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## The "Three Ages" of Cinema Studies and the Age to Come

### The Three Ages, a Disciplinary Comedy

DUDLEY ANDREW

THE OCTOBER 1999 JOB LIST PREPARED BY THE SOCIETY FOR CINEMA STUDIES HAS JUST APPEARED: FIFTY-ONE TEACHING

positions involving film. What does it mean that only ten of these are situated in designated film programs, while thirty-six are hosted by departments of literature, primarily English? It means, among other things, that departments of literature are redefining and deregulating themselves. They may have cautiously welcomed film for a half century but hardly at this scale: fifty-one open positions suggest hundreds of positions permanently in place and thousands of students studying this subject each year. The confidence the humanities shows in this field is shared by most of my students, who are younger than cinema studies and must sense it to be, if not august, at least well established, rather as English seemed when I majored in it and assumed it to be as old as England. However, any census of course catalogs reveals cinema's uncertain location and function from campus to campus, posing questions of general expectations and standards—indeed, putting in question the definition of cinema studies. Evidently universities want to offer film. Bravo! But in what manner and for what purpose? What "qualifies" the hundreds of applicants applying for these fifty-one positions? Where did they gain their expertise or self-confidence?

Academic cinema studies took off—around 1968—with enormous enthusiasm. It was a garden in the Prague Spring of academia. Today one senses it in disarray. Some scholars panic that the predicted end of celluloid may mean the end of the art they staked so much on. Hoping to be well placed in the next century, some have abandoned this one and raced to protocinema or to postcinema, investigating a time when the movies could have been anything or speculating on the digital age when once again the movies might be anything. Is the century between these—the century of cinema—but an "entr'acte," as one recent book has it, a threshold (Zielinski)? Perhaps, but then let film scholars monitor this hundred-year passage, looking backward and forward with their specially

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trained eyes. This would be my apology for cinema studies in the humanities: to prepare students for a new era of art and entertainment by grounding them through cinema in traditions and theories of storytelling and image making that reach to the roots of modernity. For modernity enters over the threshold of cinema, as even those who distrust the medium agree. We who are devoted to it debate how best to guide students through this passageway to their future.

A crude time line suggests that just when cinema studies began to congeal into a discipline, the dikes of disciplines broke everywhere in the humanities, and subjects ran together as never before. Many applaud the current freedom to teach film in freshly conceived and multiple ways. Curiously, this situation recalls the time before 1968, when films were picked up by energetic professors in various disciplines to lighten and enlighten the heavy humanities. Let me mark the periods of cinema studies with help from the intrepid Buster Keaton, whose *The Three Ages* (1923) compares a natural (predisciplinary) Stone Age, a heroic era with imperial aspirations, and the tedious market economy of the present. Keaton's comedy suits me because each age dramatizes an insurgent force (Buster's irrepressible love for a girl) against a formidably entrenched rival. Cinema studies began when lovers of film (*amateurs*) strove to legitimate their passion. Now they are involved in an institutionalized marriage with the academy that perforce requires compromise.

### *The Stone Age*

At the outset neither cinema nor its study claimed much in the way of identity. The cinematograph was deployed in various situations (cafés, fairs, town halls, parishes, opera houses). It incubated in a fertile cultural bog, amid established arts, upstart entertainments, and frantic cultural overseers intent on regulating its phenomenal growth and unpredictable social consequences. Only later did it become "the cinema," marked as an institution with its own venues

and legal status. Later still, that institution presumed to have ascended to the rank of the other arts. So it has been with cinema studies, which germinated spontaneously in cafés, in parish halls, in the columns of newspapers, and at literary societies, before attaching itself to the academy and taking a name.

For half a century, filmmakers and aficionados engaged in zealous discussions in cineclubs and contributed to chic journals or produced mimeographed notes themselves. Emerging in this "natural state" were magnificent essays on film destined primarily for a cultured reading public by Panofsky, Benjamin, Kracauer, Malraux, and Balázs. Treatises on filmmaking (by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, most notably) found their way into the hands of aspiring artists. But while courses dealing with film could be found at the University of Southern California, the University of Iowa, and a few other places, these were nearly curiosities. German sociology departments seem to have treated cinema very seriously, but American higher education shunned it as illegitimate. This was to its advantage according to Jean-Paul Sartre (54–55), who praised cinema over theater in 1931 precisely because film's natural rapport with students meant that the medium need not be taught. Films were serious enough to engender discussion—indeed, to engender those specialized Parisian art theaters that have fostered discussion since the 1920s.

