SYNOPTIQUE

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EDITION 14

2010

Letter from the Editor

Synoptique
Issue 14

It has been one heck of a year at Concordia's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema. This year, our brave faculty welcomed a myriad of M.A. students, while the school also inaugurated its sparkling new Ph.D programme. Synoptique put out its call for submissions, asking students to chime in on a theme as colorful and contested as we could think up to combat Montreal's long grey winter. Thus, our issue presents itself as fragmented and scattered, as polyphonous and diverse, and as multivalent. We've conceived an issue that occupies a liminal space—which is another way of saying that issue number 14 is slightly *queer*. We are a new editorial team, and we bring you our first issue in-between semesters and make some noise about Sex and Sexuality…so "*let's talk about sex*" shall we?

It is spring, and we have sprung forward with a love letter from Marcin Wisniewski to Kate Winslet, in which he showers her with unadulterated affection and respect for her consistent portrayal of sexually empowered women. I personally couldn't agree more. I was so impressed by her daring turn as an unabashedly desirous and sexual, albeit not vilified, mother/wife…*woman* "Sara" in Todd Field's film LITTLE CHILDREN (2006) that I literally stopped Todd Field on the street at the film debut in Telluride back in 06. Also in this issue, Dino Koutras explores representations of post-9/11 trauma, focusing on the fear of penetration as presented in John Cameron Mitchell's sexually audaucious film SHORTBUS (2006). For his part, Alexander Carson draws some striking parallels between Dziga Vertov's cameraman's penetrating gaze in MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (1929) and the fevered gaze of the pornographic film in his essay *Kino-Cock*.

In this issue we also find our faculty and our doctoral candidates chiming in on the state of Film Studies in the wake of Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies" and his inspiring lecture at Concordia which followed.

Finally, with its minimalist but rigid structure and ambiguous nature, what better way to round things out than with a few haikus? We hope you agree.

We are grateful to Olivier Creurer who once again has provided Synoptique with an incredible design, including the unique scrolling banner above. Olivier has managed to balance the sex theme with the Dudley Andrew responses in a way that, perhaps ironically, illustrates a dialectic between the polyphonic, diverse modes of sexual praxis and the stimulating, multivalent practice of academic discourse. To my delight, Olivier has visually conceptualized the relationship between cinephilia and acedeme as rightfully sado-masochistic. Good one!

We also want to thank Adam Rosadiuk for enabling us to upload issue fourteen. Adam has given much needed support and guidance to Synoptique's new editorial staff.

Thanks also to everyone else (students, colleagues, professors, friends) who contributed and supported us in other ways.

synoptique fourteen
various essays appear here
as diverse as Sex

co-managing editor Lindsey Campbell

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May 2010

Written by **Lindsey Campbell**

Edited by **Dino Koutras**

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I love you, Kate Winslet

An imaginary invitation to dinner for Kate Winslet based on the author's appreciation of the actress' exploration of female sexuality in her films following her starring turn in TITANIC.

Kate Winslet, I love you. Well, okay maybe I don't love you. In fact I don't even know you and aside from a few charming interviews (that I've seen or read) I cannot even begin to describe the kind of person you really are. But, let's just say that if I was throwing a dinner party I would want to invite you.

You are probably wondering who I am and why I am making such ridiculously grand statements. Well, let me just say that I'm a graduate student writing an article for the online, cinematic journal *Synoptique* in an issue focusing on film and sexuality. And this is where my love for you, Kate Winslet, comes in.

Like many people I became familiar with you through your starring role in James Cameron's 1996 TITANIC (though some may argue that the real starring role belongs to the lovingly immortalized ship). I'm not a big fan of the blockbuster genre and what intrigued me in the film was you, more importantly the character you played, Rose. Here was a self-assured, intelligent and most of all sexual young woman on a quest to define herself on her own terms. In a rather cliché scene Rose allows herself to be immortalized as a nude by her lover, Jack. The tableau smacks of traditional paintings of the nude à la Ingre's *The Grand Odelisque*, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, or Giorigione's *Sleeping Venus*, all reclining on cushions, with nothing but a jewel (or a fan, or a hand) to cover their nakedness. But unlike those women who are naked, exposed, shocking (everything for the artist and viewer but nothing for herself) Rose was transgressing a traditional role in a patriarchal society in order to embrace herself; her sexuality being an important part of her identity.

TITANIC made you a star, and though you could have followed the Hollywood path, you decided to create your own. This slightly unconventional road took you, and us, to films like Jane Campion's HOLY SMOKE (1999), Philip Kaufman's QUILLS (2000), Richard Eyre's biopic of the writer Iris Murdoch IRIS (2001), Todd Field's LITTLE CHILDREN (2006), and in 2008 to two extraordinary projects: Sam Mendes' REVOLUTIONARY ROAD and Stephen Daldry's THE READER. To this list I should also add Peter Jackson's HEAVENLY CREATURES from 1994, two years before TITANIC thrust you into popular consciousness.

I hope you can see a connection here; a connection that links you, the characters you've portrayed in those films to the forthcoming issue of *Synoptique*, sex, and my love for you. As a member of a group whose onscreen sexuality has often been censored, ridiculed, objectified, and vilified I welcome any fissures in the traditional, patriarchal representations of sexuality. For you see my dear Kate (I hope I can call you 'my dear Kate') I'd like to argue here that through the characters in the above mentioned films you've begun to create an image of a new woman. To be honest I don't like the word 'new' for those characteristics have probably existed in women for centuries, however our image in art and film of such women is fairly new.

I believe that what all these characters have in common is their attitude towards sex, sexuality, and their bodies. These are not women constricted and oppressed by their sexuality or ashamed of their bodies. Rather, they believe their bodies belong to them and sex and its pleasures also belong to them. Be it Ruth in HOLY SMOKE?/, SARAH IN ??LITTLE CHILDREN, Hanna in THE READER, or April in THE REVOLUTIONARY ROAD, what these women share is a strong conviction that sex is an integral part of them. Their sexualities complete them, sex satisfies parts of them, and the acceptance of their bodies (as imperfect as they may be) is an essential part of this equation. In particular Hanna Schmitz strikes me as a powerful woman for whom her body is the most natural part of herself and so, she doesn't embarrass herself, or us, with false displays of modesty and attempts at awkwardly covering herself. And to be fair, these fictional women are not perfect people, they come with their own histories and personal baggage but this is what makes them so much more appealing.

I'd like to say here that I'm not trying to draw a comparison between you and your characters; as I've said I don't even know you. However, through your choice of characters you have added significantly to the discussion of women's sexuality and their filmic representations. You've taken the spectator's gaze off a woman's body and related it back to her, to her attempts at defining herself in a world full of notions of what a woman is and should be. And for that reason, I think you'd be an engaging guest at my dinner party.

Yours truly,

Marcin Wisniewski

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Filmography

TITANIC (James Cameron, 1996)
HOLY SMOKE (Jane Campion, 1999)
QUILLS (Philip Kaufman, 2000)
IRIS (Richard Eyre, 2001)
LITTLE CHILDREN (Todd Field, 2006)
REVOLUTIONARY ROAD (Sam Mendes, 2008)
THE READER (Stephen Daldry, 2008)
HEAVENLY CREATURES (Peter Jackson, 1994)

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May 2010

Word Count: **812**

Written by **Marcin Wisniewski**

Edited by **Kristina Ljubanovic**

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Kino-Cock: The Virility Of The Man With A Movie Camera, A Metastudy

A sexy reading of Dziga Vertov's MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA *in which the author explores the parallels between the camera eye of the film and the male sex organ.*

Author's note: I have chosen to insert youtube clips throughout my analysis—this is, after all, an online journal. MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA *has appeared with several different musical scores in recent decades. I have chosen the Cinematic Orchestra version. The reader/viewer should feel free to mute the accompaniment if it seems distracting or undesirable—sound has no bearing on the analysis presented here.*

May 2010
Word Count: **1807**
Written by **Alexander Carson**
Edited by **Lindsey Campbell**
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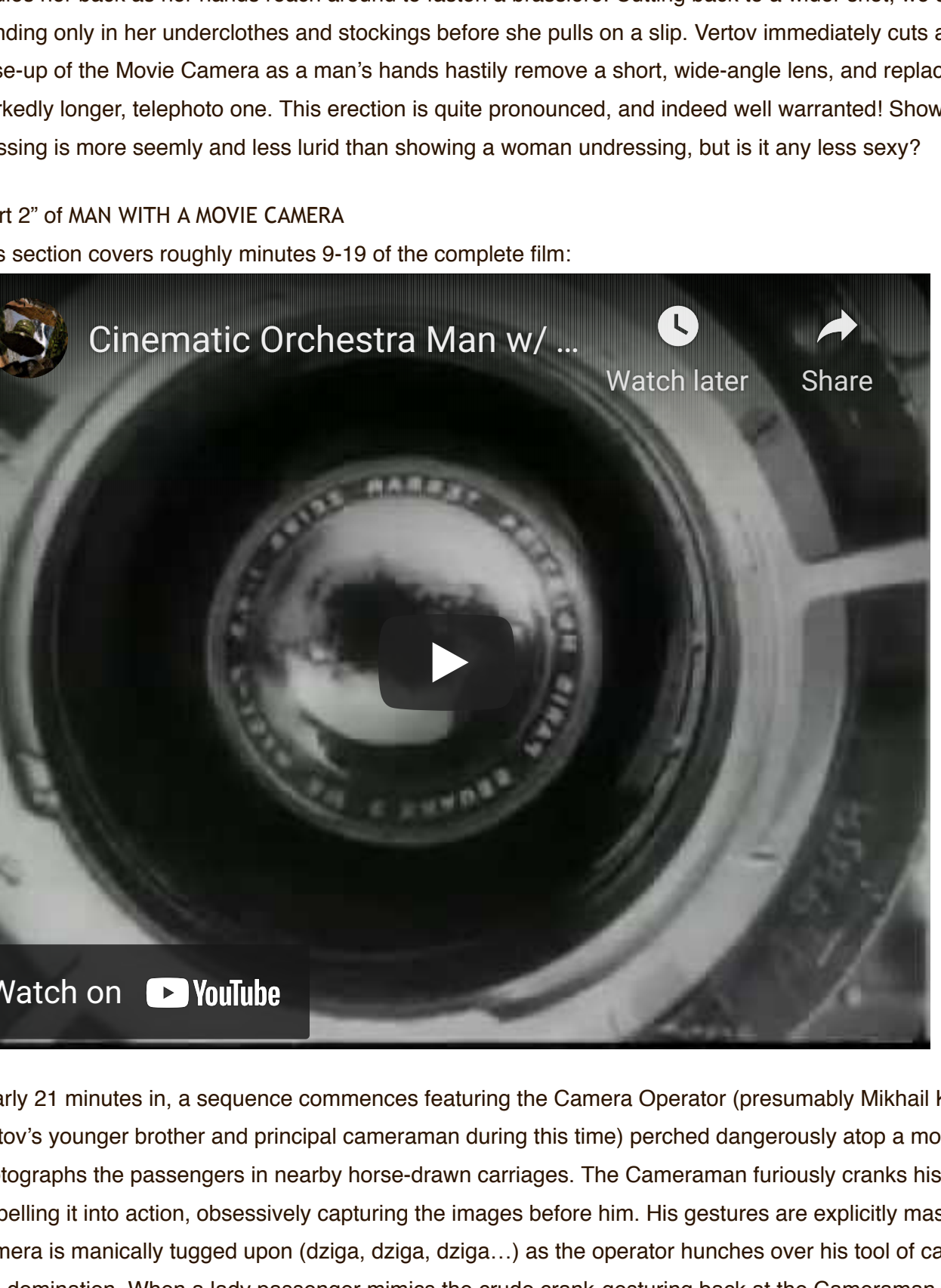
Dziga Vertov's MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (1929), having recently celebrated its 80th anniversary, is a treasure of Soviet cinema. Of all cinema, really. Vertov's film is a courageous and formidable work in countless respects, well deserving the popular and academic attention it has received throughout its 80 years. It's fair to argue that such a film is therefore quite undeserving of the sordid analysis presented here. Alas, that argument awaits my critics, and certain viewers who choose to ignore the barefaced and brazen sexual insinuation coursing through this film. My claim here is to present striking parallels between Vertov's Camera (potent images of a film Camera appear throughout the film, both with and without a camera operator) and the ubiquitous cock in heterosexual, narrative pornographic film. This study will not be limited to a simple Camera-as-Cock comparison, but will also comprise an analysis of Vertov's depictions of the Camera Operator's relationship to his hefty tools of empowerment, capture, and ejaculation (the film Camera and the film Projector) in relation to the (generalized) male pornstar's reliance on his equally essential tool of sexual triumph—the Cock. But let us not rush to penetration before we have set the mood…

Dziga Vertov was a racy figure, both socially and politically; his artistic body of work served principally to advance his contentious ideals. [1] As a teenager, he began writing extensively on the subject of cinema; his poems and manifestos were remarkably confident and sometimes virulent. He unequivocally despised traditional narrative filmmaking and sought to establish a cinematic language independent of literature and theatre (as proclaimed most succinctly in the opening titles of Man With a Movie Camera). An account of Vertov's writings and contemporary critical responses to his work are found in Yuri Tsivian's Lines of Resistance, skillfully tracking Vertov's career through the 1920's as he built toward realizing MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA, the pinnacle of his artistic and critical success.

