

Patty: Good afternoon, this is Patty White, and I teach at Swarthmore College in Film and Media Studies and also in Gender and Sexuality Studies. I'm here to interview my colleague and friend, Timothy Corrigan, who's a professor of Cinema Studies, as well as English, Art History, and with appointments in German and Italian at the University of Pennsylvania.

It's March 16th in Toronto, at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies' annual convention. Timothy is the author of more than 10 books, and if you were to count the multiple editions of some of those books, it would be scores of books. These include key books on New German Cinema as well as *Cinema Without Walls, Movies and Culture after Vietnam*, the prize-winning book, *The Essay Film* as well as *Film and Literature*, the wonderful *Film Experience*, an introductory textbook, which we've done together, and the prodigiously influential *Short Guide to Writing About Film*, which is beloved by people across the disciplines.

He's recently been publishing on the question of value and is interested in issues of description, as well as the global road movie. So a lot of different topics. I just wanted to, up front, thank you for being such a wonderful scholar and mentor, but also for treating me like a peer. I think you do that with many in our field, and I think that's important for these interviews, that it's not with gatekeepers that we're talking, it's with people who are very involved in the contemporary issues that confront our field. So thank you.

Timothy: Well thank you. You're more than a peer, Patty. Thank you for doing this.

Patty: My pleasure. I wanted to start not by going back in time, but we'll do that, but by just giving you a question about the horizon. Very ice-breaking question. If you were to pick one film that you wanted to do the DVD extras for, for say, the Criterion Collection, what would you dream film be?

Timothy: I've actually thought about that. I'm not sure if they have this film already in the collection, or at least with a supplement. I know they have it in the collection, but *Sans Soleil*, the Chris Marker film would be certainly one of my first choices. Then I think there are a variety of contemporary documentaries that I'm really interested in too, like the Sarah Polley film, *Stories We Tell*. I could go on, I think, after that. It's ...

Patty: That's what I think is interesting about the career that I just outlined in very broad strokes, is that there are many things that quicken the heart for you.

Timothy: Absolutely.

Patty: And you write about a lot of different things. I ask that because, with these eclectic interests, you've had a fairly stable employment. You've been at Temple for many years and at Penn for more, but you've also been a bit of a peripatetic scholar and done stints in Japan, in Rome, in the U.K.

Timothy: Hanoi.

Patty: Hanoi, I was gonna say, and visited in Vietnam and China, upcoming. I was just wondering if you could say a little bit about this curiosity, this interest in many things, and maybe how that relates to your keen interest in the essay.

Timothy: Yeah, that's a good question. More than just the essay film, I think it relates to my interest in film, because I am from Iowa. I was a true-blue Iowa boy, and when I went to college, I was really an innocent in many ways. Unlike the generation now, I never got far out of the Midwest until I went to graduate school in England. That really just opened my mind in many ways. It's also almost coincidental with where I started to think about film, and see different kinds of films and so forth. I think there's something, some ways entwined about this early passion for traveling, which I continue to do, and my emerging passion for film along the way. New vistas, new cultures, new peoples.

Of course, when I would take these trips, whether it was to teach in Rome, or to teach in London, Hanoi, those were academic appointments to a large extent. But I think underwriting them was this curiosity about other cultures, which had never been part of my life until I was in my 20s, at all, and remains part of my life too.

Patty: You were, as you said, you're from Iowa, and you went to Notre Dame. You studied ... what did you go in to college, thinking you were gonna study, Tim?

Timothy: This is almost funny. I was a math guy in high school. I didn't read much. I certainly didn't see any so-called important movies. I think my favorite movie as a youngster was the classic, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

Patty: Still a good one.

Timothy: I was, through high school, very strong in math, and that's what I thought I would do in college. I ended up in Notre Dame in the late '60s, and of course everything was in turmoil around the country at that point. At that point, Notre Dame was a very, almost radical campus, in many ways. It became clear to me that math was just not gonna light my fire anymore, at all. I became passionate about literature, which is a field I knew nothing about. But it seemed so exciting to me, and I just immersed myself in literature. All the literature I'd never read before. Alongside that, which was very typical of this generation, and I think other scholars have talked about this as well, is this was also the time when film studies was starting to emerge in academia, and you started to see all of these different new waves start to make their way to campuses and so forth, and so on.

