

2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
3. Thomas Kuhn, "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice," in Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 320.
4. For a brief and largely anecdotal reminiscence about the history of the SCMS, written by one of its founding members, see Jack C. Ellis, "The Society for Cinema Studies: A Personal Recollection of the Early Days," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 1 (fall 2003): 105–12.
5. I use the term *moving image* here as defined by Noël Carroll: "film, video, broadcast television, moving computer-generated imagery, and . . . any mass-produced moving image technologically within our reach now and in times to come." Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xxi. For a more elaborate definition of the phrase, see Carroll, "Defining the Moving Image," in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 49–74.
6. See Frank P. Tomasulo, "The Text-in-the-Spectator: The Role of Phenomenology in an Eclectic Theoretical Methodology," *Journal of Film and Video* 40, no. 2 (summer 1988): 20.
7. In using the term *moving image* here and elsewhere, I wish to clarify that I do not want the area of *sound* to be neglected or marginalized. Although Marshall McLuhan characterized the cinema as a "hot" medium because it primarily extends one human sense (sight) over others, sonic articulations in film, television, and the digital domain are just as important as the visuals. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964).
I also wish to make clear that my definition of *moving images* does *not* include phenomena such as smoke signals (unless analyzed within the context of a western), hand gestures, or semaphores, forms of visual communication that might technically be termed moving images. Finally, although I have advocated an "open-tent" stance vis-à-vis SCMS and *Cinema Journal*, I want to go on record (old guard as it may sound) as opposing the inclusion of *pure* radio or *pure* print journalism studies into our purview—precisely because they do not contain moving images. I am not, however, opposed to the study of radio and newspapers when undertaken *in connection with* the study of film, TV, and new media. They are both important historical precursors and contemporary adjuncts to SCMS's traditional objects of study.
8. Mao Tse-Tung, "On 'Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend,'" in Nieh Hualing, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 13. Mao's slogan was originally delivered in an address acknowledging contradictions within communist society on February 27, 1957.

New Media and Film History: Walter Benjamin and the Awakening of Cinema

by Catherine Russell

Walter Benjamin's name haunts the current debates about cinema and new media for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the provocative title of his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."¹ We can all agree that we have officially entered a new "age" of reproducibility that has

had as profound an effect on global visual culture as film and photography had in Benjamin's day. Whether we want to describe this phase as "electronic," "digital," or "cybernetic," cinema as we have known it has clearly changed and diversified into a host of experiences and perceptual apparatuses that Benjamin would not have recognized. We can speculate on how he might have reconciled the contemporary media scene with his warning against the aestheticization of politics, but it may be too late. The distinction between a politicized aesthetic and an aestheticized politics is hard to discern in a global media landscape in which politics and aesthetics are thoroughly blended.

With the recent publication of four volumes of Benjamin's writings in English, we can now begin to fill in the ellipses and better grasp the ambiguities of this idiosyncratic scholar's cultural theory. In his famous essay on cinema, he does not compare film and art but tries to grasp their respective cultural significance. He may have refused to judge the cinema, but he did, perhaps more directly than any other theorist, attempt to situate it historically; in fact, cinema and photography became his models of historiography, and it is that aspect of his work that I would like to take up here. If "mechanical reproduction" enabled a new means of thinking about history, the electronic media we have come to embrace alongside the rubric "cinema studies" has profoundly altered the ways we think about film history. If for Benjamin cultural history involves an encounter between the past and the present—if the past becomes "legible" only in light of present-tense concerns—new media has enabled us to formulate a redemption of film history that we may take for granted. This electronic recovery of film history nevertheless constitutes a key aspect of what we might mean by cinema and media studies.