Before leaping into an analysis of Vertov's chef-d'oeuvre, it is worth noting that the filmmaker's name (Dziga Vertov) is an adopted one. Born Denis Kaufman, he assumed the name Dziga Vertov as a tribute to the medium he championed so fervently. "Dziga Vertov, adopted at the very threshold of his working life, is derived from the verb which means to spin or rotate; the onomatopoeia of the first name, as Vertov intimated, reproduces the repetitive sound of a camera crank turning (dziga, dziga, dziga…)" writes Annette Michelson in her introduction to Kino-Eye. [2] Evidently Vertov believed in the supreme power of cinema, and accordingly changed his name to reflect his worship of the craft. The same spirit of devotion that inspired Vertov in the 1920's would spur on the famous Cocksmen of narrative pornography's "golden age" in the 1970's. Many leading porn actors and filmmakers of this period assumed names that similarly announced a passionate commitment to their métier—Dick Nasty, Long Dong Silver, and Dale DaBone are fine examples of noms de guerre employed in this respect.

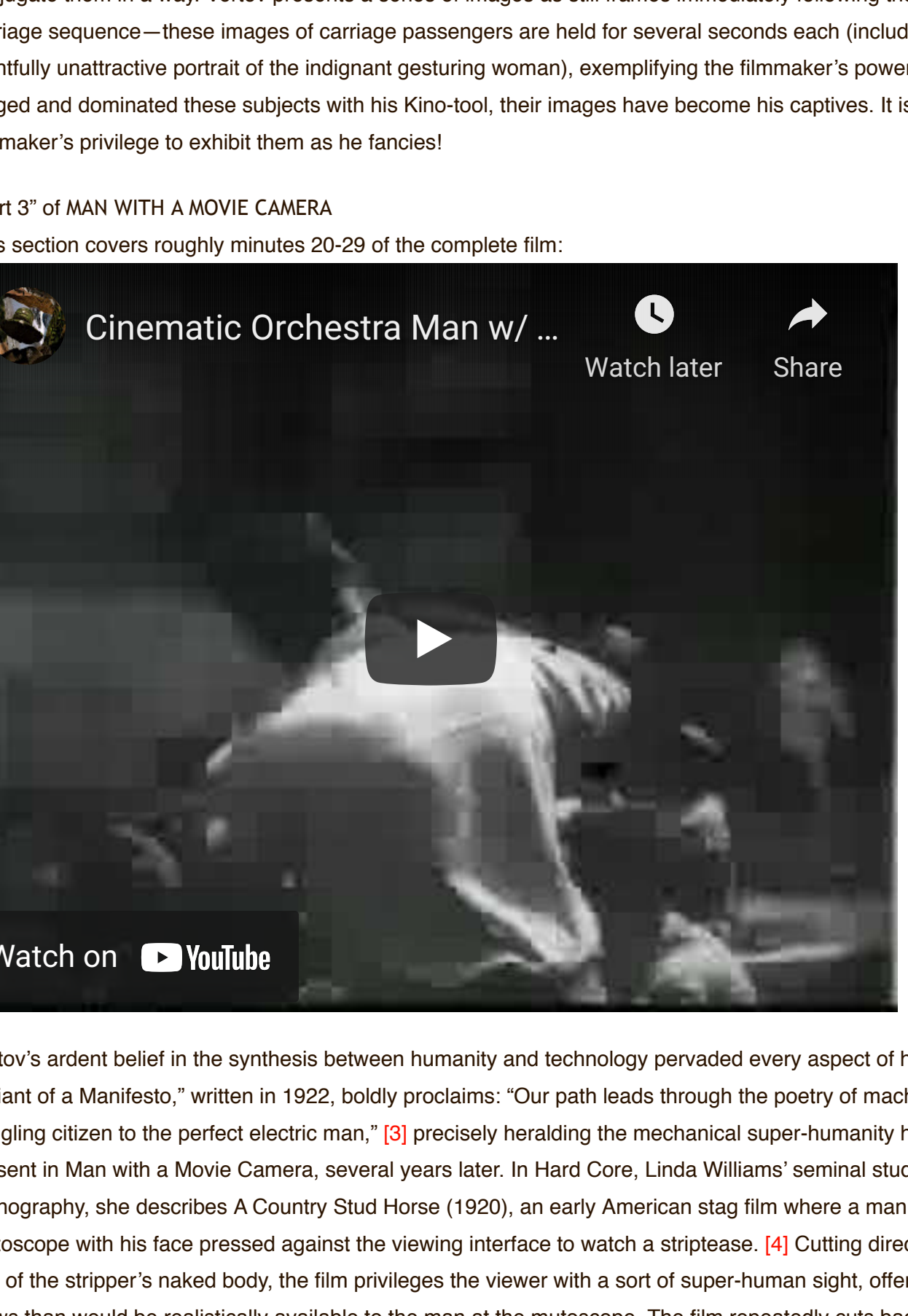
Though much of Man with a Movie Camera's blatant sexual impulsiveness is not until much later on, an early sequence foreshadows it all quite palpably. A mere 10 minutes into the film we see a young woman rise from bed, put her stockings on, and turn away from the camera while removing her nightgown. In close-up, the camera studies her back as her hands reach around to fasten a brassiere. Cutting back to a wider shot, we see the woman standing only in her underclothes and stockings before she pulls on a slip. Vertov immediately cuts away to a close-up of the Movie Camera as a man's hands hastily remove a short, wide-angle lens, and replace it with a markedly longer, telephoto one. This erection is quite pronounced, and indeed well warranted! Showing a woman dressing is more seemly and less lurid than showing a woman undressing, but is it any less sexy?

"Part 2" of MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
This section covers roughly minutes 9-19 of the complete film:



Nearly 21 minutes in, a sequence commences featuring the Camera Operator (presumably Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov's younger brother and principal cameraman during this time) perched dangerously atop a moving car as he photographs the passengers in nearby horse-drawn carriages. The Cameraman furiously cranks his camera, propelling it into action, obsessively capturing the images before him. His gestures are explicitly masturbatory—the Camera is manically tugged upon (dziga, dziga, dziga…) as the operator hunches over his tool of capture, power, and domination. When a lady passenger mimics the crude crank-gesturing back at the Cameraman, is he embarrassed or intimidated? No, for he is in control! It is clear that Vertov's technique is beyond mere voyeurism. There is nothing covert about his Cameraman's imposition on his subjects. His camera has empowered him to subjugate them in a way. Vertov presents a series of images as still frames immediately following the precarious carriage sequence—these images of carriage passengers are held for several seconds each (including one frightfully unattractive portrait of the indignant gesturing woman), exemplifying the filmmaker's power. Having tagged and dominated these subjects with his Kino-tool, their images have become his captives. It is now the filmmaker's privilege to exhibit them as he fancies!

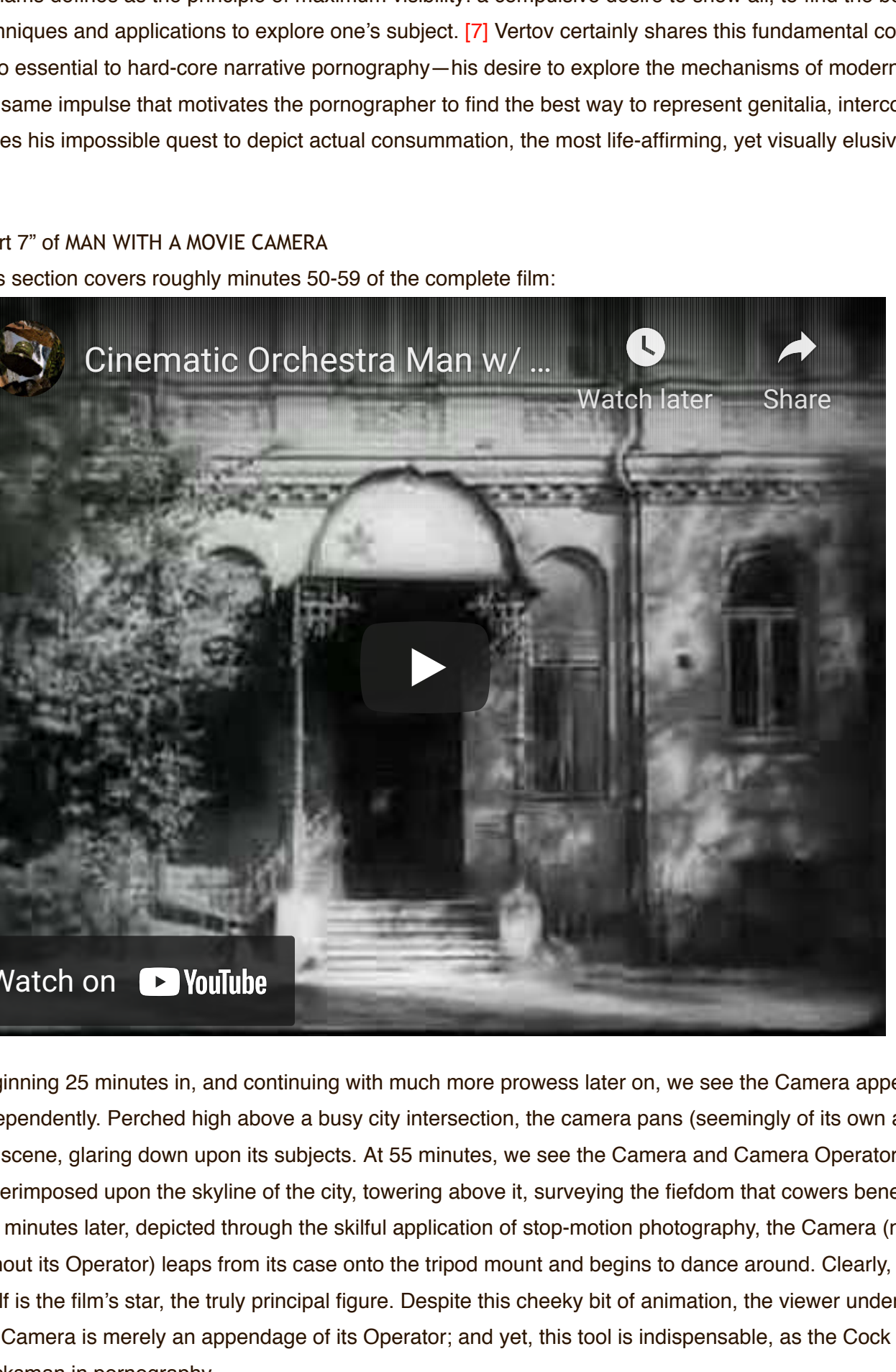
"Part 3" of MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
This section covers roughly minutes 20-29 of the complete film:



Vertov's ardent belief in the synthesis between humanity and technology pervaded every aspect of his work. "We: Variant of a Manifesto," written in 1922, boldly proclaims: "Our path leads through the poetry of machines, from the bungling citizen to the perfect electric man," [3] precisely heralding the mechanical super-humanity he would present in Man with a Movie Camera, several years later. In Hard Core, Linda Williams' seminal study of pornography, she describes A Country Stud Horse (1920), an early American stag film where a man stands at a mutoscope with his face pressed against the viewing interface to watch a striptease. [4] Cutting directly to close-ups of the stripper's naked body, the film privileges the viewer with a sort of super-human sight, offering closer views than would be realistically available to the man at the mutoscope. The film repeatedly cuts back to reveal the male voyeur manually propelling the crank-powered mutoscope with one hand while masturbating with the other. This early example of human sexuality being bolstered by a cine-mechanical aid points directly toward Vertov's vision of an improved human experience through technological innovation.

Vertov's goal to actually see the world better through cinema can be easily interpreted as a manifestation of what Michel Foucault calls scientia sexualis, humanity's basic impulse to detail an increasingly scientific understanding of sexuality. [5] "I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it," writes Vertov in 1923. [6] Though he does not actually delve into pornography in any way, his efforts convey the same will to knowledge/power that motivate our scientia sexualis—he maps the modern city with the same care and passion he devotes to the study of a woman dressing in the morning. His project assumes what Linda Williams defines as the principle of maximum visibility: a compulsive desire to show all, to find the best formal techniques and applications to explore one's subject. [7] Vertov certainly shares this fundamental compulsion that is so essential to hard-core narrative pornography—his desire to explore the mechanisms of modern city-living is the same impulse that motivates the pornographer to find the best way to represent genitalia, intercourse, and drives his impossible quest to depict actual consummation, the most life-affirming, yet visually elusive moment of all.