I was drowning myself in literature, and going to films for the first time that seemed so exotic and different.

Patty: On campus film societies?

Timothy: On campus film societies, and so forth. There was one class in Notre Dame that taught film, but there were on campus film societies. Then at the end of my undergraduate years, which was when the Vietnam war was still hot and heavy, I think people forget that those were the days of the lottery. So I was targeted at going overseas and getting

drafted. There was no doubt about it. I applied to two graduate schools. Toronto and Leeds, in England. I said, "This would be how I would answer the draft call."

That, of course, I went to England. Which, in some ways, the film art scene was really vibrant all over England at the time. That sort of added to this really growing interest in film, and all the possibilities that were available in film, and so forth, and so on. Then it carried on.

Patty: But you studied Irish Studies at Leeds?

Timothy: Correct. Irish Studies at Leeds. I'm not exactly sure why, I could get into an MA in Irish Studies. That was certainly a lot better than going to Saigon.

Patty: At that point.

Timothy: At that point. It was really very exciting to do that, and I think we can talk about this in a bit more, but there's a certain, from a distance, it seems almost a certain sort of randomness to my interest in different fields. From math, to English literature, Irish studies, and eventually to film. I do believe in my heart of hearts, there's a pattern somewhere there. Yeah, then I went to graduate school at Emory and did a PhD in Romanticism. But, again at the same time, I had this parallel track going, which was developing this interest in film.

David Cook was there at the time, and he sort of mentored me privately about film. That's when I saw a lot of films simply through my friendship with him, and his encouragement along the way.

Patty: You then went to, in short order, you piled up these degrees, now with the Vietnam War as a background, this is making more sense.

Timothy: Right, right, right.

Patty: This is by now the end of the '70s, but you went to Paris, and Paris at the end of the '70s you did the Paris film program, which, could you say a little bit more about that? That's so formative to many of the lions in our field, and ...

Timothy: Yeah, it changed my life, it changed my life, in many ways. At the time, when I was at Emory, I finished my degree. Even though it was in British Romanticism, it was heavily geared towards literary theory. It began in some ways, or at least continued my romance with different kinds of theoretical models and some sort.

When I finished at Emory, I was in one of those gap years where I didn't have a job, I didn't know what I was gonna do, and David Cook said, "You know, why don't you go pick up a degree in film, because you have the passion for that, and that's what you wanna do." It was at that point in my last years at Emory, that I spotted the Germans, the so-called New German Cinema. He said, "Why don't you go and develop that interest?" I applied to some American MA programs in film, but the Paris one was just,

in some ways, too wonderful to pass up. As you said, it was a place where a lot of scholars of my generation spent time for a year or more. We could run down a list of all the people that were there.

Dana Polan ran it for a while. I think Janet Bergstrom was there. Possibly Mary Ann Doane, I'm not sure. A lot of the people that got interest in, particularly French theory, which was in its heyday at that point. This would be the late '70s. I trotted off to Paris, and as I mentioned before, I was being propelled a lot of these times by just my cultural curiosity to be in other places. I got there, and it was the first time in my life that I actually academically concentrated solely on film. We had people like Raymond Bellour, Christian Metz, Thierry Kuntzel, these were our teachers. Marc Vernet, Michel Marie.

Then around that, we had all these Paris University seminars, which we were allowed to go to. So we could go to Julia Kristeva, in one of her classes. Or we could go to Roland Barthes lectures at the College de France. It was an extraordinarily exciting time for me in terms of just shifting from a kind of literary world, to a cinematic world, across in some ways the cutting edge of these new theoretical models that were coming out of France at that point. Coincidentally or not, it's when I was trying to develop this idea about the New German Cinema: Fassbinder, Herzog, Helke Sander, and others.

This is a long digression, which I don't need to go down, but in the late '70s, for various reasons, you couldn't see a lot of these filmmakers in Germany. You could see them in Paris. So it all came together in some ways, where I had this wonderful experience of contemporary French theory, but then on the streets I could see Syberberg, and Fassbinder, and all of these other great German filmmakers who were just starting to show up around the globe.