New media has altered film history most immediately by making it more accessible. The canon is available at the local video store (and, potentially, in our living rooms via satellite or broadband transmission), while specialized video stores and Internet sources provide access to the vaults of Hollywood and the popular cinemas of many different countries. Scholars and collectors can view material that was once available only to the very few researchers able to travel to remote archives. It is now possible to teach the silent cinema with films that students will actually watch, complete with soundtracks, color tinting, and crisp images projected at the right speed. Even experimental filmmakers like Michael Snow and the late Stan Brakhage—last holdouts of the video invasion—finally gave up their work to the digital interface of the DVD format.² The enhanced image and sound qualities of digital media have stimulated a welcome rerelease of a host of classic and neglected titles that may stimulate a parallel resurgence of film history scholarship. As teachers and scholars, our field has become infinitely enriched because of new technologies that have so greatly increased the dissemination of cinema.

Moreover, there is enormous potential in new media to transform what we do as cinema scholars. Copyright issues notwithstanding, we can use digital versions of film images to illustrate our writing and teaching in innumerable ways. We can add subtitles to bring films from all over the world into our classrooms. The potential for analysis and for communicating about cinema should not be underestimated. Voice-over commentaries on DVDs by directors and other participants in

film productions, along with the release of outtakes, alternate endings, and “making-of” documentaries, constitute valuable heuristic tools and new texts for analysis. Meanwhile, such DVD commentaries by film scholars have given our field public credibility by making our expertise marketable (although I think the jury is still out on that one).

Given this incursion of “new media” into the domain of cinema—and I could go on, of course—we cannot block our ears to Benjamin’s cautious reminder about the aura. Is it still cinema without celluloid? And with so many reissues of “more authentic” and alternate versions of titles such as *Metropolis* and *Touch of Evil*, where is the text? Which is the text? Is there an original object of study, if film history has entered such a state of flux? In Benjamin’s terms, we may be said to be working with “allegories of cinema.” Translated into the digital language of new media, torn from its original theatrical context, cinema recedes to something awaiting redemption. This is the task of today’s historian and archivist, whose work is of course aided by those very technologies that threaten the existence of the object.

Yet the work of redemption, which is the work of reading, articulating the terms of analysis, or mapping out the production of subjectivity produced by a given film at a given point in time, makes ever-new demands on the critical and theoretical tools that we have available. The new histories of cinema that are now being written on the basis of the widespread circulation of video and digital media are having a serious impact on the scope of cinema studies as an academic discipline. As the object of study has moved from the celluloid print to the electronic allegory, it has forced a certain interdisciplinarity on the discipline. Here Benjamin is already ahead of us, as a scholar whose “homelessness” was inextricably tied to his refusal to respect disciplinary boundaries.

This expansion of film studies was amply demonstrated at a recent conference in Hawaii. Organized by Markus Abé Nornes and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, “Kinema Club II” brought together the members of a listserv dedicated to the study of Japanese film and TV. As Japanese film studies has been greatly enriched by the contributions of Japanese-speaking scholars, so also has the corpus and the scope of the entire field. Papers were given on everything from early cinema, to Pacific War propaganda, to television and anime; and an intriguing array of images on video, DVD, and laptops was shared and exchanged. While it is wonderful to see the emphasis moving away from a handful of auteurs, it has become apparent that diversification is accompanied by a diversity of critical languages and theoretical paradigms. Even if we were all discussing Japanese cinema and television, we were all talking about it in different ways. We wondered at the end of the day where the focus of Japanese film studies might be found, and even if the canonical texts of the 1970s and 1980s need to be resurrected for this purpose.

The questions raised by this small subfield of cinema studies are, I believe, highly relevant to the field as a whole. At the same time, it is important to recognize the role of noncinematic media in bringing us to this point of reflection. Cultural studies is not the culprit in the diversification of film studies but the inevitable result of the surfacing of myriads of film cultures by means of new technologies.

Within the multiplicity of textual objects—including global film cultures, amateur video, TV studies, video games, and the electronic allegories of film history—the primal cinematic experience lingers as an auratic, utopian, and impossible moment. Cinema has perhaps become an intersection of many different conversations, but it is not necessarily cinema as an object but as an experience and mode of perception. New media may have drastically altered the forms of experience and perception once associated with cinema, but because people have been thinking about the conditions of subjectivity associated with cinema for such a long time, the field has a disciplinary integrity that can help us better understand the contemporary media landscape.