"Part 7" of MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
This section covers roughly minutes 50-59 of the complete film:



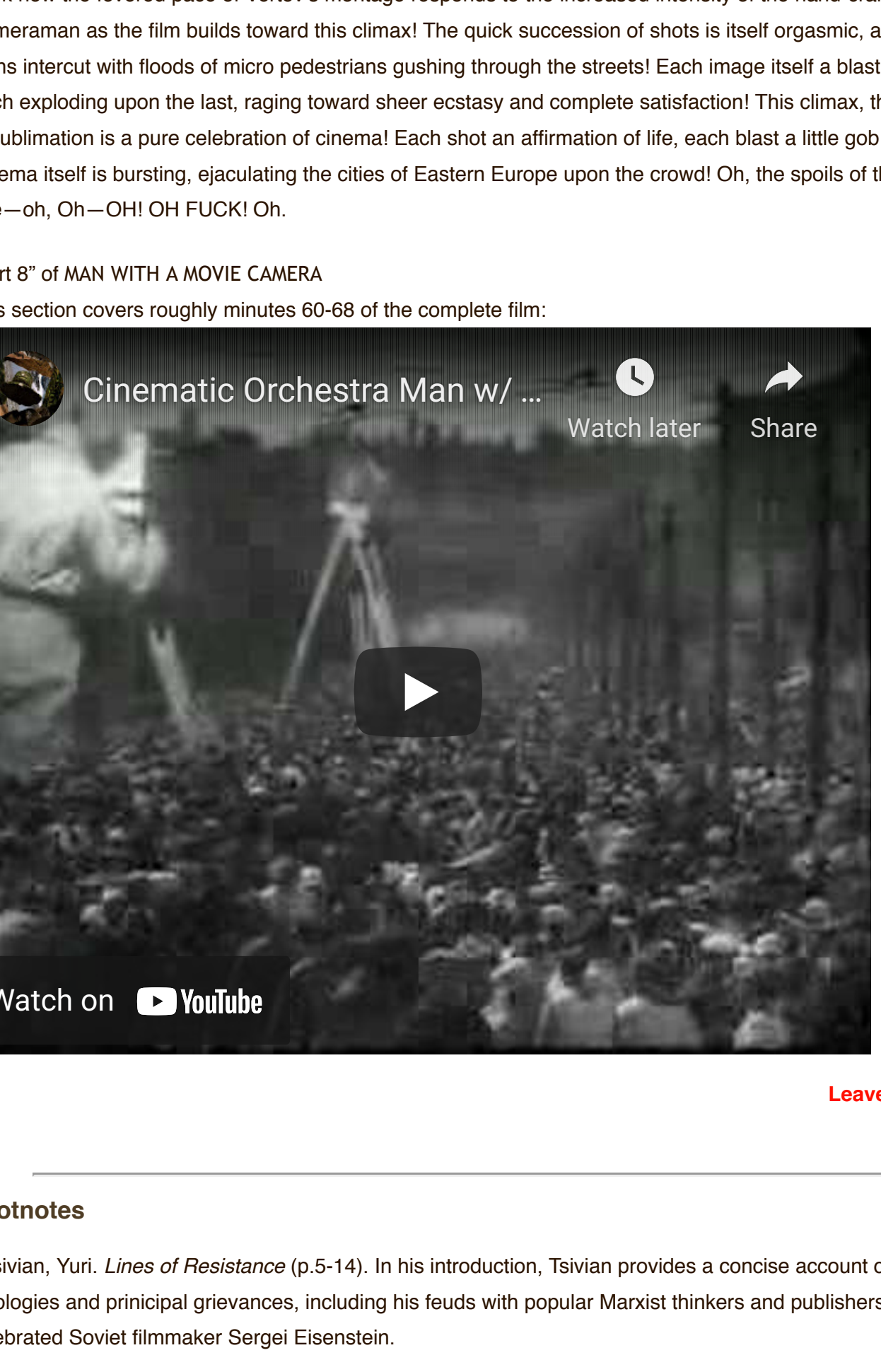
Beginning 25 minutes in, and continuing with much more prowess later on, we see the Camera appearing to act independently. Perched high above a busy city intersection, the camera pans (seemingly of its own accord) across the scene, glaring down upon its subjects. At 55 minutes, we see the Camera and Camera Operator superimposed upon the skyline of the city, towering above it, surveying the fiefdom that cowers beneath them. A few minutes later, depicted through the skilful application of stop-motion photography, the Camera (now appearing without its Operator) leaps from its case onto the tripod mount and begins to dance around. Clearly, the Camera itself is the film's star, the truly principal figure. Despite this cheeky bit of animation, the viewer understands that the Camera is merely an appendage of its Operator; and yet, this tool is indispensable, as the Cock is to the Cocksman in pornography.

Though Vertov claimed to abhor narrative cinema, he undeniably created an infamous onscreen character by depicting his Camera/Operator with such creativity and reverence. [8] In narrative pornography, the Cocksman is a surrogate for the (usually) male film director, much as Vertov's Cameraman is his own surrogate, acting upon the desires of the artist who provides the gaze, the frame through which the audience participates in the experience.

Vertov's Camera casts its gaze upon every detail, from the most magnificent to the most quotidian. From the boulevards to the factories to the private bedrooms of Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, he reveals the activity of daily city life. The Camera captures these images, and Vertov is the loving master of his captured subjects—he dominates tenderly, with care and precision. He then demonstrates his authority and supremacy through montage! He exhibits his captives at length, in quick succession, depending his will. Here the metaphor of Kino-Cock becomes fully realized, as Vertov shifts his focus increasingly toward projection in the final 7 minutes of the film. He repeatedly shows images of a captive audience positioned beneath an enormous screen. Bright ejaculations of light from Vertov's Projector complete the Kino-Cock corollary as images blast out upon his audience with the virility of explosive territorial cumshots!

Mark how the fevered pace of Vertov's montage responds to the increased intensity of the hand-cranking Cameraman as the film builds toward this climax! The quick succession of shots is itself orgasmic, as charging trains intercut with floods of micro pedestrians gushing through the streets! Each image itself a blast of semen! Each exploding upon the last, raging toward sheer ecstasy and complete satisfaction! This climax, this ultimate act of sublimation is a pure celebration of cinema! Each shot an affirmation of life, each blast a little gob of humanity! Cinema itself is bursting, ejaculating the cities of Eastern Europe upon the crowd! Oh, the spoils of the filmmaker! The—oh, Oh—OH! OH FUCK! Oh.

"Part 8" of MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
This section covers roughly minutes 60-68 of the complete film:



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Footnotes

[1] Tsivian, Yuri. *Lines of Resistance* (p.5-14). In his introduction, Tsivian provides a concise account of Vertov's ideologies and prinicipal grievances, including his feuds with popular Marxist thinkers and publishers, as well as celebrated Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.

[2] Michelson, Annette. *Kino-Eye* (p. xviii)

[3] Vertov, Dziga. "We: A Variant Manifesto" reproduced in *Kino-Eye* ed. Annette Michelson, (p8).

[4] Williams, Linda. *Hard Core…* (p78-79).

[5] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality* (p51-73)

[6] Vertov, Dziga. "Kinocs: A Revolution" reproduced in *Kino-Eye* ed. Annette Michelson (p.17)

[7] Williams, Linda. *Hard Core* (p.48-49)

[8] This irony was not missed by Soviet film critics at the time. See: Tsivian, Yuri. *Lines of Resistance*. (p.321-346)

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Filmography

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

About the Author

Alexander Carson is a narrative artist, filmmaker, and occasional scholar. Some of his work can be seen at "North Country Cinema": http://www.northcountrycinema.com

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Penetration in *Shortbus*: Trauma, Representation, and 9/11

This essay considers SHORTBUS *(John Cameron Mitchell, 2006) from the perspective of Trauma Studies. The author advances the argument that Shortbus responds to the events of 9/11 in progressive, if provocative, ways, and that this response is at odds with the response of more typical Hollywood fare.*

Trauma Studies is an interdisciplinary form of scholarship that engages with the manifold dimensions of human suffering and its repercussions and representations. Trauma is typically considered an individual experience, but trauma scholars argue that it can also be a shared, collective one; indeed, their model proposes a tight integration of individual and collective experience. [1] Traumatic events are powerful enough to disturb, even reconfigure, the social body, [2] which may partly account for the fact that Trauma Studies first emerged out of a revitalized historical discussion of the Holocaust. [3]

Any event that resists assimilation into the psychic economy, whose resulting affect is so overwhelming that its cognitive registration is incomplete or distorted, can be characterized as traumatic. [4] Put another way, a traumatic event resists comprehension, resists the process whereby it is assigned meaning. Trauma, in this sense, is a pathology, one with a physiological explanation: the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for integrating new information with past experience, shuts down during moments of trauma—it simply ceases to make sense of incoming sensation and emergent perception.

There is no cure for trauma. Instead, the goal for both individuals and the social body is to "work through" its effects, a process whereby the traumatic event is integrated into the psychic economy and finally granted meaning. Trauma scholars argue that assimilation can be achieved via a variety of mechanisms, but all agree on the critical importance of translating the traumatic experience into a representation—only through the mediating force of representation can what is initially unimaginable enter the realm of imagination. In the case of 9/11, making collective sense out of the attacks required a representational intervention on a mass scale, a task for which Hollywood cinema is eminently suited.

Hollywood solved 9/11's rather recalcitrant representational problems through recourse to its timeworn technique of displacement. In practice, this meant a re-staging of those infamous images—the collapse of buildings; the fleeing, panic-stricken, and dust-covered citizens; the shock and awe of military retaliation—within allegories of alien invasion. [5] The terrorists of the Middle East, already alien and unintelligible to a Western audience, were re-conceptualized by Hollywood as hostile creatures from another planet come to wreak destruction.

The two most successful films in this vein (successful both commercially and as representational interventions) are CLOVERFIELD (Matt Reeves, 2008) and WAR OF THE WORLDS (Steven Spielberg, 2005). Both films succeed primarily because of a calculated strategy to limit their narrative perspectives to the ordinary (non-military, non-governmental) citizens on the ground: regular folk who are completely bewildered and shocked by the events in which they find themselves caught up. The resulting images are strongly evocative of 9/11 footage, the bulk of which was captured from much the same perspective.

Promotional image for *Cloverfield* (2008)

September 11, 2001

The argument can be made that films like CLOVERFIELD and WAR OF THE WORLDS participate in the working through of the trauma caused by 9/11 since such films translate the experience into representation and thus domesticate the anxiety associated with the attacks. But representational interventions of this sort come with a price, for in rehearsing the tragedy of that day so faithfully, they do nothing to mitigate the destructive impulses unleashed by those events. Films of this sort traffic in fear, hostility, prejudice, malice, and other assorted horrors, ensuring the continued circulation of these impulses in the psychic economy.

But imagine a film that offers an alternative to the representational solutions advanced by mainstream Hollywood. Imagine a film that tries, however obliquely, to break the cycle of destructive psychic energy kept in circulation by films like CLOVERFIELD and WAR OF THE WORLDS, and that seeks to funnel these energies into a more benign, and decidedly erotic, channel. SHORTBUS provides this alternative. It too takes on the trauma of 9/11, but in contrast to mainstream Hollywood, its representational intervention eschews images of death, destruction, and retribution in favour a utopian mix of sex, pleasure, and conviviality.

Although we are never privy to its root cause, trauma seems to be a pervasive affliction in the post-9/11 environment of SHORTBUS. The character of Sofia, for example, has been searching in vain for her orgasm her entire life, a dilemma apparently grounded in an uncomfortable experience with her voyeuristic father when she was young. There is also James, who has suicidal tendencies that are the result of his past experiences as a young hustler. But trauma is not restricted to mere characters in SHORTBUS. The city of New York itself suffers throughout the narrative from periodic brownouts—the luminous spark for which the city is widely acknowledged has unaccountably dimmed.

A link is thus established between the individual struggles of the characters on the one hand and whatever affliction is affecting the city as a whole on the other. It is at this intersection of the personal and the social where a collectively shared experience of a singular traumatic event is registered. We are never privy to this event. All we are presented with is its aftermath, still unresolved and thus still inducing anxiety.

The clip below introduces a character who claims to be the former mayor of New York. Watch how he explains the nature of the shared trauma afflicting the city and its citizens. Pay special attention to the notion of permeability he raises, and how this notion relates to fear and redemption.

