

Aca-Media, Ep. 49, "Pretty Good for the Dog Days of Summer"

Original release date: July 15, 2019

www.aca-media.org/episode49

[Start of recorded material 00:00:14]

Christine: [00:00:14] Welcome to the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* Presents *Aca-Media*. I am Christine Becker.

Michael: And I am Michael Kackman.

Christine: Got that rolling off the tongue now.

Michael: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, that's so good.

Christine: [00:00:23] Ever onward.

Michael: Really, really good. It's hot.

Christine: It is hot. You see, I was hoping Scout would be breathing heavy so I could [overtalking].

Michael: [00:00:32] So we had this whole like setup here because Scout, the wonder dog, is helping us today and she's been interrupting and kind of running around with her bone and stuff, but she's now too hot and tired and I think she just fell over so even she's not going to interrupt the show.

Christine: [00:00:49] Yeah, so there goes our opening bit – The Dog Days of Summer – Michael came up with that.

Michael: Aw!

Christine: The Dog Days of Summer.

Michael: It's hot.

Christine: [00:00:56] Yeah, which you're just coming also off of it being cold and rainy and so suddenly now it's hot.

Michael: It's true. You've been down south. I've been here in the home of the polar vortex and June Tober.

Christine: [00:01:07] Yeah, I apparently brought the heat up with me, although we're not as hot as Europe. I'm hearing like France and Spain are in the 110s.

Michael: Yeah, OK.

Christine: There we go. Scout is back.

Michael: OK, that's enough.

Christine: There we go.

Michael: That's enough, OK, Scout, go lay down.

Christine: [00:01:26] All right, thank you, Scout. We'll interview Scout in another episode. It's too hot to interview Scout right now.

Michael: It is too hot; so we've got an episode here.

Christine: [00:01:34] Yeah, we've got some pretty amazing interviews, including in the middle of one, you know, really like breaking news in the middle of an interview so hot stuff, but not that kind of hot.

Michael: Not that kind of hot.

Christine: [00:01:47] A totally different kind of hot. But yeah, I did one interview. I talked to Juan Llamas-Rodriguez about his new article in the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* so he is our first –

Michael: First one.

Christine: [00:01:57] Yeah, and then Joel Neville Anderson takes on an interview and he wanted to talk to Chris Cagle who wrote an article for *Film Quarterly* about the streaming service Kanopy, and that article went viral, and then he asked to also speak with Nedda Ahmed who is an arts librarian and co-chair of the Libraries and Archive SIG in SCMS, to have a conversation about the state of streaming and owning physical media and all those challenges in the university system.

Michael: [00:02:29] Plenty of good stuff; shall we jump in?

Christine: Let's do it.

Michael: First up, Juan Llamas-Rodriguez.

Christine: [00:02:35] So yeah, let me just give a quick introduction here. Juan Llamas-Rodriguez is an Assistant Professor in the School of Arts Technology and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. His research and teaching mobilize media theories to critically analyze social phenomena on a global scale and he specializes in transnational media, digital

labor, border studies, infrastructure studies in Latin American film and television.

[00:02:56] His work has appeared in a number of journals and edited collections and he is a member of the Global Internet TV Consortium, a network of media study scholars seeking to understand the implications of internet-distributed television around the world. So I was speaking to him here about his article in the spring 2019 issue of *JCMS*, is that right?

Michael: That's right, yeah.

Christine: *JCMS*.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely.

Christine: [00:03:17] I want to make sure I wasn't leaving out an initial there, and it is titled "A Global Cinematic Experience: Cinopolis, Film Exhibition and Luxury Branding," so it's about this company called Cinopolis, fourth largest film exhibitor in the world, and in fact has been augmenting its businesses by introducing luxury cinemas in Mexico and the US and in India.

[00:03:38] So Juan writes about those and argues that the strategy depends on creating a modular cosmopolitanism that appeals equally to upper middle class patrons across different nations. This can come at the expense of audience satisfaction though and so he wants to look at the challenges facing film exhibition and critical theory in this era of multiplex expansion and media platform proliferation.

Michael: Right on, let's give it a listen; phew.

Christine: [00:04:11] I'm very excited to welcome back to the podcast – we've got Juan Llamas-Rodriguez here, so welcome Jan – Juan, excuse me, sorry. I was going to make sure I wasn't going to screw up your name and then like the easiest part of it I screwed up – Juan, hello.

Juan: [00:04:25] Hello.

Christine: [00:04:26] And I say welcome back of course because we had you on the podcast – I checked, it was episode three and that was an episode where we interviewed a veterans attendee of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, and then someone whose first time it was, and that was your first time.

Juan: That's correct.

Christine: [00:04:42] Yeah, so we've got a nice kind of bookend here. I don't want to say bookend because that makes it seem like we'll never have you on the podcast again, but second installment where you are the first author we are interviewing who has an article in the *Journal for Cinema and Media Studies*.