New media has not reinvented cinema as an auratic object but as a complex and multifaceted form of experience. In other words, our new age may seem like a repeat of the overhaul of the art-culture-politics constellation that Benjamin described, but it is not exactly the same at all. Far from making cinema obsolescent, the reproduction of cinema in electronic form has transformed it into an aspect of everyday life. Discussions about the parallelism of early cinema and new media—most of them informed by Benjaminian historiography—have begun to frame the classical period as a transient and temporary phase.³ And yet even the canonical, classical text, translated into electronic form, is broken down into chapters and appended with “special features,” so that the linear narrative becomes one option among many.

Thus, we may be approaching a moment, if we are not there already, when we can embrace Benjamin’s recipe for historiography: “In order for part of the past to be touched by the present instant there must be no continuity between them.”⁴ In other words, once we have lost cinema to the digital age, we may finally come to understand its significance to our own ongoing historical catastrophe.

Notes

1. Although the title quoted is the one most people are familiar with, a new translation of Benjamin’s essay has been retitled “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” The editors of the third volume of Benjamin’s *Selected Writings* claim that this “second version” of the essay, only slightly altered from the one with which we are most familiar, is the one that Benjamin originally wished to see published; and it was the basis for the French translation that was published in May 1936. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 101–33.
2. Michael Snow’s films have been collected on a DVD-ROM entitled *anarchive 2—Digital Snow* (Paris: Les Éditions du Centre Georges-Pompidou, 2002); Brakhage’s films were released shortly after his death in 2003 as *By Brakhage: An Anthology* (Criterion DVD, 2003).
3. Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere,” in Linda Williams, ed., *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 134–52; Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Catherine Russell, “Parallax

Historiography: The Flâneuse as Cyberfeminist.” *Scope*, www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/parallax-historiography.htm.

4. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 470.

The State of the Field: Notes toward an Article

by E. Ann Kaplan

If film studies has always been in transition, as it moved from a loose collection of amateurs, enthusiasts, and fans to become an academic discipline—however unstable—the transition that faces us now is seen by some as of a different order. As has been much discussed in recent years, with the advent of new digital technologies, our traditional object of study—the celluloid strip we knew as film, along with the institution we knew as cinema—seems in danger of disappearing. We now routinely watch films on numerous kinds of screens, in diverse formats, and in varied contexts. These new technologies and viewing sites challenge the film theories of the 1970s and 1980s, which were based on the traditional cinematic apparatus and on the significance of the material cut of the celluloid in editing. We also know that students in our classes grow up in a world of multimedia images and sounds of which film is just one example. There are generational differences among faculty as well as between faculty and students, since the cultural formation of younger faculty vis-à-vis the image/sound world is often closer to that of the students than to the scholars who grew up with analog technologies. Many students have never seen a 16mm projector or a 16mm film, to say nothing of the 8mm home movie camera I grew up with.

SCS recently changed its name to SCMS to take account of the new realities of a world of images and sounds that come to us from many sources and that are received in multiple sites. However, one may well ask what the status of film as such is in all this. Is our old object of study really disappearing or only seemingly so? And, along with our old object, is the very shape and organization of the discipline we struggled so hard to establish already being challenged by new categories, such as cultural studies, media studies, and visual culture?

When we faced a challenge years ago from television studies, we (wisely) accommodated to that challenge by including panels on TV at our conferences and articles on television in *Cinema Journal*. TV and film continue to share many things, but just as surely, TV is also close to the computer as a kind of liminal technology.

The departments of communication that were introduced in many universities some years ago have gone their own ways because their methods were usually closer to those of the social sciences. More recent clusters of knowledge such as cultural and visual studies seem closer to film studies in method, ideology, and theory and thus require serious discussion. For instance, should cinema studies