This video is age-restricted and only available on YouTube. Learn more
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Fear has driven people to become impermeable, led them to cocoon themselves in a protective shell that blocks all interpersonal connections. Impermeability is an apt descriptor of the social body's general response to the attacks of 9/11: once fluid borders were now perceived as dangerously porous, certain foreign nationals were now eyed as invasive—barriers of all kinds were being erected, blocking connections and cultivating a culture of impermeability.

A fear of penetration—the consequence of having had a permeable orientation that was then easily exploited—prayed on the psychic economy of the social body. Consider the following images:

US defenses penetrated

Penetration in *Shortbus*

What does the image of a plane being deliberately driven into one of the nation's most recognizable landmarks suggest if not foreign bodies penetrating the nation's defenses, infiltrating its porous, permeable borders?

In SHORTBUS, the surging fear of permeability brought about by the attacks is re-articulated on the level of social connection, especially on the level of sexual contact. For example, suicidal James refuses to allow himself to be sexually penetrated by anyone. James equates sexual penetration with emotional penetration, and his fear of the latter manifests a fear in the former. In reference to the adoration showered on him by his partner, James says: "It stops at my skin. I can't let it inside me."

In SHORTBUS, the solution to this trauma is to overcome the fear of penetration, to risk the dangers posed by permeability in order to cultivate the interpersonal connections necessary for a healthy social body. Elements that hinder or otherwise obstruct direct contact between people are presented in SHORTBUS as unwanted barriers. Masturbation—sex with one's self—is frowned upon in the film: James breaks down into tears after reaching orgasm alone; Sofia repeatedly fails to masturbate her way to orgasm. The film also presents technology as a mediating force that only isolates individuals, keeping them separated from one other—cameras, vibrating eggs, even a social networking PDA used to facilitate hook-ups only exacerbate interpersonal distance. Permeability can be achieved neither through masturbation nor through recourse to technology.

James overcomes his trauma only after confiding in the stranger who prevents his suicide attempt. James opens up emotionally to this person in ways he never allowed himself before, preparing the way for a sexual encounter in which James finally allows himself to be sexually penetrated. This act, which registers James' new-found permeability, lifts him out of depression, securing his relationship to his partner.

The married and monogamous Sofia is, in her own way, also impermeable. Her inability to achieve orgasm is hampered by her steadfast refusal to be unfaithful to her husband, a person with whom she is sexually incompatible. The character Justin Bond, impresario of the Shortbus club, casts Sofia's problem to connect in terms of electrified circuitry: "Think of it" he says to her, "like a motherboard filled with desire, that travels all over the world, that touches you, that touches me, that connects everybody. You just have to find the right connection, the right circuitry."

It is at the Shortbus club where permeability is encouraged and may be sought without fear of recrimination or rebuke. At its core, Shortbus is a sort of sex community, and the explicit orgy scenes that take place there reinforce the notion that the road to permeability—to living sanely and without fear—goes through uninhibited sexual congress. Sofia finally finds her orgasm at Shortbus, in a three-way sexual encounter that does not include her husband.

The trajectory of the narrative travels from an initial point of despair, melancholy, and alienation, through various false remedies and solutions, and lands squarely on an orgasmic point of restoration, rejuvenation, and reintegration. Punctuating this return to vitality is the sudden emergence of New York from a city-wide power outage. As the lights spread over the city at the close of film, we are assured that it, like its citizens, indeed *through* its citizens, has finally discovered the right circuitry. This utopian finale, which is celebrated in a communal sing-along at the club, suggests the successful working through of the traumatic experience.

Whereas CLOVERFIELD and WAR OF THE WORLDS reinforce the instinct for impermeability, SHORTBUS rejects it. Instead of promulgating a fear of invasion, SHORTBUS celebrates the act of penetration. The film makes the case that closing borders, like closing off oneself, is no solution to the anxiety unleashed by events like 9/11. SHORTBUS demonstrates how the health of the social—and, in turn, individual—body depends on cultivating a sense of permeability, on seeking out the right circuitry, and allowing oneself to be penetrated.

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Footnotes

[1] For a full account of how trauma has been theorized in the Humanities, see Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutger's University Press, 2005.)

[2] I am using the term "social body" to designate the collective awareness shared by a given society's members. This collective awareness is specifically constructed through the transmission of culture. For an example of this concept in action see Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). A analogous concept is Émile Durkheim's "collective consciousness," which is theorized throughout his works as the abstract space wherein the shared beliefs, customs, and values of a given society circulate. Both concepts designate the ground that unites a group socially, a ground that is forged in part through the expansive reach of mass media, including cinema.

[3] This discussion culminated with the publication of Michael Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[4] For a good account by cognitive scientists of the physiological mechanics of trauma see Joseph LeDoux's *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

[5] Recall how Cold War paranoia was displaced in movies like THEM!(Gordon Douglas, 1954) and INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (Don Siegel, 1956) of the 1950s.

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Filmography

SHORTBUS (John Cameron Mitchell, 2006)
CLOVERFIELD (Matt Reeves, 2008)
WAR OF THE WORLDS (Steven Spielberg, 2005)

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4 Responses to Dudley Andrew
Editor's Introduction

[Intro] [Kouras] [Ogonoski] [Wasson] [Covert]

While our traditional formula of organizing issues around a broad theme has many advantages, it also has its limitations. The chief drawback is that contributors aren't encouraged to engage in direct dialogue with one another. In this issue, for example, my piece on SHORTBUS does not directly touch upon the issues raised by Alexander Carson in his wonderful article "Kino-Cock," which itself has little enough to say about Marcin Wisniewski's endearing love letter to Kate Winslet—they are related to one another only by way of a general theme. So we thought that, in addition to our usual format, we'd try something a little different this time around.

The goal was to encourage dialogue and debate amongst our colleagues in film studies by means of the public forum offered by Synoptique, and we felt the best way to go about this was to solicit opinions on current issues circulating in the discipline. To that end, we zeroed in on some contentious remarks made recently by Dudley Andrew in his article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies" concerning the current direction of film studies. We then presented his argument to colleagues and ask for their responses. Along with one faculty member, Haidee Wasson, we also received contributions from several PhD students, including Matthew Ogonoski, Andrew Covert, and myself. Each response presents a unique perspective on the issue, but all are engaged in dialogue with Dudley Andrew, as well as with each other.

Andrew's article was originally published in the summer 2009 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, and can be accessed in full here: http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/ci/2009/35/4. I highly recommend taking a look at it before venturing to the responses. Luckily, it's a great read. I've also included an outline of his central argument below, but I should warn you that it lacks the nuance and precision with which Andrew himself makes his case, and which makes "The Core and Flow of Film Studies" so compelling.

Dino Koutras
Co-managing editor

A summary of Dudley Andrew's "The Core and Flow of Film Studies":

For a recent edition of *Critical Inquiry*, film scholar Dudley Andrew agreed to produce a report on the current state of film studies. The resulting article begins with Andrew relating the history of film studies from its initial emergence in the academy through to its present form. Throughout this survey he stresses a certain fault line between those approaches that sought to impose academic discipline on the medium (filmologie, semiotics, cognitive science) and those more cinephilic ones that resisted such attempts at disciplinarity (Bazin, for example). But what is noteworthy about this article is not the report itself, which is benign enough. What is noteworthy is the contentious editorial with which concludes and in which he makes some disparaging remarks on the current direction of the discipline.

Andrew raises the issue that film studies (the study of film) is being increasingly absorbed by other disciplines, such as media studies, cultural studies and communication studies. He is wary of this process because there is the risk that film will lose some of its autonomous space within the academy. He argues that something valuable is lost when film is treated like other media objects—such as television content, video games, and so forth—and not on its own terms.

Andrew defends this position by claiming that there is a decisive difference between film and all other media that warrants the sustained study of the film object itself. Film, he argues, is subject to the principle of *décalage*, a term he defines as "a discrepancy in space and deferral or jumps in time." Unlike other media, which operate according to the principle of immediacy, film exhibits a "slight stutter in its articulation," furnishing an experience that is not immediate at all, but "reflective, resonant, and voluminous." Andrew describes this experience as a "productive friction" and contends that it makes film comparatively unmanageable as an object of study. For proof he returns to the report he supplied at the beginning of his article, a report he now mobilizes in support of his argument. His detailed description of the various phases that academic film studies has passed through—everything from the cinephilia of Bazin, to the ideologically-determined models of the 1970s, as well as the more empirical, post-theory approaches of recent years—is offered as evidence of the degree to which film resists attempts by scholars to mold it into a stable academic form. In other words, he contends that film refuses to be thoroughly disciplined; it is too unruly.

Andrew suggests that it is this very unruliness that made film an attractive object of study for some of the brightest minds of the twentieth century and in turn fuelled some of that century's great debates. He states that the advent of film discourse "produced a way of thinking and cultivated an instinct of looking and listening" that the discourses of other media cannot hope to rival. When film is kidnapped by other disciplines and robbed of its distinctiveness as an object of study, this force—this "productive friction"—is strangled, if not obliterated. Andrew ends his article with an appeal to return to the sustained study of film, to return once again to the film object as the source of debate and scholarly discourse.

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Response to Dudley Andrew: The Death of Cinema and the Future of Film Studies

Dino Koutras responds Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies" by suggesting that, as scholars, we can't ignore the evolving nature of our object of study.

[Intro] [Koutras] [Ogonoski] [Wasson] [Covert]

The demise of film as an artform, the decay of film culture, the death of cinema—Dudley Andrew's recent article in *Critical Inquiry* rehearses a by-now familiar theme. This theme appears most often as a response to the seismic shifts that rattle the cinematic landscape from time to time—new technology, for example, or changes in movie-going habits. It addresses the sense of loss, or threat of loss, such shifts entail and typically takes the form of a lament or eulogy; although sometimes, as is the case here, it is delivered as a call to arms. When silent cinema succumbed to sound, such laments were common. The introduction of television, in its turn, provoked anticipatory mourning throughout film culture. Such hand-ringing has now become a permanent fixture in cinema circles, ever since the rise of the blockbuster. It has only intensified with the advent of home video and the digital revolution that followed.

But Andrew has developed a unique variation on this theme, for his concern is not only with changes in how we watch or experience films. His concern is primarily with how we *study* them. Film, he says, is being marginalized in the academy, ceding some of its hard-won autonomy to upstart competitors. On the surface this might seem like a benign enough development, but Andrew argues the stakes involved are actually quite high. He contends that film has historically attracted some of world's brightest minds and that, in trying to account for this formidable medium, these thinkers were led to produce a correspondingly sophisticated discourse. Andrew claims it is this discourse, above all, that is at risk with film's precipitous fall into academic irrelevance: that particular activity organized around attempts to come to terms with a medium that seems to stubbornly resist such efforts. It is the singular kind of debates—the "ingenious, complex and passionate arguments"—that flows expressly from film that he seeks to safeguard.

Where does cinema's stubbornness spring from? According to Andrew, partly from the films themselves, "especially powerful ones," which "have been able to stand up to the discursive weight that cinephiles (critics) and academics (theorists) have brought to bear on them." (913) Here Andrew reminds us that while some of the best minds of the last century were compelled to study film, equally great minds were compelled to make them. The list of (for lack of better word) geniuses that recognized and exploited the potential of the medium would be too long to list here. [1] But given the current commercial conditions of production, we must entertain the possibility that great minds are no longer as consistently drawn to cinema as they once were. Or even if they are, we ought to consider the current difficulties great filmmakers face in trying to make the kinds of films that challenge other great minds to study them. From a commercial point of view, video games are just as lucrative as movies. How long before the gravitational pull exerted on creative talent by video game makers begins to draw potentially exceptional filmmakers away from cinema's orbit? To me, this dilemma seems to constitute the bigger threat to film discourse than the absorption of film studies into media studies. For the debates cherished by Andrew to persist, films of a caliber necessary to bear the discursive weight required of them need to continue to be made. And—we must be frank with ourselves—it's not at all clear that they will be.

But beyond the types of films that have been made, Andrew contends there is something inherent in the movie-going practice itself that provides the conditions necessary for productive, protracted debate. Using the term *décalage*, Andrew suggests that the experience of watching a film projected on a screen in a darkened theatre promotes a state of mind in the spectator conducive to sustained reflection. By contrast, other media—television, the internet, video games—discourage reflection. According to Andrew, *décalage* ensures that cinema in endowed with a rambunctious quality that stimulates discussion and debate of a kind that is often fractious but always animated. But if film is as rambunctious as he claims, then its disruptive power should not be so easily smothered by an association with other, more banal, more immediate media. In fact, it is just as likely that film's unique power to promote reflection will only be enhanced when put in a position to serve as a point of contrast with, say, the unreflective immediacy of the internet. If, on the other hand, film's rambunctiousness is easily domesticated by this kind of association, then perhaps Andrew has overstated cinema's capacity to induce a reflective state of mind. If this is the case, then we must conclude that the role played by *décalage* in fostering those great debates was never quite as instrumental as Andrew suggests.

