

Patrice Petro: My name is Patrice Petro, and I am Professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I'm here today with Mary Ann Doane, Class of 1937 Professor of Film and Media at the University of California, Berkeley. This is Friday, the 27th of March, 2015, the third day of the society's annual meeting in Montreal at the Fairmont hotel.

Patrice Petro: Mary Ann Doane is truly a field pioneer who has written, published, and co-edited numerous articles and books on feminist film theory, cultural studies, and semiotics, including *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Films of 1940s* in 1987, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* from 1991, and *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* from 2002. She has also written on photography, television, and digital media, and is currently completing a book on the use of the close-up in film practice and theory.

Patrice Petro: So to begin, allow me to provide some framing remarks that I hope will guide our conversation. In the introduction to your book *Femme Fatales* you write, and I quote, "There is a strong temptation to find retrospectively a consistency and coherence, perhaps more importantly a direction in one's own work, making an author the least reliable historian of her own ideas." End quote.

Patrice Petro: More recently in your book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, you describe the late 19th and early 20th century desire to analyze and rationalize time in what you say is quote "The smooth narrative of a successful and progressive rationalization." This smooth narrative is nonetheless as you say quote, "disturbed by an insistent fascination with contingency, indexicality, and chance that manifests itself in many different levels in aesthetics, debates about photography, physics, biology, and the growth of social statistics and statistical epistemologies in general." End quote. "Rationalization," you conclude, "must entail a reduction or denial of contingency."

Patrice Petro: I'm hoping that in the course of our conversation today, we can avoid any smooth narratives or rationalizations so that we can talk about the coherence of your own work as well as its inconsistencies, contingencies, and departures from a coherent project. But to start, allow me to ask you some questions that will allow you to trace for us your research and career path.

Patrice Petro: So to begin, what got you interested in becoming a film and media scholar?

Mary Ann Doane: Well, like everyone else, I think I wanted to be a filmmaker. That was my goal initially, and even when I went to University of Iowa for graduate studies, my idea was to learn as much about filmmaking as I could there, never to get the PhD, and then just go and make films. But of course, that didn't happen. So I became, even when I was an undergraduate at Cornell, I became more and more interested in theory. And there it was primarily literary theory. I was an English major there. And took some film courses as well, but I became so interested in theory, so pulled in that I was pulled a little bit away from the goal

of filmmaking. Although when I did go on the job market, I went on the job market for both kinds of jobs, both filmmaking and film theory.

Patrice Petro: So what made you choose the University of Iowa after Cornell?

Mary Ann Doane: Well, at Cornell the only one teaching film at that time was Don Fredericksen. And he had very recently gotten his PhD at Iowa. And I only knew of two programs, Madison and Iowa. I was pretty ignorant about the field of graduate studies in film. And so I visited both of them and I was pretty heavily in debt from my undergraduate years, and Iowa gave me more money so I went there. So there is a lot of contingency involved in all of this.

Patrice Petro: Oh interesting. Yeah it's just both of us went to the University of Iowa. I can remember in the day that the argument people would say if you were interested in working in Hollywood, you would go to the West Coast, if you were interested in more independent film, you'd go to New York, if you're interested in history, you'd go to Madison for their wonderful archives. But if you were interested in theory, you would go to Iowa because there were only cornfields.

Mary Ann Doane: I never heard that.

Patrice Petro: In any case, can you tell us what training preceded your first teaching job whether formal university-based training or creative activity or both.

Mary Ann Doane: Well, I did do both at Iowa. I made films, and worked very closely with filmmaking and the technology etc., but I also took courses from Gayatri Spivak in Comparative Literature. It was a very exciting time to be at Iowa. Dudley Andrew was there, and he brought in people like Thomas Elsaesser and Annette Kuhn and there were a lot of people going through Iowa at the time. So despite the fact that there were very few film faculty actually there, I think three, there were plenty of people to study with both in English and Comparative Literature, and the people that Dudley was constantly bringing in, mostly from abroad. So, I studied cinema, theory, history.

Patrice Petro: Interestingly, it was the same for me but it was '70, I don't know how many years later, but I mean, it was a really interdisciplinary program we were encouraged-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, yes

Patrice Petro: ... to take classes across the humanities which was one of the strengths I think of the program.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, definitely. No, I very much liked that.

Patrice Petro: Since you said you were a filmmaker, what kind of films did you make?

Mary Ann Doane: I think they may have decayed already. But my first film was actually a documentary that was called *To Approach*, and it was about a teacher, Angelo Bertocci. I don't know if he was there when you were there, but he taught the history of literary theory, and he was very, very animated guy who would write all over the blackboard and jump around, and he had his lecture notes which were yellowing from the years, all the years. It was just fascinating, and so, I made a documentary with a lot of close-ups of him teaching. I wanted to have this kind of constrained feeling with all this energy kind of bursting out of the frame. And I also took stills, and I then panned over the stills. So in this documentary, I invented the Ken Burns affect before Ken Burns, but I can't say I'm very proud of that. There was a lot of panning over these still frames and I did it all, I mean, in those days there were no digital editing so everything was very hands on with the materials etc.

