

## Bits and Bytes

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# **Bits and Bytes: Film Studies through New Screen Technologies**

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The digital 21<sup>st</sup> century has transformed the 20<sup>th</sup> century incentive to study film. Towards the end of the previous millennium it had begun to seem as if film studies was finally able to emancipate itself as an academic discipline in its own right and proclaim its independence from such subject areas as modern languages, literature and cultural studies. But then film was ambushed by the Internet, which subsumed it into media and communication studies. Nevertheless, a decade into the new millennium, film has arguably defied purists and pessimists alike by surviving convergence with new screen technologies to emerge as a multi-media field of research, production and reception. Despite rumours of its untimely demise, film studies is evolving to the extent that it is possible to posit a new and expansive concept of its academic and social worth within a pan-European curriculum in communication, information and media studies.

What has changed most dramatically as a consequence of multiplying media platforms is the way that films are distributed. Even more dramatic than the social impact of television or the discreet delivery systems of VHS and DVD is the way that the Internet and its scrum of new screen technologies has changed the way that film is received. The effect of this on the academic discipline of film studies, the ranking of graduate skills, the professional deployment of those competences and the shaping of a relevant, coherent curriculum reflects the way that the digital age has impacted upon the audio-visual world in general, with increasing crossover and convergence. In a similar manner to the way in which educational institutions in the higher education sector seek to establish pan-European curricula, film producers and television broadcasters in Europe are now commonly bound together by economic imperatives supported by the European Commission:

Whatever State aid there is for film should have the cultural aim of ensuring that Europe's national and regional cultures and creative potential are expressed in the audiovisual media of film and television. At the same time, though, it should also aim to lead to a sustainable European film sector. (Kroes and Reding in Rooke2008, 223).

Swap 'educational' for 'cultural' in that statement of objectives and the challenges facing higher education in general, and film studies in particular, become clear.

Part of the problem with assessing the contemporary health of film studies is that the discipline has barely managed to historicise itself. Instead of a retrospective consensus about the evolution of film, scholars must continually take sides in a melee of debates about narrative, subjectivity, time, space, reality, gender and much else besides that are invariably expanding due to a radical increase in the availability of films on new formats. For example, as Anne Friedberg maintains:

Now, a variety of screens – long and wide and square, large and small, composed of grains, composed of pixels – compete for our attention without any arguments about hegemony [and] our assumptions about 'spectatorship' have lost their theoretical pinions as screens have changed, as have our relations to them. (Friedberg 2004, 924)

Such technological transformations must be integrated within academic study because student skills will only become professional competences when the curriculum reflects and deploys them accordingly. Any survey of the effect of new screen technologies on film studies in a pan-European context must therefore propose its own convergence of innovation with tradition in order to achieve this interaction of the cultural aims, education funding and sustainable industry of European nations and regions. A manifesto follows.

### **1. Film Studies 2.0.**

In relation to media, diversification suggests less concentration on core business and more on subsidiary gambits designed to maximise the appeal and multi-functionality of a product. As regards education, moreover, where the 'product' is the graduate, what is desirable is his/her multi-faceted employability gained by the acquisition of a variety of specific and transferable skills. Film studies traditionally employs textual and comparative analysis within synchronic and diachronic analyses that aid critical thinking allied to reflection and written exposition that conforms to the humanities model. Yet, much like the modern film companies that are part of diversified conglomerates with holdings in music, leisure, television and publishing, to name but the most synergetic of enterprises, graduates

and their instructors must now invest in transferable skills that include practical and theoretical knowledge of new technologies. For example, because films are now distributed through countless channels, via satellite and cable television, home video, video-on-demand, iPods, and other new technologies, all of these must be integrated into the classroom so that they may be utilised outside of it.