For my part, I think the concern over the film object's place in the academy is somewhat misplaced. It distracts us from the more pressing issue of recognizing—and adapting to—the revolutionary transformations that cinema is currently undergoing. We seem to have a hard time acknowledging, let alone accepting, that film is no longer the lone bright star that shines a light on our contemporary experience. It may have served that function at one time, but I don't think we can deny any longer that it has been usurped in this capacity by its younger media siblings.

There is a wonderful tension in film that springs from its inability to properly reconcile its material existence—the brute fact of its industrial production—with its more ephemeral, affective properties. These properties always escape or "exceed" a film's otherwise mechanical, codified, and sometimes rigidly choreographed design. It is no accident that this tension largely defines the general aesthetic tenor of the last century—the age of recording and reproduction. It explains why cinema has been so central to our understanding of the experience of modernity, and why, as a consequence, it has sparked such delirious discourse.

But we need to consider the possibility that this tension is no longer what defines our contemporary moment. We need to accept that perhaps our current concerns cannot be addressed via attempts to come to grips with the elusive properties of film. In this new media world, "cinema" as a visual phenomenon might persist, or even proliferate in some formal sense, [2] but the kind of experience that Andrew discusses is fading rapidly. Its demise was assured long ago by the consolidation of the blockbuster and the enthusiastic embrace of the "high concept" approach to popular film. This mode of cinema was spearheaded in the US by the likes of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, but it has since been taken up all over the world. In the blockbuster era, a film is no longer just a film. A film is more than ever an "event," a node in a much more expansive network comprised of several types of media. To experience a film in our current era typically involves engaging with a whole host of extra-theatrical experiences that, taken together, have made the simple act of "watching a film" or "going to the movies" an anachronism.

I sympathize with Andrew. I even share his lament. But we in the discipline are faced with a stark choice. We can either insists that what we consider to be the cinematic experience is defined according to some measure of *purity*, one that is contingent on appropriate viewing habits (one that induces *décalage*, for example), or we can open ourselves up to a more contemporary understanding of our object, and accept the range of possible cinematic encounters in their *plurality*.

The first approach might safeguard the still-raging debates over cinema's role in the mediation of the modern experience. But the liability of this approach is no small matter. By adopting it wholesale, we risk our capacity to properly respond to the realities of the contemporary film experience—in all its guises. We might also end up focusing on a potentially outmoded conception of "cinema" at the precise moment that cinema's progeny—including video games, graphic novels, and contemporary serial drama—has transcended its humble origins and is out there conquering the world. Film studies, in such a scenario, would end up increasingly devoting itself to cinema's glorious past at the expense of any claim to contemporary relevance.

The second option, as Andrew so elegantly demonstrates in his article, has its own pitfalls. Mostly, we risk spreading out too thin, losing the central core around which we have organized ourselves intellectually and according to which we have maintained our identity. We would also have to concede that maybe Susan Sontag was right all along, and that this time the death of cinema—the particular kind that film studies has long been devoted to—is finally at hand. But by going this route we might also open up ourselves to a whole host of emerging objects and practices whose lineage can be traced directly to cinema. We should not reject this option too quickly, if only for the possibility of renewal it brings, but also because we have much to contribute to our understanding these new, and important, phenomena.

Important debates will no doubt be fought this century by great minds, but it is questionable as to whether or not cinema will remain central to them. It part, the outcome remains up to us as film scholars. But we should not let ourselves be driven to distraction arguing over film's place in the academy because, as crucial as that issue might be, there is a more important question we need to focus on. We need to figure out what role we want to play in the debates that are to come, that are in fact currently taking shape. The question is not about sharing space with new media or *cultural studies*. The question concerns our current and future relevance. Do we want a seat at the table of the coming debates, where we can trade on our considerable expertise? Or do remain loyal to a narrowly conceived object—one that is seemingly on the wane—and thus allow ourselves to be pushed to the periphery. The choice is ours.

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Footnotes

[1] But here's a start: Welles, Hitchcock, Resnais, Kubrick, Godard, Eisenstein, Leone, Ford, Kurosawa, Fassbinder, Tarkovsky, Coppola, Allen, Rossellini, Bergman, Renoir, Herzog, Bertolucci, Fellini, the Marx Brothers.

[2] In his article "Dr. Strange Media; Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Film Theory, " D.N Rodowick argues that this is, in fact, what has happened.

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Response to Dudley Andrew: What is at the Core?

In his response to Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies," Matthew Ogonoski scrutinizes the finer points of Andrew's argument, with particular focus on his concept of décalage.

[Intro] [Koutras] [Ogonoski] [Wasson] [Covert]

Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies" is an impressively voluminous overview of the history of Film Studies up to and including the current state of the discipline (if indeed it can be referred to thusly). And though the majority of this study provides few points of entry for contention, and is a highly recommended read, the conclusory remarks made in the final pages are fleeting and unclear. While Andrew certainly demonstrates an eloquent and passionate perspective of cinema and why it should be studied, the proposed methodology (a tentative term for now) is confusing and incomplete. Andrew explains that the temporal lag of cinema, an affect he describes as unique to the medium, is a key ontological characteristic of the form, and therefore critical to its study. He names this aspect *décalage* and describes it as a gap that "lies at the heart of the medium and of each particular film, a gap between here and there as well as now and then," yet fails to describe how this affect may be useful (914). In this sense, he does not provide a methodology with which to approach the study of cinema, but a characteristic of film with which to structure a methodology that may prove useful. The article is most useful and entertaining in its own right without the inclusion of an incomplete suggestion of how to save Film Studies. Because the conclusion of Andrew's article is so contentious, my focus shall remain here, and I will suggest a few alternative perspectives on the significance of his proposed, and tentative, characteristic/method known as *décalage*. This examination will not pretend to be complete or definitive, but instead is set up as a way to invite and encourage more discussion in regard to Andrew's ideas.

First, I propose that there is something complicated and insufficient about naming this lag of cinema, or *décalage*, as a unique and therefore important characteristic to privilege over other media. Andrew proclaims that this temporal disposition is unlike other technologies such as television, videogames, or the Internet. It is the immediacy of these media and the way the viewer experiences this immediacy that distinguishes them from film. For instance, the immersive experience of videogames is not the same type of immersive experience of film. Andrew couples the immediacy of access of both streaming Internet video and television as characteristics that differ from the cinematic experience. And though he is sure to discuss cinema's contemporary existence throughout the proliferation of new technologies in everyday life, he primarily argues for a purist viewing experience of cinema in order to cultivate the full potential of *décalage*. I can wholeheartedly agree that the immediacy of streaming Internet video or videogames, whether consciously or subconsciously recognized by the viewer, does spark some sense of ontological difference from the medium of cinema. However, Andrew's fault lies both in his wholesale homogenizing description of these other forms of media, and also in his privileging of the pure cinematic experience without defining that experience. I will focus on these two factors in order to expose the problems of his conception of *décalage*.

First, I would like to draw attention to a specific, yet broad and encompassing, form of media of two different time-periods in order to provide a contrast: television in the late eighties and early nineties, and then again with the start of the HBO-style drama series in the vein of what has been deemed "cinematic television." These two periods have been chosen because both encompass my limited knowledge of television, and both provide examples of the form that test Andrew's suggestion. Andrew's concern involves the viewer's recognition, whether on a subconscious or conscious level (this is unclear), to recognize the temporal issues of cinema. The temporal issues are of two types: the lack of immediacy in cinema, and the time involved in going to and experiencing the movies. The affect of *décalage* results from both of these situations. It is the former concern that will be examined first. *décalage* results here from the realization that the filmic object was acquired in the past and therefore is not connected to the current moment. There is much time and planning that goes into any production, and perfection (to whatever degree), or at the very least completion, is attained after many obstacles are navigated and problems solved. Ultimately, and to summarize, films are complicated processes of construction that necessitate much mastery, and therefore the end product will always present a sense of past-ness. However, these temporal issues, in relation to the past-ness of the form, are not wholly unique to film.

In 1990 a new television series premiered. It was called LAW AND ORDER (NBC, 1990). In fact, going into its 20th year of production it is still called LAW AND ORDER, and has become part of a successful franchise. This television drama is highly constructed, which is in contrast to many television shows surrounding it, particularly at the time of its inception. It is obvious that this show has a larger budget, is filmed over a number of days (unlike its televisual counterpart, the sitcom) and shares many of the same production problems that may effect film production. I believe Andrew would contend this viewpoint because LAW AND ORDER is filmed on a weekly basis (or, at least, broadcast so) and is part of the everyday, home-viewing experience. However, neither of these responses would disqualify the constructedness of the object itself, or the past-ness that is implicit. If the film object can indeed influence some sense of affect due to its *décalage*, why then can television not do the same? I realize that LAW AND ORDER is just one example, and in the 90s it only represented a small and select type of television series. (HOMICIDE: LIFE ON THE STREET [NBC, 1993] is another example). Indeed, this show may have been quite anomalous for a substantial period of time. However, this brings us to the next point: the contemporary state of serial television.

Currently, there are many television shows that are either part of the HBO family of serial drama, or are formally and stylistically derivative of it. What is meant by this is that these shows, like LAW AND ORDER, have high-budgets, are structured in complex ways, and have an inherent feeling of past-ness similar to films. A few examples of these shows are THE SOPRANOS (HBO, 1999), SIX FEET UNDER (HBO, 2001), DEADWOOD (HBO, 2004), TRUE BLOOD (HBO, 2008), etc. The most prominent and important example that elicits this feeling is an HBO original series called THE WIRE (HBO, 2002), a police/criminal drama that centres around law enforcement and drug culture in Baltimore, Mass. This series is often described as having a cinematic quality, an opinion typically resting on the show's high-production values and complexity of narrative construction. Although here is not the place to elaborate, I believe this form of serial television is one that exhibits both qualities that can be understood as cinematic, qualities that distinguish it from other television content. However, not only is the series described as cinematic, but it is also making its way into universities as a course appended to Film Studies. In fact, Linda Williams taught a film course on THE WIRE at Berkeley last spring. Again, these are highly constructed shows and, as objects, enable a realization of their past-ness.

The purpose of mentioning these series is not to disclaim the affect of Andrew's concept of *décalage*, but simply to suggest that cinema is not the only technology to hold this characteristic. The perspectives provided simply serve as suggestion for further study and elaboration. Being no expert of television, these are only tentative, yet, I believe, apt observations. I implore others to contest or affirm these suggestions. Andrew warns, "To have [how film has taught us to watch] subsumed by some larger notion of the history of audio-visions, to have it dissipate into the foggy field of cultural studies, for instance, or become one testing ground among others for communication studies would be to lose something whose value has always derived from the intensity and the focus that films invite and often demand" (913). Why exactly would this knowledge of how films have taught us to watch disappear? If this knowledge hinges on the concept of *décalage*, and if *décalage* is indeed important and unique to cinema, why would these things disappear within media or communication studies? Would they not be used in those disciplines to demarcate cinema and express why it is important?

This same fear begs further questions. If film, or the way in which film has taught us to view, is in trouble, this would necessarily imply that current film is not what it used to be. Here I am specifically drawing attention to the viewing of film in a theatrical setting. If *décalage* is an important way of understanding film, why would it not continue to be an important characteristic, and why would it not continue to be used when approaching contemporary theatrical film? The immediate answer would seem to be that Andrew is primarily concerned with celluloid, a concern that manifests itself as technophobic when, for example, he homogenizes all forms and media (perceived as) characteristically different from film. If *décalage* is a specific characteristic of celluloid, why only celluloid, particularly when the above examples of television suggest a similar affect?