Mary Ann Doane: That was the first film I made, and the second film I made was called *Maude's Knee in the Afternoon*. So you can probably guess what that was about. It was a parody of Rohmer's films. And it was set in a bathroom. It was also very claustrophobic with an actress sitting in the tub, and she shaves her knee the entire time, and a man comes in and sits on the toilet and reads Pascal to her. So, that was really pretty much it. That was the film.

Patrice Petro: What was the first film course related to film and media that you took? This would be at Cornell.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. It was at Cornell from Don Fredericksen, and it was History of Film One, I think. It was just a large lecture course that he taught. I wanted to take filmmaking immediately because I knew that was what I was interested in. I was also interested in creative writing and art in those days, and physics and math. I was originally going to be a math major or a physics major, but was dissuaded from doing that.

Mary Ann Doane: The first course was just a very conventional film history class because I couldn't take the filmmaking class because, another contingency, it conflicted with the work I was doing. I had to work at Cornell in the dining hall, and so I couldn't take that course. I did eventually take it. And I rationalized it to myself saying that I needed to see a lot of films before I made films which is-

Patrice Petro: It's so true.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, I mean, it was smarter than I thought.

Patrice Petro: Yeah. So could you tell us a little bit about your first film teaching job at a university. Where was it? How did you get it? What was the first course you taught and how might you describe it? So repeat a little bit, how did you get your first job, and where was it? And what was the first course you taught? Tell us a little bit about it.

Mary Ann Doane: I was very lucky. My first job was at Brown University. And it was a very good job. It was very exciting to be hired there at that time. I remember that the job advertisement was for someone to teach film theory and film criticism in the Semiotics program on loan from the English department. So I was always worried that the English department would declare me overdue and take back the loan, but that never happened. It was Bob Scholes' program, the Semiotics program. Michael Silverman was there.

Mary Ann Doane: And so, film was always studied theoretically at Brown, that basically theoretically. There was history and criticism, but theory was the main impulse.

Patrice Petro: Was there a production component?

Mary Ann Doane: There was always a production component as well. Leslie Thornton still teaches there, and she taught there first when I was there a few years. But Morgan Fisher was there. A number of ... Leandro Katz was there teaching filmmaking. So there was always a filmmaking component. I didn't teach in it. They got real filmmakers to teach in it, in the program, but it was there. And I think my first course, it's hard to remember actually what my first course was, but I believe it was a course called Intro to Cinematic Coding and Narrativity which was a course that, I think Michael Silverman and Bob Scholes had put together. And it was, you can tell from the title, Coding and Narrativity, that it was very much about breaking down film theoretically and thinking about it critically rather than historically. So it was not organized as a film history class but as a theory and criticism class. And it was articulated with theoretical readings also.

Patrice Petro: Was there a lot of student interest?

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, at that time, there were students, they used to call them Semiotots, and they dressed in black and smoked and did theory. They were very interested in theory. There were students who weren't, but they just left, basically. They didn't remain in the program.

Patrice Petro: So, now we're moving just into the publication realm, but what was your very first publication? I wanted to hear about what your first publication was, but what were the dynamics for publishing more generally? So if you could start with your own and talk more about what the scene was like at the time.

Mary Ann Doane: This is the height of contingency, my first publication, I think. Everyone should be so lucky. I had written a paper for a course on *Sunrise*. Dudley taught a course, Dudley Andrew taught a course that was entirely on *Sunrise*. And we looked at all of Murnau's films but we really studied *Sunrise* quite thoroughly, and everybody wrote a paper on *Sunrise*. And I had written a paper, and I left it on my desk in one of the graduate student offices, and another student picked it up, read it, and gave it to a friend of hers at Northwestern who wanted to publish it in *Film Reader*. So I didn't even submit it.

Patrice Petro: Okay.

Mary Ann Doane: Someone else submitted it for me. And it was Owen Evans, I think, who did that. And *Film Reader* was a journal that came out of Northwestern and it was very interesting. They did a translation of Comolli's and a number of interesting-

Patrice Petro: What year are we talking about now? 1980?

Mary Ann Doane: No, no.

Patrice Petro: Earlier?

Mary Ann Doane: Earlier. This would have been 1977-8, somewhere around there. Maybe even earlier, maybe 1976, but I'd have to have to look at my CV.

Patrice Petro: I've got it here, of course. We can move on from there.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. That's about when it was. And *Film Reader* didn't last. I mean, it only had a few issues, I think, and then kind of bit the dust. But I actually have a very easy time with publishing, and again was just very lucky. I went to a lot of conferences at the Center for 20th Century Studies, what was then the Center for 20th Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. And those were extremely exciting conferences because they would bring people like Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Stephen Heath, Teresa de Lauretis was there, and these conferences were-

Patrice Petro: Christian Metz. I remember that group.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: I was a graduate student at Iowa in 1982, and Ed Lowry was teaching as a visiting professor and a number of us, Edward Ball, a whole group of us, Carol Flinn, we went into a van and drove to Milwaukee to go to this conference. It must have been 1982, and it was on the avant garde, and I remember you were there. I remember seeing Christian Metz, and it was very, very exciting.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, definitely. And that also provided a kind of venue for people to hear your work and want to publish it. And some of the publications came out of that conference and were edited by Stephen Heath and Teresa de Lauretis, for instance.

