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

Language marks off the borders of disciplines, which are in some respects epistemic speech communities. “Cinematology” drew explicitly...
on the “filmology” movement in France that had proposed to set in place a comprehensive methodological approach to what the filmologists termed the “science” of cinema.\textsuperscript{4} Gessner had visited Paris in the postwar period (the first of many Americans in Paris drawn by the study of film and newfangled, fancy theories); the alliance with filmology bypassed or overrode the \textit{belletrist} criticism and cinemphilia widespread in the Paris of \textit{Cahiers du cinéma} and the \textit{Cinémathèque} in favor of a more rigorous, “scholarly,” and “disciplined” formation of knowledge and expertise. “The cinematologist is a scholar rather than a journalist,” the \textit{Christian Science Monitor} observed approvingly in 1960, “a theoretician, rather than merely an articulate spectator.”\textsuperscript{5}

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

\textsuperscript{4} The filmologists had initiated university programs and conferences in France and started the publication of the journal \textit{La Revue internationale de filmologie} from 1947. See Edward Lowry, \textit{The Filmology Movement and Film Study in France} (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), in particular 4–5.


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Cinema Journal} 7, no. 1 (Fall 1968): 1.

\textsuperscript{7} Dana Polan, \textit{Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 342–343.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Cinema Journal} 7, no. 1 (Fall 1968): 1; Ellis, “Ruminations,” 49; Polan, \textit{Scenes of Instruction}, 343.


would in turn inform the idea that film could constitute the grounds of an autonomous discipline that would be properly housed in a university department and supported by a professional association. The dynamics of the questions about ontology and film as language and art would continue to resonate within that discipline.

Gessner and the cinematologists participated in, and concretized, a shift in the conception of the study of cinema, of what kind of knowledge such study would generate (and what it would not). Most importantly, there was a shift way from social science paradigms that had initially dominated film study (up until the early 1930s, let’s say, prior to the formation of the Film Library at MoMA in 1935). Cinema study would claim for itself a place in the humanities, defined in the modern research university in the early through mid-twentieth century as nonpurposeful, as otherworldly (and this was precisely the definition that had earlier been given to cinema itself as its place in the public sphere was circumscribed in the early twentieth century).

The editors of Cinema Journal (renamed in 1968, from the earlier Journal of the Society of Cinematologists) noted that while the “social implications of cinema” and the “scientific aspects of film production and audience analysis” would be “never far from our thoughts,” the journal and professional organization it served “shall probably emphasize film as an art and the criticism of it as one of the humanities.” Film study would become part of the “liberal arts,” distancing itself from the mass culture debates of the 1950s and the fearful anxieties about the mimetic and politically deleterious effects of film as manifested in the House Un-American Activities Committee investigations of Hollywood. The social sciences would happily wave goodbye to cinema study, but would remain invested in media and communication, and this would inform the flourishing institutes and programs of “communication studies” in the immediate postwar/cold war period (financed in part by private foundations and the government, addressing principally radio and television and only tangentially cinema). The schism between communication/media studies and film studies would remain.

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

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


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

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

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

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

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17 See, for example, Robert Steele, “A Personal Reaction,” University Film Producers Association Journal 17, no. 4 (1965): 19–24.
19 Stewart, “The Study of Motion Pictures in Colleges and Universities,” 35.
universities. *The Motion Picture and the Teaching of English* was published in 1965. The book, predictably, imagined the study of cinema as a formalist endeavor akin to new critical practices. “Work up a vocabulary of film analysis,” the book advised students, and “begin to analyze a short film as carefully and thoughtfully as you would a poem”; in this way, study should focus on “the unique characteristics of film as an art form,” of “film as film and not as sociology.” Likewise, the creation of the American Film Institute in 1968, as an offshoot of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, further established an institution guided by principles about the import of film—what President Lyndon Johnson described as “the 20th Century art form.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

additions to the “liberal arts” like film studies.\textsuperscript{30} To be sure, the function of film study would be sometimes different for the varying organizations and institutions outlined, but there was enough common ground here around ideas about appreciation, discernment, and the political efficacy of the liberal arts in shaping liberal populations.

Yet, in the final twist of my genealogy, this common ground would be severely tested by the developments of “the 1960s,” which began to question the role of disciplines and universities as part of power structures that disadvantaged groups historically marginalized from the center of the liberal polity. The developments are well known, to some extent, though often within the discipline through a nostalgic sense of the founding of film studies as a radical discipline. The reality was murkier than that, as my account of the historical precedents of film studies shows. Certainly, though, the questioning of disciplines and universities was felt strongly in the porous disciplines of English and film studies, which were peculiarly receptive to new ideas about racial and gender oppression in particular, and were accordingly reshaped toward the end of the 1960s, and more clearly in the early 1970s, as disciplines that addressed social oppression through cultural analysis. The new critical idea that literature and (to some extent) film was an intransitive realm, without propositional content, was cast aside. Again, as with cinematology, new ideas from Europe were central to this, though now they began to shape a sense of cinema as a form that ought not simply be “appreciated” but rather questioned, condemned, even disavowed. To love the cinema it was necessary to no longer love the cinema, and to work to destroy its seductive visual pleasure. The journal \textit{Screen} in the UK would take a central role in this (and it also turns 50 this year, celebrating its middle age with SCMS); this context would inform the establishment of other journals like, for example, the feminist journal \textit{Camera Obscura} in 1976.\textsuperscript{31} At the same time, other transdisciplinary journals and institutions formed amidst a questioning of the nature of what disciplines did to and for knowledge (associated with Thomas Kuhn’s work on the structure of scientific knowledge and informing also Michel Foucault’s examination of the formation and functioning of the human sciences).\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Critical Inquiry}, to pick one notable example, started in 1974; new subdisciplinary and interdisciplinary fields emerged (for example, women’s studies, cultural studies, African American studies, Latino/Latina studies); Humanities Institutes were created. Today, I write from a Centre for Intercultural Studies, having just returned from visiting in a department of Visual and Environmental Studies—institutional spaces that house a cinema studies that is still poorly disciplined after all these years.

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

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

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

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

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

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