This idea follows that of 'Media Studies 2.0' put forward by David Gauntlett, who argued that the usual methodologies of understanding media studies had become irrelevant because they were designed to address a very simple model linking broadcasters and publishers with consumers (Gauntlett 2011). Gauntlett rejects the traditional approach to media studies that favours expert readings in key texts by well-known critics of popular culture and is aimed at teaching students how to develop an appropriate critical style that focused on major western producers of media content. Instead, 'Media Studies 2.0' favours a focus on new qualitative research techniques aimed at enabling a truly international audience, whose creativity is evident in everyday independent media projects such as tweeting, blogging and the like. Most pointedly, Gauntlett argues that the view of the Internet and new digital media as an 'optional extra' should be 'correspondingly replaced with recognition that they have fundamentally changed the ways in which we engage with *all* media' (Gauntlett 2011; emphasis in original). Consequently, audiences (including students) must be recognised as already being capable interpreters of media content and conventional research methods should therefore be supplemented by those that make use of students own creativity. As Gauntlett surmises:

Conventional concerns with power and politics are reworked in recognition of these points, so that the notion of super-powerful media industries invading the minds of a relatively passive population is compelled to recognise and address the context of more widespread creation and participation. (Gauntlett 2011)

The consequences for what might be called 'Film Studies 2.0' include recognition of the new malleability and mobility of film via new screen technologies and an understanding that audiences are not simply the naïve victims of sly marketing strategies, but are wise to

such ploys and perfectly capable of responding in kind when they feel themselves to be manipulated or second-guessed by studios, marketing campaigns and even filmmakers. Indeed, as Gauntlett states, ‘the fact that it is quite easy for media students to be reasonably slick media producers in the online environment, means that we are all more actively engaged with questions of creation, distribution and audience’ (Gauntlett 2011).

Film studies has to move away from the rapidly antiquated concept of the cinema and the same is true of filmmakers, as Richard Linklater, director of the DIY classic *Slacker* (1991) admitted:

Most people who come up to you and say they liked your movie watched it at home. You just have to accept that. Every filmmaker in the world has this idealistic notion of, ‘Oh, how nice, they were sitting in a huge theatre watching it on a big, beautiful screen!’ But they weren’t. (Stone 2010, 36)

Instead, they were probably watching bits of it on YouTube via their mobile phones before sharing the clip on Facebook so that their friends might ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ it. The challenge facing film studies is to actively embrace this activity as part of the curriculum because, like or dislike it, this is how students ‘see’ films. Although one of the most obvious advantages to teaching film in the new millennium is that the Internet now provides a seemingly infinite archive for films that may be accessed, downloaded, streamed, burnt, ripped and shared in order to facilitate a variety of modes of viewing, the relationship of students to these artefacts has changed to the extent that the discipline of film studies is being transformed in countless ways. Students tend to search for clips on YouTube or, at most, download copies of films to be watched in short segments on their laptops. Film-watching is no longer a time-consuming activity for a captive audience but an elliptical one for the solitary and easily distracted spectator. So although the model of film-watching in a cinema may be invoked in historical analyses, it must be recognised that the contemporary experience of watching films is very different, which prompts the need to integrate this behaviour into the curriculum and the requirement to keep pace with ever *newer* new screen technologies.

## **2. Extras**

Whereas the study of film has commonly relied upon retrospective analysis in order to identify and analyse such things as film movements, auteurs and emerging genres, that response is now much more immediate and more complicated. What is available nowadays is not only the film, but various versions of it including directors' cuts, workprints, special editions and the like. This creates its own problems. For example, which version of the five available of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1981) should one study? And, moreover, what of the deleted scenes, should they be viewed as well? To many this is not a problem but a pleasure, although it does provide real headaches when it comes to sorting out the versions in ones head of a film such as *5x2* (François Ozon, 2004), an exquisitely calibrated film in five chapters telling the tale of a marriage in reverse order; for what should one do with the deleted scene on the DVD that constitutes a whole other post-divorce chapter that once seen cannot be disengaged from the narrative? Answer: all these different versions, extras and add-ons should be considered because that is, after all, how the film is consumed by students.