Patty: So not just the cinematheque, just showing in regular theaters-

Timothy: Regular theaters and so forth. Of course, Paris has so many wonderful theaters that are art cinemas, and still does. Still does.

Patty: Maybe, did you go to one of those art cinemas with your soon-to-be wife, Marsha Ferguson, because you met her at that time.

Timothy: Actually, I did indeed. I did indeed. It was a little later in this experience when we were in second half of this year. I was fully engaged with theory and with the films themselves. We still talk about this. On our first date, and she was not a film person at all, at least not then. She's a theater person. But the first date I took her on was to see Chris Marker's *Letter From Siberia*, which is not exactly your most romantic date.

Patty: At least it's not as bad as *Taxi Driver*.

Timothy: That's right, right. Or *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, & Her Lover*. Which is another story.

Patty: And what did she think?

Timothy: She thought it was very strange. She thought it was very strange. She's younger than I am, and she was really mystified by this whole notion of film theory. I think most people are, who are not in our world. Say, "There are theoretical models for film? For making films?" I said, "No, well, not exactly making films, but thinking about films, and so forth."

Patty: That film was perfect for illustrating that.

Timothy: Well, it was. It was also disconcerting, if not alienating in a way. But it all worked out well in the ...

Patty: Great. No, when you still, go back to Marker again and again.

Timothy: Yeah, well who would've thought, right?

Patty: It's interesting that you discovered the Germans in Paris. You were studying literature. You were studying romanticism. When I think of the connections between your work on Coleridge and Herzog, I see some connections there, but can you say what, besides the excitement of this new culture, what was it about New German Cinema that drew you in?

Timothy: This is one of those issues, questions which I ask myself. I was just talking with Cecilia Sayad yesterday, saying how you look at the different topics we choose and it doesn't seem like the necessarily follow logically. It's not as if, like a lot of scholars, I am a specialist in German cinema, or I am a specialist in Korean cinema, or some other theoretical issue. But in my own mind, I find threads that bind them in some ways.

When I was working on a Coleridge, there were two things which in some ways, at least in retrospect, anticipate the work I did later, which is one, I was interested in Coleridge for theoretical reasons. As I said before, I was in graduate school, but also was, as an undergraduate, was really quite fascinated with different theoretical models of some sort. Usually literary, but as you got into the contemporary fields, often European, French and so forth and so on. That theoretical base is what, in some ways, got me to Coleridge. Then secondly, and we can come back and talk about this, is I've always been interested in the literary essay. I never knew what exactly to do with it as a form at that point, but it was always something that I enjoyed reading, and talking about, and so forth, and so on.

Interestingly, of course, Herzog has this hyper-romantic dimension to him. He turns to early romantic texts, German romantic texts. One could argue that his whole aesthetic is this romantic aesthetic. Almost metaphysics, as Deleuze called him. That was something that interested me along the way too with him. Then secondly, as sort of again trying to keep a logic here, is when I was working on Herzog, and the Herzog book, I started to look at all of these short films of his. *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, *La Soufrière*, these films which I would later call essay films, but then just seemed like strange documentaries as so forth.

So there's a sense in which it became, or it becomes at least in retrospect, a logical move to move towards Herzog. I must say that he's not how I got interested in New German Cinema. That has a more somewhat sordid side to it, which is that-

Patty: Do tell.

Timothy: When I was studying with David Cook, this would've been something like '77, one of the art cinemas was featuring whatever, two weeks on the New German Cinema. Which meant nothing to me. So David said, "Well let's just fill up a thermos with martinis and we'll go down there and sit in the front row of the movie theater and watch these movies." So we did.

I remember walking in there and seeing the first one, the Wim Wenders film, which is translated, strangely as, *Kings of the Road*, and just saying, "This is a kind of film I've never seen before." It was then and there, in '77, I said, "I need to write about these guys."

I started writing an essay on Wenders, in fact. It got rejected a number of places. I realized, and I realized this after I got to Paris, that it was a kind of literary reading of film. That's why the transition to Paris and studying with true film scholars, in really many ways catapulted me from a literary student who loved films, to somebody who understood what film scholarship and analysis was.

