

Charlie Keil: I'm Charlie Keil. I am a professor in the History Department and the Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. It's May 6th, 2017 and I'm here in glorious Madison, Wisconsin in the studios of the Vilas Communication Arts building and it is my pleasure to be speaking to two influential figures in film study. David Bordwell, the Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies and narratives and Kristin Thompson honorary fellow at the University of Wisconsin, Madison's Communication Arts department. We will be reviewing the scope and depth of those careers. As we work through those careers we only have enough time to sort of scrape the surface, but we'll do what we can. I'm going to start with what is a customary question for these field notes interviews, which is how each of you were drawn into the fields of film study. We'll start with David because the entry point was chronologically somewhat earlier, but not fields that were well established, certainly David when you began. How it is that this drew you?

David Bordwell: Well, when I was a young teenager, my early teens, I was interested in the arts generally. I was interested in literature particularly, but also visual arts, painting and film was part of that. Particularly I was interested in the criticism of the visual arts. I began to read, among other things, books on the history of film. When I was going into my high school years I was reading books like Arthur Knight's *Liveliest Art* and so on. I grew up on a farm so I didn't see many films in theaters the way a city kid would. I did watch films on TV. There were a lot of particularly classic American films I could see on TV. When I could I would try to see films in theaters.

David Bordwell: I became interested in the current cinema and the history of cinema, but I never thought I would be actually doing research in film. I thought I would be an English teacher in high schools. When I went to college I really focused on being a literature teacher, but also ran the film club at my college. Then after I got out and I taught in high school for a while I decided it wasn't working for me. I went back to graduate school and because film was getting more and more important for me I decided to go to graduate school at the University of Iowa and went there and continued on.

Charlie Keil: I know that you wrote early pieces for places like *Film Comment*. Were those were written before or when you were in graduate school?

David Bordwell: A couple, or three of those, were written when I was still in college, when I was an undergraduate. There were no film courses that I could take. By my last year I was projecting for the first film course that was taught at my college, the State University of New York at Albany. I was the projectionist and actually while I was projecting I wrote a paper, not exactly for the course, but I just wrote this paper on *Citizen Kane*. Then that eventually got published in *Film Comment*. I didn't have any film courses for credit until I went to graduate school.

Charlie Keil: What was the nature of film publication at that point? Now it's inconceivable to think that an undergraduate would whip off something on *Citizen Kane* and then find it published in *Film Comment*. Was it wide open?

David Bordwell: Well, I think there were no really functioning film journals except one in the sense of a research journal; *The Society For Cinematologists* and *Cinema Journal*, I think in those early days, but I wasn't aware of it. No, film criticism was really a branch of film journalism on the whole. *Film Comment*, as the name implied, was a sort of forum for people who wanted to write informal, not non-academic exactly, but intellectual commentary on cinema from a perspective of the people who are interested in the arts generally. You could wriggle into that scene if you were just writing what you thought were informed discussions, critical discussions of films. But yes, it was all different because there were hardly any film academics. About the same time I graduated from college NYU created its Ph.D program in film, which was the first dedicated film studies program, even though there were film studies being conducted in other programs under theater departments or other kinds of rubric.

Charlie Keil: How did you decide on University of Iowa?

David Bordwell: It decided on me. It was the only one that accepted me. I applied to two, NYU and Iowa. NYU lost my application so I couldn't get in. Iowa accepted me so I went there.

Charlie Keil: How would you describe the culture of graduate film study at that time?

David Bordwell: Well, it was great because nobody knew anything, so we could be ... if you were interested in something you could pursue it. There was so little serious research on film at that time that your teachers were often young people like yourself, were working right along with you and figuring things out as you went. Almost anything you wanted to write about you'd be saying something new about, because there was very little prior work done.

Charlie Keil: Who were the influential instructors for you at Iowa?

David Bordwell: At Iowa there were not that many film professors. The most influential for me was Dudley Andrew, which is only two or three years older than me. He was finishing his Ph.D when I got there. I think he was still taking courses even my first year. But by the end he was finishing his Ph.D when he was directing my Ph.D. he had just finished, I think, his Ph.D when he directed my Ph.D. It was very different. I think the field was just burgeoning. I can't speak for what other programs were like, but there was a sense that really the young people who are coming through were defining the field, were creating it.

Charlie Keil: Were there any peers who were at Iowa at the same time you were that then went on to figure in academia?

David Bordwell: Oh sure. A lot of the people we were close to at Iowa ... the people I knew best were the senior grads when I came in, when I was just starting. People like Don Fredrickson, Tim Lyons who was a scholar of Chaplin research, but then more people came along. Our colleagues Mike Budd, eventually Phil Rosen, Mary Ann

Done came after I had left, but of course I was in touch with Mary Ann. I knew Mary Ann, and a whole host of people who came through Iowa a little bit after me, but who became friends afterwards. Yeah.

Charlie Keil: Kristen, how about you? How did you get drawn into film study?

Kristin T.: Well, it was somewhat the opposite with me, because I was a theater major as an undergrad. I thought I was going into tech theater. I loved film, but I had not read anything about it the way David had. Spring of my junior year I was looking for an elective course. Absolutely the only one I could fit in was history of film, which was taught by Dudley Andrew. I got into the course, even though I didn't have the prerequisite of survey of film. He said read Arthur Knight's *The Liveliest Art*, which as you can tell is about all there was to read.

Kristin T.: I got in, took the course, and I started watching things by Méliès and German expressionist films, the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. It was so completely different from any films I had ever seen before that I got very intrigued and went on and started going to the local films at our student union and took a couple more courses my senior year. By the time that was over I decided I don't have a future in tech theater, but I want to go on with this. At that time I thought maybe I would become a film archivist. I went on to get an MA at Iowa and a minor in library science. That was the first part of it. Then when I came to the end of my MA I decided I didn't want to leave grad school so I applied to the University of Wisconsin Madison, got in and came here for my Ph.D.

Charlie Keil: Can you say a little bit about, as David has done, and maybe be a little more expansive, because obviously the university of Wisconsin, Madison is going to figure not just prominently but almost singularly in both of your careers. What was it like in both of your careers? What was it like being a graduate student at that time?

Kristin T.: Well, I loved it. As David said we didn't know all that much at the time. Anything you were interested in you could just launch in and be fascinated by, do research on, write about and I also was writing essays for publication when I was here at Madison before I finished my Ph.D.

Charlie Keil: Right. Who was amongst your cohort peers?

Kristin T.: Well, there was Maureen Turim, Edward Branigan, James Benning, who of course is a very well known experimental filmmaker, Brian Rose, Diane Waldman all of whom went on to do various things in film. It was a very, very intelligent and dynamic group. I feel lucky to have come in at that point.

Charlie Keil: Right. David, at this stage you would have been teaching, so you started in the late 70s. No, earlier 70s. Yeah, sorry about that.

David Bordwell: Early 70s. I got my job here in 73.

Charlie Keil: Right, right. By the time Kristin came in you had already been teaching here.

David Bordwell: We came in the same year.

Charlie Keil: Okay.

David Bordwell: She came in as a graduate student and I [crosstalk 00:10:12].

Charlie Keil: You came in as an instructor.

David Bordwell: Yeah.

Charlie Keil: If we just get this chronology right, and I should have known this, that the first edition of *Film Art* is published in 1979.

David Bordwell: Yes.

Charlie Keil: You had already collaborated at least once I know on a piece on Ozu.

David Bordwell: 76.

Charlie Keil: Yes.

David Bordwell: Yes.

Charlie Keil: When did you decide that collaboration would be something that was viable and was worthwhile as a scholarly approach? It's not typical, not just in film studies, the humanities generally does not favor collaboration. Text books perhaps, but not so much scholarly works. I'm just wondering when it became clear that this was a model that the two of you would want to pursue?

David Bordwell: Well, we watched films together of course. We saw Ozu films in the early 70s sporadically. They were just becoming available on 16 millimeter and on television. We were getting interested in Ozu. Then we had a chance to see quite a lot of them when I did a course that featured several Ozu films in it. Other students wrote things out of that course too Ed Branigan-

Charlie Keil: Ed Branigan, yeah.

David Bordwell: ... out of that course. We were studying Ozu. Really it was pretty much a critical study. There wasn't much historical perspective to it. We saw enough of them and we saw that what we were thinking about didn't quite fit what people had already said about Ozu. Again, the literature was sparse. There was Paul Schrader's book on transcendental style. Richie's book had recently come out about the same time as we were watching the films, but that was about it. We thought we had something else to say so we wound up combining stuff that Kristin had done in the course, that I had done in the lectures in the course and

making something out of it. Kind of the same thing happened with *Film Art*, although I was teaching that course too regularly every semester, the introduction to film course. The structure of that course became the basis of *Film Art* and Kristin TA'd in that course also.

Charlie Keil: It's always interesting to think about the genesis of a textbook. Obviously you're teaching the course so you're thinking this should become a model for other people doing instruction of a course too. Is that the-

David Bordwell: I just wanted to teach a course that was unlike the other courses that I knew about. One thing that I think is important is that, not just us but other people in our generation, were the first people to feel that we really had expertise in film study. Most people who came to film study before us were philosophers or literary critics or people who studied theater and so on. They brought those perspectives to it, but we really were film as film people. That we studied cinema. That gave us a range and depth of knowledge of the medium and its history that really was not going to be the same kind of thing that you got from other angles.