Purists are in an untenable position because DVD, Blu-Ray and the Internet provide unprecedented access to the filmmaking process and a wealth of information and supplementary materials that extend the arena of film studies to a plethora of interdisciplinary approaches. They also force film theory to evolve in order to face up to the challenges. On the one hand, for example, the notion of a director's cut of a film with a director's commentary celebrates auteurism like never before, while the copious extra features investigating the work of the editor, cinematographer, costume designer and many other labourers and craftspeople besides blatantly disables it. In response, film studies must move away from the 'glass case' experience of viewing a single film in its initial version because this does not recognise that films have a dramatic and organic afterlife on multifarious platforms following their original cinema release. Key to such endeavour is recognition of the fact that the film experience of students – and so their film knowledge and its mode of expression – is vastly different to that of previous generations. We can only teach them if we learn from them too.

### **3. Bits**

Thanks to the Internet, DVD and other new screen technologies, consumers have become adept at receiving and making sense of audio-visual material in an apparently original manner; but such transformations are not without ironies and also reveal intriguing continuances. Films, for example, are now often consumed in separate DVD chapters or as ‘bits’ in clips and fragments on YouTube and other media platforms to the extent that students of film now commonly admit to never having seen complete films. Instead, they are content and enthused by having seen ‘bits’ of them: *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) is reduced to the Odessa Steps sequence, for example, and *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929) is but a momentary slitting of an eye. Bits are now deemed sufficient. However, this is not so much the result of any attention deficit disorder, but the consequence of multi-platform viewing practices.

Nevertheless, this new way of seeing films is not all that novel, for fragmentation is crucial to the notion of collage that was propagated by Jean-Luc Godard, whose key films of the 1960s can now be ably consumed in ‘bits’. The British Film Institute’s DVD of Godard’s *Bande à part* (Band of Outsiders, 1964), for example, offers a multitude of tiny chapters that allow the viewer to dip in and shuffle the ‘bits’ of the Madison dance number, the minute’s silence attempted by the characters (for which Godard cuts the actual soundtrack) and the infamous record-breaking run through the Louvre, all without the bother of framing them within the barely functioning narrative. Knowing Godard’s distrust and distaste of narrative, he would approve.

Similarly, the DVD of *Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys, Michael Haneke, 2000) aptly offers an identical viewing pleasure predicated upon an acceptance of a new form of fragmented, purposefully *incomplete* viewing of these tales that makes for a far more meaningful experience for the DVD audience than that of the one in the cinema that cannot pick and choose. The Region 2 DVD is divided into 46 chapters, each of which presents an incomplete tale. It thus suits the sense and sensibility of the film because it serves the discourse of disconnection put forward by Haneke in what is arguably the last great

European film of the twentieth century. The first great European film of the twenty-first century was Haneke's *Caché* (Hidden, 2005), which begins with a lengthy view of a Parisian suburban street that is suddenly rewound, revealing its origin as a VHS tape.<sup>1</sup> The pre-DVD home viewing experience is thus replicated to disquieting effect; but what is most prescient about these films is that Haneke fully expects his films to be consumed at in a 'home-viewing' manner that will make the sudden 'rewinding' both disconcerting and meaningful to a sofa-bound audience. In this, if not in the now antiquated use of VHS, Haneke disproves Linklater's aforementioned description of every filmmaker having the idealistic notion of a lavish cinema experience, for it is in the domestic consumption of *Hidden* that the consumer is consumed.