Patty: That's in the context of, as you said, Bellour, and Metz, and I know you have a good story about Roland Barthes, who is an essayist of the first order.

Timothy: Absolutely, and I have to say that I think of not just theoreticians, but of writers. Roland Barthes remains, in many ways a kind of absolute god to me in the way he writes and what he writes about. I was studying with Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel and of course in those days, they were, besides theoretical people, they were absolutely focused on precise textual, frame-by-frame analysis, as we know with Bellour's work particularly, but others. That taught me a tremendous amount, a tremendous amount.

The funny story, I think that you're referring to is the one where Bellour received a Doctorat d'État in Paris, which is beyond a PhD. It's for greater than a PhD. We went, a couple of us from his class to see this ceremony of his. Orals, his defense. It was in one of these grand Sorbonne hallways, and everyone was in regalia, and the only people in the audience was myself, my friend from the program, and Stephen Heath. That was entirely it. I had just done my doctoral defense back at Emory not too many months before, which was quite rigorous. I remember Barthes's first questions for Raymond. He said, "Raymond, how do you write about something you love?" I was just so impressed, I thought you cannot possibly get that wrong, that's great.

Patty: So that was great. Was Metz also one of the examiners?

Timothy: Oh, Metz was there, and Mitry. It was Metz, Barthes, and Mitry. So, quite a committee, quite a committee.

Patty: Yeah, so that was like a primal scene of love, and scholarship, so that's pretty great.

So your first book on *New German Cinema: The Displaced Image* made you an expert on this, but it was also part of a very heady, intellectual time with film studies. Kind of a lot of people working on New German Cinema, so there was a lot of really exciting intellectual ferment back in the states. Can you say a little bit about that?

Timothy: Absolutely. As I was saying, I got interested in, and I think this follows, or describes a pattern in my scholarship, I got interested in the Germans not because I was interested in Germany, or interested in what was going on in German cinema, historically at all. I saw these films, and these films just knocked me over, and I said, "I gotta write about that." I think in a lot of what I write about follows that pattern. It's not so much, I have a big theoretical project or a methodological interest that I'm gonna guide me, but I get interested in very particular films, and see to what extent they complicate or trouble particular theoretical or methodological issues. That was the case with the Germans.

I was also taking a class with a famous German theoretician, Hans Robert Jauss. I was interested in his work on reception and so forth. It just seemed to me that I was gonna try and work out through these films I loved some of the theoretical issues that I thought they provoked. That meant that when I settled back in the States, after this, this was also a very hot scholarly topic. It created a really wonderful community for me, of people who were really Germanist scholars. Like Tony Kaes, Miriam Hansen, and Ric Rentschler. All of whom became totally supportive, and great friends. They were real Germanists, in a way. Ric, of course, is probably the premier German film scholar in this country along with Tony. I was taking a different angle at it, that was really about the films and some of the methodological issues that I felt were being dramatized in them. But these other Germanists were really close and good.

Patty: But it was also about film theory being quite identified with that, I think at that time. It was the time of the Milwaukee film conferences that had different topics, but there was a really important one, right, that you participated in?

Timothy: And I think that that's true, I think that even the people that I would describe as true Germanists, they were in many ways, very much galvanized by these new films coming out of Germany. Of course, they'd been coming out since the late '60s at least, for many of them. So it created a really interesting dynamic, and you're saying The Center for 20th Century Studies was doing things on the New German cinema. There were special issues in *New German Critique*, and a variety of other journals as well. So it was really an exciting time for me as a film person.

Patty: So you also, I think, I don't know if reinvented yourself isn't the right word, but made a very big impression on the field with the *Cinema Without Walls* book. I know, for me, as a kind of emerging cinema scholar, the fact that I loved theory, and I loved reading about classical spectatorship, but what was going on around me wasn't really that, and you were one of the first scholars that systematically, and expansively said, "Well look, we are in this post-modern moment, and let's think about the apparatus really differently." Could you say a little bit about what you argued in *Cinema Without Walls*,

how it was received, and what that meant in terms of a pivot for you, intellectually, pedagogically, whatever?

