

**Distinguished Career Achievement Award – 2009- Lucy Fischer presents E. Ann Kaplan**

**E. Ann Kaplan, Stony Brook University**

The Society for Cinema and Media Studies Goes Global.

I am delighted to accept this prestigious award—one year late due to the unfortunate timing of the Swine Flu epidemic. I had the chutzpah to plan to start my Tokyo acceptance speech (translated and printed I believe—and now an archival object) with congratulating ourselves on having made it to Tokyo. Some undaunted ones amongst us were indeed there, and thanks to you a small conference did take place. But the full scope of the event had to be abandoned. We share our regret with Dr. Noriko Mizuta, our Josai Colleagues, Staff and friends, and our SCMS Executive Council under the careful guidance of Patrice Petro. Special thanks go to Council Member Akira Lippit, who worked hard to bring our unique, courageous international initiative to fruition, and to staff in SCMS' Main Office at the University of Oklahoma, who bear the brunt of such adventures.

However, despite our disappointment, much was gained during the process of planning the Tokyo Conference: Because of the planned event, we started a unique international collaboration, members made new connections with Japanese scholars, directors and film enthusiasts, or renewed lapsed friendships. SCMS and Josai equally have shown that we can work together across long distance, and across language and cultural differences, in our shared commitment to bring international institutions and scholars together, as we must, in our globalized era.

Receiving this Award at Josai would have been fitting, given my long associations with Josai's International Campus. Soon after the new campus was opened in the early 1990s, Chancellor Mizuta invited me to inaugurate women and film courses in the innovative Gender Studies program she was starting. Being a visiting professor from 1994 to 1997 was a privilege in years when academic exchange with Japan was only just expanding.

I first came to know Noriko when out of the blue sitting in my Rutgers Office in the 1980's I received a phone call about permission to publish a Japanese translation of the 1978 version of *Women in Film Noir* (Noriko also translated *Women in Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, and other books of mine were later translated into Japanese). It was a thrilling moment for me, and the collaborations highlight the crucial role of international exchange, translation, and travel to building a genuine global form of Film and Media Studies. SCMS' bold move to have annual conferences in ever more distant foreign locations is part of this effort to make our organization genuinely international.

Now to this Award, which I am very happy to receive under its new title, namely as a *career* achievement award and not a *life* achievement award, since under the old title, the award sounded as if one had come to the end of a career: In fact, I sometimes feel as if I am just starting out, each new project a beginning. I am also happy to receive this award in Los Angeles, as we celebrate SCMS' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and especially to receive it at this Bonaventure Hotel, made famous for humanists through Fredric Jameson's 1984 essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Culture," which I heard him deliver in New York. In the face of today's realities, this hotel, along with postmodern theory itself, seems faded, late modernist, comfortable rather than new. While later theorists somewhat exuberantly embraced postmodernism as a thrilling murder of master narratives, in the wake of 9/11 Jameson's warning about the collapsing of distinctions and

critical positions seems justified. 9/11 was a flashing up of history western nations had ignored—a break that brought to a head long simmering rage. The turn to Trauma Studies in the 1990s, catching up with history, marked a change in humanities research that I have contributed to, and that seems fitting in our globalized era with its accompanying crises. I'll return to this theme in discussing my new research on futurist disaster films as a cultural symptom embodying traumatic anxiety about where the world is headed. Film research fittingly moves in conjunction with world events, changing as culture changes bringing new areas to investigate.

But first to some personal history: While our 50th anniversary has occasioned many thoughtful reflections by SCMS members on the history of Film Studies (David Rodowick's fine award essay being one of these), I thought I would reflect for a few moments on my participation as a British subject in the emergence of Film Studies (as early Cultural Studies) from 1960 to 1963, taking place through The British Film Institute in London. This was about the time that The Society for Cinema Studies (as it was known for many years) was founded at the prompting of The Museum of Modern Art in New York (a recent issue of *Cinema Journal* offers details of how SCS was started by a small group of male scholars). Scholars in other nations were also developing embryonic Cinema Studies around this time. It is becoming ever more clear that Cinema Studies has from the start been as international as film itself. If many scholars like myself and Teresa De Lauretis (also being honored today) ended up bringing European experience to the U.S. in the 1960s, so others from elsewhere (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are increasingly bringing their knowledge and experience to US Film Studies. Meanwhile, US film scholars have moved to Asia, Australia, New Zealand or Latin America bringing US experience to those nations. Ideas have moved in multiple directions, then, over our 50 years in business, and continue to so move.