David Bordwell: There weren't that many film textbooks, but most courses about film usually taught it from a literary perspective. We wanted something that would teach it from a more film-centered perspective, cinematic centered perspective. The upshot was that I designed this course based on what I had done in Iowa, because I taught the course earlier as a grad student at Iowa, but I elaborated it here. I had the ambition of making it a fundamental, if you like it sounds pretentious, vision of film aesthetics. There was an integrated aesthetics of film that I hadn't seen generated. Then when we'd been teaching it for a while I was approached by Addison-Wesley, that's the publisher of the first edition, that said, "Would you try a textbook?" Since I wasn't making that much money at that point it was a very attractive offer so we said we'd try it. I think we started in 76 or 77.

Kristin T.: 77 is when we signed the contract, but as I recall they initially wanted you to do a history textbook.

David Bordwell: Yeah.

Kristin T.: You said, "It's impossible at this point in film studies to write such a book."

David Bordwell: Right.

Kristin T.: They decided, "Well, all right an aesthetics textbook." They still wanted a history component. They wanted at least a chapter on history. I was still a grad student at the time we signed the contract. I think it was about two months before I defended my dissertation. I was brought in as the person to write the history chapter.

Charlie Keil: Oh, was that the actual division of labor?

David Bordwell: No.

Kristin T.: That was how we sold it to them I think.

David Bordwell: That was the rationale but it wasn't-

Charlie Keil: That was not the process.

David Bordwell: No. Actually, it also should be said probably, if the series is about the history of the field, before the 70s and before you had this generation of people who were getting MA's and Ph.D's in film studies most film courses were taught as history surveys. If there were a film course it would be a history survey one semester womb to tomb, Méliès to whenever, usually neo-realism and maybe the new wave. That would be that and everybody hit the high spots. As Kristin said often the textbook would be Arthur Knight's *Liveliest Art*. What I think our generation brought to the table was a different conception to how you introduce people to film studies.

David Bordwell: It was partly because we were, as I say, rather film centric and wanted to look at cinema as a medium. It's also, I think, because they were starting to get these rumbles of continental theory, which were coming into the field. One of the most exciting things about being a graduate student then was what's in the latest issue of *Screen*? What is this translation of how you do cinema? What was the BFI seminar on last month that they probably used mimeographed notes from? Those kind of things. It got us more and more thinking, not exactly ahistorically, but in terms of conceptual categories. What might have been then called the "language of film". Semiotics certainly was a powerful input into that.

David Bordwell: There was a trend, I think, among the people of our generation, to think that the introductory course should be a survey of the expressive capacities of a medium. A systematic survey with history as a partial layer for that process, but mainly you get people aware of the range of expressive possibilities. That was the way I conceived the course. Other people, I think, conceived their courses that way. Other textbooks, eventually, were conceived that way. At this point I think it's more common for the introductory course to be that kind of category survey of the medium and then a secondary course or later course to be the history survey. That influenced the way the textbook went.

Charlie Keil: Even in this early work, the first edition of *Film Art*, your book on Dryer, Kristin's book on Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, there's an overt obviously invocation and application of formalism, what would become as neo-formalism. Obviously it's consciously working against certain givens of continental theory; But to what degree did you start to see it, if you saw it this way at all, as a program, as something that was going to define your scholarship apart from what were

dominant trends that other people were beginning to establish? This would apply to both of you obviously.

Kristin T.: Yeah. I remember quite vividly being in Paul's books store down on State Street with David. He pulled a copy of Lemon and Rice's, I don't remember the exact title, but it was Russian formalist essays and said, "Oh, I think you might enjoy this." I read it and obviously that became the basis of the method I used in my dissertation. I think that might have something to do with the fact that we collaborated, because we recognized that we both loved the Russian formalists and could work with that method and so we could work together.

David Bordwell: I would say, as far as from what art goes, there are two layers. One level, it's an orthodox art survey. This goes back to the Renaissance writings about paintings. There's design, there's color, there's composition, light and all these ... this idea of enumerating taxonomically the features of the medium is a very old one. It was not hard to pick that up and indeed if you go back to the aesthetics books of the 30s like Arnheim's *Film is Art* or Raymond Spottiswoode *Technique of the Film* they do the same thing. At one level it was just, I thought, a modernized up to date post-Bazin version of a film aesthetics book. It could be a foundational book for film aesthetics without any particular doctrinal commitment; Formalism, psychoanalysis, whatever you like.

David Bordwell: At another level, I think though, the textbook tried to assume that people had not been aquatinted with some of the new developments in literary theory and art theory that emerged at that period. For instance, it's convenient to say there was continental theory and then you opposed Russian formalism to it. Actually, you have to remember part of the dynamic of continental theory of the late 60s and early 70s was Russian formalism. Barthes and others were very keen on the writings of Shklovsky and Tynyanov and so on. Of course, Todorov was an emigrate and he knew all this stuff. There's a way in which the structuralism of the late 60s of narratology and stylistics, in Paris of that period, come out of Russian formalism. What happened was that became part of a much bigger mix of psychoanalysis and post-hegelian philosophy and all kinds of stuff. That became characteristic of big theory, in a way, of the 70s and thereafter. In a way what we did was extract, what we thought was useful for the questions we were interested in, out of Russian formalism and then pursue it as we inspect the film.

David Bordwell: This would be my general point, which is that the big ... you ask what was the big revelation of later years was that research depends on questions. This was something that was broached for us at Iowa. Then when I was a graduate student and then throughout the rest of my career I started asking. Then into our teachings say, "What are the questions you're trying to answer?" For certain questions, certain theoretical models work. For other questions they're just not appropriate. It doesn't mean they're wrong or bad or terrible. It's just that they're not well suited as tools to answer the questions you want. In a sense the questions we were interested in, about the nature and function of cinema as an art form, we thought in terms of narrative stylistics things like that were

probably best answered in our personal research apart from *Film Art* by those kinds of formalists ideas.

Charlie Keil: Right. Now I think initially putting it that way seems rather value neutral.

David Bordwell: Yeah.

Charlie Keil: Eventually that would be less and less the case. If we flash forward just a little bit to what I always think of as the Annus Mirabilis for your reputations as scholars, which was 1985, obviously the major work there is the *Classical Hollywood Cinema* co-authored with Janet Steiger, but then also ... I'm interested to know whether this was simply an accident of publication, *Narration in the Fiction Film* for David and *Exporting Entertainment* for Kristin. This is a significant splash. It's quite unusual for scholars to have two books come out in one year. It's even less common for books to come out that seem to announce a way of approaching the discipline that seems to signal a move in a particular direction and that has the field almost on mass responding I'd say, first to the importance of the work.

Charlie Keil: I remember when the reviews for *CHC* came out. Almost to the person everyone said, "This is a monumental undertaking. We may not see a work of this nature again for quite some time." Clearly, when you were conceiving it you thought this is a bit of a door-stopper. Just in terms of the scale of it. You had three authors, so it's going to be a larger work anyway. I'm not saying it was all premeditated like, "We're going to change the nature of film study." There was, in a way, with the confluence of the publication of the three works something of, whether deliberate or not, an announcement of the move that you were making as scholars towards defining certain key areas. I see Kristin shaking her head a bit. [crosstalk 00:22:35]

Kristin T.: Well, we thought it was a good to be a very short book. We pictured as short because we thought, as many people did at that time, that there just wasn't evidence out there. There wasn't research material that we could find that would warrant a larger book. We didn't think of it as monumental. We thought of it as a prelude to other things we wanted to do. I am perpetually working on a book, or putting this book on the back burner, but a perpetual project for me is a book on the 1920s, what I call the commercial avant-garde film movements; Expressionism, impressionism, and Soviet montage. David wanted to work on other directors besides Dreyer. He had done Dreyer. We realized we needed to know what the norms of the films that they were reacting against were. Nobody had examined what was already being called the Classical Hollywood Cinema at the time. We set out to do that and we found this enormous amount of material that essentially forced us to write a much larger book. I don't think it was a statement [crosstalk 00:23:44].

Charlie Keil: No, but it's interesting to know whether in fact it was conceived of as a statement, but when one looks at it and one looks at its component parts, beginning with David's initiating framework. Then what really was pioneering

work by you on early cinema, especially the later years of early cinema, because virtually no one had spoken to those and certainly hadn't spoken in the way you did about the way that they attached themselves or interacted with the conceptions of later classical work.

Charlie Keil: Then all of Janet's work on the industrial context. When you put it all together it does become ... and certainly the response of critics indicated that it did seem to be the most systematic, and to some degree the most ... I want to put this properly. A statement that seemed to some degree almost irrefutable in its comprehensiveness. That became, I think, the context within the work was then received. It was not so much throwing down the gauntlet, but it was saying something that in its very scope and depth of research would be hard to refute. Take this on if you will.

David Bordwell: Yeah, I agree with Kristin. We thought it would be small and it grew. Also, I think it really was a matter of saying, at the outset, everyone talks about what classical cinema is, but what is it really? Can we really systematically try to understand it? How does it work? How do movies made in the system work as narratives, as audiovisual displays and what made it work this way? What causal factors impinged? It was a complicated project, but I say, "Okay, let's look at the way this cinema behaves using the tools of narrative and stylistic analysis. Then using the tools of business history and mode of production studies to figure out why it behaves this way. There's another level to it that I think we're not absolutely original in, but it was maybe carried to a new degree. That is using the statements of the industry itself, mostly publishes sources, very little unpublished sources there's some, but not very much, as its public rationale for why it does what it does. Then reading those at a bit of a bias.