Timothy: Again, I think there were, at that time-

Patty: And we should say, it's '80s. '86.

Timothy: It's the mid '80s, and it was just a number of films that I was seeing that both excited me and confused me. I was also, as many of us were, reading different models of post-modernism at that time as well. So I decided I was gonna try it out, I was gonna try out some of these methodological issues, problems, questions that are associated with post-modernism, and see to what extent that they could illuminate these different films along the way. Or different issues. So that, I went after it in terms of one of the famous Jameson models about how history, in some ways, becomes recreated through models of post-modernism. Questions about auteurism, genre, and politics themselves. So to what extent you could use these larger post-modern frameworks to have close textual readings of different films, which spanned the globe at that time. Everything from Scorsese films to Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*, the amazing television series from Britain. I think it worked out pretty well.

There were other books coming out at the time, some brilliant ones like Anne Friedberg's book on *Window Shopping*, which came out about the same time. So as a scholar you just wanna get in the conversation a little bit.

Patty: I feel like some of the, I mean many of the ideas from that book are really influential, but especially the idea of the commercial auteur, and that was prescient, it really became so much more how American cinema, independent cinema, reinvented itself in terms of director brands. And that's something you're still interested in.

Timothy: Yeah, I guess I am. But it's funny, I found that when you, and I'm sure you've had this experience with your work too, you have a larger view of what you want the book to be about, and specific chapters to be about, and you really don't know what's going to catch on, and that chapter on auteurs caught on. Then you have other chapters, where you say, "Gosh, I thought that was a great chapter, and people seem to be ignoring it, or some sort."

Patty: It'll make its way back, all of us, yeah.

Timothy: You just have to follow your heart, do your work, and see what arrives.

Patty: I'm struck with you saying you fall in love with a film, or you wanna work on a problem in film and your extremely influential book, *Writing About Film*. Could you talk a little bit about what encouraged you to take that pedagogical turn in your writing, and what the gratifications and maybe downsides of it are?

Timothy: There's many ways to talk about it. I think what I've always been interested in with film is writing, and how people write about film. It's kind of a variation on my early interest

in reception theory and so forth. But how do people write about film? That's in some ways a kind of a large framework to sort of explain or justify their books. The actuality is, and this is where I think pedagogy becomes something very important in my life, and in our life I think, is that we as scholars spend a lot of time getting material for a book together, thinking about how we're gonna market it, who would be a good publisher, and so forth, and so on. In this case, there was an editor from Little Brown, just walking the hallways, and she stopped in and said, "I have this series on writing about art, writing about philosophy, whatever. Would you be interested in doing one about writing about film?" I said, "Sure, I guess."

Patty: That was when you were at Temple?

Timothy: Yeah. And it was partly because I was interested in the issues of writing, but it's a very, very basic book. The real, in some ways, motive for it was, and I think this is the motive for some of the textbooks that I and we do, is that I would spend a lot of time in the classroom trying to explain to people how to write a film essay. I thought, well, if I'm gonna spend all this time doing it, why don't I just package it as a book? Again, you don't know how it's gonna go, but that book has been around. It's been around. I sent it off to the publisher back in the old days when you put it in the mail. This time, from Tokyo, when my wife went into labor with my oldest daughter. So it's got a very cloudy beginning.

Patty: Very long life, yeah.

Timothy: Yeah. And it has hung around.

Patty: But I think it also speaks to the interdisciplinarity of cinema studies, and the ways that people outside our discipline are also thinking through these very important artifacts of their lives. So it's a really nice ...

Timothy: Well, and I think in the history we've been talking about, I've always been, as you are too, and many in our field are, absolutely committed to a kind of interdisciplinarity. That interdisciplinarity can go in different directions, but it usually really does, I think, infuse what we do in different ways.

Patty: Thinking, the pedagogy books, and there's more than one, there's also *Film and Literature*, which has a core theoretical place in your work around adaptation. I'm wondering if you could speak to that interdisciplinarity, or what is adaptation for you, say right now. What are you thinking? Because we're seeing so much intertextuality, and transmedia, yeah ...