Subject to the pause, rewind and fast forward buttons, film has become a malleable victim of home-viewing and 'on-the-go' technologies such as the iPhone. More than this, the onscreen chapter selection function of all DVDs (except those of David Lynch, which tend to feature just one chapter that consists of the whole film) allows viewers to watch a film as they might listen to a music CD. That is, by skipping tracks/scenes and hearing/watching only their favourite ones. Why bother with the first tedious thirty minutes or the silly last half hour of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), when it is the middle section, when Scottie (James Stewart) transforms Judy (Kim Novak) into Madeleine (Novak again), that is the truly unique and sublime 'bit' of cinema? DVD lets the viewer do this in a manner that dismisses narrative more triumphantly than Godard ever managed.

Perhaps, after all, it is in the 'bits' that greatness resides. André Bazin posited as much when he wrote of 'holy moments' in which he saw cinema's harnessing and recreation of life as representative of God's very act of creation. For André Bazin, the myth of total cinema was found in:

A total and complete representation of reality [,] the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief [,] an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time. (1967, 20).

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<sup>1</sup>Haneke had used this trick of 'rewinding' his film before, of course, in *Funny Games*(1997).



This goal was an unattainable ideal, but one which Bazin believed drove the development of the actual technology of film. Bazin made little space for the voyeuristic subjectivity that is at the centre of so many films (especially *Vertigo*) and so much film theory. Instead, he saw images as self-subsisting, independent, liberated from any particular perspective or narrative and free too from any specifically implicated viewer. The chapter selection feature on a DVD and the uploading of brief clips on YouTube allows for this isolation of moments or ‘bits’ in a manner that makes for their aesthetic appreciation in a manner that suggests current students may be closer than any generation yet to experiencing Bazin’s ideal.

#### **4. User-generated material**

Due to cheap, lightweight digital cameras and screen-based technologies allied with computer programmes that allow filmmakers to edit, apply special effects and quite sophisticated CGI, a new surge of user-generated material has highlighted the potential of incorporating user-generated film and audio-visual material to the study of film in a way that wholly democratises film-making and revolutionises the way that previous film movements are perceived. Students no longer observe the evolution of film from a critical distance because they exist at its epicentre. They have the same tools at hand as the filmmakers, not only for production but increasingly for distribution too. Better said, they *are* filmmakers – or at least they have the potential to be filmmakers and it is the function of the curriculum to enable them in this regard, even if this is simply a matter of drawing their attention to the fact that the technology to make films as rudimentary as *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003) and as sophisticated as *Monsters* (Gareth Edwards, 2010) is a download away. In *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Robert Stam states that: ‘one can hypothesize a future society where all citizens will have access to the code of filmmaking’ (2000, 111-12). Well, the future is now.

Christian Metz argued that film language was different to spoken language because, whereas to speak a language is to use it, to ‘speak’ a film is to invent it (Metz 2004). Thus, the capacity for invention of film students must be inspired, channelled and assessed. The tools of making original short films or mash-ups of existing films are accessed via the same mouse and keyboard that students use to write their essays and it would be wilfully ignorant of educators to ignore this ability. Just as Jean-Luc Godard used film as the medium of his

message by producing essays on film *on film* in works such as *Made in U.S.A.* (1966) and *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (Two or Three Things I Know about Her, 1967), so the capacity for producing coursework for assessment on digital video should be prioritised. Simple exercises such as illustrating the Kuleshov effect, for example, are far more effective when produced on digital video and accompanied by a reflective essay (or better yet, a commentary) than a dry, written account of the experimentation of others. Any student can master the rudiments of digital editing in order to create his or her own Kuleshov effect by which two pieces of film are juxtaposed to inspire a connective narrative in the mind of the audience.

Tutorials abound on YouTube, including 'Hitchcock Loves Bikinis' in which Alfred Hitchcock explains the Kuleshov effect by means of juxtaposing a benign image of himself with, firstly, that of a baby in order to prompt the sense of his affectionate demeanour and then juxtaposing the same image of himself with that of a girl in a bikini in order to prompt the suggestion that he is a 'a dirty old man'.<sup>2</sup> No amount of text books can equal the impact of this minute-long tutorial. However, what is even more compelling is the way that students can respond to Hitchcock's challenge by editing shots of themselves filmed on digital cameras, laptop webcams or mobile phones into montages that juxtapose their own impassive faces with all manner of shocking, subtle, erotic and humorous images. This can even be done immediately in the classroom: filmed, uploaded, edited and screened within thirty minutes or less.