But there is more than one dimension to Andrew's suggestion. He states,

> *This French term décalage connotes discrepancy in space and deferral or jumps in time. At the most primary level, the film image leaps from present to past, for what is edited and shown was filmed at least days, weeks, or months earlier. This slight stutter in its articulation then repeats itself in the time and distance that separates filmmaker from spectator and spectators from each other when they see the same film on separate occasions. The gap in each of these relations constitutes cinema's difference from television and new media. (914)*

Andrew contends that, in addition to emerging from the delay imposed by film production, *décalage* also arises in the spaces, or gaps, that exist between filmmakers and spectators. I will here point out that Andrew does not discuss these two temporal relations that construct *décalage* as working in tandem. In other words, there are two possible ways that *décalage* may come about, according to the film scholar. As stated above, I believe Andrew's wholesale dismissal of television is problematic. He discusses *décalage* as an ontological affect of cinema, and it is implied he is specifically discussing celluloid-based cinema. However, the way he defines the term allows it to be applicable to more than just celluloid; in fact, at no point does he discuss the actual physical qualities of celluloid. Instead, he infers that celluloid has some connection to temporality that other materials, whether video or digital, do not. If Andrew is implying that there is an indexical quality that photograph-based celluloid contains that other media do not, then I draw the readers' attention to Tom Gunning's discussion of indexicality in "What's the Point of an Index, or, Faking Photographs." [1] I believe a comparison of Gunning and Andrew's articles would be quite fruitful but, unfortunately, there is no space for that here. However, I am unsure whether to attribute Andrew's assertions to a discussion of indexicality, mostly because he does not use the term once throughout this lengthly article. So it seems his argument for *décalage* is based not in relation to medium ontology or specificity but to some sort of pseudo-cognitive affect. In other words, it is not the film object that imposes *décalage*, but rather a conscious or subconscious understanding of the concept of *décalage* that informs the viewing of an object. If the latter case is true, there is no reason why *décalage* could not be conceptually applied to television.

For now I would like to focus on the second form of *décalage*, the gaps created between filmmakers and spectators. Describing the affect of *décalage* this way is a misstep on Andrew's part. Although part of his project is to save cinema from falling into and being disseminated by the disciplines of Communication Studies, Cultural Studies, and Media Studies, by contextualizing part of the affect of *décalage* as a spectatorial practice, he relegates this dimension of *décalage* to Cultural Studies. He removes the concern of *décalage* from the pseudo-cognitive realm and places it in one of cultural interactions and how those interactions inform knowledge. In other words, by drawing attention to the importance of the gaps created between the filmmaker and spectators, or simply between multiple spectators, he implies that the place of the theatre plays a major role in *décalage*'s affect. He contrasts the theatre with television by referring to television's place as an everyday object in the household. But by focusing attention on the place of cinema as being away from the home, he is not discussing an ontological affect of the cinema itself, but a cultural practice of viewing the cinema. The question is not "how does the cinema affect the spectator's thoughts about the act of going out," but instead, "how does the act of going to the movies affect the ways spectators think about film?" This may seem like an issue of semantics, but if Andrew implies that the cinema produces some sort of ontological affect by prompting a sense of *décalage* in the spectator, based on the gaps between the object and the subject, then this also implies that there are particular ways of viewing that are privileged. But there are many ways of viewing film. There are many types of theatres. Is Andrew privileging any one? Does it matter if it is an arthouse, a megaplex, or a drive-in? The only common characteristic shared by these different theatrical settings is the fact that they are places that must be traveled to. Therefore, if *décalage* is an inherent affective characteristic of the cinema itself, privileging the place of exhibition seems moot. If the affect of *décalage* (in the case of these gaps between viewers and filmmakers) is solely dependant on the act of going out, regardless of where the film is shown, then why can these same affects of *décalage* not translate into the home? It seems very unflattering to discuss the power of cinema in these terms.

This second conception of *décalage* is dependant on purist conceptions of the cinematic experience. And yes, if one is to view a film in the theatre then they must leave their homes in order to do so. But I am unconvinced that this somehow affects spectators' conceptions or realizations of temporal gaps. Essentially, I believe that this sort of argument places more emphasis and concern on the cultural practices of movie-going, then on ontological affects of watching film. Andrew states,

> *The gap in each of these relations [that construct décalage] constitutes cinema's difference from television and new media. Films display traces of what is past and inaccessible, whereas TV and certainly the internet are meant to feel and be present. We live with television as a continual part of our lives and our homes; sets are sold as furniture. Keeping up a twenty-four-hour chatter on scores of channels, TV is banal by definition. (914)*

In this quote, Andrew draws a distinction between the phenomenological affects that film objects contain and the cultural significance of objects such as television and the internet in our everyday experiences. He neither explains how an outing to the cinema implies an inaccessible past or gaps, nor does he discuss an ontological affect of the televisual medium. In other words, he collapses the differences between the ontological characteristics of the medium of television and its existence as a cultural object in our homes in order to distinguish it from cinema. This seems like a covert strategy to avoid the discussion of applying the concept of *décalage* to other media.

Andrew's purist argument also ignores different ways of viewing. Of course different spectators view in different ways. I like to think of myself as a purist as well when considering the theatrical experience. In fact, I never consume food items when at the theatre for the following reasons: it is a distraction (crumpling of bags and slurping of straws); and it leads to bathroom visits. I recall having to leave the theatre twice while watching ONLY THE LONELY (Chris Columbus, 1991) when I was eleven years old so that my bladder would not explode from so much pop. Now I rarely drink at the theatre. I have only left a theatre to use the washroom twice since that day. I'm glad to say that both times were during terrible films. The point of this anecdotal digression is to reveal that the ways in which people watch films is very much determined by they themselves, how they think of and how they desire to experience the films. So why can I not attain the same impression of *décalage* at home? Consumers go to great lengths and spend copious amounts of money today in order to establish home theatres. If the cinematic experience is dependant on some purist sense of spectatorship, why can these same issues of temporal gaps not be recreated in the home? The viewer is aware that, regardless of viewing a film at home or at the theatre, the filmic object is constructed with an inherent past-ness. And as for the cultural experience of viewing the film, it is a highly subjective matter that is contingent on the spectator's frame-of-mind.

Another way of examining Andrew's argument is to ask why the concerns of temporality would affect *décalage* in the age of home viewing? To continue the above example, I was upset at missing large segments of ONLY THE LONELY, but that was a highly subjective response based on my temporary amnesia of the fact that I could always rent the film later. Of course, at the time this meant waiting a while longer than the turn-over of home distribution today, but I could still indeed rent the film. My being upset was of course partially based on the fact that I had wanted to view this film in the theatre and, in my mind, I had failed. In this sense, I would somewhat agree with Andrew in that the experience of going out did mean something to me. However, this reveals another dimension of the incompleteness of Andrew's argument.

Films continue to be released in the theatre. If *décalage* is dependant on the experience of going out to the theatre, then why is Andrew worried this element of the cinema culture will dissipate? If *décalage* is dependant on the understanding of past-ness inherent in cinema, and the technologies used to construct both cinema and television are starting to approach convergence, then why can *décalage* not be an aspect of television as well as cinema? Again, a question of format arises. Andrew states, "In contrast [to television], we go out to the movies, leaving home to cross into a different realm. Every genuine cinematic experience involves *décalage*, time-lag. After all, we are taken on a flight during and after which we are not quite ourselves." (914) But this act of going out to the movies does not wholesale explain the affect of the mystification of film from which we are "not quite ourselves." Furthermore, Andrew's explanation that the act of going out brings attention to the spatial gaps between filmmaker and spectator, and between spectators themselves, does not appear to be limited to the second category of *décalage*. This description seems more relevant to the former category of *décalage*, a focus on the constructedness and past-ness of film. Why does going to the theatre draw any more attention to the spatial distances between filmmakers and spectators?

Ultimately, Andrew's argument for the importance of *décalage* in the cinematic experience is unconvincing; at least in the ways he describes the conditions of *décalage*. *décalage* seems an important characteristic of film, but a characteristic that is not wholly relegated to this specific medium. As for the place of viewing, I believe that Andrew, like many theorists that promote a purist way of viewing cinema, overlook both the fact that viewers continue to visit the theatre, and the fact that viewers love cinema so much that they try to turn parts of their homes into areas of theatrical experience. I agree with Andrew that movies train people to watch in particular ways. Ideally, this means that viewers watch in an uninterrupted and undistracted way. The same interruptions and distractions that existed in the early days of theatrical cinema still exist today. At home, yes, the viewer has more control, and can pause to use the washroom, or check an IMDB entry. However, purists of cinema, if the purity of the experience remains important, will not distract themselves from the home-viewing experience. Those who will are also those who would care little for distractions and interruptions in the theatre setting: going for popcorn or to the washroom. The actions of this latter group do not reveal the importance of cinema for them, but rather its unimportance. Using the washroom is of course sometimes a biological necessity, and I have at times been utterly frustrated at my aging bladder and the balance of importance that has shifted toward it and away from the importance of the cinema. I see pausing at home therefore as an advantage, though I understand Andrew's perspective of temporality in this light. However, those popcorn people are the same people that will pause incessantly just for the very reason that the cinema is not important to them. Their cinematic outings are more about the event status of movie-going (in all its cultural studies implications) than that of the phenomenological experience of cinema. Essentially, those viewers that do care for the cinema, that are trained by the cinema to view in particular and purist ways, will always regard cinema with a certain respect and an understanding that it is a particular, and, in many ways, unique object. These are the people that understand *décalage*, and will continue to understand it, even in their home-viewing theatres.

I was lucky enough to attend a recent presentation of Andrew's at Concordia University. He primarily discussed this article and read excerpts. At one point in the conversation he discussed "The Exemplary" of cinema, and how *décalage* is particularly pertinent in these examples. There is a whole other counter-argument that could be developed, but there is no space here to do so. However, I bring this up to warn of a potentially disastrous path that this discussion of the importance of *décalage* could take. This is definitely not the way cinema studies should hope to retain validity, by being even more elitist than it already is. By privileging some examples of cinema over others, cinema studies would relegate itself to a thing of the past. If film studies wants to stay afloat in the age of convergence, reminiscing over cinema past would most definitely be counter-productive. It seems, "We're going to need a bigger boat."

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Footnotes

[1] Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, eds. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

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Filmography

LAW AND ORDER (NBC, 1990)
HOMICIDE: LIFE ON THE STREET (NBC, 1993)
THE SOPRANOS (HBO, 1999)
SIX FEET UNDER (HBO, 2001)
DEADWOOD (HBO, 2004)
TRUE BLOOD (HBO, 2008)
THE WIRE (HBO, 2002)
ONLY THE LONELY (Chris Columbus, 1991)
And a nod to JAWS (Steven Spielberg, 1995)

About the Author

Matthew Ogonoski is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. Film and Moving Image program at Concordia University. He previously acquired an MA in Film Studies from Concordia where he wrote his thesis The Brand Behind the Mask: Batman in the Age of Convergence, and also holds a BA in Honors English from the University of Winnipeg. Matthew is primarily interested in contemporary Hollywood cinema, adaptation, and new technologies. This is his second contribution to Synoptique.

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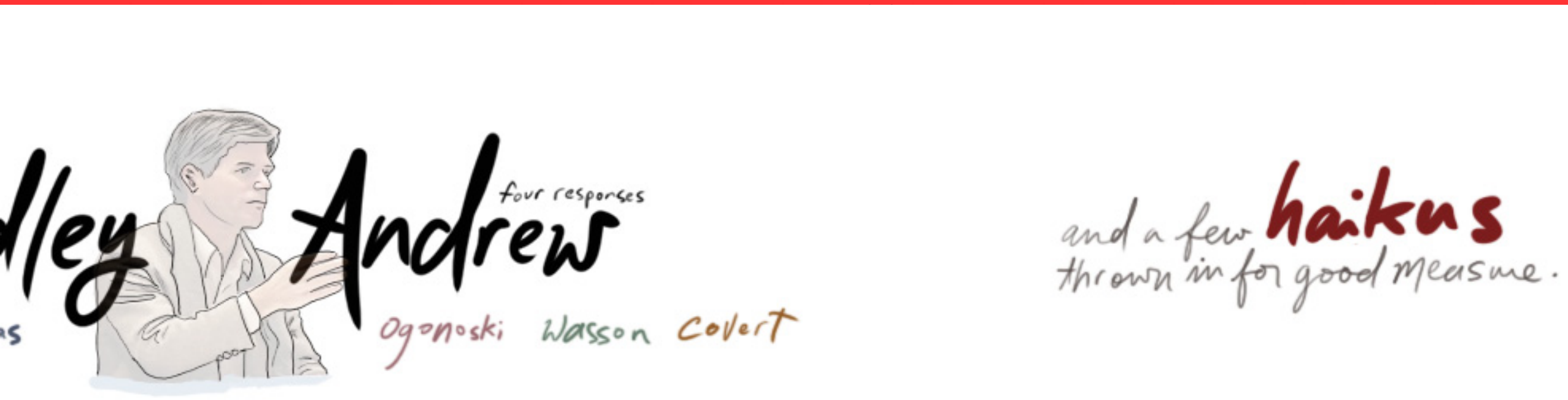

Response to Dudley Andrew: Small Discipline, Big Pictures

Haidee Wasson responds to Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow in Film Studies" by considering the institutional realities that Andrew's program would have to contend with.