Patrice Petro: Right.

Mary Ann Doane: And the first paper that I gave at a conference, actually I believe I gave one at SCMS, that was my first paper. I can't remember what it was on. But there were no conflicting panels at that conference. Everybody listened to every talk. So you can imagine how small SCMS was at that time.

Patrice Petro: I remember at the first SCMS conference I went to was SCS was in 1981.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, yes.

Patrice Petro: In 1982, it was in L.A.

Mary Ann Doane: Yeah, this one was at Northwestern.

Patrice Petro: It was before that.

Mary Ann Doane: It was before that.

Patrice Petro: But everybody could hear each other's talks.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: I mean, it wasn't a huge group.

Mary Ann Doane: Yeah.

Patrice Petro: Yeah it was multiple-

Mary Ann Doane: It was a very cozy and intimate group of people, unlike what it is now. But the second talk I gave was at Milwaukee at the Center for 20th Century Studies, and it was a talk on sound. It was the piece that I wrote about the ideology of sound editing, and that's eventually, well, it came out first in the book called *The Cinematic Apparatus* which emerged from that conference.

Mary Ann Doane: And that paper was really kind of tough to deal with, a very concrete problem that I was having in my work in filmmaking and sound editing. I was having difficulty figuring out how to edit sound, and I began to think about it and do research on it, and go back and read a lot of the SMPTE journals about sound perspective etc., and wrote on that. So it's a piece that I'm kind of proud of because it emerged out of a problem in film production, and an attempt to theorize the difficulty that I was having, actually.

Patrice Petro: That's really interesting because I did attend your talk yesterday, where in fact, you were talking about sound.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: So, even though we've been talking about contingencies up to now, there's obvious coherencies over the course of your career, as well. I'm sure we're going to get to more of that as we go on. So let's move on to the next question. So, when you were a student or in your first job, what films were you watching. Or what film or media text were informative to your thinking?

Mary Ann Doane: Well, I keep going back to Hitchcock, I think, for the same reason that Hitchcock was so crucial to film theory at that time because Hitchcock's films very clearly theorize the act of looking. Voyeurism and fetishism, and are very self-aware. And that was very important for me at the time to find films that had a kind of intelligence, cinematic intelligence. But I also was looking at the women's film, maternal melodramas, love stories of the 1940s because my first book was on the woman's film, and that was an attempt to deal with the question of female spectatorship.

Patrice Petro: Now this wasn't your dissertation.

Mary Ann Doane: It wasn't. No.

Patrice Petro: *Desire to Desire*. What was your dissertation?

Mary Ann Doane: My dissertation was called the "Dialogical Text: Filmic Irony and the Spectator", and when I completed it, I wanted to start another project. I didn't want to publish it. I thought of it as what I actually think a dissertation should be which is an exercise, not a book. An exercise in writing a book. And I probably could have published it, but I just decided I didn't want to rework it, I wanted to move on to a different problem. The dissertation was an attempt to find films that did have kind of that ironic intelligence about their own positioning of the spectator in a sense, and their own delineation of the look and the voice, and to sort of confront contemporary film, what was contemporary film theory then, with the work of these films which it was difficult in a way to encompass that or explain that within the film theory that existed. And so I was looking to sort of outline the clash between these ideas. And it was an interesting voice in film too, and where you locate voice. Irony.

Patrice Petro: So then you said you moved on, you were watching a lot of women's films. You also wrote very significantly, not only with the Murnau film, but certainly with Pabst and violent films in general were of interest to you as well as across ... You know what I mean. But, let's talk a little bit about the impetus behind *The Desire to Desire* and the films that you were watching and it'd be interesting just the context of the debates of the time and how you were intervening in them with this work.

Mary Ann Doane: Well, the debates were all around spectatorship and how to theorize spectatorship. And most of the work that had been done that was sort of heavily read and used at that time was about the male spectator. In fact, there was nothing really about the female spectator when I began this project, and even Laura Mulvey in her wonderful article uses the pronoun he, and as you know, she later wrote about the female spectator as well. We were both interested at the same time in this, but I chose a group of films that were directed towards the female spectator generically. And so that I could talk about that position and what I saw as the possibilities and the impossibilities of that position.

Mary Ann Doane: Debates after that really began to break down the question of the spectator, and to make it more and more delineated in terms of, y'know, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, all of the different differences that one can think about in relation to the spectator and audience studies, as well, which purported to confront the concept of the spectator with the real spectator. And I was never really interested in that the tell you the truth. I thought it was very theoretically flawed, and but it was a position. What we were talking about was a position, and it was a rhetorical position that was produced by films, and a form of address, and so it didn't really ... The idea of the real spectator and where the real spectator positions himself or herself was not necessarily aligned with that.

Patrice Petro: On the other hand, you were always very interested in history so it wasn't just a ... Although your background in semiotics and formal analysis, it wasn't just women's films generically at any time, it was in a very spe-

Mary Ann Doane: 1946.