David Bordwell: For instance, I think when I was writing about American cinematographers role in promoting cinematographers they would say certain things. "Here's why we did this. Here's why we chose this lens. Here's why we light this way." I think not many people had actually gone through the documents we did. I think we went through more journals than anybody had that point, and obscure journals in some cases. If people did do that they just took it at face value. Whereas I think there was a level at which we took the statements, at least that's published, within the trade papers, within the professional organizations as rhetoric. There's a way in which they're packaging their choices, their public rationales for what they're doing. That's interesting too. That is not only what do they think they're doing. We may not have an unmediated access to what they think they're doing, but actually how do they frame it for us in terms of what they think they're doing. That's instructive too.

David Bordwell: I think we tried to read these things, if not skeptically exactly, but with a bias saying, "Look, there's a rationale. There's an agenda here." American cinematographer wants to make cinematographers look good. Okay, let's take them for granted. How do you look good? You solve problems. Basically the director comes to you and says, "I want this," and nobody's ever done this before. How do I give it to them? The cinematographer becomes this

resourceful figure. People have gone on, like Patrick Keating, gone and trace this as part of the strategy of these workers in the industry. How does technology disseminate? One question that came up again and again in the classic literature is there's the artist, there's the inventor and there's the business man. All three of these somehow magically work together to create the cinema that we know. How? They aren't just by themselves. They operate within institutions. How do those institutions hook up to one another?

David Bordwell: Suddenly you're looking at the ASC and the professional association, the engineering associations, or you're looking at the companies that supply tracks and dollies and lighting fixtures. Suddenly you realize they're all talking to each other. They're sending these things to each other. They're publishing things. They talk about, "Here's what we should do." "Well this doesn't work." "Okay, we'll build the dolly that way." All this stuff is going on. It's that rich mix of institutions and people working together. Not necessarily to a well defined goal, but to some general approximation of what they want flowing in together. That's the kind of stuff we got into and that's why it took so long to write the damn thing. We're getting into the textures of those institutions and looking for the causal factors.

David Bordwell: It became a study of what now I think, what John Caldwell calls production culture. We didn't think of that label, but it was a great label for that sort of thing. How do the actual agents within these institutions operate, these social actors? To me that's one of the best things we did in that book even though it's flawed in its execution in some ways I think. The actual opening that up as an area of study was, I think, quite important for the field. Also, just the idea of trying to explain how a classical Hollywood film works by taking ordinary films. As Kristin says, what are the normal ordinary movies? How do they behave?

Charlie Keil: Again, if we can go back to the idea of 1985 being a time when together you have three books out, and with *Exporting Entertainment*, Kristin, you're demonstrating the value of original research, sort of drilling down deeply to answer some questions at a historical level. Then *Narration in the Fiction Film* you're setting up a methodology for understanding the way different modes of film work. Classism being embedded within that, but a larger model trying to explain, in a sense, narratologically how different kinds of films work without being totally indebted to literary models. I think again collectively these works get seen as the erection or formation of something that gets called the Madison School. I wondered if that took you by surprise when you started to see this. Were you thinking, "Well, yes indeed. That is what's happens." Or instead was it more, "Why are they construing it in this fashion."

Kristin T.: If I can go back for a moment just to explain why they all [crosstalk 00:30:17].

Charlie Keil: Yeah, that would be great.

Kristin T.: That was not planned at all either. The first press that we sent the *Classical Hollywood Cinema* to was quite interested, but they unexpectedly got a couple of negative outside readings. We had to take it to another press.

David Bordwell: Really negative outside readings.

Kristin T.: Yeah.

David Bordwell: Like, "Never publish this book."

Kristin T.: Well, anyway we had to go to a different press and that press got positive readings. We had finished the book and sent it in initially in '82. There was a three-year delay. I think the other two books represent us turning away from the *Classical Hollywood Cinema* to, in my case my other project that I wanted to do, the '20s book. I realized that I had to talk about the degree to which people in these countries were seeing American films. I planned a chapter at the beginning of the book where I would talk about that. That's when I began to find all this material that you mentioned, all these government documents that actually covered exports of films in the silent period. I ended up ... again, it expanded into a short book, but still considerably longer than a chapter. Then of course we had to go back and do the work with the actual publication of the *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, but it was kind of a coincidence really.

Charlie Keil: Maybe a coincidence practically, but in terms of the perception and reception, again seen in such a way as to confirm for those who are making these statements, that there's a move here to define cinema studies in a certain way.

David Bordwell: Again, not all cinema studies though. I go back to the issue of questions. This was the heyday of psychoanalytic feminism. There was no question that there were a lot of different perspectives out there at that point. I look back on it now and an answer to an earlier question of yours, when did you become aware you have a research program? I would say around about 1980 or '81. I began to realize that the questions I was interested in, which were those of form and style in cinema, traditional aesthetic questions, the art form you have to ask what are the forms, what are the styles and how those could be understood in historical terms. Those would be sort of the general directions in which I'd move, that I'm interested in at various scales. Like single filmmakers, single films even, but also groups of films, maybe whole filmmaking traditions or maybe the history of cinema generally.

David Bordwell: I'd be interested in historical investigation of form and style. That became clear to me when we were working on the Hollywood book. What we were doing was writing a kind of a history of an academic art form the way people might write the history of academic painting France, or composers in Vienna. How do you write a proper symphony? Who's the patron who's paying the bills for this and so forth. Those kinds of questions that musicologists have asked for a long time, or the same kind of thing with art historians. The churches, the patron of this

image, how did they make it, how were the chemicals, the pigments mixed, those kinds of things.

David Bordwell: I began to realize that this was the kind of stuff that would be interesting to me and if I could, within that, research program, formulate targeted questions that create specific research projects that, that would be something that would be worth pursuing. You mentioned that other book, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. What I said at the very end of it, the book ends very self consciously with saying, "This a path I want to pursue." It says, "This could be a useful way to think about historical poetics of cinema." That's really what I began around '82, '83 when I wrote that book to think to think this is a research program for me.

Charlie Keil: The subsequent works for each of you, in a way, I'd say advance the methodological stakes to another degree. The book on Ozu explicitly invokes historical poetics. Certainly with *Breaking the Glass Armor* neo-formalism becomes almost the rest of the work is to demonstrate the efficacy of such an approach. Then of course *Making Meaning* lands as a kind of polemic within a field, which has now matured. Now we're getting into the late '80s. It's basically 10 years since the first edition of *Film Art*. In some ways no matter how you want to construe what it was meant to do you can't escape the legacy of *CHC* [crosstalk 00:34:58]

David Bordwell: We keep coming back to it.

Charlie Keil: Yeah. Did you see yourselves as unwilling polemicists? There were a lot of debates during that period. I remember and it seems like they came from all sides. Barry Salt is coming at you from one end and another ideological critics are coming from another end. There's debates in *Screen*, all sorts of venues. Did you see that there was a necessity or value in being a little more polemical during that period?

David Bordwell: I wouldn't say Kristin was very polemical, would you?

Kristin T.: No.

Charlie Keil: No, well maybe not, but I think certainly some of the coauthored rebuttals are [crosstalk 00:35:49].

David Bordwell: Oh yeah, well of course, but that was expected. When you get a review like we got in *Screen* I think you have to respond. They want that. It was provocation.

Charlie Keil: I think partly what I'm getting at is it was the nature of the discipline at that time that there was a kind of what are the competing visions of what cinema studies should be. I think part of what you seem to be saying is that there's a coexistence. There's a lot of different things to be determined.

David Bordwell: Oh, absolutely. There were two levels to it for me. One is if you're asking research questions and trying to answer them in the most plausible ways there can be no disputes, really. We can agree. You may want to dispute what the important questions are, and I think people did want to do that. If you grant that people can pursue what they're interested in then if you're doing it in an honest and evidence-based fashion what's the problem? There was also a concern that the kinds of research were ... that there was an agenda. I remember being told this by some people say, "Your work doesn't fit the agenda." I'm thinking, "What is the agenda? I'm not aware of it." Well, the agenda was essentially psychoanalysis and Neo-Marxism.

David Bordwell: Now I'm somebody who's very sympathetic to left wing political science and political economics theories. I'm more skeptical of psychoanalysis because I'm not sure what psychoanalysis is exactly. Nevertheless it's legitimate to pursue these things. I think that what was worrisome to people was that what we did didn't engage enough with issues they thought were salient; Patriarchy, Capitalism, things like that. I see what we do, and this again echoes the old Russian formalist, as completely necessary to any kinds of social or political critique. That doesn't mean that everything you write has to be a call to rally behind some cause. The other thing was I actually did have intellectual objections to some of the work that was being done. I thought it wasn't plausible. I thought that it wasn't the best research that we could get.

David Bordwell: I felt that in the spirit of this we would point them out. I would point them out anyway. *Making Meaning* becomes, essentially a way of saying, "Look, there's more things to say about movies than interpreting them." One of the reasons that doctrines outside film studies, like psychoanalysis or whatever got brought into film studies is because, it's a handy hermeneutic. It turns out no matter which of these hermeneutic models you use you make the same inferential moves. You make the same reasoning routines. You appeal to the same metaphors and so on. Actually, interpretation is sort of content free. It's a series of intellectual moves you make plugging in whatever semantic fields seem appropriate. Now that could well be wrong. That's just my conception of how interpretation in literature or film studies or in any field works.

