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**THORBURN:**

The film experience is, as I said, began many years ago, 38 or 39 years ago in the version that I teach. And it has undergone almost a continuous process of transformation. One of the ironies is that it began its career in an era before there was any technology available to support film study.

It made things actually very awkward. But it was also in some way convenient for the professor. What we used to have to do was show the film. We used to-- and in fact, MIT belong to a group called the University Film Study Center. A group of institutions, included Harvard and Yale. And what we did was we had a library of 16 millimeter prints of classic films. And we circulated them.

So you had to alter your syllabus so that the guy at Harvard was also able to do Keaton because there was only one copy of *The General* available. So that was very complicated. And but we all managed to do it.

And then at while I was at MIT, that system became moribund because videotape became available, and films became available on videotape. We also begin to be able to project them on videotape. So we didn't have the problem of trying to rent the movie at great expense, or to belong to the Film Study Center, and try to keep these fraying 16 millimeter prints in operation.

So that was a great boon. It also allowed us for the first time to stop and start the text. So it allowed for forms of close reading of the media that had never existed before. And one of the things it exposed was the errors of older scholars and older critics, who were working from memory in describing films, because in order to write about a film in the old days, in the days when I began to teach film, you actually had to project a movie.

And they had scholarly versions of 16 millimeter and other kinds of projectors that would allow you to stop and start things so you could study things. They were fairly expensive. And you had to go to an archive that had the material film.

The advent of videotape transformed media study and transformed film study in ways that are still not fully clear because every film scholar, any place in the world, was able to get his hands on important text. And that process is, of course, been elaborated an almost infinite number of times, a tremendous number of times over the past decade, so that today, people could go online and virtually get access, certainly to clips, and to many older films that were never

available before.

And every university, and every film class has access to this material, and can even set up-- first, as we've finally done at MIT-- a system in which students can actually videostream films to their own laptops at will. And that's another wrinkle because that's a very recent addition to what the film course did.

So in the beginning, we would have a communal viewing. And it was the only time the students could look at the film. They couldn't even get a second look at it. Then we moved to a phase in which we continued to have the communal viewing. But we made videotape versions of the films available on reserve for students who wanted to write papers or to review for exams.

And then we moved to a phase in which when DVDs were available, we would sometimes not only project the film from DVDs, but we would also make both tapes and video DVDs available to students for use after class. And we would also allow students to borrow the DVDs and watch them in their own time, and not attend the communal viewing if they were unable to attend.

And, of course, that immediately set in a process, began a process of attrition, in which fewer and fewer students found time to come to the communal viewings. This is partly a function of the scheduling crisis at MIT, and the busyness of our students. If they have an option to do it in their own time, they will often do so, so that what had been a kind of sacred space in the course, the 8 to 10 evening slot that I often used to show the film experience text became less and less well attended.

And this had the also troubling effect of a slight-- ans I say maybe more than slight-- but at least a slight decline in the attendance at the evening lecture. Because the way I taught the course was I had one lecture at 4 o'clock. From 4:00 to 5:00, they would break for dinner or their sports activities. At 7 o'clock, I would give an introductory lecture. And at 8 o'clock, the communal screening would begin.

That communal moment before the advent of streaming and before it was easy for the students to get access to the text on their own, was a much more powerful moment than it has become. And so we haven't figured out what to do.

We haven't exactly figured how the course can evolve in ways that can maximize the students opportunity to look at the material in their own time, but also maintain a sense that there are

certain spaces and times during the day that are devoted to our activity, just as there are for their physics lab, and just as there are for their chemistry lecture. We've got to do that to maintain our parody with the sciences.

When I begin the film experience, I asked the students to do something they find increasingly difficult. In the old days, this request wasn't necessary in quite the same way. In the old days, before the proliferation of smartphones, and visual media all over the place, and everyone being able to make his own video and so forth, and the ubiquity of DVDs, before those days, I was able to tell the students, look, we live in an audio visual age. We live in a televisual age.

I want you to think that stuff away. I want you to think yourself back to an age before people understood that there is such a thing as a film. And think about the original meaning of movie is. Go back to the root meaning.

It's a metaphor that is a dead metaphor for us. But it actually-- it tells you what the most fundamental aspect of the movies were for the original audiences, and why they were so fascinated by the capacity of this new technology to capture motion. It seemed like, and it was, a tremendous new advance in technologies of the representation of human experience, because it captured humans in motion. It captured the movements of the world.

And the first films, as I try to show my students, were so preoccupied by this wondrous capacity of the medium, that it's almost the only thing they filmed. And you can see the evolution of the medium embodied in the way in which, after an initial profound fascination with the novelty of movement begins to wear off, other properties of the film medium begin to be discovered.

So I tell my students this principle. And I ask them to try to think their way back into the attitude of these first viewers, who didn't know about the visual media, to play a kind of thought experiment. Today, it's much harder to make them play that experiment because I have to tell them, as I do in that first lecture, think away your iPads.

Imagine a world without iPads. Imagine a world without smartphones. Imagine a world without instant communication.

And of course, this is much harder for the students to do. And of course, at one level they're much more capable of processing audio visual information than I am, and then my parents' generation, and all of the generations older than they are, because they've grown up in an

environment in which essentially they're surrounded 24/7 by audio visual stimuli, by audio visual signals.

Many people might see this as dangerous. Perhaps it is. But it develops new capacities.

And one can see this in the history of television, in which at a certain point, there are certain kinds of television programs that become too complex for older generations. And only the younger-- the cutoff comes around 1980 with a show called *Hill Street Blues*, which older fans, the fans that belong to my parents' generation, couldn't watch because it had too many subplots. And it jumped around too much.

But the younger generation that was used to going to the movies, and had been watching television, and had been watching MTV, or the origins of MTV, were able to understand this very easily. And of course, that process continued on television very intensely so that today, there are forms of television whose audio visual complexity is beyond the imagination of the people who were making programs for the medium in the 1950s.

One irony of this situation is that even though the students are very adept at processing this information, they are even more ignorant about the history of the medium, especially the history of movies, than ever. And it's even harder today to find students who even remember the environment in which people had television sets that required you to change the channels, or who had television sets in which were confined to a single room, and which in order to watch it, you had to move into that room.

So the physical environment is changing so much. And of course, the original space of the movies, the great communal theater, that's a dying space. You have to try to remind the students about that. And so the part of teaching the film course has become much more historical.