Patrice Petro: I think you took great care to really specify that in terms of the period in which these films were produced.

Mary Ann Doane: Right. But it would never have occurred to me to try and find out what women really thought about those films.

Patrice Petro: Right, right.

Mary Ann Doane: That was the difference, I think, and kind of audience analysis and theories about the spectator, and it was much more heavily invested in theorizing. You're right. Historicizing it, but theorizing that historical moment also.

Patrice Petro: Right. But I mean, we'll be circling back to this, I know, but just to kind of enhance or expand on what we've been talking about. And I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about, not only what you were reading at the time, or books or articles that were important to you, but key journals which may not exist anymore, which may still exist, but for you at that time, and I'm thinking now probably mid-70s to 1990.

Mary Ann Doane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: Okay.

Mary Ann Doane: Okay.

Patrice Petro: I mean *Camera Obscura*-

Mary Ann Doane: Oh yes.

Patrice Petro: ... certainly from 1990. Was it 1990 or '91 with the Spectatrix issue.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, yes.

Patrice Petro: But that's at the later end because I'm thinking of venues for publishing, or what seemed to me at the time I was, I'm only slightly younger than you, but I can remember *Screen* or-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. Well *Screen* was the major reference point because it was so heavily theoretical.

Patrice Petro: Maybe you can tell more about this, and I'm sure people who are listening to this, some don't know this history of *Screen* or-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, I always assume everybody knows it.

Patrice Petro: I think-

Mary Ann Doane: But yeah, no *Screen* was the venue for continental theory applied to film basically. It was the place where one went to try to investigate or speculate about what Lacanian psychoanalysis might mean for the cinematic spectator, or what Althusser and Marxist theory, Brecht etc. How that could be used in relation to film. So those were the types of theory, continental theory, that primarily was taken from France and French theory of the '60s and '70s and applied. I don't like the word applied, but confronted with film or film confronted with that theory.

Patrice Petro: It always seemed to me though in that context, and I can recall this, and I know that you are absolutely right, but what I remember of that time was various scholars looking for different touchstones, even from a British cultural, Stewart Hall-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: ... [crosstalk 00:24:32] Williams.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: I mean, it wasn't so much only French theory or ... And in a way, in the U.K. at the time, all of these kind of converged in an interesting way. It produced different kinds of results so ...

Mary Ann Doane: Well, I don't think they did converge actually. I think they co-existed.

Patrice Petro: Better. Yes.

Mary Ann Doane: Uneasily in some respects.

Patrice Petro: Do you remember key debates at the time or fallouts or ...?

Mary Ann Doane: Well, there was also *Jump Cut*-

Patrice Petro: Yes.

Mary Ann Doane: ... in the United States. And *Jump Cut*'s had a kind of consistently anti-anti-theoretical stance, and was a place where people who wanted to do something else, who wanted a kind of alternative, would go. But there was *Wide Angle*. I'm not sure when *Wide Angle* started, but that was an important journal. *Enclitic*.

Patrice Petro: That's right.

Mary Ann Doane: Which came out of Minnesota, which I found to be very, very interesting. There were non-film journals.

Patrice Petro: *M/f*.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. *M/f* was extremely important for me. I have a whole run of the *M/f*. The last one is a black issue. But that was basically, Elizabeth Cowley wrote on film, it was basically a feminist journal, but very important to me. And there was *Signs*, as well, another feminist journal. So it wasn't just *Screen*, but I think *Screen*, in my intellectual history, had a kind of dominance at that time over other journals that were available. And the forcefulness of the work there for me, it's really has shaped my trajectory. It would have been quite different if I hadn't encountered that journal as many people did at the time.

Patrice Petro: Could you tell us a little bit what you recall about the cultural and community context in which you worked? You could talk about perhaps at Brown, but also in the wider community. What was it like at the time? Because at the time film theory and film studies was just being shaped.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: And what were the key issues of the time, and how would you describe the community of scholars at the time?

Mary Ann Doane: Well, Brown was an interesting place because I think it was at that time the only Ivy League school that actually had a film major, and the others, I mean, Harvard has a history of film, but it did not really have a major, I believe. And Yale had nothing-

Patrice Petro: Right.

Mary Ann Doane: ... at the time. So Brown kind of stood out, and I think that film had a great deal of support there because Bob Scholes was there. And he had a certain amount of power within the humanities given his work and the importance of his work. And he was always interested in film, and I think it grew out of his interest in

semiotics and finding different kinds of sign systems other than literature. He was also always very interested in narrative theory.

Mary Ann Doane: So it was this little enclave basically at Brown, and at that point in time within a lot of the literature departments, there was a move against theory. There was a resistance to theory, and one of the exciting things about film when we were first lured into the field, I think, was that it was not fully formed. It was open, and it didn't have this rigid, ossified past which would dictate the kinds of criticism that would be resistant to more theoretical stances.

Mary Ann Doane: And so in film, feminism was invited in really with open arms in a sense which wasn't true in many of the literature departments. And that for me was the real excitement of it. Also, that it was very political. It was very much grounded in politics of culture, politics of artworks, the politics of sexual difference, all kinds of politics were at stake in much of that work.