David Bordwell: So far no one has shown me anything like an alternative model that's as developed. Partly because I think people really like to do interpretations. They really like to do it. It's very satisfying. There's nothing wrong with it. One of the arguments I make at the end of the book is interpretation should be a part of any aesthetic of any art form, any critical approach, but it's not all there is. A lot of what I do is try to suggest some other things you can do besides interpreting things, although interpretation can have its role as well. When I talk about films I often interpret them.

David Bordwell: It's just trying for a broader view, but it was polemical. It was suggesting that there was a kind of intellectual thinness to what was being done in many ways. Or at least a lack of reflection on the part of the people doing it. They were just not aware of repeating the same routines over and over again as if this was a

great discovery. It seemed to me that there was a kind of edge to it that I wanted to have there if only to stake out some space for some other things that could be done.

Charlie Keil: Kristin, I probably should have mentioned that your work on *Breaking the Glass Armor* isn't necessarily polemical, but it is certainly demonstrating the value of an approach which wasn't being adopted by many scholars. Certainly the neo-formalist approach, but also the notion that in a sense interpretation can take a back seat and that a rich description in some way of works is as valuable and perhaps more valuable for film analysis. Actually, there are not that many works of diverse film analysis such as you provide in that book. I'm wondering what was the genesis of that work? How did that come together? Some of the stuff had been published, obviously earlier in other venues.

Kristin T.: Yeah, the earliest essays go back to the mid 1970s. Basically the ones I wrote later were things I had did. I took off time from working on *Exporting Entertainment* because it was so boring going through all these statistics. I just would take a month and write one of these essays and go back to working on *Exporting Entertainment*. Eventually I had the essays that are in the book. It was a steady slow process over about a little over a decade really. I didn't intend it as polemical. I just believed in this method. I knew I was defending it, but I didn't feel any really strong need to do that.

Charlie Keil: Was there a satisfaction in being able to, within a single work, really show ... I mean in a way it becomes a counterpart to narration in that you're able to range over seemingly quite disparate works and show a method that can reveal things about those works that otherwise people wouldn't put together in the same volume.

Kristin T.: Yeah. Well, I believe the first chapter is called "One Approach Many Methods" and argues that you really tailor your method to the individual film. Yeah, I was aiming to demonstrate that you could get a great variety of types of analysis by using this one approach.

Charlie Keil: In a way one sees that replicated, aimed at a different readership obviously, with *Film Art* as it evolves into having these chapters at the end; Which then show how does one take what one's learned in the front end of the book and then see it applied to everything from *Meet Me in St. Louis* to *Tout Va Bien*. In a way *Tout Va Bien* appears in both those works in variant forms. The textbooks in a sense sort of come back with a vengeance. You then get *Film History* coming, as I recall also, in the mid 80s, I think, was the first edition.

David Bordwell: No.

Kristin T.: No, it's '92.

Charlie Keil: Oh.

David Bordwell: I'll just add one thing. I think you're right. I think *Film Art* doesn't reflect our own work, and that's because we're trying to make it nonsectarian if you like, is that it doesn't do so much with norms. Kristin put her finger on it earlier when she says almost all the work we do, when it's tied to specific films, I'm not talking about *Exporting Entertainment* which is a different thing or my book say on the digital transition, but when it's talking about films our work tends to start from the premise of what's normative filmmaking in this context? What seems to be the menu of possibilities for the dominant sort of practice at that moment? It might be Classical Hollywood Cinema. It might be Soviet Montage. It might be Hong Kong Cinema. It might be what Ozu's doing when he's working in Japan.

David Bordwell: I think that one of our points of departure that informs our research program in answering those questions is to say, "What sort of common practice is there? What's the taken for granted?" It doesn't have to be only one thing. It can be just a structured set of choices, but the choices are bounded. What is that? That is not so much what we do in *Film Art*. I think that's an extra dimension to doing a film analysis that we do or try for in our own work that we don't really execute very much in *Film Art*. Only that last chapter on film history where it says, borrowing from Wölfflin, "Not all things are possible at all times" suggests that really Griffith couldn't be Godard, but in a way Godard can't be Griffith either, that sort of thing. That only really comes into that book at the end I think. Of course certain things like continuity, editing and three-point lighting and those are norms in a sense, but they're uncontroversial.

David Bordwell: The idea of studying film as a set of structured alternatives, a menu, an echo system, whatever of branching alternative possibilities and seeing each film as a variant of that in its own unique way. It's not just trying to make it like the other films. It's always playing off the other films. Again, it's a Russian formalist idea, but it's also right there in French structuralism. It's intertextuality in the French structuralism of the 60s and early 70s. It's what Barthes does in *S/Z*. Those kinds of things are not so easily separated off I think.

Charlie Keil: At the point when *Film Art* is entering into secondary and tertiary editions, and it clearly seems to have a marketplace life lets say, and there has been this label attached of the Madison School, and certainly you now both have quite established reputations as film scholars of some influence, how did you experience that influencing in turn what was happening at the pedagogical level? Did you have a sense that the school was now, in a way, on the map? It's not to say that the students would be any better. Obviously there was a fantastic cohort when Kristin was Ph.D student, which was very early in the programs life, but did you have the sense that this was now establishing the program as a distinct entity, that it would draw students of a particular kind that people would come to the program because of what you had done as scholars. One doesn't want to in anyway ignore what was happening from other instructors in the program obviously, who were all doing their own work, which was further cementing the reputation of the program, but ...

David Bordwell: Well, first of all I think it's very much fair to say that the *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, as you suggested earlier, was a kind of flagship for that. It has to be said also that we would not have done the *Classical Hollywood Cinema* the way we did it had we not been at Madison, because we were exposed, I would say, to two people who were very influential on formulating this. One is Tino Balio and his study of the industry and the other is Doug Gomery and his study of the business conduct of the industry. They really alerted us, I think, to the possibility of melding the study of films, particular films, or groups of films, or genres or whatever, with that context of the institutional framework.

David Bordwell: That was not something we got at Iowa. At Iowa there was no instruction in the nature of conduct of the film industry. It was really something I picked up here. I remember coming in to my first Ph.D. prelim defense. A student had not had courses with me, but he was my TA. I was sitting on his committee and Tino Balio just started asking him all these questions about the American film industry. I thought, "I don't know the answer to any of these questions. I could not get Ph.D. in this program that's hired me." I began to realize I think we have to start thinking about these things. At least I had to. The questions I was asking as a researcher were kind of merging with those kinds of issues. Through a friendship with Tino and with Doug Gomery learned a great deal from both of them, read their works. We went through Tino's syllabus. It really shaped the way we thought about *Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

David Bordwell: Of course, Janet Staiger's dissertation had that very strong component to it in a way that was what fed into the work that she did for the *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Already there was, I think, a sense that what we did at Wisconsin in the 70s ... let me put it this way; In the 70s what we did at Wisconsin was we studied certain kinds of films very closely, we did very rigorous formal analysis and we studied the structure and conduct of the film industry.

David Bordwell: I think what happens with *Classical Hollywood Cinema* is they'll start to come together. By the end of the 80s people are saying, "This is kind of what people do." If you're a cinephile and you love film and if you want to really ... certain kinds of films or filmmakers work you want to know very intimately in a way that analysis can lead to that. And if you want to understand the causal inputs that come from the institutional framework of a film industry that is a place to study that." That's not to say that we can't study reception. That's not to say we can't study all kinds of other things. That seems to be the basic thrust of the program. I think it brought people who were interested in those things.

Kristin T.: Yeah, and I think to add to that Janet had not yet written her dissertation when we were talking about doing the *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, which was about 1978. She did a paper for Doug Gomery's class that she was in that he very much recommended to us. We thought we don't know how to do the industry part of this technology style and industry oriented question, but Janet does, so we invited her onboard. Doug Gomery and Tino Balio were very influential directly on that choice.

Charlie Keil: It seems like there's a precedent there. Already you had been involved with *Film Art* before you were fully accredited and then you did the same thing with Janet in a sense.

David Bordwell: It seems weird in the humanities to have so called junior scholars, people who haven't got their Ph.D or haven't gotten a job yet, to work in such a high capacity. It's true it isn't humanities I think or maybe not so much anymore, but it was then. In the social sciences and the laboratory sciences it's very common for excellent young researches to immediately be introduced as authors of papers, maybe primary authors of papers and having their own labs and so on. Graduate school really is ... it's kind of an apprenticeship, but it's very hard to divide the line between when you're the apprentice and when you're a practitioner. Sometimes it happens before you actually get the piece of paper that says you're a Ph.D. I think that happened for us, definitely. We were happy to have that input. Janet also brought a lot to it too. She was one of those people who figured out how to read the literature, the documents, particularly the published, but also the unpublished documents with that eye towards the self-presentation of the industry, what the industry thinks it's telling these people. That skepticism was very, very helpful I think.

Kristin T.: Yeah, and speaking of the grad program here, so many of the dissertations that have come out of this program over the years have been published. Janet's third part of the *Classical Hollywood Cinema* was her dissertation. My dissertation was published and many others. I suppose that's one reason why the Wisconsin project label was formulated. It's a very high profile department.

Charlie Keil: To just talk a bit more about the textbooks now, and there's a couple of reasons I want to invoke them at least one more time. First of all, Kristin your role at UW was not primarily in the classroom. You had the status of fellow and you would occasionally teach, but by and large you were what we would often call an independent scholar. In other words you were at liberty to devote much of your time towards your scholarship. I'm wondering to what degree that helped fuel the emergence of these two rather consequential textbooks, especially *Film History*. Interestingly, I think everyone notes this, your name appears first. It's Bordwell and Thompson for *Film Art*, but it's Thompson and Bordwell for *Film History*.