[Intro] [Koutras] [Ogonoski] [Wasson] [Covert]

Let me begin by putting my cards on the table. I am co-editor of a book on the history of film studies called *Inventing Film Studies* [1]. This book includes a range of approaches to understanding the present and past of Film Studies; there are several arguments that the book seeks to make. Perhaps the most important one is that at the heart of a healthy discipline is debate. Good old-fashioned arguments help us to better hone our own thoughts, they fortify the core of our practice as a group of scholars, and they help us to direct future research traffic. Second, this book struggles honestly with an issue that may seem pejoratively academic to many. But to me and my co-editor (Dr. Lee Grieveson), this struggle is foundational. That is, writing the history of anything requires some sense of the parameters of that thing, that object you are working to historicize. Such a process of definition should, if not in whole at least in part, precede the closely related questions of method (how to study that thing you are trying to understand).

Now, defining what "film study" has been (and what it is) is far trickier than most attempts to discuss the discipline often allow. If we can begin with a most basic assumption, that an academic discipline finds its home in the university, we have at least a starting point for outlining the parameters of our inquiry. But we know that universities are complicated institutions with large bureaucracies. They receive money from different places (private and public) and are thus beholden to different extra-organizational interests and demands. Universities have different missions and mandates, different strengths and weaknesses, different faculty bases, different student bodies. They are filled with Faculties of Fine Arts, Arts and Science, Engineering, Business, as well as departments, schools, research centers and institutes. Like all institutions they are comprised of established interests and emergent ones, senior scholars and junior ones, senior administrators and junior ones, powerful individuals and lesser known team players. Universities are not only or simply the ivory towers their critics make them out to be. Often universities and colleges have a root-system of relationships with other organizations and institutions that have their own interests and identities. Productive relationships form and unravel with many such entities, from multi-national conglomerates to local arts groups. So, where does film study fit here?

If we are going to begin answering that question, we need to understand the basic institutional features of film studies. Of course, this kind of approach would undergird the other more familiar avenues of inquiry that shape understanding of any discipline. What are the key texts? Key journals? Key ideas? What is essential knowledge? How is that knowledge produced, disseminated and carried forward? What are the important professional organizations? What is their function and mode of operation? What should we as film scholars do with our time and expertise? How do we adapt to change? What should graduate students be required to know and do? What is and what should be our specific relationship to cognate fields and disciplines? What is our more general contribution to the whole of arts, humanities and social sciences research? Why does what we do matter? In what ways does it matter? And perhaps most importantly: What is at stake in defining the center, the periphery, the inside and the outside of something like film studies? Is the goal something noble like clarity and intellectual vision? Is the goal to win institutional capital, like establishing a program's status as a department or a school? Or, is the impulse more about including some kind of work and excluding other kinds? Perhaps it is more committed to establishing hierarchies of value and degrees of relevance? All of these questions must be asked; the clearer their answers the more honest and valuable the contribution any meditation on our discipline will be.

I say all of this to make a rather simple point: the components that constitute any discipline are numerous, multi-faceted, and complicated. Any attempt to assess the state of a discipline must always make some foundational assumption about what aspects of the discipline are most important. In making such assumptions, some aspects of the discipline rise to the fore and others are often forgotten, deliberately ignored, or devalued. This is the argument of *Inventing Film Studies*, which works to make some of the forgotten or perhaps ignored aspects of our discipline known. My co-editor and I worked toward this goal, in part, because we wanted to provoke a dialogue not just about how to define the parameters of our discipline but to call attention to the ways in which idealized articulations of what we do can too easily be mistaken as synthetic statements for what is, and what has been, or more nostalgically, what has sadly passed.

So, these are the basic dispositions and insights (a few among many) that I bring to my own response to Dudley Andrew's recent presentation at Concordia, and his fuller, extremely elegant articulation of his ideas recently published in *Critical Inquiry*.

When working on *Inventing Film Studies*, I noticed that when film scholars talked about the discipline very often they were articulating an idealized wish-image: What does scholar X wish we would all do and do well, rather than what is or has been. And, of course this happens in other disciplines as well. Ironically, Cultural Studies—a field that does not fare well in Andrew's thinking—is an obvious culprit, persistently debating what its parameters and purposes are in this fashion. In Film Studies, the received history of our field demonstrates a focus on the 60s, on modernism, on the particular theoretical conjunctures of the 70s. Indeed, these things were ascendant internationally, as Andrew dutifully reminds us. Yet, a good deal of this historiography is flavored with a certain degree of idealization. Many questions about the modernism of Film Studies remain unasked. For instance, it was largely in the US, Canada and the UK, that Film Studies really became a recognizable, university-based discipline at that time. So, how do we explain that?

I would not dispute the importance of any of these things (the 60s political context, modernism, etc.)—they are crucial to the history of film studies and to other disciplines too. But what is often missing in this narrative are all of the other things and ideas and movements that also made the discipline/field possible: portable film and sound technologies; the cold war and the U.S. National Defense Education Act of 1958; a long history of art making and American do-it-yourself ideas in universities; a long history of visual education movements and attempts to modernize learning; changes in the publishing industry; a vibrant public sphere organized around cinema; a changing American industry. And, most importantly, what's often missing is an accurate sense of what studying film has actually looked like for a long time: straddling departments, imbricated in A-V depots and labs, collaborating with political and arts organizations, and so on. Chapters in *Inventing Film Studies* support these claims with more elegance and evidence than I can supply here.

The concern I have in response to the Andrew lecture is that it triggered a lingering discomfort I have when cinephilia often resurfaces as the secret idealized history of the discipline, and a nostalgic cinephilia at that. While disciplines may in part be shaped by such crazy and often highly personal love, I don't think they should be constituted by it, or justified by resort to it. Obviously, we should work to acknowledge and never disavow the way that object-affection operates. Yet I become especially skeptical about the primacy of cinephilia when we in film studies think as intellectuals that our love is special, and that all of the other loves are lesser loves.

Our love (cinephilia) has led some of us to make rather surprising claims that don't always hold up beyond the parameters of our discipline. For instance, that cinema yields the most complex, difficult, rich objects amongst all other expressive forms. It might be true—but this is something we must continue to argue and support in comparison to other cognate forms and, ideally, in discussion with others who think that paintings, sculpture, poetry, literature, sound, comics or video games are the privileged points of entry to aesthetic, theoretical or cultural complexity. We cannot just internally anoint cinema and then designate ourselves as keepers of magic. If we do, then we die and become irrelevant.

Or take the case of teaching. Cinephilia is surely in operation as we design our courses; showing and teaching films we love is an elemental pleasure. But the fact remains that we don't teach love, even though in some way we might model it. Our job is to teach students how to think in a more sophisticated way about what they see. We teach them how to analyze images, form arguments, write essays, harness evidence. Love might inform every bit of what we do in the classroom but it alone does not sustain responsible pedagogy or curricular design.

Cinephilia also likely plays a role in one of the other persistent subtexts in Film Studies—that film not only holds a privileged epistemological status vis-à-vis modernity, but it also possesses an inviolate, unrelenting, non-negotiable, avant gardism. This manifests in Andrew's plain assertions that film is more difficult than other media forms. This manifests also in something like the common "cinema of attractions" thesis, particularly as it has moved beyond its historically specific claims for early cinema and been used to understand all manner of cinematic spectacle, from Hollywood blockbusters to recent museum and moving image installation work. The idea that cinema's truest moments are beyond language, beyond the constraints of narrative, and elevate us above and beyond all other attractions persists. Undergirding this is, I think, a kind of cinephilia, a certain committed romance with the moving image. As we know, cinephilia, like any kind of object love, is complicated. But it's important to point out that as instrumental as the love of film may be for the achievements of film study, there is also an anti-intellectual and anti-institutional side to cinephilia that does not always serve the discipline or encourage healthy debate. The politics of taste are difficult; the politics of love perhaps even more so.

Thus, while I certainly have my own romance with moving images, I also find myself increasingly wary of the anti-intellectual aspects of cinephilia, especially in times when we need to work especially hard to maintain our specificity in the context of an institutional politic that would rather have us say we do everything poorly than do one thing well. I don't think that this kind of love provides by itself the kind of impersonal and dispassionate currency we need to establish a foothold in meaningful debates, particularly those that rise above and reach out across the humanities, let alone across to all of those who practice film studies.

Lastly, I currently work here at Concordia in Montreal. We are a small discipline, a small department, a small faculty, and a small university. As a part of a real politic, I believe that we need to work hard not to retreat into a precious idea of "cinema" and "film study" but to embrace the change that is sweeping the field, a change that involves theories and methods, objects and no doubt a little crazy love. We need to work hard to explain to other scholars working nearby and far away why what we do matters. We need to know what they're doing. We need to form bridges across media technologies, visual forms, and scholarly methods in order to assert the relevance of what we do to colleagues across the university. This is both about claiming our place at the table, but also about allowing ourselves to benefit from the hard work of others working in neighboring fields. Happy dialogue, infuriating disagreement, and good old fashioned hearty dialectical debate will help us to ensure that our small discipline and its big images will continue to be relevant across the arts, humanities, and beyond.

A second major response to Andrew's presentation and paper has to do with the relationship of Film Studies to other fields and disciplines. Andrew began his talk here at Concordia with a familiar warning: media studies is "gobbling" up film studies. This sense that "film study" is an innocent victim to essentially inimical forces, variously identified as media studies and cultural studies, is a common one. The parallel suggestion that "cinema" is a similarly hapless victim, "kidnapped" (p. 915) by consumers who "sequester" films to their monitors, belies a worrisome disposition to my mind. I find these claims, which were apparent throughout Andrew's presentation here and in his article, curious at best and most certainly arguable. What does it mean to suppose that a thing as abstract and complex as "film study" is innocent, fragile and persistently victimized by bigger, scarier, less well-intended disciplines? Or that film itself is a fragile, pure essence always at risk of being defiled by those other dirty media? Taking the case of the fairly recent pairing of film with media studies in university programs, one could easily observe precisely the opposite. Film departments are renaming themselves with impunity (Screen Cultures, Film and Moving Image Studies) but not seriously changing their faculty base, their curriculum, or their intellectual commitments. Some departments formerly known as "Film" claim to do just about everything (architecture, dance, sound, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, geography, economics and so on). But everything can start looking like nothing very quickly.

This tendency for film scholars to espouse—often in good will—a profound interdisciplinarity can also begin to seem not just thin but rather arrogant and even irresponsible. Imagine announcing to an architect that we "do" architecture in our film program. I, for one, would not want to work or live in that proverbial (or actual) building. A similar tendency might be seen in the SCS renaming itself SCMS, a renaming I supported for good reason. But, it should be said, there were media studies groups and scholars and organizations long before our Society for Cinema Studies came along to claim them. Or read through any of the recent innumerable books that seem to suggest that cinema is in fact everywhere, constitutive of everything modern, everything visual, everything that moves. Cinema is the world, or so the supposition goes. In other words, one could equally argue that cinema, or at least the discourse of cinema, is gobbling up media and everything else in its wake. Some film scholars have been seriously forwarding these ideas.

Now, I don't think anybody wins in either of the above scenarios, that is, in a small, unchanging, narrow articulation of the discipline's primary object of analysis or in a diffuse everywhereness of it. In fact, the argument for specificity is unassailable as a basic element of any disciplinary foundation. It's one reason that I prefer comparative and cultural work, which allows for clear definitions but puts them in dialogue with difference and context. The argument for specificity, peculiarity, uniqueness and even exceptionalism with regards to any one expressive form need not mean that the study of film must take place to the exclusion of any or all other cognate forms. Studying technologies comparatively, examining industrial convergence, aesthetic hybridity, artistic and formal influences, and practical pairings (watching movies on television screens) can help with debates about specificity but also further ideas about its limits. If we are complicated enough to live well and happily with the current diversity of visual forms, I am confident that we, as an ever-growing group of scholars, can work together to understand them. It might even be fun.

I, for one, am certainly happy to give up on singular definitions and see where our wandering leads. And I am not alone in this disposition. Witness the recent special "In Focus" section of *Cinema Journal* devoted to the history of SCMS, the present and past of film study. We don't need to make bedfellows with the ostensibly promiscuous practices of cultural studies in order to articulate arguments for critically assessing the presumed coherence of cinema. For instance, Rick Altman makes this point through his rigorous investigations of cinema's past, and the tentacular intertwining of images, sounds, screens, spectators, practitioners, and industry that comprise his object of study: what we used to know simply as "silent cinema."

Surely we must always come back to some idea about specificity, but always assisted by basic caution in research, rigour of argument and evidence, and precision of language in our scholarship. Though, if we are going to argue that cinema is essentially about projected movies in movie theaters, it behooves me to observe that precious little has been written about movie theaters, projection and projectors, or about the questions of space, light, and congregation that seem basic to dominant definitions of cinema. In other words, there are a lot of things about a conventionally defined "cinema" —celluloid projected through a machine of light into a dark room onto a screen—that have been deemed irrelevant or uninteresting, outside the boundaries of the discipline. In this sense, debates about specificity start to look overly specific, too partial, and inadequately interrogated.