Mary Ann Doane: And at Brown, there was a center, the Pembroke Center, which was a center for feminist theory, and it really was theory. It was a very theoretical center. Somewhat like the Center for 20th Century Studies was defined initially as work in theory. And the Pembroke Center didn't do just any kind of feminism, it was a theoretically-based program, as well. And the journal of *Differences* eventually emerged from that.

Mary Ann Doane: But that was not only a place that was very supportive for women at Brown, and there were very few women on the faculty at Brown at that point in time. It was very supportive in terms of careers and that kind of thing for women, but also intellectually, it was very important to me to have that outlet, to have that ...

Patrice Petro: Yeah, I think it's really important for people who may be listening to this interview. I can remember, I went to undergrad at University of California, Santa Barbara from 1975 to '79 and I only had one woman professor.

Mary Ann Doane: Yeah.

Patrice Petro: I mean, it was ...

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, it's hard to imagine now because the scene has changed drastically since that time. But I used to go to faculty meetings, and it would be a sea of suits and white hair, and I thought they were going to card me before they let me in. And there was a lot of work being done in affirmative action also. I was on an affirmative action monitoring committee at Brown that had a great deal of power because there had been a suit at Brown. And so the court had to oversee every single hire, and they did it through this committee. So it was a very different kind of scene.

Patrice Petro: That's interesting. So over the course of your career there, I mean, you saw massive changes in terms of hiring-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: ... and the kind of makeup of the provost. And I think this is kind of incredible to people, younger scholars today to think that this was really what it was like. But to get back to the community question, you've talked a little bit about the community at Brown, and you may not agree with me and you're of course free not to agree with me, but my memory ... And you were somebody who I really admired. I really admired the seriousness of your work. I admired the theoretical dimension of your work. I of course was absolutely committed to the political and historical components of that work, but my memory at the time, again being just a little bit younger generation. When you were a professor, I was entering graduate school.

Mary Ann Doane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: I felt that there was very much a community, what I'd have called a community of the question. That there was a sense that there were questions, maybe it wasn't just one question, but there was a community of the questions. Everybody was interested in the same questions that they were not proffering the same answers.

Mary Ann Doane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: There was a lot of debate even when you talk about *Jump Cut* versus *Camera Obscura* versus *Screen, Discourse, or New German Critique*. I mean, so there wasn't one answer.

Mary Ann Doane: Right.

Patrice Petro: So I do not want to imply some kind of lockstep 'cause it was not.

Mary Ann Doane: No.

Patrice Petro: The battles were intense. But there was this notion about questions that were the key questions. And I think now, of course, we have many, many communities and many, many questions, but it's not, in those days, I can remember very much like the Minnesota series of critical theory. Every book to come out. Translation or ... People were really looking for resources to think about these questions that we considered so critical. So I wondered if you can just say a little bit about that wider community that you were engaged with through conferences, but that really must have been formative.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: It can instruct too. With Stephen Heath who was so important and is just not there anymore.

Mary Ann Doane: Right.

Patrice Petro: I wonder if you just say something about that time and what you remember.

Mary Ann Doane: Well, I think you described it very well. There were all these different, I wouldn't say factions, but different ways of addressing these questions about film, and many of them, if not all or most, were politically grounded with different kinds of politics. So Miriam Hansen, for instance, had always been interested in both '70s film theory, but Frankfurt School theory, as well. And you were always very interested in Frankfurt School.

Patrice Petro: But so were you.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. I mean Benjamin was a major ... *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility* was a major text for just about everybody. And it was important for us to think about film in a larger context of media, as well. But I think what you're pointing to, the idea of community, had to do with the fact that film was a very small field.

Patrice Petro: Yes.

Mary Ann Doane: You could know everybody in the field pretty much. It was easier to know people. It was easier to go to conferences where you didn't have to make choices between panels. Everybody went to the same panels. They were often organized-

Patrice Petro: And of course that produces a community of the question-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: ... because people are listening to the same ... We're engaged in the same kind of issues and questions.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. And again that was very attractive to me in terms of the community that was formed. As film became more and more professionalized, more acceptable academically, I think it lost that kind of thrust of the question or the process of questioning, and it became more fragmented in terms of self-specializations. A larger field where it's very difficult to know, impossible I think, to know everybody who's working in the field. But it's maybe hard for people now to imagine that we did.

Patrice Petro: It was funny a few years ago, I did one of the ... At SCMS, I think maybe it was two years ago, maybe it was three years ago, but they had the inaugural scholarly interest group, the film theory interest group, and I went to the panel and there was a special panel to kick off this scholarly interest group, and at the Q and A, I said, "I'm not a member of any scholarly interest group because I thought I was in a scholarly interest group and that was called the Society for

Cinema Media Studies rather than ... And now I can't remember how many, more than 20.

Mary Ann Doane:

Yes.

Patrice Petro:

But rather than lament it, in part, what is done, it's much like our media culture today. There's just multiple communities, and it is other disciplines and learning societies have shrunk where we continue to grow. So there remains enormous interest in a variety of questions that I think-

Mary Ann Doane:

No, that's good. I agree. And it is the construction of a different notion of community which is a subset within what for us was a whole at that time, but was also a subset itself-

Patrice Petro:

Right.

