conjunction with these goals to overcome the mimetic effects of movies and so create stable subjects and social orders. “Appreciation” was often aligned with the ability to see through the movies, to resist their invocations to, for example, live “unproductively.” The introduction to the 1965 Commission report made this clear: “Recognizing that in the years ahead the life of the college graduate will include greatly increased amounts of leisure time, the Commission is committed to strengthening curricular and extra-curricular activities designed to prepare graduates to make wise and productive use of this new leisure.”

Likewise, thirty years on from its early articulations of film education as “appreciation” and buffer to the mimetic effects of cinema, the National Council of Teachers of English prefaced its 1965 study by stating, “[F]ilm has an unparalleled power to transmit information and inferences . . . [and] it is concerned with ethics, values, and truth.”

The study of literature had, as Ian Hunter has shown us, a long history as a form of ethical self-management, a mechanism to produce civic subjects. Certainly this perspective had informed various formations of the study of film, stretching back to the film appreciation classes in the 1930s and through organizations in the postwar period like, for example, the American Film Council movement and the film programs of the United Nations. Charles Acland has shown us how the Film Councils grew out of the war effort to educate and prepare citizens, and proliferated in the postwar period as a way of developing pedagogical standards for film and for “constructing a

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22 The expression is from Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 74.
brand of coordinated liberal civic responsibility about and through motion pictures.”

In the mid-1950s this project would be supported by grants from foundations seeking to buttress a Fordist economic order, including the Ford Foundation themselves and the Arthur P. Sloan Foundation (the latter establishing “business studies” at MIT). Liberal internationalism, played through culture and education but subtended by the ideals of free trade and processes of globalization, would be central to the creation of international bureaucracies in the postwar period, most notably the United Nations. Cinema study would come to be a part of this, as Zoë Druik has shown in her analysis of the functioning of UNESCO, the cultural committee of the United Nations. UNESCO developed forums for examining the impact of cinema and its potential as an educational tool, to create liberal citizens, administer mass liberal democracy, and so obviate the need for global conflict and the ensuing damage to economic order. It published a series of reports, including *Bibliography on Filmology As Related to the Social Sciences* (1954) and *The Kinetoscope and Adult Education* (1958), which would participate in the upsurge of scholarly attention to the cinema that prepared the ground for the Society of Cinematology.

Together, the goals of the various organizations and institutions that emerged in the postwar/cold war period to survey and influence the study of cinema, to foster a discipline, were underpinned by a dizzying relay of ideas about the role of the university, about the function of what gets called in the United States, with disarming obviousness, “liberal arts,” and about the governmental import of education for the shaping of liberal subjects. Universities have, after all, always been tied up with the business of social reproduction. It will perhaps, though, not have gone unnoticed that two of the organizations surveyed thus far, the American Council on Education and the National Council of Teachers of English, were also supported by the major trade organization of the film industry. The AFI was well supported by the industry also. Why? Certainly there were advantages for the MPAA in uplifting the cultural status of cinema, that age-old goal of film regulatory organizations, and this was given urgency in the early 1960s as the Production Code was winding down (it would be replaced in 1968). And of course the MPAA had a stake in capturing the baby boomers and making them avid moviegoers, and it certainly had plenty of practice at joining regulatory debates about taste to the goals of making money. The MPAA’s alliance with nascent formations of study in the university suggests also something of the way education was increasingly connected to the expansion of Fordist capitalist imperatives, an alliance that had been fostered by the cold war and that would enable the massive expansion of universities in the postwar period. Area studies, for example, would directly benefit from this political context, with money from the CIA, the State Department, and the Ford Foundation, and the trickle-down effect of this would help the establishment of


28 Ibid., 168. Acland traces out how the Council morphed into the American Federation of Film Societies, which flourished on university campuses and was a further impetus for film studies classes.

additions to the “liberal arts” like film studies. To be sure, the function of film study would be sometimes different for the varying organizations and institutions outlined, but there was enough common ground here around ideas about appreciation, discernment, and the political efficacy of the liberal arts in shaping liberal populations.