Juan: Oh, the rebrand thing.

Christine: [00:04:59] Yes, exactly, just a rebranding. Not a whole dramatic difference. Not quite as similar to getting your first SCMS under your belt, but still I think this is – you're our go-to now. Anything like new you're the first person. We've got you branded for that now. But we are here to talk to you about your article and we will, of course, go through the stuff that you cover, this fascinating article about the global marketplace for luxury cinemas.

[00:05:25] But actually I want to start behind the scenes with our conversation because I think this is one of the key things we can do in the podcast, is help people understand how the sausage gets made, so to speak, and you don't usually get a chance to talk about how you actually get to write things.

[00:05:39] And so I wanted to start there because you had written on your social media posts that this began – this article began four years ago as a seminar paper in grad school at UC Santa Barbara for Ross Melnick's "Global Exhibition" class, so I was curious about where this idea came from? What was the originating idea? How did you start researching it and then how did it evolve in the writing process from a seminar paper into now a *Journal for Cinema and Media Studies* article?

Juan: [00:06:02] Sure, yeah, so this has been like an article that's been with me across a number of different stages. So it started as a seminar paper for the "Global Exhibition" class and UC Santa Barbara is on the quarter system, which means that although the grad seminars are seven weeks tops and then you have to start thinking about your paper like two weeks in, so it's pretty much – it's a series of sprints is I think how we best describe it.

[00:06:32] So I wasn't really – my dissertation work was not an exhibition, per se, and I was taking the class because I was interested in the topic and because I liked Ross, so everything was fairly new to me so I think I picked a subject that I could easily latch onto.

[00:06:47] And I'd been visiting my parents in Mexico and I visited Cinopolis, which is the film exhibition chain that I analyzed, and I noted the VIP cinemas were popping up in a lot of different locations. For a while it was only in very sort of the high end neighborhoods, so I started getting interested in that and decided I'm going to do a paper on this because it's something that I can grab onto.

[00:07:10] And originally, it only focused on Cinopolis VIP cinemas within Mexico, but the argument didn't actually change that much, the central argument, so it was still very much thinking about how these cinemas are trying to – or are aspiring to create this sort of cosmopolitan experience. Getting people into the local multiplex but then getting a sense of like, well, this is – you're sophisticated now, you're part of the sophisticated part of the world.

[00:07:36] So that was sort of the general aspect, but it was very much just first person, let's say, experience, not me just going and experiencing it and theorizing through my own experience of that.

[00:07:48] And then the iterations from there became a number of iterations. I got feedback from it as a seminar paper from Ross. I submitted it actually to the SCMS student award, and it didn't get the first place that year, because it was chosen as one of the three, one of the things I got this year which – I don't know if it's always the case but at least it was that year – is we got feedback from the judges on the papers, so that was great because I got to incorporate new peoples' feedbacks into it.

[00:08:20] And then finally, did some revisions and decided to submit it to what was then called *Cinema Journal*. So even though it came out in the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, and so it went through that transition. And I came back to it mainly as I was writing the dissertation because it was not related to my dissertation at all so it always became this sort of side project that I could come back to.

Christine: [00:08:39] And that seems like a great value of having a really inspiring grad seminar where you get to write a great paper, get a lot of great feedback and then kind of build from it. It seems like sort of an ideal for a grad student, and now that you have a tenure track job and you've got a really plum publication early in your career to put on your CV.

Juan: [00:08:56] Correct, yes, and that it's something that for a while just felt like that publication that I turned to when I was tired of working on the bigger project, but now I keep thinking this might just actually have a lot more circulation, until the book comes out in like a year or so.

Christine: [00:09:14] Well, one quick side note then before we get back to the article. What is the dissertation/book? What is the bigger project where then this was just sort of the thing you turned to when you could get a relief from the big project?

Juan: [00:09:24] So those are two different projects. So actually, I finished my dissertation, graduated and then very quickly decided that I didn't want to do that as a book project so my dissertation, pending one article which is

currently under review, will exist by the end of this year as three articles and two chapters out there in the world.

[00:09:44] As soon as I started the tenure track job at UT Dallas I started the new project, which is now the book project, so it builds off of it. So the book project itself is thinking about the mediation of border tunnels, so underground tunnels around the US/Mexico border and thinking through it across a number of different mediums.

[00:10:04] So thinking of documentaries, thinking animation, thinking videogames and thinking design projects. And so it started in the dissertation – it was one chapter of the dissertation and now it's become a bigger thing, so that's why I say hopefully in two years.

Christine: [00:10:21] Well, it sounds like you've got a lot of layers of research there. And getting back to the article – that was one thing I really enjoyed reading about your article, that you have this sort of experiential element where you actually went to these cinemas and sat in the lobby and include basically a viewing diary as a component of the article.