Mary Ann Doane:

... of something else having to do with intellectual inquiry, in general, about culture and media. But and I think it was the political dimension that also led to a kind of sense of urgency about what we were doing and maybe even relevance, to use that term.

Patrice Petro:

So why you think it changed? Or when did it change?

Mary Ann Doane:

Well, I don't think it has changed for some people. For some people that's still really what's at stake, but I think the more academically respectable film became, the more it was possible to carve out a space, a subfield, and to dispense, very insistently look at that for its own sake in a way, and not because we felt some kind of larger political questions that sort of were the after effects of the '60s and '70s in film theory. So I think that's partially why it has changed.

Mary Ann Doane:

And there seem to be more questions, I guess. We thought there were a handful of questions that were very pressing, and the more the questions proliferate, the more the different investments in those areas change as well.

Patrice Petro:

In your opinion, what were the salient characteristics of the contexts in which film and media studies grew? I think the question here was just formulated by the team that is doing this oral history project. It's really to get at national context for the study of film and media, your own development, or even the development of film and media at universities. So I mean, you just described the political impetus and the urgency that was felt in the '60s and '70s, and I know in the special issue of *Signs* that Vivian Sobchack and Kathleen McHugh edited in 2004, there's a really wonderful piece by Laura Mulvey where she tries to trace where the change happens. And looking retrospectively, what she says is because sometimes you're living through it, you can't see it, you can't see it. It's a retrospective glass that's gonna enable you to see the change.

Patrice Petro: So rather than what we get a lot these days in our generation where people want to mark 1989 because of the fall of the Berlin wall or the beginning of internet or whatever. There's a kind of triumphant narrative of the end of the bipolar world and all this stuff. What Laura Mulvey does is, I think is really important and I agree with her, is say that really that was happening much earlier, and it was the '70s and Thatcher and Reagan, it was ushering in the whole neo-liberal moment in which we're living that really changed the politics and shifted where people really felt we had to engage. And she talks about how, given what was happening worldwide, that the problems of women in developed countries couldn't take precedence over environmental degradation, that poverty in Af... That the Left itself was trying to really rethink, and certainly changes were happening in film and media.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: Production and distribution and everything else. So I like that she focuses on 1980 rather than 1989.

Mary Ann Doane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: But I wondered if you ... It's something that really fascinates me and I try to think about when ... I mean, in our field, we keep hearing the 1990s, film theory died. Film itself was no longer relevant. And I often felt like Rip Van Winkle 'cause I thought it was important to me, and I was alive and I thought that we were pretty much alive. I didn't know that it was dead. Nobody told me.

Patrice Petro: So I wondered if you just ... The whole context in the '90s and shifts in theory and that sort of thing, and national context I suppose if you had any comments at all about that.

Mary Ann Doane: Well, I haven't read that article by Laura Mulvey, but it sounds really wonderful. I'll definitely take a look at it. And certainly that was case, so the Left had to regroup and rethink in terms of different kinds of strategies and changes. Not only in the United States, but worldwide, the idea of global issues, the idea of a feminism that wasn't just white, upper-class etc., but took into account different contexts within which femininity was formed as a concept. So I hesitate to date it to tell you the truth.

Patrice Petro: 'Cause there are structures and there, yeah.

Mary Ann Doane: Yeah, but there certainly was a change, and I think it was a more gradual change. I don't think it was a sudden rupture or catastrophic moment of a shift, but that it was a kind of gradual shift that responded to things that were taking place both in terms of a broader politics and in terms of academic politics where a lot of the work was in forging programs where none existed. And I think that problem has diminished, and film and other forms of media are taken much

more seriously within the realm of the university community than they were at that time. But I would say, I was writing theory in the late '80s so, and the '90s.

Patrice Petro: Of course.

Mary Ann Doane: And the aughts.

Patrice Petro: Exactly.

Mary Ann Doane: So, for me and for you, I think it didn't end.

Patrice Petro: No and in fact within feminist theory, I mean, I've used, before this interview as I told you, I re-read your books which I've read before I taught them, but I was really struck by *Femme Fatales* in a number of ways. So that was published in 1991, but of course, it, then, it contains essays written in the '80s, and up to ... You take great pains to really talk about differences, the dark continent, issues of race. You're really trying to pose still a theoretical vantage point but to try to look at these various issues and certainly your most reproduced article is "Film and the Masquerade", but I think that's interesting too in terms of even performative nature of femininity and Judith Butler's work which you were, I mean, it's the same-

Mary Ann Doane: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Patrice Petro: ... it's a very similar argument.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: But I wondered if you'd say more about that and your memories of that.