After World War II such theaters sprouted in urban centers everywhere, projecting films that had gained reputations at international festivals, also a postwar phenomenon. Cinephilia had caught on. Catalogs, filmographies, and indexes appeared. In 1950 André Bazin published the first book devoted to an "auteur," a short study of Orson Welles, introduced by Jean Cocteau (Tachella). Bazin conceived the project during an all-night interview with the despondent Welles in the Excelsior's bar after the failure of *Macbeth* at Venice in 1948, and he put the finishing touches on it the next summer at the Biarritz "Festival of Maligned Films," presided over by

Cocteau and attended by Welles and the wide-eyed Truffaut, Godard, and Rivette. During the 1950s auteur studies became the order of the day as cinephilia infected film journals, *Cahiers du cinéma* foremost among them. Auteurism was the popular arm of an unofficial phenomenology of film that began infiltrating the academy, upsetting those amateurs for whom the cinema should remain an anarchic force in culture, undisciplined by academic research. That debate crystallized around “*filmologie*,” organized on the fringes of the Sorbonne by professors of physiology, psychology, and sociology from around Europe. But *filmologie* hardly took hold. It was too academic, not sufficiently cinephiliac, and it had no curricular outlet, whereas in American universities pedagogical innovation rather than research led the way. Films aerated a random number of literature, theater, philosophy, and art history classrooms, brought in by the passion of individual professors. English departments eventually encouraged the study of adaptations of novels and plays, and they permitted their Americanists to include popular movies in treating genres and myths. But it was the Romance language departments that made the most of this climate, channeling the robust art-house boom into the classroom. Timidly at first and then unapologetically, they introduced Cocteau, Fellini, and Buñuel into their syllabi and articles.

Amateurism can be a matter of pride, particularly when set against dehumanized disciplinary. This drama, always at issue especially in France,<sup>1</sup> swung in favor of the discipline in the late 1960s, hinging on Jean Mitry’s two immense publishing feats: his *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, completed in 1965, and his *Histoire du cinéma*, the first of whose five volumes came out in 1967.<sup>2</sup> Mitry grew up in the heyday of amateurism, founding cineclubs in the 1920s, cofounding the Cinémathèque Française in 1936, and even making experimental films. But in the 1960s he aspired to teach at the Sorbonne and to systematize the haphazard insights of a half century of amateur devotion. A

hint of this mission could be felt in the United States when in 1959 a small cadre of professors sporting special qualifications dubbed themselves “cinematologists.” Rebaptized the Society for Cinema Studies in 1968, this group claimed to set academic standards for a new field of study. To insure discipline and thus respectability in the academy, they scrupulously monitored admission to their ranks. I remember being turned down.

### *The Imperial Age*

In fact, it was not Mitry’s books but their rejection that ushered in a genuinely disciplined spirit. First, in an extended two-part review, Christian Metz dethroned Mitry by criticizing his aesthetics as amateurish after all.<sup>3</sup> Then Jean-Louis Comolli, a disciple of the Marxist Louis Althusser, dismissed Mitry’s linear historiography. Martin Jay would later characterize this new severity of spirit as “iconophobic” because it treated cinema suspiciously; semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis did not appreciate films but rather conspired to “read” them as symptoms of hidden structures (456–91). The middle years of the 1970s marked the wholesale importation to America of these mutually reinforcing systems of thought. In the space of eighteen months there appeared Metz’s *Language and Cinema*, Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure in the Narrative Cinema,” Jean-Louis Baudry’s “The Apparatus,” and Stephen Heath’s “Narrative Space.” Standing atop earlier works by Noël Burch and Raymond Bellour, these studies systematically reduced the entire complex of cinema to its basic processes. By the mid-1970s the most ambitious students were intent on digging beneath the commonplaces of textbooks and “theorizing” the conscious machinations of producers of images and the unconscious ideology of spectators. For instance, while innumerable appreciations of directors were available in this hot publishing market, the study that seemed consequential was Peter Wollen’s chapter on Ford and