Kristin T.: Well, that's partly because people do call *Film Art* Bordwell and Thompson.

Charlie Keil: That's true Bordwell Thompson.

Kristin T.: Which one do you mean? Yeah, we had to come up with something else. Well, the first textbook was pure luck in that I was just about to get my degree and this textbook publisher decided they wanted us to write this book. I was facing going out on the job market and maybe having to commute back here for somewhere else. Getting a chance to write that was a way of avoiding that, of being able to stay here in Madison and work with David on the book. As I said that was pure luck. Then that book became the basis of my being able to be an

independent scholar. Later I was the one who decided I was going to write a film history textbook. That was, I think, 1987. David rather fatally said, "You could get it done faster if I were to help you, couldn't you?" I said, "I certainly could." Then we ended up collaborating on that. Yeah, that was a way of trying to continue being an independent scholar without the necessity of teaching somewhere else.

Charlie Keil: Can you give us some insight into how that then actually plays out? How that collaborative process of writing something as extensive as a film history textbook works out in practical terms?

Kristin T.: Well, we sit down and outline it and then divide up the labor. We take separate chapters, or in some cases parts of chapters, but we write separately and then stitch it together. Obviously we read each other's work and revise it. That's whether we're collaborating on it or not, of course.

Charlie Keil: Were you surprised at the uptake? I know in talking to you before about this you've always said, "*Film Art* was more consistently successful than *Film History*." There were times when you thought *Film History* would just fade away, though it has not. Were you surprised at the degree to which the textbooks were successful? That they were taken up as teaching tools in effect.

Kristin T.: Well, I don't think *Film Art* was very successful at first. It grew rather slowly and it has become quite successful. In the beginning it was not so much so, whereas the *Film History* textbook, because people already knew the first one, I think tended to get picked up a little more rapidly. I think there just aren't as many courses in film history anymore. If it was originally the case that most courses were in film history now it's the opposite. *Film Art* gets used a lot more than *Film History*.

Charlie Keil: Or at the very least the populations of courses that take up film art are just larger and so there's a bigger buying public.

Kristin T.: True.

David Bordwell: It's also the case that we're rather bad textbook authors at least one way. That is that we write the overachieving textbooks. *Film Art*, some people will say, is just too hard for their students. *Film History* is not exactly well suited to a semester of 15 weeks where you show one film a week or maybe a couple films a week. It really is trying to be, just as *Film Art* tried to be, and integral aesthetic film masquerading as a textbook. *Film History* is a kind of attempt, at least our take, on what the history of cinema could be intelligibly understood to be masquerading as a textbook. It's a more ungainly textbook because I think to do the justice to what we think is important you'd have to have a two-semester course. In some places there is even it's across three quarters. Some people use it across 15 weeks, 30 weeks, even more sometimes. If you think about a textbook as something that's really targeting the way courses are taught neither

of those books exactly do that. They're halfway between, I would say, halfway between orthodox books and textbooks.

Charlie Keil: There's also to a degree, and you've already acknowledged it, there's a methodological ambitiousness attached to both the books that I think many instructors would wish you had not bothered with. Certainly it's setting up what is form, how do we understand form in *Film Art*. Then in, at least in the early iteration of the *Film History*, there was a very explicit historiographical mapping out as well, which got dispensed with. Since it went online in the subsequent addition-

David Bordwell: I feel very bad about this and this is one of the bad things about writing a textbook is because you're constrained. The great thing about writing a textbook is you can revisit your ideas, make corrections, explain things that you bungled before, do all kinds of things. The thing becomes an organically growing thing and you can improve it as you go along, which is not usually the case with a scholarly book. At least in the age before the Internet. The disadvantage, one of the disadvantages of a textbook is that most publishers don't want to see them grow because they become ungainly and expensive. You always have to put in new material and more material so something else has to go. I really regret losing that historiographic introduction. I think it's important for students to understand that there is this tradition of writing about film and there is a systematic way to go about it.

David Bordwell: It may be that just as with *Film Art* the form section is meta knowledge in a way the way that the meta historiographic section is in the later book. In *Film Art* we just thought that we might be meeting a student who had never had a course in the arts before and so didn't know about form and style, didn't know that these things are ways. That all these concepts are out there for music and painting and sculpture and all those other things. We sometimes find people who say that, that's the only chapter they assign students in their literature course or something like that. They're doesn't seem to be in literature anymore that kind of concise introduction to why would we look at the architecture of a novel or of a play. We felt we had to give that a little bonus material if you like. The same thing with historiographic chapter.

David Bordwell: I think that for graduate students it's a very important thing and for bright undergrads it's an important thing. For most faculty it seems like just an extra layer they don't need. That's fine. They don't have to use it. It's online. They can use it or not. It's again part of coming out of that 70s emergence of film studies as a distinct discipline. We do film damn it and we have a tradition and we think about these things. We care about ideas and we want to lay out these ideas as articulately as possible just like other fields have done for hundreds of years. There's a kind of insistence that film studies have an intellectual ambition to it that we would want to avoid not saying. We would like to see film studies have depth.

Charlie Keil: I've often thought that the 70s were a period where journals were extremely important to the discipline and then the 80s were a period when books became. How would you, looking back now, see the 90s? Clearly the field grew quite significantly during that period. I'm wondering how you see the choices you made in terms of the works you pursued, how that fits into the changing nature of the film studies landscape.

David Bordwell: Well-

Kristin T.: Go ahead.

David Bordwell: I think that's exactly right. I think a lot of fields, when they start out, there might be a blockbuster book that sets things off. Very often it's done through articles. Clearly the one in our field was Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema", the most important 21, 22 paragraphs in film studies. There are other articles too, but I think you're also right that the books become more and more important in the 80s. I wouldn't have said the 90s. I wouldn't segment it quite that way I guess. The 90s are also an era of important books. For me the next important phase of, if you like, the dissemination of ideas in film studies is the Internet. Certainly since I retired in the early 2000s I felt that, that was a natural extension of my interests and a way of writing something that's a little different from both an article and a book. Another mode of writing I guess or register of writing that a blog entry as a kind of research essay that doesn't have all the paraphernalia of scholarship and maybe would be better if they did, but also was more informal.

David Bordwell: In an idiom trying to get readers who aren't academics. They're intellectuals maybe, but they're not academics. They're cinephiles but they're not necessarily film students. That kind of thing appealed to me, an extension of my teaching in some ways I guess. Also, the idea of being able to illustrate things without worrying about publishers saying, "We can't have anymore pictures and the pictures can't be in color" and all that or popping in a clip from something, this is very exciting. To me the next level would be the Internet. The problem is that the academic machinery doesn't respect work that's published on the Internet to its fullest degree yet. I think still now a young untenured faculty member would have trouble saying, "My book is online. I wrote it and published it online. I got critiques from a lot of senior people in the field who gave me good advice and I took it. It just isn't published by an academic press."

David Bordwell: I don't think that person would get tenure at this point. Presses are making the adjustment to that slowly, as far as I can tell, but they are making that adjustment. Maybe there will be a possibility for that. All I know is that the people who are most interested in doing that sort of thing are publishing orthodox books for the most part. Maybe sometimes self publishing them, but publishing self orthodox books, but making sure they have a supplement online of clips and images and other things that will amplify what they have done in the book. I think that's great. I think it's probably the next phase of that. If you're thinking in terms of what makes a splash I think one of the things that we

did, if I think back on it now I didn't think this at the time, was we may have been part of a push towards pluralism in the field. I think it would be fair to say in the 70s there was a lot of diverse activity. In the 80s things tightened up a bit and there was a sense of, as I said earlier, the agenda.

David Bordwell: I think that if we did anything beyond just proposing our own ideas was saying, "You don't absolutely have to do only one thing. There are several things that could be done." If there is now a vast pluralism, as far as I can detect in film studies, where you can study almost anything. People think that's fine. Go ahead and do it. If that's what is present now then we did participate in that trend.

Charlie Keil: Right, so thank you for looping us back a bit, because you advanced my well engineered chronology way past where I wanted to go.

David Bordwell: I studied flashback [crosstalk 01:03:26].

Charlie Keil: I do want to get to the point where, for example, the blog seems to be the major way in which a lot of your ideas and your scholarship get advanced. Part of the reason I wanted to talk about the 90s and into the early 2000s was precisely what you're talking about. The field does diversify considerably and also in terms of the kinds of works you choose to do. I'm wondering did you feel at that point, "Well, now I can do this work on such and such." I'm not saying there was ever constraint in terms of what you chose to write, but whether, for example when you write on Wodehouse is that an indulgent? Did you see it that way or did you just see it as this is just another aspect of the work I choose to do?

Kristin T.: I wrote about Wodehouse because I had a question about him. My question was how can an author, who's highest aspiration in life is to publish with the *Saturday Evening Post*, be one of the great authors of his century? I think I answered that to my satisfaction, but really was just written because of that. I was curious.

Charlie Keil: I think I kind of know the answer to this question from asking it. Do you think you would have been able to publish such a book if you had wanted to write it earlier than you did?

Kristin T.: I think so, because I published with a very small private press, an individual in fact who loved Wodehouse and published only books on Wodehouse. That part of it I don't think I could have easily found a publisher on my reputation as a film scholar.