Mary Ann Doane: Yeah, that was actually written for a conference at Yale. And Miriam Hansen was at Yale at that time, and she had invited me to the conference. And I remember giving the paper and I think it was pretty well received especially since I was wearing glasses at the time, and it made such a big deal of women wearing glasses and taking off the glasses and that kind of thing. And I'm still in a way surprised that it's reproduced so much. That it probably is the one article I've written that has been reprinted most. And I think it, possibly because it does take a kind of extreme position in relation to female spectatorship, in relation to psychoanalysis. I think it's also often misread as advocating a kind of genuine closeness and intimacy that's associated with women versus the distance that's associated with men. It's an attempt to very carefully unpack that but it doesn't advocate a kind of essentialism.

Mary Ann Doane: The other article that I wrote that we really haven't talked about was on television. "Catastrophe". And-

Patrice Petro: I was at that conference with you.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. It was on-

Patrice Petro: It was 1987.

Mary Ann Doane: It was? Okay. It was at Milwaukee. It was a television conference, and I hadn't written anything on television before, and I think Pat Mellencamp must have invited me, and she said, "Well, I know you haven't written on television, but it would be interesting to hear you think about television." And she was interested in "Catastrophe" as well, and that was another piece that I like a lot because it emerged from sort of my own viewing habits to tell you the truth. My own fascination with catastrophe coverage on television.

Patrice Petro: And contingency.

Mary Ann Doane: And contingency. Yes, yes. That as well. And the attempt to kind of grapple with the lore of the representation of catastrophe.

Patrice Petro: I just want to, this is well within what we're talking about, but I wanted to read a passage. This is from *Femme Fatales*, but it's a question about psychoanalysis which I think also bears on questions about feminism in the past and today. So I wanted to read ... This is what you wrote in 1991. I think this is from the introduction. Yes, it is. I see the page number.

Patrice Petro: You said, and I quote, "Much of my own work has been shaped by the conviction that psychoanalysis was a particularly appropriate methodology for deciphering the psychical operations of the cinema and its impact on spectator, but this belief always existed in an uneasy tension with the simultaneous conviction that psychoanalysis was most significantly about the limits and instability of such knowledge, about the decenteredness of the investigative position itself as the effect of the unconscious."

Patrice Petro: You go on to say, "When my work is unproblematically labeled psychoanalytic, there is I think a failure to register the wariness in my relationship to psychoanalysis which is legible in the earliest essays." So I wondered if you'd say more about the limits and usefulness of psychoanalysis for your own work, for feminist theory, whichever way you want to take it.

Mary Ann Doane: Well, that's an interesting quote which I had entirely forgotten that I wrote. And I think even the idea of an uneasy relation to psychoanalysis would not necessarily mollify those who critique using psychoanalysis.

Patrice Petro: Well some don't even critique it, they dismiss it.

Mary Ann Doane: Dismiss it, yes. And even grappling psychoanalysis in any way shape or form would be problematic from that point of view because Freud is the past, we've gone beyond that. I'm not sure where, but that's the idea, so. But I think for me it was important to not identify myself whole-heartedly as a orthodox Lacanian,

for instance, or even an orthodox Freudian. But I think psychoanalysis is fascinating not only for the kinds of theories and formulations it comes up with, the idea of the unconscious, the idea of symptomatic readings, the idea of kind of dialogic relation between the analyst and the analysand, and Freud's writing itself, and Lacan's writing, as well, as being a kind of an important arena for grappling with certain questions.

Mary Ann Doane: And I think more and more, I've begun to approach psychoanalysis itself as a kind of symptomatic text. So in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, Freud is not used in order to understand cinema, he's read, actively read for theory of time that grapples with other theories of time at the same moment, not necessarily a correct theory of time, but one that can be historically situated in interesting ways in relation to contingency and modernity. So I still teach psychoanalysis, and I still have students who take the course, and they're always intrigued by it. And actually, I encourage them not to apply it to text, to films or literature or whatever, to just read it and analyze it and think about how it works and how theories are developed in a kind of exercise in theory building or seeing how theories are constructed.

Mary Ann Doane: And I'm still an advocate of reading it, but not necessarily of just using it, in ways that are, I think, questionable, very direct and literal uses of psychoanalysis.

Patrice Petro: It's interesting that, as I said, of course when your book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* came out in 2002, I read it right away avidly, and I've taught it in my own graduate courses. And until I prepared for this interview, and when I re-read everything in a couple of days on the go, I always thought that it was a kind of departure from your earlier work because it wasn't as explicitly feminist as the earlier two books or many of your articles.

Patrice Petro: On the other hand, I'd say after reading this all now, again we're talking about temporality and when you read things and how it's seemed to ... I was so struck by how much of a piece ... I'm not trying to make a complete coherence here, but there are coherent concerns across the work over time. But I wondered if you'd just say a little bit about how *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, does it depart from feminist concerns? How would you, to people who would say the feminist psychoanalytic film theorist, which is also not an accurate description of your work, but to talk a little bit about how that book both fits into your work, instead of me saying it, and the kind of feminist film theory interest which I know, remains of interest to you.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes, yes. Well, I think one thread that kind of runs through all of my work in some way, shape, or form, has to do with a kind of fascination with technology and a kind of technological substrate of film which is linked to my original desire to be a filmmaker. And to work with the technology. And I think that is in the earlier feminist work, which does use psychoanalysis, but it's always very much about the cinema as an apparatus and about form and frame. And so it's not really kind of ... It never was an images of women in film approach which is one

of the reasons I went to psychoanalysis because psychoanalysis was about the spectator. It was being used in that way primarily to think about spectatorship.