Hawks in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (74–115), for it went beyond mere appreciation to describe what he would call in the revised edition "the structure" of the authorial function (167–68). The field had adopted an identity, and that identity carried a peculiarly Continental cast, starting with the adoption of structural linguistics. One can track its genesis to Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, keeping a special place for Roland Barthes, who carried textual semiotics across a bridge to a psychoanalysis of reading and who repeatedly addressed the cinema in doing so. Names such as these show why comparative literature faculties naturally played a key role in bringing cinema into the most sophisticated conversations in the humanities. The background of these professors in foreign language and in critical theory primed them to interpret complex art films and to translate or exploit the exciting developments in and after structuralism. For a time, journals like *Diacritics*, *New Literary History*, and *Semiotica* seemed more germane to disciplined film studies than *Film Quarterly* or *Cinema Journal*.

Of course, such a massive importation caused friction, particularly in English departments, where popular culture was often celebrated rather than criticized, and in communications departments that catered to undergraduates who hoped to enter rather than crush the culture industry. Semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis found fervent followers among graduate students, but many professors were intimidated by this European tone, finding its ethos elitist. In the midst of this debate, cinema studies attained its "majority" and could at last be seen unmistakably on the academic skyline, an independent structure with its own distinctive architecture. Although fewer than a dozen campuses could boast film degree programs at all levels, one expected to find the sketch of a film major or concentration or sequence in a great many college catalogs. A 1977 textbook presenting the field to newcomers bears a symptomatic title, *How to Read a Film*.

### *The Present Age*

The current moment—for Keaton and for cinema studies—is loudly American. Insolent yet democratic, an upstart cultural studies has deflated the primitive force of films and the imperial force of Continental critique. Before 1968 students must have felt themselves acolytes of auteurs. In the second age an enlightened Continental hegemony may have overturned such idolatry, but obeisance was still demanded, this time to master disciplines and thinkers. Today, by contrast, American film scholars roam freely in a domain whose very borders they seem able to redraw by election, sometimes by consensus. Power in the classroom is wielded not by the subject matter nor by the discipline but by the professor's agenda. And heading that agenda is the production of new essays and books mandated by the American tenure triage. The logic of the American university may here be at odds with that of the discipline, since by definition disciplines outlast individual projects and careers, whereas tenure and promotion are geared to the distinctiveness of careers. If the cinema studies edifice of semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis was abandoned while its mortar was still wet, one can certainly blame the weight of ideas it was asked to bear or the flimsy trusses upholding them, but look first to a university system that encourages scholars to expand into new subdivisions rather than repair, fortify, or remodel the field's city center.

Feminist film theory, the first and most telling Anglo-American cinema studies initiative, aimed at the outset to completely restructure but not abandon the edifice's Continental design. After all, feminist work drew on an enormous legacy deriving directly from European psychoanalysis. But as this work diversified and as attention turned to cinema's position vis-à-vis other social groups, the discipline's regimen of required reading stood in the way. This sentiment emerged at the plenary session of the 1994 Society for Cinema Studies convention, where the discipline's long-standing emphasis on "theory"



was said to inhibit the wide-ranging development of new scholars, new interest areas, and new methods. This cry for liberation spoke to a constituency aiming to diversify a roster that was already at least four times larger than it had been in 1976—nearly a thousand film scholars, all needing to publish. To thus atomize the core of this young field was to participate in a spirit of radical pluralism overtaking the American academy. In cinema studies this development accompanied a mutation of “the object of theory”<sup>4</sup> from art films to selected Hollywood auteurs and then to American genres. By the 1980s, when American studies methods vied with critical theory, television had crept into syllabi and convention programs. The relative anonymity and ephemerality of TV, its “flow,” challenged the purity of the feature film and further sanctioned the priority of questions posed by scholars over those posed by films or by the discipline. Some today celebrate the dissolution of films in “bitstream” flowing and intersecting across diverse media.

How does one characterize an era of pluralism, except to point to sites of plural inquiry where films and theories about them become objects among other objects? History is such a site (harboring topics like early cinema or colonial-postcolonial images); so too is reception study (examination of phenomena like cult films and fandom). The rubric “intermedia” labels a third site of investigation. Here the motion picture, formerly the field’s founding object, is tracked as it combines or vies with other arts and technologies (digital ones, more and more often). Together these sites help constitute the cultural studies approach, where, moreover, political urgency frequently sets the research program. Left to themselves, scholars choose whatever audiovisual objects best address what really concerns them in the present, such as the definition, struggles, and future of a social group that generates or consumes those objects. Would Mitry or Metz recognize cinema studies in the United States today? Does cinema studies recognize itself as it enters a new century?