The potential for this immediate practical deployment of theory is limitless. Editing according to the rules of intellectual montage can be realised in the classroom quite easily, as can editing by association in imitation of memory à la Chris Marker or Alain Resnais. So too can students explore the meaning of the long take, the complex inter-relationship of the Deleuzian time-image and the movement-image, the psychological effect of canted angles, deep focus, and all manner of camerawork and editing techniques that are no longer abstract ideas and theories but immediately accessible tools that can be simply and effectively integrated into the classroom. Furthermore, this practical work can be easily submitted for assessment as they can be uploaded to the Internet on a website dedicated to the course or any

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCAE0t6KwJY>

public-access website. For that matter, no course is now complete without a blog, twitter account or website on which student/user-generated material can be compiled, discussed and disseminated. Just as new digital products and delivery systems are accelerating convergence between industries, so the education system and curricula that aims to keep pace with this evolution must embrace the production and distribution of user/student-generated content rather than just observe these transformations. It is only by these means that relevance of film studies, the coherence of a curriculum and the employability of students will remain viable.

These are just a few of the countless ways in which new screen technologies have transformed the way that students understand film. Even if the educational system does not bend gladly to such innovation, as an absolute minimum there should be space for illustrations in essays and assessed work, whether in the cut and paste of screen grabs or the appendix on DVD, memory stick, website, blog or dedicated chatroom. Educators should encourage students to engage with the technology of filmmaking, even at the risk of indulging the solipsism that plagues much user-generated material; for this only fulfils François Truffaut's prophecy that:

The films of the future will be more personal than autobiography, like a confession or diary. Young filmmakers will speak in the first person in order to tell what happened to them: their first love, a political awakening, a trip, an illness, and so on. Tomorrow's film will be an act of love.  
(Truffaut in Brody 2010)

The problem, as Truffaut admitted, was that this advocacy of user-generated material often resulted in self-love, in films that 'eventually became more than personal: they became narcissistic. The makers of such films spoke very personally, but sometimes they could have benefitted from having had a friend read their scripts first' (Truffaut in Brody 2010). More than friends, this is a role for educators.

For those seeking friendly educators, meanwhile, there are also several fine associations that students and educators should be encouraged to join. One of the finest that will serve as an example is the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS). Primarily a North American organisation, it organises an annual conference, publishes the *Cinema Journal* and, most importantly, provides what it describes as:

The opportunity for members to network with one another through the Society's various caucuses, groups, and networks. SCMS enables the creation of web-based communities supported by group pages and e-mail listserves, and bulletin boards for members to post and read current announcements on the SCMS website. Members are also invited to interact with one another through the social networking capacities of the SCMS website (which can be enabled through individual and group profile settings). Membership in SCMS, therefore, offers on-line and in-person access to over 2,500 scholars and professionals in the fields of Film, Television, and Media.<sup>3</sup>

European scholars do feature in the online membership directory, but there is a need for a strengthening of the European equivalent, the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies<sup>4</sup> and a greater push towards membership that allows students and educators alike to be firm film friends.

## 5. Shorts

Something of a logical consequence to the integration of user-generated material is that students will progress to the production of short films, whether they be narrative-based, experimental, or mash-ups of found material. These will not only demonstrate understanding (or the lack of it) of film theory and practice but will serve as showreel and prompt for further research. The advantages to all this hands-on filmmaking are countless, for the production of short films demonstrates knowledge and understanding more immediately than any 'hands-off' critical essay. Thus, the analysis and assessment of short films should be incorporated into every film studies curriculum. Little expense is required as most students possess filmmaking equipment in their laptop cameras, webcams, digital phones or cameras. Uploading is simple and several fine cheap or even free editing programmes are available to download.