How did I get to work with BFI educators? Having graduated in English Language and Literature from the University of Birmingham, in 1959 I was a post-graduate in London, teaching students at Kingsway Day College of Further Education. This was a couple of years after Paddy Whannel came in as innovative Education Officer at The British Film Institute. The BFI was a unique organization with aims somewhat different from the American Film Institute: Funded by the British Government, the BFI early on made Film Education and publishing a priority. At the time, there was no Film Studies as such in British universities and it seemed highly unlikely there ever would be. The BFI developed information packets to help teachers, and as educators at Kingsway Day College, co-teacher Norman Fruchter and I could rent 16 mm films from BFI archives. In 1962, Paddy Whannel invited instructors at several higher education colleges to write short monographs about their courses. Jim Kitses, my second co-teacher at Kingsway, and I wrote a monograph describing courses we had been teaching to our young working class students at the college. Popular Culture was one of the few ways we could connect with these students, so that our entry into Visual Culture was educationally strategic, not intended to start a new discipline. Kitses and I hammered the book out together line by line on a typewriter, and it appeared as *Talking about the Cinema*—a first edition in 1966 (Figure 1) followed a second edition 1974 (Figure 2). There were two other volumes in Whannel's first BFI book series on *Teaching Film*—one by Stuart Hall (then organizing courses at a Teacher Training College in London) and another on Television by A.P. Higgins, *Talking About Television* (Figure 3). Hall and Whannel shortly afterwards co-wrote a book, *The Popular Arts*, one of the first cultural studies volumes on popular entertainment to appear in England. BFI publishing was born, and much of the credit, often not fully known, goes to Paddy Whannel (Figure 4): I especially wanted to honor Paddy here as my first film mentor, along with Stuart Hall, and other

BFI lecturers such as Alan Lovell, Peter Harcourt, and Victor Perkins. Looking back, Paddy's contribution to the development of the film culture we have today was hugely important.

At Kingsway, Fruchter, Kitses and I taught some of the first cultural studies film courses, on topics like "South Africa and Apartheid" (showing works by Lionel Rogosin, and documentaries about the Sharpsville Massacre). We invented topics such as "Images of the City" and "Popular Music and Jazz;" we even taught a course on "Women in the Cinema," but I have no memory of what we might have done given that the feminist movement had not yet started!

When I came to Rutgers University in 1963 to do a Ph.D in Comparative Literature, not only was no film being taught, but no-one had thought to organize any kind of Film Series. As a graduate student, I organized film showings and managed to bring Paul Morrissey and the Velvet Underground to present their experimental films and performances at Rutgers. It was the heyday of so-called underground cinema in New York, with Jack Smith and Andy Warhol making extraordinary films long before they became famous. I discovered a tiny group of women working in a small New York Office where they distributed films made by women, and I lugged these 16mm films to the Rutgers campus. This group later became the now hugely successful Women Make Movies organization. I began teaching and writing about women in film, mainly in the pioneering journal, *Jump Cut*, also crucial in the development of Film Studies. I taught first at Monmouth College and then at Rutgers, where I set up their first interdisciplinary film program, and also participated in one of the earliest Women's Studies Programs. About this time, in the early 1970s, I was invited by a female professor (unfortunately, I don't remember her name) to give a paper on women and film at SCS' annual conference at Temple University. There were few women yet in the organization and, memorably, at that conference, I was delighted to meet Vivian Sobchack: we bonded amidst the swath of men, and our relationship

continues today. The paper I presented there on Lina Wertmuller was one of my first film essays, published in a (short lived) journal, *Marxist Perspectives* that I was connected with, along with film scholar Leonard Quart.

We all know how from this point on almost, Cinema Studies took off in the UK, the U.S, and internationally in ways I don't need to rehearse here. Recent broad surveys of the development of Cinema Studies have already found their way into my graduate film classes. But these anecdotes—a small slice of the international history of our field—serve as a marker (as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary) to measure the huge changes to the field in such a relatively short space of time.

One of the questions facing our field is how to keep a certain coherence while at the same time including new research objects as new technologies transform the visual sphere. One answer is that we don't keep *one* focus. SCMS has been smart enough to offer itself as an umbrella for a whole variety of approaches to studying the moving image, as a brief glance at the Conference program reveals. We could have splintered into many sub-specialties in regard to images (TV, internet, digital arts, nano device studies, silent film history and theory, popular culture and music studies, photography and cinema, and more). But we wisely stayed together so that we could learn from others doing research in areas far from our own. The collaborative interchange amongst scholars working in distinct sub-specialties allows us not to get lost in a narrow area but to keep in view the complexities of the broad field we share.

My overall interest and concerns with the moving image in relation to society have stayed relatively stable: I have always been interested in the impact of varied social, political and cultural histories and images on publics and vice versa, the impact of publics on images. This

lead me in the early days to think about ideologies in cinema, especially as regards women, and to join others in developing feminist approaches to film. I went on to address (and theorize) the visual culture work of minority groups internationally. More recently, as befits our cyberspace, diasporic and crisis-ridden era, I have been less concerned with ideology than with how affects flow through moving images to publics. As Brian Massumi has noted, affect is now everywhere, and while it has not displaced ideology, affect has become a powerful force in societies in tandem with the increasingly visual and mediated culture of today. Affect requires the attention especially of media scholars since it is images with their strong emotional charge that so powerfully ignite publics.