### The Maturity of *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*

Having called on Buster Keaton to organize a first pass through the history of cinema studies, I inevitably resurrect a favorite example, Alain Tanner’s *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*, for my second pass.<sup>5</sup> Never so pertinent as on this occasion, given its title and its date (1975–76), *Jonah* describes ages of the individual rather than of civilization. Thus a certain childish playfulness in early cinema studies gave way to the earnest adolescent hopes of the 1970s, later tempered by the realism and compromise of an adult attitude. John Berger conceived the film on the heels of *Ways of Seeing*, a hallmark text, immeasurably earnest and confident, in the Marxist-psychoanalytic vein. But *Jonah* envisions the passing of hopes for political and cinematographic enlightenment, even if, stalwart to the end, it makes a covenant with the future. Jonah’s paternity lies with revolutionaries of 1968 who form a fragile commune on an organic farm outside Geneva, capital of global capitalism. Converting a greenhouse into a schoolroom, they dare to construct not just an alternative future for their children but “alternative children” altogether. Ultimately, internal conflicts and external pressures disperse the band. As they return to alienated labor in the city, they nevertheless carry memories of solidarity and retain a faith in *Jonah*, conceived on the farm, then borne along in the belly of the whale of history, who will be spit out on the shore of a new millennium. This is the year when that covenant matures. What world—political, cinematographic, academic—has he found or must he build?

May 1968 prepared the ground for the film culture that in 1975 seemed to offer a vanguard alternative pedagogy within a university system just on the point of recognizing cinema studies. Under the moral pressure of 1968, film students aimed to theorize the political, cinematic, and academic orders and to be wary of the tricks and seductions of the establishment. Exuberant in its adolescent ambitions for a unified field of cinema

studies, structuralist theory was promulgated by a self-assured cadre—pretentious or heroic, as you choose—whose project would be prematurely abandoned, perhaps because of internal contradictions but more certainly because its logic was at odds with that of the university system. Like the group in Tanner's film, cinema studies after the 1970s slipped into standard adult roles in that system, swelling in numbers but no longer so defiantly different.

Berger and Tanner's interlocking zones of politics, cinema, and academics are precisely what Fredric Jameson aims to account for in various chapters of his *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Roughly since the conclusion of the Vietnam War, he implies, the once dramatic conflicts of first- versus second-world politics, of Hollywood entertainment versus modernist art cinema, and of humanist scholarship versus critical theory have dissipated into unregulated flows of money and video images, whose academic equivalent is free-wheeling new historicism and cultural studies. In the entertainment order announced by *Jaws* (1975), *Rocky* (1976), and *Star Wars* (1978), global Hollywood prepared the way for swift, universal image marketing abetted by cable television and soon by videotape and then digital technologies. Images proliferate now, referencing other images more than they do the natural world, which in any case no longer need anchor them photographically. Free of mimetic responsibility, free even of their authors, images float weightless as thin surfaces, whereas Tanner had insisted on lugging his big camera—shouldering it, pushing it along bumpy tracks—so that the viewer would feel the difficulty of making images, would sense the artisanship and community effort to shape meaning, would credit both the world and the art. But today a film is no longer thought of as a rare, heavy object lifted by elevator in large canisters to the tabernacle of the projection booth above and behind the spectator, who waits for its transubstantiation on the screen. Today's spectator is more likely to carry films on tape home from the

video store or to record them off the air or through the wire for later use. Now that technology has wrested authority from the world and the director, viewers sense that all images are simultaneously available. Is it any wonder that students today have difficulty crediting cinephilia and the florid writing it inspired? If they are still able to anticipate the premiere of a film, it is as media event or as box office contest, not as aesthetic experience or as entrée to a different world. In contrast, return to 1975 and a moment of supreme cinematic anticipation: that year the producer of Renoir's *The River* was flown to Iowa City to present what we presumed to be the only surviving print of the film, which had not been screened in two decades. Most of us expected that, if we watched closely enough, Renoir himself would be visible in the images he had so carefully filmed in India; others assiduously took notes on the color spectacle of life and colonialism in India, a country that had just been partitioned. Today a video copy of *The River* gathers dust on the Renoir shelf in the university library. As for images of India, they show up in Benetton and Nike ads, in MTV clips, and in Bombay musicals broadcast on the university station Sunday mornings.