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<sup>3</sup><http://cmstudies.site-ym.com/>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.necs-initiative.org/>

The practice of short filmmaking enables group dynamics and provides its own critique of auteurism. There is no excuse for not encouraging students to put their ideas (or those of their greatest influences) into practice. One particularly enthusiastic group of students of my acquaintance were so taken with the stylings of the French New Wave that they named themselves the Swansea Splash and produced some truly excellent work.

## 6. Surf

Staying with the Internet, film studies must avoid the disdain with which Internet sources are met by several academic sectors. Hundreds of thousands of clips, interviews, trailers, and all manner of film-based ephemera are preserved in the pixelated amber of the Internet. For example, googling Godard brings up the obligatory Wikipedia entry<sup>5</sup> and that of the Internet Movie Database<sup>6</sup> as well as a transcript of the interview with Godard conducted by Colin McCabe at the British Film Institute in June 2007.<sup>7</sup> The links beneath this include a selection of clips from YouTube including the trailer for *Vivre sa vie* (My Life to Live, 1962).<sup>8</sup> Click on this and YouTube will suggest in a sidebar that one proceeds to a viewing of Nana's (Anna Karina) dance around a pool table<sup>9</sup> and from this to trailers, clips, interviews, mash-ups, tributes, homages and much else besides, the suggestions gradually incorporating clips and the like from all of Godard's films. The trailers are a particular delight, revealing much about Godard's working practice and thoughts on cinema. That for *Une femme est une femme* (A Woman is a Woman, 1961), for example, offers a soundtrack of Godard trying to explain the nature of the feature in a dry, raspy academic tone while being continually interrupted by Karina protesting in a variety of tones ranging from the pleading to the seductive, from the angry to the petulant, that 'oui, mais une femme est une femme'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Luc\\_Godard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Luc_Godard)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000419/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/godard/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfZQpLSuxKE>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNU4wx23B\\_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNU4wx23B_0)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOyEj2SKVCQ>

The trailer for *Band a parte*, meanwhile, is accompanied by a honky-tonk score that reveals more than any academic treatise that the film was Godard's own rumination on the silent comedy.<sup>11</sup> And, of course, there are the aforementioned holy moments of this film including the minute's silence,<sup>12</sup> the race through the Louvre,<sup>13</sup> and the Madison,<sup>14</sup> which, YouTube will helpfully indicate, influenced the dance sequence in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1995).<sup>15</sup> What else? There is also the soap advertisement made by Karina that so entranced Godard and a record of his bizarre 1984 meeting with Woody Allen. YouTube also suggests link to François Truffaut and the entirety of his on-line *oeuvre* as well as that of Steven Spielberg, Eric Rohmer, Ingmar Bergman and Shane Meadows amongst a never-ending stream of others, many of whom will lead one back to Godard. The white noise of the Internet can be a beautiful thing and dismissal of this resource leads not to an academic stance but an ignorant posture.

## 7. Referencing

There is a problem with much of the above. In fact, a pending and already belated consequence of such practice is that standard methods of referencing in academic essays are woefully outdated. Trying to cram the details of URLs into footnotes is a hazardous process at best, while any attempt to map a route to DVD extras by means of the bibliographic formats available to written works is not just difficult but inappropriate. New methods of referencing audio-visual works and constructing bibliographies are needed so that the potential of film studies through new screen technologies can escape the binds of traditional literary and cultural analysis.

However, the solution is simple because the electronic submission of written work allows for hyperlinks. These essays with hyperlinks are source documents called hypertexts. Examiners and educators will no longer read essays but navigate or browse them. Hyperlinks

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<sup>11</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzVNh8glTok>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9XAi7xYOwQ&feature=related>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZp-dVHiIuk>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3HME4oDPNk&feature=related>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWr\\_eSfTtIw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWr_eSfTtIw)

are references to documents or parts of documents, files, clips and much else besides that the reader can follow directly just by clicking on the underlined text. I would add one here for illustrative purposes but the nature of this published work disallows it. Q.E.D.