Timothy: Right. The obvious, in some ways, foundation for that is, I was trained in literature when I went to Temple. I was doing both literature courses and film courses. It was almost, in many ways, a natural product of that tension or exchange between them. I was teaching adaptations along the way, and so forth. Again, it became a way to put together some readings and some thinking about adaptation. Specifically, about film and literature, now it seems to me somewhat, no naive, but simple formula.

Of course the book went into another edition and I was able to jazz it up, and make it in some ways more contemporary. Because, along the way, this field of adaptation, which certainly during the '70s, and probably the '80s, was in many ways, not dismissed, but marginalized in terms of film studies.

Adaptation of human literature, that's what English departments do so they can show some motives. At least since, I think the 2000s, maybe a little earlier, this field, adaptation studies strikes me as really quite interesting, because it has grown in many different directions than just film and literature, or movies on the screen. It's about so many other engagements and intersections, which can be discussed and talked about under the rubric of adaptation studies in the broadest terms. Not only in terms of the relationship of the industry to film production and where that comes into play as an economic model, but the way adaptation spread across not just film and literature, but video games, music, and so forth, and so on. I find it, in some ways, more exciting now that it certainly was when I started working on it.

Patty: That's great. It struck me just that there's an interesting direction of, I wanna say tension, but I'm not sure it is a tension, between literature in that sort of fictive mode, and your interest in documentary. You teach quite a bit about documentary and the form that you mostly concentrated on is the essay film, and your book, *The Essay Film After Montaigne ?...*

Timothy: *From Montaigne, After Marker.*

Patty: *From Montaigne, after Marker.* I sometimes get the prepositions, it's intriguing how-

Timothy: I struggled with those prepositions.

Patty: It's intriguing how the prepositions come out. So that book came out in 2011, and won the Katherine Singer Kovács Award from the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. I think maybe, what is it, a few years later, there's now a shelf full of books on the essay film.

Timothy: Right, especially this year.

Patty: This year, yeah. One of which you co-edited with Nora Alter, and her own book on that topic came out. Is there something similar going on here about hybridity, or about thinking across to what you were saying about adaptation. Is the essay film of interest because these genres are in flux?

Timothy: Yeah. I think in my case particularly, as I was saying before, it was always when I did literary studies, I was somewhat unusual, in a sense I wasn't primarily interested in poetry or novels, I was particularly interested in essayists, people like Pater or Ruskin, and so forth, and so on. I was, or Hazlitt ... so I had that practice always in my mind, and certainly it's something to do with my moving in that direction with film.

But I think again it was in many ways, the scholarship followed the practice in the sense that ... and I think that's true of many of these books which are coming out these days on it, is there was a recognition that something different is going on here. I was never, at first, that interested in documentary. I am, certainly, now. But when I started seeing things like *Sans Soleil* in the '80s, or Errol Morris' film, *The Thin Blue Line*, you would see these, and Herzog, I would add him too, you'd say, "Well these are what? What do we call these things? They're sort of documentaries, but the certainly don't look like *Man of Aran*, or *The River*, or anything like that." So it became a project about, what are these films about? It just happened to, in some ways, trigger my own interest in the essay itself.

One of the nice things about it being a particularly active scholarly field these days, is in the best of active scholarly fields, there's a lot of disagreement and argument about it, and I have gotten in a few of those. But I think that what we all share is a sense that this is a really distinctive form of filmmaking that, pick your date, just started to emerge, and certainly is proliferating right now quite a bit.

Patty: For the record, where would you be in those debates? Could you, sort of say, what position would you defend? And I say that because I know that part of the essayistic is, it's not about defending, it's about exploring.

Timothy: Yeah. I think, contrary to everything else in my life, I think I'm the kinda doctrinaire scholar in the sense that many of the very smart people who work on this wanna take, in some ways, a looser attitude towards it. Both historically, and in terms of formal aesthetic issues and so forth. Nora Alter, Thomas Elsaesser, or a variety of other people wanna see it as a kinda open field that goes all the way back to, maybe even the 1890s or something in terms of its prototypes. Certainly in the '30s or the late '20s with *Man with a Movie Camera*, I have a much stricter historical sense of it as a post World War II phenomenon, and one that has, for me, very specific tripartite structure. It's not just about personal expression, it's about, in some ways, the sort of destabilizing of subjectivity and personal expression.