Charlie Keil: Then can you say something Kristin? I don't know what David's involvement was, but I know that you were heavily involved in the University of Wisconsin press series, which David certainly had a book in. That's where *Narration...* was published.

Kristin T.: He was on the board as well.

Charlie Keil: Yeah, but did David do any editorial work as well?

Kristin T.: Yeah.

David Bordwell: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Charlie Keil: Well, then this is addressed to the two of you, how did you see that work? I won't say there were many great books published through that series because I'm being modest. I think that it contributed to what you're talking about David, which is the diversification of the field. One of the hallmarks of that series was that there were a lot of different works. Many of them were UW dissertations, but if one sees a, let's say flowering of the field through a diverse array of topics being covered in film books, that series certainly contributed to it.

Kristin T.: Well, I think our main motive in forming it was the fact that at the time we did that it was rather difficult to get film history books published. All our books are historical works. That was our main goal.

David Bordwell: Right, film history books that weren't biographies.

Charlie Keil: Right.

David Bordwell: There were very few books, university presses and trade presses are happy to publish biographies particularly of famous figures, celebrities, actors, directors, whoever. At that point there's no university press that pursued as specific policy publishing film history books that were monographs in a sense. We thought that would be a unique contribution we could make. They could be stylistic histories like yours with an industrial or larger scale base or they could be straight up histories like Doug Gomery's History of Moving Exhibition, or Leslie Midkiff-DeBauche's book on World War I in American film. We didn't think of it in terms of economic calculation, but there was a niche that no one was pursuing. Since we have the documents here we have these archives here and people did research in them. Tino and Doug and others were identified with historical research here. We thought this was a natural fit for Wisconsin's press.

Charlie Keil: Do you see that mantle having been taken up by places like California and to a certain extent Columbia, Texas.

David Bordwell: [crosstalk 01:07:17]

Charlie Keil: Exactly.

David Bordwell: Yeah.

Kristin T.: Yeah, by the time we finished we thought our job is done. It's much easier in the last few decades to get books of any kind really in film studies published.

Charlie Keil: Right. So if one looks at the scope of your work some people might say it looks like what they do is that they choose something they're interested in, particularly be it a director or a national cinema, Eisenstein, Hong Kong and then they do something on Hollywood. Is it that systematic? You indulge that and then go back to ... is Hollywood something that always gets returned to or has it just turned out that way in the course of research flow?

Kristin T.: Well, yeah I think we do return to Hollywood because it's been the dominant set of norms around the world. A thing that filmmakers or movements within countries react against. Yeah, we come back to it. I specifically came back to it with *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* because I was annoyed with all the talk of post-classical cinema, post-Hollywood. I just wanted to show that Hollywood is still with us very much so. The same basic norms, even if they're varied a little, are still with us.

David Bordwell: Same for me. It is the way in which it is always going back. In some ways I think that all my work is done backwards, that I really should write my book on Dreyer now. Now I know enough to do it right. There's a sense in which the other projects teach me things about cinema that I then think, "Aha, that applies to Hollywood too, but in this different way." For instance, when I was studying Eisenstein and Ozu I thought I have to figure out more about how narrative works. Well, fortunately Kristin wrote a book, *The Storytelling of New Hollywood*, which actually gave a way to think about plot structure.

David Bordwell: I had thought about narration, but I hadn't thought about plot structure very much. She laid out an option for thinking about that. I thought what if we tried it with very contemporary films, with recent films? I did *The Way Hollywood Tells It* as an attempt to talk about ... to take further her argument that the classical tradition persists, but with variations and differences, so revisiting *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. The last book I just did called *Reinventing Hollywood* is about how the 1940s can be thought of as a kind of period where certain things, norms again, coalesced that were not salient in the 30s. The mature sound cinema, as it's sometimes called, made very palpable in the 40s.

David Bordwell: I keep going back to it. In a way this new book is a way of saying, "This is a different set of questions but within the ambit of the Classical Hollywood Cinema. I'm not saying that *Mildred Pierce* is not a classical film. It is a classical film, but there is something very specific about what was happening in Hollywood of the 40s that gives it certain other distinctive features. We do keep circling back to these things for sure. Also, as E.H. Gombrich said, "I just know more now." You go back and look back and say, "I hope I've learned something in 20, 30 years since this thing is on.

Charlie Keil: Is it also question of, because you've returned this question of norms again and again, is it a question of reestablishing in a sense how the norms work and then

gravitating towards those norms-testing works? It seems that if one can discern your own taste from what you write about there seem to be two camps. There's the films that are to some degree representative of a normative tendency and then those works that so clearly work against them. You don't write a book on Ozu unless you're interested in figures who ... and the figures who do reoccur in your work Godard, Bresson they are very much, one could say the outer reaches of opposing those norms. Is it a bounce back and forth as you say because the one helps to reinforce the knowledge of the other?

David Bordwell: [crosstalk 01:11:28] Once I gave a lecture at Columbia and a student came up to me and said, "I think I've got you figured out. What you like is the unconventional parts of conventional movies and the conventional parts of unconventional movies." I said, "Yeah, that's kind of true actually." No, there's something in what you say, but I think once you start looking for norms and patterns among them and the practices that make them possible it's kind of hard not to see how things stray from those things. Or how certain things can become consummate realizations of those norms. One thing I always go back to is *His Girl Friday*. This is a film that's very, very important for me as a way of crystallizing on the one hand everything that can be done within a classical system, and at the same time so surpasses it in many ways.

David Bordwell: It's still a mystery about that film as far as I'm concerned. It's completely rule abiding in almost every respect, but at the same time who could ever replicate that film? There's a sense in which I'm fascinated by those questions that say, "Here's something that really is very, if not formulae, very standard. Then there are these things in it that go beyond or stray outside and so on. That's one of the reasons I wrote the 40s book. I kept finding all these weird-ass movies, which when you look at them you think how did that even get released? Then it turns out, well it gets released because it fits. It's coherent. It comes out like any other movie. It looks like other movies. Then you're looking at it from askew and say, "It's still really peculiar." What made that possible? Well, it turns out that there are sub-traditions, I guess, of that particular form of peculiarity. There were several filmmakers working in those minor veins to try to try something new. The more you look the more detail you find. It's something you can go on with forever obviously.

Charlie Keil: It's interesting you put it that way. The criticism of your work, let's say the criticism in the sense of the, not necessarily sympathetic criticism I've read of both of your work, is sometimes that you ... this is ironic Kristin that one of your early publications was about excess, but it's that you don't account for ... that there's a model that wants to, in a sense, make everything fit a formula. Therefore those very things that are peculiar, that don't quite work, that incite pleasure in ways that aren't fully explicable get ruled out or cleared away in your approach. Yet you're saying the very thing that drives you back to certain topics is the, not inexplicable, but the things that require further explanation because they're not immediately-

David Bordwell: Yeah, it goes back to what questions you're asking. If your question is how does this film fit into a tradition that's one kind of question. If how does this film give me a buzz, that's another kind of question. That's a question I don't try for actually, how does this film give me a buzz or how do films give me a buzz. I do think though there is an important set of questions about how we understand films, whether or not they give us a buzz. That's through the cognitive dimension of my work. I'm trying to look at models of mine that weren't psychoanalytic for explaining that. I've never been able to feel that I had a good grasp on what gives us pleasure. I'm not all together sure anybody else does either. That's not the question I pursue because it's just beyond my ability.

Charlie Keil: I'd like to touch on cognitivism for a moment. Just because you raised it with *His Girl Friday*, Kristin is there a kind of touchstone film for you? Is there a film that you're constantly thinking, "I could say more about that film because every time I return to it there's more that it reveals to me."

Kristin T.: No, I don't think there is such a film.

Charlie Keil: Okay.

Kristin T.: We can go back to cognitive.

Charlie Keil: Yeah, I was going to say maybe that requirement [crosstalk 01:15:22] going both cognitive.

David Bordwell: [crosstalk 01:15:23]

Charlie Keil: David, do you want to say a bit about how that did? This takes us back chronologically, but as you say we're now fully engaging with the flashback mode.

David Bordwell: Yeah, what happened with me was I came to it through narratology and stylistics. I'm looking at these films and I'm going, "If this is setup in this way to pay back later or if this shot is overlapping the space of the next shot the viewer must be doing something. This is engineered to create that." Why would you bother to do these things if you didn't presuppose the viewer was doing something with it? I began to realize that this goes back to the issue about interpretation. It's not just the meanings of films that you want to talk about, but it's their affects. As I say, one of the effects is clearly pleasure enjoyment. Those are hard to explain. Another effect is intelligibility and comprehension. How is it possible to just follow a story? How is it possible to understand the layout of space? It must be possible because people do it and it must be that the people who made the films thought it was possible that their practical psychologists.

David Bordwell: They know that, "If I do this sort of thing with the framing or that sort of thing with the lighting or the cutting or this sort of thing with the script it will be

intelligible or at least I'm hoping it will be intelligible. Maybe I have to make it redundantly intelligible, but at least I have to ..." you begin to think these people understand intuitively, tacitly how we make sense of films. Can we explain that theoretically? To me I didn't see that on offer in the literature that was being canvassed by people of film theory at that point. It seemed to me the most plausible account was offered by the tradition of cognitive psychology which is indeed just about the very same thing. How is it that language is understood in the Chomskian mold, how are pictures understood? How our intelligible world come to us through perception. Those kinds of things were just not talked about in film studies. People talk about vision without understanding how eyes work, things like that. I thought maybe there's something there.