## 8. Scope

The question of what exactly constitutes an education in film studies is largely one of context and that of European students is markedly different from that of American students for example or, no doubt, their African or Asian contemporaries. At various times, film scholars have classified American and European cinema according to Paul Schrader's view that:

American movies are based on the assumption that life presents you with problems, while European films are based on the conviction that life confronts you with dilemmas – and while problems are something you solve, dilemmas cannot be solved, they're merely probed. (Schrader in Elsaesser 2003, 44).

However, as Thomas Elsaesser observes:

[Schrader's] assessment is not that far removed from the view of Gilles Deleuze, who in his Bergson-inspired study of the cinema proposes a more dynamic, and self-differentiating version of Jean-Luc Godard's old distinction between 'action' and 'reflection' [,] contrasting instead the movement-image of classical cinema with the time-image of modern cinema. (Elsaesser, 2003: 44)

Thus, the dialectic model of Schrader may be mapped beneath that of Deleuze with the result that distinctions collapse, especially because this dual-layered elitist binary equation fails to take into account the European mainstream and the American art house.

In sum, distinctions and divisions are outmoded. So too are the national boundaries of cinemas such as the supposedly French or the arguably Spanish. In British universities, the study of film emerged from language-specific departments (with a helpful tug from gender theorists) so the demarcation of nationalities was embedded in the curriculum. The result is that an edited book such as Elisabeth Ezra's *European Cinema* (2003) does not contain any

discussion of European cinema. Instead it contains fine chapters on Spanish, German, Russian cinema, etc., but nothing on the putatively European. The recent trend towards transnational cinema has corrected this outdated form of classification to some extent but there is still much resistance to the idea of a curriculum in European film studies that is not compartmentalized by country.

The removal of borders can adversely affect a sense of identity and prompt a response of more intense nationalism, but people are also able to analyse their sense of dislocation more efficiently now because technology brings them knowledge of a shrinking world. The scope of a film studies curriculum must therefore shift from the traditional vertical layering of films within a specific country, whereby filmmaking is nationally circumscribed from the lowest level of amateur short films, up through low-budget exploitation films, generic fodder, mainstream star-driven features, blockbusters, prestige films and auteurist festival favourites and awards-winners. This is because new screen technologies allow for a horizontal sense of cinema that recognises a global sedimentation of these layers in many countries and seeks to explore their affinities instead of maintaining an inherently nationalistic bias towards the vertical hierarchy outlined above. The comparison of, say, short films from Spain and Japan, or auteurist films from Germany and Malaysia, or exploitation films of Italy, Mexico and Korea, is enabled by these technologies, whether they be online, streaming, downloadable or available for purchase on DVD, Blu-Ray or eBay. In addition, there are problems that need to be acknowledged including plagiarism, how to make sure that comparisons of disparate cultural traditions are viable.

Thus, there is no excuse for a solipsistic approach to contemporary cinema as the rules of inclusion and exclusion will be doubtlessly artificial, more driven by the educational and institutional context than any realistic attempt to map the new world of film studies. In rejecting the vertical hierarchy of national cinema in favour of the horizontal affinities of films from different areas of the world one gains a critical understanding of context and an all-encompassing sense of the evolution of cinema as well.

## **9. Employability**



Perhaps the single greatest challenge facing film studies is that of ensuring the employability of graduates. The move towards the privatisation of the higher education sector through student fees and the removal or reduction of grants and scholarships means that students have no choice but to embody the role of consumer that has been designed for them. Yet there exists a paradox at the heart of this new order of things, for if educators are cast in the role of producers, then the consumers are in fact the employers and the product or commodity is not so much the curriculum, which is the means of production, but the employable graduate.