So what that means in terms of my own thinking and writing about it, is more and more filmmakers are calling themselves essay filmmakers, and that's fine. But my models attempts to say, "If we give it a stricter definition, in some ways, it allows us to value what's really successful about certain filmmakers, and certain films along the way."

Patty: That has to do with the public expression, or the engagement with ideas.

Timothy: Yeah. Kind of an engagement, which I talk about in terms of a tripartite model, a subjective engagement with a public sphere, or public events of one sort. Which in that engagement, generates a kind of, and this is a common term that goes with this, generates a thinking on film. But it's an engagement which that thinking is not simply about what's happening out there, what does that event mean? But it's also an engagement with, how is this changing me? How am I rethinking myself as I engage in this filmmaking?

So it's a very active, dynamic kind of filmmaking for me, a transformative kind.

Patty: Could you name a recent essay film that's excited you, and that you maybe haven't got around to writing about yet?

Timothy: Let me think. A recent one, well I think I mentioned before the Sarah Polley, which is not so recent, but *Stories We Tell*. I think I just a fabulous example of that.

Patty: And I'm think, well-

Timothy: Go ahead.

Patty: No, no, I was just thinking of examples, one of the pleasures of writing with you, the introductory textbook is that in its reiterations, we have to come up with new examples. You did a lovely little piece on *Stories We Tell* for that book that I'd love to see percolate out [crosstalk 00:40:00].

Timothy: Yeah, and I'd love that film, and I love showing the film. But the Agnes Varda films, I think, are just remarkable in many ways. Some of the times I'm coming back to filmmakers that other people have known for a while that I'm just finally seeing in this, like Harun Farocki, whom I discovered late in his career. Patrick Keiller, who not many people know, the British filmmaker. Then there's the great filmmakers, like Trinh T Minh-Ha, who's still working beautifully in that genre, I think, yeah.

Patty: Yeah. I wanted to ask you a little bit about where the creative juices are going right now, and if you'd be willing to talk about some of your current projects?

Timothy: Yeah, they're going towards retirement.

Patty: You keep threatening this.

Timothy: No, I don't know. It's really, at this point in my career, I think it's not unusual later in one's career, is you wanna be sure that if you're gonna write a book, you're gonna really wanna write a book. It's not because you need to write a book, or people are expecting you to write a book. I've been toying around with, most recently, this notion of description. Which, again, in some ways, you can hear the echoes of my interest in writing and so forth, and so on, about. Because description, and ekphrasia, and all of that is not a particularly new model for thinking about the relationship of image and language. But it's gotten a lot more attention recently, and it's been theorized in more complicated, interesting ways I think than ever.

What I'm interested in is not what often gets attention, which is how do films describe the world. I'm interested in how we as film viewers, film critics, film scholars, how do we put description to work when we write about films? This is something that I emphasize in the classroom as well that, for my students, I say, "When you describe a scene, it's already a critical, hermeneutical act." What I wanna do, if I do this, what I wanna do with this book in some ways, explore the extremes of that. Of how describing a

particular scene, an image, a shot, can become a generative process, both theoretically, intellectually, and rhetorically, along the way.

Patty: I love the emphasis on language. Is description always about language in your definition?

Timothy: If you are describing a scene ... yes, I suppose, but you're making me think, too, because certainly the, to distinguish it, the video essay as opposed to the-

Patty: That's where I was going, yeah.

Timothy: The essay film is a kind of description in itself. Which is not necessarily linguistically centered in that way. To tell you the truth, I'm not totally knowledgeable about what's happening there. I am interested, primarily in the linguistic encounter. This goes back to, I think, some of the interests I've had throughout my career in language.

Patty: You also just mentioned, you took us back to the classroom, which is this, let's get the students writing well about film. Let's get the students thinking about what they're doing when they describe. You also won the Pedagogy Award from the Society for Cinema and Media Studies just a few years after the Kovács Award. So this organization has had an important place for you.