To respond to this deregulation and dispersal of its object, cinema studies broke free of its Continental inheritance. One voluble challenge, "posttheory," sees its modest program as an adult alternative to the immature ambitions of European "grand theory." Rather in the tradition of American social science, posttheory calls for a coordinated array of "mid-level" research questions that can progressively clarify aspects of the field (Bordwell 26). Critics of this program find it in fact immodest, given the strictures it imposes on research methods and assumptions. Posttheory brashly wields these restrictions not only against the remnants of (post)structuralism but equally against cultural studies, whose political ambitions can require largely untested beliefs about subjectivity (10).

While posttheory and cultural studies may be at odds, they share a distaste for French film

theory, and they both can claim to be heirs of the turn toward historical research evident in 1980s film scholarship. The methods of a generation of sophisticated researchers toiling in an increasing number of archives were consolidated in Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's 1985 textbook *Film History: Theory and Practice*, which, coming a decade after my equivalent consolidation of classic film theory (*Major Film Theories*), marks a telling change in priorities. Today we still enjoy an efflorescence of historical research, although its focus has floated from production to reception. Increasingly scholars care to establish not the constitution of films but the constitution of audiences.

Reception studies originally carried Continental and formalist casts, sometimes tracing the outline of the "implied reader" in the structure of texts or wedding textual analysis to a rhetorical examination of audience function (as in semio-pragmatics). More crucial to American film scholars was the kind of literary sociology pioneered by Hans Robert Jauss, who analyzed not the structure of masterpieces but the vicissitudes of their reception. Encouraged by British cultural theorists, especially Stuart Hall, film scholars now replace debates in depth over the reading of, say, *Young Mr. Lincoln* or *Tokyo Story* with innumerable lateral case studies that elaborate the cultural politics of such and such a moment. And so just as the obligatory viewing list of key films and auteurs has proliferated into an unmonitored web of audiovisual artifacts, so intensive readings are discounted by reception studies in favor of accounts of the uses made of films in given situations by given groups of viewers.

To counteract the randomness inherent in the study of audiences, film scholars have either focused on box office hits, which presumably reach a global audience and are therefore most important,<sup>6</sup> or aimed to establish "viewing formations" (Klinger). Here the ideological predispositions of definable populations affect, perhaps determine, the impact and interpretation of whatever images those populations entertain. Lately

population groups have moved center stage, as cinema studies, like cultural studies overall, has come to support "identity politics" and, indeed, to take on the problem of the constitution of social identity itself (gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality). If Jonah today is writing his dissertation in the United States, it undoubtedly addresses Swiss cinema or Swiss spectators—both taken to be hybrid formations, naturally.

These shifts in scholarship and attitude are easily tracked. Take *Camera Obscura*, one of America's most distinctive contributions to the field and highly sensitive to changes in it. First published in 1976, the periodical changed its original subtitle, *A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*, in 1994 to *Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*. In the transitional decade of the 1980s, *Camera Obscura* devoted an entire issue and many articles to questions of history. Or examine a much broader source, the programs for the annual conferences of the Society for Cinema Studies. At the 1968 meeting, at the University of California, Los Angeles, where the group adopted its current name, twelve papers were presented, evenly divided among history, theory, and criticism. This balance generally held into the mid-1970s, when a challenge came from the structuralist camp. One can sense the changing of the guard in 1975, at New York University, where, among nineteen papers, seven were devoted to André Bazin, while two newcomers to the field, Nick Browne and Bill Nichols, presented influential analyses that signaled the ascendancy of semiotics and psychoanalysis. The 1979 program, at San Francisco State University, was saturated with such "theory," and the number of papers had grown to thirty, still delivered one after another to the entire group.

