

4 Responses to Dudley Andrew: Editor's Introduction

Dino Koutras

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.