In a nutshell, I don't share what seems like Andrew's intense distrust of the voracious Cultural Studies and Media Studies fields; and I don't share the construction of Film Studies as innocent, either intellectually or institutionally. And, if Cultural Studies and Media Studies are such a threat to Film Studies, might there be more to say about the ostensibly benevolent influence of English Departments? Lastly, I think it's time for more film scholars to make better friends with Cultural Studies and Media Studies, first and foremost, by developing a more nuanced sense of what these fields have been, what they are now, and where they are headed. I must confess that I do not recognize the cultural studies to which Andrew refers. When I think of cultural studies, I think of the nuanced materialism of Raymond Williams and the profound, engaged dynamism of Stuart Hall. To simply suggest that Cultural and Media Studies are a danger to Film Studies is to ignore the influence of these fields and to forego the help of some formidable writers, the above particularly influential on film scholars in the UK. (See the discussion between Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen on this in *Inventing Film Studies*.) But it is also to ignore some of the best work in film studies to be published in the last 10, 15 or maybe even 20 years.

I believe that we in Film Studies form a small discipline with an important contribution to make across the humanities and the social sciences. That contribution has something vaguely to do with understanding the specific combination of reproduced moving images and sounds, and their place in the modern world of art, entertainment, politics, culture, and industry. In order to pursue this understanding effectively, we certainly need an active debate about what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. In this sense, I thank Dudley Andrew for helping me to formulate these ideas and for contributing passionately to this cause. But I want to reiterate the importance of conducting our debate with an eye to the real politic of the university. This means many things but, most pressingly, Film Studies must work hard (as a small discipline) to understand what it has to offer other disciplines, both small and large, and the scholarly community as a whole. This entails, I suppose, a kind of double-burden. We need to be good at what we do. But we also need to find ways to explain what we do, to put it in dialogue with major paradigms across the arts and humanities, and occasionally the social sciences. I think many would concur that one of the primary reasons Film Studies gained a firm foothold throughout the 1970s and 1980s in universities was not just the intellectual ferment we associate with post-68 theory, and postwar filmmaking, but also the ways in which film scholars (themselves often trained in literature and sometimes sociology, art history or linguistics) were articulating their ideas to resonate and compel scholars from across the humanities to take notice, and to use these ideas in their own work.

I know of few people who would argue against the need for some degree of specificity in any discipline. Art historians study art. Music scholars study music. But we must also study with a clear understanding that our objects are always to a degree in flux, changing in this way and that. Vibrant disciplines adapt and grow around challenges to their object. For instance, definitions of art have long included anti-art. Thus, understanding the limits and particularities of specificity *and* the limits and possibilities of hybridity will contribute to an enriched context of debate. Alas, we have no choice. Our debates about specificity and purpose can only be conducted in a context of change, and so change our debates must.

Leave a Comment?

Footnotes

[1] Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds. *Inventing Film Studies* (Duke University Press, 2008).

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Andrew, Dudley. "The Core and the Flow of Film Studies." *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Summer 2009): 879-915.

About the Author

Haidee Wasson is an Associate Professor in Cinema Studies at Concordia University. Her research interests include modernity/modernism, film exhibition and reception, cultural institutions, emergent media, film and media theory, feminism, and film and media historiography. Her published work concentrates on cinema, but explores the broader relations among media forms and practices (cinema and newspapers, books, radio, film, television, internet).

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Response to Dudley Andrew: The Exemplary of Film Studies' Demons

Andrew Covert strikes a conciliatory tone in responding to Dudley Andrew's recent article "The Core and Flow of Film Studies," arguing that we need to find a balance between sober analysis and the subjectivities we inevitably bring to our scholarship.

[Intro] [Koutras] [Ogonoski] [Wasson] [Covert]

For all of its ambition to equanimity and collegiality, Dudley Andrew's latest article "The Core and Flow of Film studies" in Critical Inquiry has come under sustained fire from virtually all quarters of the discipline. A recent talk given by Dr. Andrew here at Concordia on "The Exemplary of Film Studies" did little to quell the disquiet. But middle ways are often the most despised of solutions.

Andrew does much in his article to set up the position of the discipline in its current incarnation, presenting a good highlight reel of film studies from the past century or so. Although he sets up numerous debates that have defined inquiry into film, it must be admitted that his is a history with a particular end in sight. Many have condemned this superficially innocent cataloguing of film thought as an effort to smuggle late-model "cinephilia" into the current practice of the discipline. Andrew's history certainly establishes and defends a place for such an approach, but it is indisputably a cinephilia of the Dudley Andrew variety. Overall his article suffers from an ailment not unusual in historical accounts, that under the guise of an equitable statement of the facts he brings together themes that nevertheless present a very personal view of the events discussed.

The response by Dr. Haidee Wasson in this issue of *Synoptique* does much to add a more universalist and positivistic spin onto Andrew's rather deterministic progress report. Her article outlines a very cogent and legitimate criticism of Andrew's effort to boil down the disparate camps of history, theory, textual analysis and media studies to a single Hegelian direction. However, at points her commentary slips dangerously close to a homily on the nature of the "complexity" of the issues at hand. Such a commentary points towards the already self-evident nature of the vexed relationship between film departments and the changing structure of university finance and administration, as well as the thorny issue of interdisciplinarity and the consternation research areas like Visual and Cultural studies continue to cause the field. Any professor or student working in the discipline for the last ten to fifteen years would have been exposed to these issues. And while I would agree that Andrew's sins are many, simplicity is not one of them.

Wasson's particular target for criticism is not Andrew's in-depth research and knowledge of the area, but what is, for my part, one of the more solid points of his argument: the defense of incorporating the rather nebulous concept of a certain "cinephilic" essence into the work of film studies. I must agree that a historical defense of this disposition is hardly the most sensible approach, but I believe that it is just such a failure that illustrates the importance of the concept as a necessary part of film studies. My criticisms are not exclusively of Andrew's or Wasson's method, or the veracity of their factual assertions. I wish to concern myself instead with the conclusions they draw, the implications that follow concerning authority and responsibility in the discipline, and the possibility of gathering the "nebulous" and the "concrete" together at the heart of our work.

As films scholars, we have traditionally been challenged by the question of authority. From where do we draw the conviction of our conclusions? Is it from the traditional disciplines that under-gird our methodological framework? (i.e. Literary theory, History, Social Science, Aesthetics, philosophies of time and space etc.) Certainly since its inception our discipline has had to borrow its authority from other sources, justifying itself with recourse to work done elsewhere. While the strength of its conclusions and the values of its contributions are undoubtedly the product of decades of very excellent and precise work, the discipline is still implicated in this diverse web of justification.

Many disciplines in the academy, with Science at its head, have a grand and highly formalized methodological tradition that invests them with authority, as much as it requires their responsibility. Where authority is vouchsafed by method, responsibility is clear. But in film, and other textually focused disciplines of humanistic study, that to which we are responsible is more questionable. Having employed a number of different methodologies to approach our object of study, to which are we ultimately responsible? In some cases 'dancing with the one who brought us' is not possible, and even less desirable. This question is however not an idle one, because it drives to the heart of film studies' role in the humanities and what it can offer other disciplines at a time when all of our influence in the academy is at an all-time low.

It seems that since Post-Theory's plea for (or should I say assertion of?) a singular and integrated method for films studies, much work has been done not exactly to this end, but more or less assuming that such an end already exists. Responsibility in the discipline has thus been split between those linking to a polyvalent matrix of disciplinary systems and those committed to a methodological ideal that has yet to fully emerge. While I would place myself unapologetically in the first camp, my position is more radical in that I believe that if we are to create for ourselves an approach which at least acknowledges an unabashed love of our object, it is to that object that we must see ourselves as responsible. Thus we must maintain a continual tension between our codification of film and its inherent singularity as the *justification* for, rather than a failing of, our conclusions. Such a position reads as problematic only because it embraces the fluidity at the center of humanistic research, and because it places film, rather than film studies, at the center of our structure.

This position is not far from Andrew's own, except for the effort he makes to conflate the goals of films studies with the goals of the institution and, as such, downplays and even conceals the essentially anarchic factors of film: subjective experience, material aesthetics, shock, dialectical image etc. No doubt these elements cause more problems than they solve. However, we cannot simply revert to naturalizing claims to objective knowledge in film, claims whose stock has fallen elsewhere in the humanities for the fact that they tend to merely dismiss these tensions. So, if we are to admit subjective experience to the discipline then we must not downplay the structural complication such an inclusion precipitates.

I wish to argue that our goals should have little to do with the integration of film into the pre-ordained structure of thought and administration. Our responsibility must remain to the object: to film—and all of the trouble, confusion and complexity such a commitment entails. Dudley Andrew ignores, as many scholars working so long for the acceptance of the discipline have learned to do, the tension that exists between the universality of our terms, codes and laws, and the singularity of the objects with which we deal. Haidee Wasson wishes to conserve the complexity of the "Big Picture" but in so doing picks and chooses very carefully the problems she's willing to discuss. If we acknowledge the singularity of our texts and a subjective dimension to their reception, absolute systematicity in their description becomes questionable indeed. Of course, the danger does not lie in systematicity itself, but in the way in which it takes on a natural, and unreflexive character. In such cases it leads to a point where the theory, history or analysis around film becomes more important than the film itself.

We share many of these same challenges as our humanities brethren, if they are willing to be honest, but the modernity of our concerns and, dare I add, their currency, go far beyond these other disciplines' possibilities. We must accept that the much sought-after authority and autochthonous solidity of the other more established humanistic endeavours is received, rather than inviolable wisdom. Far from having superior methodologies to which we must aspire, many have created an artificial distance and supposed independence from their disciplinary origins. As such, they miss the extent to which their structures of interpretation frame and digest their object of study, mistakenly asserting their claims as holistic truths.

What is quantifiable and measurable in film will always be there to be found. It is inevitable that eager and enterprising taxonomists will continue to collect and archive such complexities. And we are all the better for it to be sure. However, it is the assertion of these elements as the *whole* of film—and furthermore the effort to measure the limitless and regulate the chaotic—that turns such a view into a dubious proposal for an absolute and singular method.

Our current problems I see as flowing from our efforts to make film "fit" either into a traditional mode of humanistic analysis or into models of social and scientific understanding. The challenge remains to re-ignite the historical and theoretical questioning film makes of the staid and conventional models of understanding art and experience in the modern world. Not, as I heard in a recent SCMS question period, for film studies to find "its method," whatever that singular and sacred codex of laws may be.

Dudley Andrew's work and position makes a positive contribution to the field. And yet it seems to retain at its heart a utopian eschatology, where at some point, in the sweet by and by, all of the current conflicts (and those that lie dormant in our past) will be resolved, and the discipline will take its rightful place in the pantheon of scholarly knowledge. For my part, I see film studies *as* these debates—that the discipline is inherently dispersé, fragmented and fractious, because its object is all of these things and more.

The exemplary of films studies must include the fact that we exist at the fault-lines of most of the debates around art and scholarly inquiry in the modern world. Far from being a reaction to an inferiority complex, or a plea for anarchy, this argument recommends a preservation of tension at the heart of the discipline: a tension between the sober and the Dionysian, the known and the obscure, the professional and the amateur. Perhaps Susan Sontag remains correct in her demand, at the end of her famous "Against Interpretation," for an *erotics* of film—with all the endless subjective complexities such a concept inspires.

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Bibliography

Andrew, Dudley. "The Core and the Flow of Film Studies." *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Summer 2009): 879-915.

About the Author

Andrew Covert is a PhD student at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concorida. His background is in semiotics and critical theory and he is a contributing member of the advanced research team in the history and epistemology of moving image studies (ARTHEMIS).

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if a wrestler falls
he'll soar from the top rope again
without her love

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decomposing bride. Falling,
Silas will join her.

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clouds rolling past, fast
these fish won't fight in rivers
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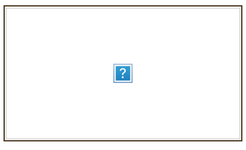

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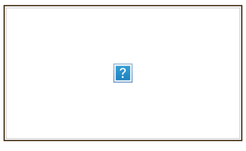
he reads camus
he looks so much older now
i hear he's half deaf



Elite Squad
byTamahin Mehanni

Plastic bags, can't breathe
Wage war on gangs and on self
You are your own law

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Filmography

CAMILLE (Gregory Mackenzie, 2007)
ELITE SQUAD (José Padilha, 2007)
THE WRESTLER (Darren Aronofsky, 2008)
RUMBLE FISH (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983)

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Lindsey Campbell is
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Tamahin Mehanni is going into her second year in the M.A. in Film Studies program, and has a background in Communication Studies. Her primary research interests are the representation of women in narrative cinema and the social impact of documentary films, especially in the realm of community activism.

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