David Bordwell: The hope, and I'm not sure it was completely realized, but the hope was to hook up the kinds of things that were thrown out by analysis, narrative analysis, stylistic analysis with the kinds of mental processes that were postulated by cognitive science. As I said I don't think it was completely successful. I think notions of schemas, intuitive inference, things like that, I believe, still hold good. I think that there's a kind of level of operating. I'm not sure it completely works, because there are things put in films that you're not supposed to see. When you're scrutinizing them under analysis you find them. Maybe they're just something your sensory system rides over in normal perception. It's only when you stop the movie on the Steenbeck that you realize wait a minute. That's really weird. Who notices? Maybe nobody notices. Then there's a mechanism for not noticing that we ought to know about. Then there's why isn't it noticed?

David Bordwell: That sort of is an interesting question. It's a tangled bit, but I do think that was, if you want to talk about changes that we've made in the field I think that's been a very important one. I think now there's a whole flotilla of people doing cognitive studies of film that just weren't there in 1985. Some of them have come up to me and said, "I didn't think there was a place for the kind of questions I was interested in, in film studies." Either these are empirical scientists, people actually run experiments, show people movies, go to cultures where people don't have movies and ask them questions about these things they show them. Very interesting research. Interesting projects. Or people who say, "I never liked that Saussurean model of language. I always thought a Chomskian model was better." These debates just weren't had within film studies. I don't think I ever visited a conference where someone said, "Y'know, a Saussurean model of language is really designed for phonology and semantics. It's not designed for grammar. We shouldn't expect this will tell us anything about syntax. Chomsky is doing this."

David Bordwell: I never heard that talked about. It was, "Here is what Saussure says." There's a way in which I think the narration of the fiction film book did for some people opened up possibilities of looking at a film from that psychological perspective, which is not just cognitive, but does have affect involved. A lot of people have taken off from that and talked about emotion and perceptual things. That opened a door. I'm not saying I furnished the room. I'm just saying I opened the door a little bit. I think that has proven useful. For me it was a short-term

answer to my question. Why are these movies made this way? It was a formal question. For other people it's why do movies do what they do? It's a much more general theoretical question. That's what people are exploring now.

Charlie Keil: Kristin some of your later work seems to go into terrain that I don't think people would have normally associated with, lets say what kind of work you do. If you look at, for example, *The Frodo Franchise* or some of your work on television do you see this as all of the piece or do you see yourself more as this interests me? I think I know what you're going to say, but I'm interested in knowing how someone who had a sense of what they thought Kristin Thompson would be interested in or write about, how you would make sense of that for them.

Kristin T.: Well, I think *The Frodo Franchise* in some ways goes back to the *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. I do talk about the form of the film, the technology involved, the businesses involved and that sort of thing. It's an attempt to look at the interactions, but in a way that is new to the franchise culture of Hollywood. Franchises have just become so important. *The Lord of the Rings* was such an influential one that I thought it should be written about. I had loved the book of course since I was a teenager. I was more interested in that particular franchise than in others. It also was one that fortunately allowed me to get access to the filmmakers and other people and indirectly involved and get a lot of information. I think it's still talking about norms of Hollywood, but it's a new set of norms in the larger sense across the industry. It's a very, very influential film on all those levels.

Charlie Keil: And in television?

Kristin T.: Television, I basically agreed to do those pieces on television because I invited to Oxford and they were very pressing about wanting me there. I said, "I don't do television." The woman who was inviting me said, "Oh, I'm sure you could come up with something." I thought I could talk about narrative, so I did break my own rule and talk about television.

Charlie Keil: When you say you broke your own rule ...

Kristin T.: Of not talking about television in my work.

Charlie Keil: Yes, why do you have a rule about not talking-

Kristin T.: I'm not a television scholar. I'm thoroughly a film person. By comparing the two and already having a sense of what I thought of modern Hollywood narrative structures I was able to come up with a lecture series that then was published.

Charlie Keil: Okay, so now let's go to the point of the blog.

David Bordwell: That's a good transition because that allows us to write about stuff we're not experts in.

Charlie Keil: It's called Observations On Film Art, which to some degree is a play on the title of the textbook. Clearly you make it sound as though the trajectory is retirement, then moving to a new mode of communication that is not constrained.

David Bordwell: For me that's the case.

Charlie Keil: Yeah. Obviously it would be a bit different for Kristin. Was there anything beyond the sense that the modes that one uses to communicate are shifting? Was there dissatisfaction with conventional publishing at all? Had you also felt like, "I've said what I want to say in the book." Clearly if there was that sense at that time that has changed, because you've gone back to conventional publishing.

David Bordwell: [crosstalk 01:23:35] It was more of an experimental thing. Like what would it be like to do this?

Charlie Keil: And you had the time to do it.

David Bordwell: Now I had the time. That's crucial. I would not have done this had I not retired. It's so time consuming writing these blogs. When we were starting blogs were very casual. They were like, "I saw this great band last night. It was great." There were people writing ambitious blogs. I don't want to say there weren't. The expectation of those blogs were brief and ephemeral. What Twitter became, you know? We were doing just completely the wrong way.

Charlie Keil: It's like the textbooks all over again.

David Bordwell: Yeah, it is. That's absolutely right. People say this is Internet 1.5. We never really got to Internet 2.0, which is about interactivity, letting people comment, constant flow and turn. We treat the Internet like a big magazine rack. Basically there's all this stuff to read there and we have a magazine on the rack and there's not letters-to-the-editors. The people, they can write emails to us. Our email isn't secret, but no comments. It was a very strange thing, but it was a chance to write in a way that was more casual and conversational, in a way that would maybe reach outside the people who don't want to read the books or want to buy the books or whatever.

David Bordwell: Also, and Kristin emphasizes this a lot, it's also a supplement to *Film Art* and *Film History*, but particularly *Film Art*. We're hoping that people who read the textbook would then look at our blog and get ideas that bounce back and forth between them. Sometimes the textbook refers to certain blogs that are relevant. We put those in the margins. Sometimes what we do in the blog echoes the textbook or points to the textbook or aims at teachers for ways they can use the blogs in teaching the book. There's that mesh between them, but it goes beyond the textbook because it's just about anything about film that interests us, or indeed not about film. It can be about comics. I've written about

comics on it or other things that just interest me. It's a much more casual kind of thing, but we try to give it rigor and depth at the same time.

Kristin T.: It also was not calculated. This is another thing that came out of a chance thing, which was that every time we revised *Film Art* McGraw-Hill sends out these questionnaires to people asking for suggestions or comments. One of the comments was, "Why don't you have a blog?" That was the inspiration. Then we started thinking about it the way David said. It really was initially very closely connected to *Film Art*.

Charlie Keil: Were you surprised at the success of it? Did you ever think-

David Bordwell: Success if relative.

Charlie Keil: I know, I know, but there's a lot of blogs that have come and gone.

David Bordwell: Yeah, we've been going about 11 years. We've had over nine million hits in that 11 years. For some blogs, or some websites I should say, that's not very many. Some get a million a month. For us we think that's pretty good. Some years we've had over a million. Last year was under 900,000. It fluctuates around there, which means that some people are at least clicking if not reading. Then again when you write a book or an article you don't know if anyone, who even buys the book, has read the book. You don't really know. For us it's a way to think out ideas. This has many functions. One function I would say is it's a draft for a book. Some of the books I've written since then have spun off the blogs. This happened with my book on the digital transition, but also Kristin and I did it with some of the things we'd written about Christopher Nolan.

David Bordwell: The other thing was it was a way, the Internet generally, not necessarily the blog, to bring back a book that had gone out of print. *Planet Hong Kong* was not going to be reprinted. It was not going to be revised. I thought let's do an e-edition. That enabled me to update that book. Then the blog could point people towards that and the site would make it available for sale if they wanted it, or at least just read about it on the blog. There's a very rich interaction you can have with the Internet and your publications and your research.

David Bordwell: I would still go back to publishing books. I've done it twice now in the last couple of years. I would do it again, but I also would like to consider maybe doing another self-published book like *Planet Hong Kong*. It's experimenting with options. We did one book based on the blog that kept the blogs up. It's called *Minding Movies*. That seemed to workout okay even though people could say, "Why would you put out a book that you can read for free online?" They're revised and there's more material, but still it's pretty overlapping. Okay, so with *The Rhapsodes*, this book on 40s critics I did, I took them offline. Now the book exists in my final thoughts. I just didn't want the earlier ones out there because I changed my mind or I'd revised in some ways.

David Bordwell: You've got all this flexibility with the Internet and its relationship to hard copy publishing that I find just very exciting. It can keep your research going in lots of different directions. Or I can do like I'm doing now, which is doing reports on films I know people can't see. I'm at the Library of Congress, I'm watching these films from the 1910s. I'm thinking these are tremendous, but they're fragmentary. They'll never be on DVD. How can I let people know about this? I thought, "You could go put them on the blog." Maybe I'll write about them some day as a book. Maybe I won't, but at least for the moment I can try to get people excited about these things.

Charlie Keil: Clearly one of the advantages is the flexibility it affords you. It's multimodal in effect. What are some of the disadvantages?

David Bordwell: Feeling like we have to write a blog this week.

Kristin T.: Yeah, that's the main one.