Karl Marx has it that 'a commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (1990, 163). In a turbulent employment market, graduates are commodities and an employable graduate therefore corresponds to Marx's theory that 'by virtue of it being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself' (1990, 255).

Yet, employability remains an elusive factor. When asked by a prospective employer to detail the qualities being brought to a post, the candidate might well impress by listing foreign languages or computing skills but would not get far by declaring, 'Well, I'm employable'. So what can make these graduate 'products' into desirable goods? At the very least, critical thinking, an awareness of group dynamics, leadership ability and confident, convincing self-expression in written, oral and audio-visual form should all be part of the student experience. Successful film studies graduates should have portfolios of written work and showreels of film productions that they have written and/or directed or contributed to as part of the crew. They should have conducted seminars and given presentations. In sum, they should have contributed as much or more to the curriculum as the educators.

Placements of work experience (or at least observation) in professional filmmaking organisations are also a highly desirable element of an undergraduate degree. More than anything, graduates should possess a realistic understanding of the industrial sector, which includes knowledge of film festivals, marketing and public relations as well as an awareness of funding bodies and the correct approach to applications. They need to appreciate the advantages of new screen technologies but they also need to be wary of getting lost in its white noise. It has been said that there is no such thing as luck, there is only the moment that

experience met an opportunity. For scholars and educators alike, film studies through new screen technologies provides an opportunity to gain real experience of the professional context in which graduates will all too soon find themselves.

### **10. Convergence**

Film studies does not exist on its own but in an ever-changing multi-media landscape and the academic discipline needs to evolve in a similar fashion in order to survive. Relevance is a fragile element of any undergraduate degree but all the more so when the pace of technological change moves much faster than any administration system. A scientist may go to work fairly confident in the knowledge that no new elements have been discovered since his or her last lecture on the subject to the previous year's finalists, but the educator in film and media studies needs to run just to stand still. Every day a multitude of old and new films emerge through new screen technologies that offer novel means of access and demand a constantly revisionist stance. Supply outpaces the rational mind. How can competences be agreed upon when new ones are demanded by ever newer technologies? How does one design a curriculum knowing that in a very short space of time there will likely be new means of production, distribution and reception with the potential to make the syllabus already look outdated? Reading a book, once learned, is an eternal skill, but each new screen technology requires new abilities. How does one convince noble institutions to support a commitment to perpetual change rather than tradition? How does one traverse the legal maze in order to realise rather than frustrate European convergence in audio-visual communication that contributes to the Bologna process?

The challenge of realising a viable undergraduate syllabus that embodies Gauntlett's model of 'Media Studies 2.0' and incorporates the variables relevant to film studies, while maximising the potential of a pan-European undergraduate degree scheme that exploits the ambitions of the Bologna process, is one in which different convergences converge. That is to say, just as the pan-European curriculum is based upon the convergence of credit-weighting, assessment practice, term-time, classroom activities, administrative systems and academic policies, so film studies within this curriculum is based on the convergent forms of audio-

visual communication and the synergetic, accessible modes of production and distribution of film materials.

Bringing new screen technologies into the lecture theatre – or deploying them to bring the lecture theatre to the online community – will shape the curriculum and provide for the recognition of learning outcomes as the basis for a new educational system that encourages sharing between students, scholars and educators in all participant countries. Pan-European means nothing and everything when it is rendered electronically, that is, in terms of a wireless, on-line learning environment that invalidates borders. However, in order to realise this brave new world of media and film studies, we need to channel competences, languages and knowledge into a strategy that responds to the international, inter-cultural and interdisciplinary needs of students, one that does not forsake academic realities for the virtual reality of an unrealised blueprint. But we must be quick. The bad news is that technology is evolving so fast that the distance between our best laid plans and this brave new world of film studies is widening. The good news is that our students already live there.

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