Patrice Petro: Which of course, I'm sure came out of your semiotic training and a move to a more post-structure semiotics where you have to talk about the interpreter. It's not a matter of-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: ... I mean, I think these are ... Anyways, go on, I didn't mean to interrupt your train of thought.

Mary Ann Doane: That's okay. This is a conversation. It's good.

Mary Ann Doane: And I think that's my concern in *The Desire to Desire* and *Femme Fatales* which has a piece on *La Signora di tutti* which is very much about the production of an image literally within the film of the star. Well, all of the pieces in that book are very much about feminism and about the ... The reason it's called *Femme Fatales* has to do with the situation of the woman as enigma and the question of the question in a way. But *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, I don't see it as a departure. I think it's not an explicitly feminist book, but in a way, I think that kind of feminism isn't as necessary as it was at one time. It tries to work feminism into the analysis in certain parts of the book, in talking about the way that women are used in relations to temporality and contingency etc., but it doesn't push it to the forefront, it just makes it ... What I liked to believe is that it makes it an assumption that it will be there, and that it doesn't have to be explicitly written out.

Patrice Petro: Well after all you had written extensively about the place of the woman in ... I mean, these other two books are ... But as I said, reading it, I didn't ... It was really remarkable to me 'cause I ... Perhaps it was because it was 2002 when I read it, and just different changes taking place within not only in our field, but certainly in university more generally and scholarship. Really interesting to go to that *Signs* issue with even major feminist theorists whether in film or television studies saying they want nothing to do with feminism, that's something in the past. They'll often describe it as something that's formative or underneath. But there's a funeral tone to it all.

Mary Ann Doane: Yes. Post-feminist.

Patrice Petro: Yes, and so perhaps when I read it then, I thought it wasn't as explicitly about the issues you had discussed previously, but then, as I said, it is. It's exactly, I mean very consistent ... I'm not saying it's saying the same things at all, but really I think, to go back to certain key questions that have been key questions for you and remain key questions for you. I was really fascinated when you began in talking about your first film and the close-up and the face, but I mean-

Mary Ann Doane: Yes.

Patrice Petro: ... now this is what ... Can you tell us a little bit about this new book you're working on?

Mary Ann Doane: It's no longer only about the close-up, but it began that way. I was very interested in not only the way the close-up was used in film and various kinds of films, but in the way it was used in film theory, and just going back and reading very classical film theory, Belázs, and Arnheim, and Bazin etc. and Epstein, and try to think about how the close-up was a constant reference point, partially because it's one of the sort of few units that can be isolated as such in the cinema. And I was interested in that, and its status as a film theoretical unit as well as in films.

Mary Ann Doane: But the project has expanded quite a bit since then, and it's now about scale which is why perhaps it may never be completed because the scale has become kind of monstrous in a way. And so one of the reasons that close-up is very interesting for me has to do with scale and gigantism. But it's the scale, it's about both the scale of shots within the cinema, so medium and long shot as well as close-up, although the close-up remains central to the analysis. And scale of the screen, and I've become more interested in large scale films, IMAX, and the history of the standardization of the screen and why it remained so standard for so long a time of widescreen. And then, the corresponding miniaturization of the screen, and iPhones, and laptops, and plane seats and that kind of thing.

Mary Ann Doane: So it's really about scale and it's about what I see as a problem of navigation, a contemporary problem about navigation and knowing where one is. Not only knowing where one is, but how ... I mean, the kind of problem of cognitive mapping that Jameson talks about. How it's possible to situate yourself in relation to networks that seem to become larger and larger, and the scale is incredibly vast.

Mary Ann Doane: So that's my interest now, and the work that I have been doing recently has really all kind of circulated around the question of scale.

Patrice Petro: I think that's great. Really fascinating, and it leads me to my last question which is, in a way it's implicit in what you've just discussed in terms of your own project, but what do you see as the future of our field? Where are we moving? I mean, in your own work certainly with this idea of multiple kinds of screens and scale, and I just wondered if you ... I'm not asking you to have a crystal ball, but where do you see cinema media studies moving, how your own work is continuing to expand and develop? Any final thoughts for our field.

Mary Ann Doane: I think probably what will be hardest for our field is to maybe diminish the centrality of the cinema as the form of medium that we address, and to situate it in relation to other types of media. So a lot of, for me, the most interesting

work that's being done today is in areas like digital media, animation, and also, in the kind of corresponding field of media archeology which is an attempt to really think from the position of today about history of media technologies. And I think it's sparked, in fact, by the enormity and speed of the changes taking place in media today.

Mary Ann Doane:

And so, I think it's younger people in the field are going to determine in which direction it goes, and but I just think these are areas that should be central to that expansion of thinking because the media scene is so different now than it was when I was in graduate school in the 1970s. It has changed tremendously. The making of a film is no longer holding it in your hands and cutting it laboriously. Everything has changed quite a bit and I think the field will have to come to terms with those changes. And it will.