Timothy: I've been very fortunate, I have to say. I do take teaching very seriously, as you do. I think that award, which is wonderful, and very honorific is ... it's part of the records you have in the classroom, but it's also because I spent probably more time than most people on textbooks, and thinking about how to do innovative textbooks. Which should bring us to *The Film Experience*. Can I tell that story?

Patty: Yes, of course.

Timothy: Because that is one of my favorite projects, and it is a film introductory textbook, and there are plenty of those out there. There'll be plenty more.

Patty: Some that won't be mentioned.

Timothy: Some that won't be mentioned.

Patty: Because they loom so large in our-

Timothy: That's right. The competition. But when I originally thought about that, it was really to, again, respond to what I felt was lacking in terms of the textbooks that were available in teaching introductory courses. I wanted to expand it across those formal issues that one concentrates on in the classroom, and in textbooks, and put it in a more cultural, historical context along the way.

So with that book, and you know this story, I got started on it, and it just became too, too much for me. Because those are daunting textbooks to try and write. I abandoned it

at one point, it was reborn at Bedford/St. Martin's and I got started on it again. I abandoned it again. They said, "Please give it another try." And I said, "Only if you let me bring in somebody else to help my co-author with you." And you and I didn't know each other very well at the time.

Patty: Not well, no.

Timothy: You had just come to Swarthmore. I thought about it, and I knew your work. I knew it was very different from mine. You had interests different from mine. I said, "I'm gonna ask Patty if she'll do this." "Please, please, Patty. Do this with me." And you did, and I have been grateful ever since because it would never have gotten done without you.

Patty: Well, you're so generous. You know, just on record, you had done so much conceptual work that I think I wouldn't have known where to start about how to structure the book. And it's gone through some changes since. And we've had many editors, and many readers who've given us a lot of really good feedback. But one thing I've been really proud of in this last iteration is that we were able to draw out the ways that that book is about culture, and therefore is about race, and gender, and transnational questions, and trans-generic questions, and industrial questions that really have animated that project. So I was incredibly grateful for that. And you're the most generous ... you don't stop people from going where they wanna drive themselves into a corner with some argument, you're like, you know, let it happen. So you must be amazing in the classroom.

Timothy: Well, I try to be good, but that book gained enormously from your input. And with every edition it gains enormously as well, because not only do you have a perspective on film history and film practice that's different from mine, but you're an extraordinary reader and editor along the way. And that's probably has something to do with your *Camera Obscura* experience and so forth.

Patty: Being an editor, yeah.

Timothy: But I have to say that one of the things about that book that I also quite like, and that we have happily been on the same page about is, it's not an easy book. There's a ton of material in it. We do all of the formal analysis that one needs in this book, but it is a complicated book. Textbooks, in many ways, become, I don't know, made secondary from a scholarly point of view. But I don't see it that way at all. And if you're gonna do a textbook, do a really smart one that can be useful. And I think we did it.

Patty: Well. I'm trying to get you on camera to just say how grateful I am to you, and you're just being yourself and turning it back, but thank you.

One thing that, so just about the examples is that you also take your students to the Cannes Film Festival. And you're very interested in contemporary film culture. You're an editor. You're doing a conference on documentary. If you could say a little bit about just what you like about our field, and how it's sustained you, or how you'd push it in different directions, if you could.

Timothy: I think what I like about our field, what I like about our subject matter is that I think film and media extend so far out into the culture and the world. There's barely a corner of our world, or of our society where film and media don't impact it. When I teach my introductory class, which is often a little bit like missionary work, it seems to me, because people are from nursing, or Wharton, or wherever. I say to them, and I totally believe it, that you are not educated unless you know about film and media in this world today.

And as part of that, in terms of conferences, or film festivals, or having speaker series, I think one important way to underline the importance of it, and to develop and understanding of that, is outside the classroom, by creating cultures, film and media cultures. Where people realize this is not just something that happens in a Ivy League hallway. It's something that is part of their everyday life. And it's fine to be intellectual about it. It's fine to be intellectual.

Patty: It might be imperative.

Timothy: Imperative, intellectual, yeah.

Patty: Well, thank you.

Timothy: Thank you, Patty.