

## In Memory of Stephen Prince

Carl Plantinga and Malcolm Turvey

Friends and colleagues of Stephen Prince were shocked and saddened to learn of his death, at the age of 65, on December 30, 2020, in Blacksburg, Virginia, after a brief illness. Steve was a good friend to many, a prolific scholar with a deep love of cinema, a beloved teacher, a trusted and valued colleague, and a generous mentor to younger scholars.

Steve received his Ph.D. from the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. For thirty-two years, beginning in 1988, he taught cinema at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, more commonly known as Virginia Tech. He began there in the Department of Communication, but in a reorganization he moved to the School of Performing Arts, which offers majors in Theater, Music, and Cinema.

Steve relished teaching and did not typically pursue research leaves or sabbaticals. Nevertheless, he was a prolific scholar, and he published 16 books. His 17th, entitled *Apocalypse Cinema*, will appear posthumously. Steve's scholarly interests were wide-ranging. His publications encompass not only film history, theory, close analysis, and criticism but a diversity of genres, auteurs, historical periods, national cinemas, and theoretical issues. Steve also authored widely used textbooks on film, including *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction* (Allyn & Bacon, 1996), now in its sixth edition, and (as co-author) *An Introduction to Film Genres* (Norton, 2013).

Steve was dedicated to film as an art, but he was also keenly interested in the social and political implications of the medium and its uses, as evidenced by his first book, *Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in Contemporary American Film* (Praeger, 1992) and his more recent *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (Columbia University Press, 2010). His auteur studies include books on Masaki Kobayashi, Akira Kurosawa, and Sam Peckinpah, and he provided audio commentaries for DVDs and Blu-Rays featuring the films of Kurosawa (*Red Beard*, *Ikiru*, *Stray Dog*, *Ran*, *Kagemusha*), Peckinpah (*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, *Straw Dogs*, *Cross of Iron*) and others. His concern with genre resulted in books on the horror film, apocalyptic cinema, and political cinema, and he wrote several works on the history of American film, contributing the volume on the 1980s (*A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989* [2000]) to Scribner's prestigious History of American Cinema series.

Steve was also an important film theorist whose articles were republished and anthologized in central collections of film theory. He was pragmatic and empirical in his thinking, and he always hewed closely, in unpretentious and clear prose, to the practicalities of film production, criticism rooted in close analysis, and the psychology of spectatorship. Among his most important theoretical texts are his articles "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images and Film Theory" and "The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies," both of which are major contributions to debates about realism and the nature and function of images in filmic discourse. In his influential books on digital cinema, *Digital Cinema* (Rutgers, 2019) and *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (Rutgers, 2011)

Steve developed his important and as yet insufficiently explored notion that cinema is, and has always been, a *composite* rather than a photographic medium. Steve also examined film violence in his books *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968* (Rutgers, 2003) and (as editor) *Screening Violence* (Rutgers, 2000).

Steve was very active in his contribution to and support of the journals and institutions of cinema studies. He served as book review editor of *Film Quarterly* for more than a decade and as editor of *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* for six years. Steve is also a former president of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, and until he resigned days before his passing, he was president of the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image.

Steve lived for over thirty years in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Susan Sanders was his partner during the eight years before his passing. Those who visited Steve at his home were treated (if so desired) to fine wines and Cuban cigars. They would also invariably encounter a very large Great Dane, Steve's favored breed of dog. Steve loved touring by motorcycle, and at various times he owned a Triumph Thunderbird and a Triumph Bonneville. He made an impression in Bozeman, Montana, in 2018, when he arrived for a conference on his Indian Roadmaster motorbike. Susan accompanied him on parts of this trip, riding with him through Canyonlands, Arches, the Grand Tetons, and Yellowstone.

Among the many tributes to Steve that have poured in since his death are mentions of his kindness and generosity toward younger scholars, whose work he read and helped publish. In short, Steve was a consummate professional whose

many contributions will be felt for decades, and he will be greatly missed by his friends and colleagues.