Yet, in the final twist of my genealogy, this common ground would be severely tested by the developments of “the 1960s,” which began to question the role of disciplines and universities as part of power structures that disadvantaged groups historically marginalized from the center of the liberal polity. The developments are well known, to some extent, though often within the discipline through a nostalgic sense of the founding of film studies as a radical discipline. The reality was murkier than that, as my account of the historical precedents of film studies shows. Certainly, though, the questioning of disciplines and universities was felt strongly in the porous disciplines of English and film studies, which were peculiarly receptive to new ideas about racial and gender oppression in particular, and were accordingly reshaped toward the end of the 1960s, and more clearly in the early 1970s, as disciplines that addressed social oppression through cultural analysis. The new critical idea that literature and (to some extent) film was an intransitive realm, without propositional content, was cast aside. Again, as with cinematology, new ideas from Europe were central to this, though now they began to shape a sense of cinema as a form that ought not simply be “appreciated” but rather questioned, condemned, even disavowed. To love the cinema it was necessary to no longer love the cinema, and to work to destroy its seductive visual pleasure. The journal Screen in the UK would take a central role in this (and it also turns 50 this year, celebrating its middle age with SCMS); this context would inform the establishment of other journals like, for example, the feminist journal Camera Obscura in 1976.

At the same time, other transdisciplinary journals and institutions formed amidst a questioning of the nature of what disciplines did to and for knowledge (associated with Thomas Kuhn’s work on the structure of scientific knowledge and informing also Michel Foucault’s examination of the formation and functioning of the human sciences).

Critical Inquiry, to pick one notable example, started in 1974; new subdisciplinary and interdisciplinary fields emerged (for example, women’s studies, cultural studies, African American studies, Latino/Latina studies); Humanities Institutes were created. Today, I write from a Centre for Intercultural Studies, having just returned from visiting in a department of Visual and Environmental Studies—institutional spaces that house a cinema studies that is still poorly disciplined after all these years.

What was the role of the Society of Cinematologists in this reorganization of the field? It would be perhaps too harsh to say that its main response, in that year of 1968, was to change its name to the Society for Cinema Studies (SCS). After all, professional

30 On the expansion of universities as a consequence of the cold war, and the impact of this on the reshaping of the discipline of English, see Richard Ohmann, Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), in particular 1–41.

31 On the histories of Screen and Camera Obscura, see Philip Rosen, “Screen and 1970s Film Theory,” in Inventing Film Studies, 264–297; and Amelia Hasting, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, and Sharon Willis, “(Re)inventing Camera Obscura,” in Inventing Film Studies, 298–318. A number of scholars reflect on the journal Screen in Screen 50:1, an anniversary special issue edited by Annette Kuhn.

associations are, by their very nature, self-promoting, not spaces for the imagination of different formations of knowledge. Graduate students join them, seeking entrance to a profession; scholarly associations have—like graduate programs—a socializing function. Recently, SCS changed its name again, adding Media to its remit in 2003. It did so, on the one hand, in the midst of a series of concerns about the future of the discipline in the face of the rise of digital culture and the potential disappearance of its object of study (the cinema). On the other hand, this marked a newly expansionist sense of what the discipline would cover, a flexing of muscles by a discipline now reasonably well established in universities (largely because it brings students in and is thus economically desirable in this age of the increasing privatization of education). Yet if the name change might have marked a sort of rapprochement of the disciplinary configurations of film and media/communications, it did not engender (to my knowledge) productive conversations about disciplinary histories and identities and reflections on the methods, premises, and practices of the production of disciplinary knowledge. I would say those conversations are critical, and that further reflection on the past, present, and future of the discipline, and indeed on the shared terrains of film studies, cultural studies, and cultural history, would be a good starting point to avoid Groundhog Day. In the spirit of the oft-repeated refrain, to forget the past is to be forced to relive it.

One other, final reflection on the real-world expansionist policy of our discipline, coming from the only non–North American commenting here on the history of SCMS: If cinema studies has long been informed by, in particular, trans-Atlantic exchange, from filmology to Screen and beyond, this has not always been reflected in the way its central professional association functions. To be sure, the expansion of SCMS beyond North America, with recent conferences in London and projected (if, alas, not ultimately realized) in Tokyo, is to be applauded. Yet critical conversations need to take place about how that expansion can take place, how it can be established in a way that does not mirror Western neoliberal expansionism and the homogenizing effects of cultural globalization, about the geography of knowledge and its circulation, and the politics of travel and space. In the past our discipline entered the university in a sustained fashion in the context of the cold war; it expanded as many protested the failures of liberalism; and it grew as universities became important to the new neoliberal and post-Fordist economies in the 1970s. Maybe now, in what is perhaps shaping up to be a break with those economic and political contexts, we might start again to think about foundations both as ideas and as those material things that underpin buildings and institutions.

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