The society adopted concurrent sessions in the 1980s as it strove to increase and diversify its membership. This coincided with the turn to history, which naturally encourages a proliferation of topics. The 1989 conference, at the University of Iowa, was replete with historical papers



(ninety of two hundred delivered), and another fifty were species of cultural studies. Such a horizontal spread of topics must have alarmed the society, for a plenary session was mandated to take on common concerns (the place in the organization of television, of new technologies, and of theory). Other plenary topics have been frankly political, such as that of the 1998 University of California, San Diego, convention, "Race under Representation: Culture and Politics in California." This subject set the tone for a conference in which nearly half the over four hundred papers (read from morning to night in nine rooms) treated the politics of representing ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. By contrast, only ten percent of the panels addressed film theory, and fewer still took on standard auteur and genre concerns. Equally significant were the number of papers on new technologies, three times as many as on documentary and experimental film combined. Publishers have welcomed this explosion of topics; eighteen pages of ads in the 1998 program targeted a membership grown to nearly fourteen hundred. The conference title, "Media on the Border," aptly characterizes this surge of interest beyond traditional cinema studies—indeed, beyond cinema itself.

What should cinema studies aim to be in the new millennium? Let Jonah's story instruct us: the cinema should be taken as a transitional medium that carries forward from the nineteenth century powerful traditions of narrative and visual representation. Our students should understand this heritage, should sense its development in classic, modern, and postmodern cinema even as new media and new functions in art and entertainment arrive. Cinema constitutes a century-long threshold, uniquely able to orient us because it "stands between." It stands between popular expressions (magazines, pop music, TV) and the more considered and considerable arts (novel, opera, theater); between its old-fashioned nineteenth-century technological base (gears and celluloid) and its constantly renewed contemporary appeal (high-definition TV, virtual

reality); between a corporate or an anonymous mode of production and the auteur mode it sometimes adopts from literature. Standing between, the cinema has been particularly able to insert an interval of reflection between itself as representation and the world it references, an interval that ornate megafilms often make us forget and that digital entertainment seems eager to close. Market forces may urge the study of global Hollywood and digital technology—the world we are fast becoming—but *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000* urges the study of the whole century of cinema, not for nostalgia's sake but for the sake of everything that history and criticism can bring to education and to the politics of the present.

### A Curriculum for the Moviegoer

It was to protect something like the childlike potential of Jonah that in 1975 at my first invited lecture I took sides against the brazen independence of cinema studies ("Film"). I argued against an undergraduate film major that might rashly fix its identity. Films should be shown and studied on campus, I said, but not on a smooth curricular railroad. I preferred, and prefer today, the cineclubs of the 1920s and of the postwar era, when serious investigation and debate emerged naturally from those gathering to watch something worth looking at. I believed that students majoring in traditional fields should, similarly, gather in film classes to assess the seismic damage to their fields caused by the fact of cinema or by some momentous film. Graduate film study, however, has always made sense, its professional orientation being inevitably unnatural. Yet here, too, reluctant to pin cinema down prematurely, I fought reading and viewing lists like those that are standard tools in literary and art historical doctoral programs. The liveliness of cinema, its unpredictable power to initiate or reorient conversations across the humanities, had to be protected from those intent on benefiting from the medium's ascendancy as

a standard academic topic. Caught up in the educational bureaucracy associated with the status it aspired to, cinema studies might lose the surprising punch it had shown itself capable of delivering during the Vietnam era.

Today the field has changed, along with the university and the cinema itself. I have changed, too. Not only do I support a hierarchical major in cinema studies at both the universities I am associated with, I fight to maintain the fiction of its core against the centrifugal forces that are apt to pull every field apart, all fields being fabrications. This particular field is worth our collective care, worth making a home base for students even if they plan to leave home. As public and private spectacle, cinema puts into focus the interrelation of aesthetic, social, and psychoanalytic dynamics at work in the production and reception of every art. But to understand these dynamics requires understanding the workings of the cinematic text, the technology and industry that bring us that text, and the history and culture that make its appearance and impact probable or problematic. An organized curriculum is needed and in general is still on offer (curricula change more slowly than trends at conferences). Even in English departments that house graduate programs in film (at the Universities of Pittsburgh, Rochester, and Florida) and in the Department of Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, such long-standing film courses as those in analysis, theory, social issues, and history are available (the last one most often rendered through national cinemas, genres, auteurs, and modes). And yet, film's centenary and the end of the millennium have greatly heated the constant contest over the cinema studies curriculum.