My interest in the power of images spreading with new force through the internet to elicit emotions preceded 9/11 (I taught courses in the mid 1990s on trauma in Chinese literature and film with Ban Wang—work from the course was published by Hong Kong University Press in 2004). But 9/11 galvanized my personal emotions about trauma and World War II: I returned to Freud's trauma theories attending not only to individual psychic trauma but to how cultures also become traumatized, and my 2005 monograph on trauma culture introduced this new research direction. I argued that in the wake of 9/11, U.S and Euro-centric nations are developing a trauma culture—possibly at least in part “managed” or supported by governmental agencies. In that work, I focused on ways in which memories of past traumatic national and international catastrophes newly surfacing from traumatic repression were producing trauma culture: However, I recently realized that while memory of past personal and collective traumatic events (such as the holocaust, Hiroshima, slavery, decimation of Indigenous peoples globally) prevails today, a new aspect of trauma culture has emerged, namely prevalent dystopian fantasies about the world's future. (Although fantasies of Armageddon and apocalypse go back at least at least

as far as Biblical history, I have argued that *the form and scale* of this concern are new.) A brief sample of contemporary journalism shows that fear, panic, anxiety, pop up regularly as media (and indeed academic) topics. (Figures 5-7). I include here Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* because she builds on Barry Glassner's 1991 argument to suggest the US government and corporations "manage" trauma by exploiting catastrophe for their own political ends at the expense of the people who suffered. However, my focus in the new work is mainly on psychic aspects of collective trauma.

Tentatively titled *Trauma, Time and Technology: Dystopian Discourses in Film*, the book has a main focus on what I call "Trauma Future Tense." That is, I am interested in the dystopian future selves imaged in film, and on the cultural work such images perform. Starting with Freud's dystopian work, *Civilization and its Discontents*, written in 1929, his 1915 comments on World War I, and analysis of differences amongst fright, fear and anxiety in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I explore how dystopia and utopia are but two sides of the same coin, possibly correlating with Freud's Eros (pleasure seeking, hope) and Thanatos (looking toward death). I construct a new genre that I call "futurist dystopian film" taking care to differentiate this genre from earlier (and ongoing) Science Fiction and Nuclear catastrophe film. The dystopian genre *starts* with the world destroyed, and the plot is about how to survive the total loss of social order, sustenance and social meaning. If *Soylent Green* (1973) was a rare precursor of the genre, it has developed apace in the wake of 9/11 in films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *I am Legend* (2008), *Blindness* (2008), *Nine* (2009), *2012* (2009), *The Road* (2009), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *Avatar* (2010); and I have been told a film *2018* is on its way. (Since giving this talk, many more films about future catastrophe have appeared, but the one that almost perfectly supports my concept of trauma future-tense is *Take Shelter* (2011), whose hero suffers from *pre-*

(not *Post*) Traumatic Distress syndrome as he is terrified by images and horrific dreams about *future* catastrophic climate change.)

It is this intersection of trauma as external destructive force and subjective psychic state—trauma as dystopia of the spirit—that I will explore in studying the futurist dystopian film genre, adding to earlier studies by writers like Susan Sontag or Julia Kristeva attention not only to politics and new psychic disorders but to gender and race rarely addressed in earlier criticism. It is the symptomatic nature of the dystopian genre as it increases in our post 9/11 era that is important, as if the collective tension building up around climate change, immigration, terrorism and racism—all death related—needs an outlet in mass entertainment. Unlike Sontag, however, I do not see the genre as allaying fears but rather playing the role of the skeletons that were displayed everywhere in Medieval Europe as *Memento Mori*—reminders that death was near. In other words, the films function partly as symptom of our death anxiety but also as warnings about what humans have done, and continue to do, to destroy the planet on which we rely for our lives.

My discussion of my research on dystopian film and its affects in visual culture returns me to my opening comment about the need to build an international form of cinema studies: Trauma Studies is inherently international if not fully global given the dire predicament facing not only many nations but the planet itself. Climate change, immigration and terrorism significantly impact nearly everyone. This comparative approach to cinema and trauma partly accords with those who have argued that Cinema Studies paradigms such as “national cinema,” “international cinema,” “third world cinema,” are at once too narrow and too monolithic. Looking at international films about traumatic events—to say nothing of the fact that a disproportionate number of disaster films are being made by Mexican and Latin American directors—enables a cross-cultural perspective that does not frame the discussion through monolithic concepts yet

includes attention to the specificity of location (if not “nation” as such) in the representation of trauma. Focusing on cultural trauma through the media, and bearing in mind Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory, can illuminate trauma culture worldwide: Perhaps it can also show ways in which the dystopian/utopian binary has to be contested through new pragmatic strategies for alleviating and adapting to the disasters the films accept as inevitable. Above all I am fascinated with the way these films (and the novels or graphic texts, they draw on), deal in death before offering glimpses of, if not a utopian future as such, at least hope for humankind’s future. It is almost as if death and disaster provide the womb necessary for the birth of utopia, as Freud hinted at in 1915 in writing about World War I.

Let me end with once again thanking SCMS for honoring me with this award. Being honored in this way took me back to periods of my life that I had not thought about in a long time. For that, I am grateful, even as I appreciate that this is an award with its new title that suggests honoring awardees for scholarly work *so far*....