David Bordwell: Yeah, there's a sense we've built in the early days ... Kristin was just plotting this, because she's going back through them. I think we figured out we averaged about 70 blogs a year, at least in our heyday.

Kristin T.: We have 802 right now.

David Bordwell: Yeah, we're about 10 plus years. That's a hard tempo to keep up if you're doing other things, either traveling or revising textbooks or whatever. I think now we're settling into a blog every couple weeks. I always have something I want to write about, but the question is having the time to do it. I have a whole drawer full of files of potential blog topics. I just don't have the time to work them up with all these other things that we're doing. Clearly the rule of blogs is the more you blog the more people come. Not necessarily more numerically, but your regular readers come back more often and you have higher numbers.

David Bordwell: We're not really about numbers. If you look at say how the blog is constructed it's a scrolling blog rather than a peek-a-boo blog. The peek-a-boo blog says, couple paragraphs, read more, click and you get another click. People are about clicks. Whereas ours you can just read this role that looks like toilet paper. It just goes on forever. This blog, upon blog, upon blog. That's because we're not really aiming at high numbers of clicks. There's lots of ways we could make it more cunning and advertiser friendly, those there's no advertising on it. It's an indulgence I suppose in that sense.

Charlie Keil: Now some might say while you brought in another scholar, Jeff Smith, to work on your textbook why don't you open your blog up to a limited number of contributors and that way the pressure on you would-

David Bordwell: We have done it.

Charlie Keil: I know you've done it in a guest capacity, but to make this more regularized so that in fact you weren't-

David Bordwell: It's a problem of coordination. If we bring someone else in as a full partner then you have to have meetings about who does what when and scheduling and all that. Right now we can just go to people and bully them into submitting something. It works quite well. Matthew Bernstein, obviously Jeff, Leslie Midkiff, many people one guy gave a paper at a conference that I liked very much on the apartment. I said, "Have you got this published?" He said, "No, I don't think I'm going to publish it. I need lots of stills and clips." I said, "Well, we can put it on our blog." He wrote it and it worked out very well. We're open to lots of different kinds of things, lots of different collaborators. For the moment, short term, because administering that along with the textbooks and everything would be a mishegas.

Kristin T.: Plus it's hard to ask somebody who's still teaching full-time to go into this kind of thing.

Charlie Keil: [crosstalk 01:31:56]

David Bordwell: Yeah, that's right. It works as an occasional thing. Kelley Conway has done a couple of really good blogs for us. Several. You couldn't ask someone like Kelley or Jeff Smith or others who are our colleagues here to become a permanent fixture. It would be just too [crosstalk 01:32:12].

Charlie Keil: As you said also there's still not the recognition of this.

David Bordwell: Yeah, right.

Charlie Keil: This is in some kind of academic limbo as to what it actually is.

David Bordwell: Yeah, [crosstalk 01:32:19] they put it on their scholarly activities reports would it make any difference? I think for graduate students it might make a difference. We are curating or editing or doing what you say, gatekeepers I guess. It might help them I think. We've had some grad students write for us too. Really, the people aren't banging down the doors to write our blogs. Anonymous people are saying, "I have just the thing for you. The ten cutest hats in film. Will you please ..." sponsored content. No, we'll just keep going as long as it's interesting for us.

Charlie Keil: Speaking of new directions, note my artful segue Kristin-

David Bordwell: Brilliant.

Charlie Keil: Yeah, thank you. I don't know that everyone knows this because it doesn't relate to film studies but you've now had a fairly long standing, should we call it parallel career in Egyptology. I think most people, if they didn't know that,

hearing that would say, "What?" Can you explain how that came about and how ... When I look at it I think this is pretty, not only distinctive, but impressive. I can think of few scholars in one field who have basically ramped themselves up to the point where they're respected enough to get published in another field and can go to conferences in another field and hold their head high and not just be sneaking in the backdoor.

David Bordwell: Speak of the British Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Charlie Keil: Yes, yes, exactly, yeah. Can you speak to that part of your career?

Kristin T.: Well, it was another accidental thing. I took a tour of Egypt in 1992, which I figured was going to be my only trip to Egypt and that would be that. I had been interested as a kid as most people are. I got very interested in this one period, more or less in the middle of ancient Egypt's history, the Amarna period when Akhetaten tried to institute monotheism in a profoundly polytheistic society. That lasted only as long as his own reign did. He created an entire city on virgin land in Middle Egypt and left a great deal of smashed up art. After his reign was over people came in and just systematically tried to wipe him off the face of the earth. There's this huge amount of smashed stuff.

Kristin T.: I was actually studying reliefs and my first serious academic paper and publication was on reliefs. I got acquainted with the head of the expedition that works at the site of Amarna and he emailed me in 2000 saying that he needed someone to come and just register a lot of these smashed up pieces of relief and sculpture and so forth, stone stuff. I said, "Sure." This is one of the sites where any graduate student in Egyptology says, "How do I get to Amarna?" I've had people come up to me and ask me that. Giza or Carnac it's one of those places people just long to work at. I was very, very lucky to get on this expedition. I was expecting just to be measuring these pieces, writing numbers on them, trying to figure out what they were a part of, what kind of stone they were.

Kristin T.: Once I arrived in 2001 for about a three-week stay at Amarna I found that among the pieces I was registering there were a bunch of them that fit together. I had been told that there were no matches among these pieces. I started matching them and putting them together. Eventually I reconstructed about half of a fairly large statue, which was a big deal and I was able to publish it in the *Journal of Egyptian Archeology*, which is one of the top journals in the field. I started trying to find out where some of the pieces in museums had come from. A lot of the pieces that I was working with came out of dumps, which is basically what it sounds like. Egyptologists who can't either cope with the amount of material they have or don't want it, it's not museum quality stuff, they just rebury it on the site. Two different expeditions had done that before we came along and found this stuff.

Kristin T.: I had to investigate where it had originally come from before they took it back to the dig house and buried it. I was traveling to museums, taking photos of the

pieces that came from our site with the aim of eventually publishing a complete catalog of all the pieces from our site. It just grew into an immense project, which is still going on. I've done 11 seasons now at Amarna plus I've seen pieces in probably close to 30 museums around the world. I get into the locked cages and see the pieces that aren't out on display. That's always exciting. I'm working now with a collaborator Marsha Hill, a curator at the Metropolitan on a book on royal statuary from Amarna. That's a huge two-volume set. I don't know when we're going to finish it. It's-

Charlie Keil: Will it become the *CHC* of Amarna scholars?

Kristin T.: It will be the definitive work on this subject, yeah. Up till only very limited amount of the statuary got into museums. We have hundreds and hundreds more pieces. It's going to be a big deal in the field.

David Bordwell: *Classical Hollywood Cinema* plus the motion picture I'm going to add, those two things together.

Charlie Keil: I think we've covered a lot. I think the only thing left to do is to gesture to the future. What is there in terms of topics that you want to cover that you haven't yet been able to do? What are the dream books or the areas that you would really like to put your hand to before-

David Bordwell: Well, I have boxes in my study and every box is a project. I have three or four boxes. I'd like to write a short book on Godard, late Godard specifically, which would be an online book where I'd have clips. If he steals from people why can't I steal from him? Then I would also like to do a book, another short book on film analysis systematizing and putting in book form a course I taught here, now taught by Masha Belodubrovskaya called *Critical Film Analysis*. I'd like to put my version of that in a small book form. Maybe a printed book. I'd like to do a book on 1910 cinema worldwide.

David Bordwell: The stylistics of 1910 cinema, which is a done piece meal and other books like on the history of film style and a book staging and on a lot of blogs. I'd like to do that in a more systematic comparative way, since much of what we do, and we probably should have said this, is comparative. Then what else? Probably some other things I haven't thought of yet. Three or four more books coming. I'm hoping to do short books. Not long monsters, but shortish ones. Some online some as print books.

Charlie Keil: Kristin.

Kristin T.: Okay, well I definitely want to go back to my perpetually delayed book on the 1920s film movement since I now, I think, have written the books I needed to write before I could write it. The textbook and the blog and Egyptology have delayed that, but it's partially written. I have been working for a long time on a book on Tolkien's novels that I would like to finish. Well, my colleague and I say

that if we finish the statuary book maybe we'll go on to do the balustrades from Amarna. There's possibly that.

Charlie Keil: I think this will be the last thing. Are there either filmmakers or topics that you really enjoy either watching or thinking about but that you can't see translating into an actual published project?

David Bordwell: Most of them. Sure. We love to watch films and so it would be fun to write a book on Wes Anderson, but I don't think I haven anything new to say about Wes Anderson that I haven't said already and other people haven't said too. There are many filmmakers I'm interested in, living filmmakers. It would be wonderful to try to write a book on Kiarostami, but I think that, that's an area that many more expert people would be able to say something about. A lot of the things that I've done in the past I would be interested in a filmmaker or set of films and say, "People have done it. I don't need to do it." I would find that people hadn't really done it.

David Bordwell: The things I wanted to say about Ozu or Eisenstein had not been said. I thought with the other filmmakers that I think about I'm not sure I have anything to contribute really. I think that my general interest is diffuse and I don't really have a precise question to pursue. Probably if I did formulate it somebody else would have formulated it too. I just want to enjoy the films and read what other people say about them too.

Charlie Keil: Well, thank you both for the questions you've asked and the way you've answered them and the work you've done. We've all benefited inordinately. Thank you for being so generous with your time today.

David Bordwell: Thank you.

Kristin T.: Yes.