*Reinventing Film Studies* is the title of an impressive forthcoming anthology that wants film scholars at last to come to grips with cinema as a mass art and thus to recognize their field's alliance to media studies, cultural studies, and now visual studies. Keeping contemporary social concerns forefront, even in historical investigation, the editors (Christine Gledhill and Linda

Williams) value "usefulness" above other criteria. A somewhat different call to renewal can be felt in the welcome attention given to cinema by the traditional humanities, where "comprehension" of culture and of its representations has always guided questions of use. The journal *Film and Philosophy*, the broad impact of Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, and the return to aesthetics among many French theorists measure this renewal. So, too, do notable studies of architecture and cinema, as well as the turn to the topic of painting and cinema in art history. Courses in comparative arts, whether historical or theoretical, invariably include cinema. Indeed, one might contrast comparative arts with visual studies to recognize the persistence of the dual directions identified as endemic to the field by Richard Dyer in his introduction to *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. With disarming clarity he divides cinema studies into "aesthetic and stylistic" and "sociological-ideological" approaches, which should be taught as interrelated historical processes (4–10). The bulk of the undergraduates who choose to study film do so in hopes of joining the entertainment or communications industry. Their enthusiasm and vocational drive ought to be channeled into truly useful sociocultural investigations of film forms.

Few institutions can think of reinventing or even maintaining coordinated film programs. At most universities cinema studies must struggle to define itself in sympathetic larger departments, since administrators today are reluctant to allow a proliferation of small autonomous units. The situation in many undergraduate colleges is even less predictable, as courses on film seem to sprout haphazardly throughout the liberal arts. Today a generation of professors, having encountered cinema as part of their education, introduce films into their courses wherever convenient. Do they sense themselves belonging to a community of colleagues? The programs for the MLA conventions of the past decade measure a surge of interest in film and disclose its two directions: a centripetal one visible in national-

cinema panels (with readings of films chosen for the distinctiveness of their cultural or aesthetic difference) and a centrifugal one associated with American studies where panels treat social issues made available in popular film, on TV, and in new media. Several of the thirty-six film positions offered by literature departments in the Society for Cinema Studies listing cover both directions, with good reason.

Is it ironic or inevitable that universities are showing confidence in cinema studies at a moment when cinema studies is most anxious about the stability of its object (will the loss of celluloid to digital formats terminate the field?), about the contemporaneity of its mission (will the field become an equivalent of art history, curating masterpieces of the past?), and about the politics of the academy (what alignments permit survival and growth)? Unfortunately, this crisis of identity can be exploited by administrators whose policies seldom have the field in mind, and it can be exploited within cinema studies by weak-minded or overreaching opportunists. Cinema studies is a star grown so hot it is expanding, losing definition, fragmenting. And yet a magnetic force reshapes many of the fragments, a force belonging to the dense films over which the field is custodian and to the seductive styles of scholarship that have developed to historicize and interpret those films. Hope lies in a name, hope of a coherent and valuable project: cinema studies.

For symmetry alone I must call on a third film to illuminate this hope, a film that, as I write, exists only on a Web site as in production for 2000. Let me pronounce its name reverentially: *The Moviegoer*. Even if, by the time this issue of *PMLA* appears, Terrence Malick's project to adapt Walker Percy's great novel is scuttled, dismissed, or simply submerged beneath the indifferent mass of audiovisual artifacts, out of which only the most garish products have a chance of recognition, I choose *The Moviegoer* because its title speaks to me and because both of its auteurs believe that images and words can

create a volume in which reflection and comprehension become possible. In its indeterminate state ("in production") *The Moviegoer* suits me perfectly, for its aspiration and fragility characterize the threshold art and threshold field that will always be my subject.

## NOTES

I am indebted to Miriam Hansen, who initially asked me to think about these issues for a symposium at the University of Chicago in April 1996. Among those who commented on a first draft of this article, I must single out Nataša Đurovićová and Louis Schwartz.

<sup>1</sup> Even today the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* are reluctant to publish books that appear too scholarly and that might thus compromise its mission to maintain a high-level discourse that is nevertheless popular in the best sense.

<sup>2</sup> A fine abridged version of *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* is available in English. Mitry's history volumes remain untranslated.

<sup>3</sup> "Une étape" and "Problèmes." The second half of this critique can be found in English as "Current Problems."

<sup>4</sup> This cleverly ambiguous phrase was the title of a 1999 presentation by Mary Ann Doane.

<sup>5</sup> I have often had recourse to this film. See especially the epilogue to my *Mists* (342–50) and "Jonah."

<sup>6</sup> In "Appraising French Images" I address the danger of film history's tying itself to the film market.

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