[00:10:37] And then of course you have the – there is like political economy in there, there is cultural analysis and then you get to the theory stuff. I want to start with a bit of the theory because you have a term in there that you use as you're analyzing this design and operation of these luxury cinemas. So you write this is modular cosmopolitanism, or to quote you, "Modular similarities across nations and on the capacity of modular to efface difference in favor of a global standard."

[00:11:02] So especially since that seems like core to what you're trying to get at I wonder if we could start there. How did you see that concept as helping to illuminate this idea of the evolution of this luxury cinema marketplace?

Juan: [00:11:12] I think the concept came probably in one of the second or third revisions and that's when I started thinking comparatively. So originally I had only thought of the Mexican examples but then I started going to – Cinepolis started opening theatres in the US so I started going to those as well and trying to think of how to express in a sort of compact way the similarities that I was noticing and whether those similarities were making a difference.

[00:11:39] And so modular cosmopolitanism I bring in from postcolonial studies where the sort of Benedict Anderson version of nationalism has a strong postcolonial critique which is saying not all nationalisms are the same. So nationalism in the European sense is not the same as nationalism in the postcolonial nation state.

[00:12:00] So part of the strategies critique is basically called modular nationalism, saying these are not the same, and you're assuming that you can just transpose how nationalism emerges in the European nation versus the postcolonial nation.

[00:12:15] And so that helped – the framework of thinking through that concept really helped to say, well, it is something like what Cinopolis and all of these luxury cinemas are trying to do, which is transpose the same sort of cosmopolitan experience from one place to another, right, which is a little different from the sort of standard medium imperialism model, which assumes that it all comes from the center, usually Europe, US and then across, but modular cosmopolitanism could come from anywhere.

[00:12:42] And I think it helps because I think of Cinopolis, which is ostensibly a Mexican corporation that used its sort of monopoly in the Mexican market to expand across the world, including the US and India. So I think the modular cosmopolitanism concept helps in thinking about how do you replicate this sort of similar experience around the world, and where the purpose is precisely to replicate that experience, to make it the same, to efface the difference.

Christine: [00:13:12] And in that notion of the replication, the standard aesthetic, I was especially really interested in the notion of the lobbies that you describe and how remarkably consistent they are from one country to the next. You have one comment in there about, you know if it was in four – whatever the movie was playing and the monitors in the lobby, like you could have been in any of the other countries in the US or Mexico or the one you're in in India.

[00:13:33] And from that I think also really intriguingly you extrapolate these larger cultural implications in play, so it's not just like this space is the same or this – you know the popcorn is different or whatever, but that there are cultural implications to these designs. And especially I'm intrigued by this idea that many of – or all of these are segregated; it's like this special VIP space.

Juan: Right.

Christine: [00:13:53] And from that you say this helps to, quote, replicate the socio-spatial divides that permeate contemporary movie going, and kind of underscore that with these kind of cultural implications, and I was especially intrigued by the class hierarchies there.

Juan: [00:14:06] Yeah, and that was one of the interesting differences that pointed to the aspiration towards making the similar experience, so one of the interesting things in Cinopolis is that it has multiplexes in Mexico and Latin

America, which include the ADP cinema, so it's one or two screens within the larger multiplex.

[00:14:26] And the same in India – one has started converting multiplexes in India into their format, they would create the special area to move into the two VIP screens. In the US they started only having theatres that were exclusively, what they call in the US the luxury cinemas, so there was no multiplex. There were just eight screens and they were all going to be luxury.

[00:14:48] And so within the theatre there was this difference, but at the same time it was aspiring to the same. One of the things was the lobby. So in the Mexican case you would go into the multiplex – it looked like a regular multiplex – and then you'd go down the hallway and then you have a different ticket booth and then the lobby to essentially say now you're entering VIP space, and you have the little lobby where you can hang out and then you go into the VIP screens, which is very much – it showed being small, in the small version what the US one was, which is essentially the entire theatre is the luxury space.

[00:15:22] I think one of the interesting things there, what I note as the class hierarchies, is in places where there is that aspirational middle class, upper middle class to try and differentiate themselves from what are previously called developing kind of nations or generally the global south, there is that very explicit division of saying this is the general area and then this is the sort of more wealthy area, and having no qualms about marking that in the space.

[00:15:48] Whereas the US version, and famously trying to think that there are no class divisions, they just would have the one which is the wealthy one, but they would just put it – originally it was in suburbs in Southern California and the wealthy suburbs of Florida, so it essentially allowed the urban space to already segregate those spaces, so it was essentially places that lower working class could not go to because they couldn't afford to because there was no transportation and so on and so forth.

[00:16:15] So in the urban space it was replicating the same sort of divisions and segregations that in other cases were replicated within the theatre. So I thought that parallel, even though it wasn't strictly the same in the cultural implications it was doing the same process of division.

Christine: [00:16:29] You know then, another thing that gets replicated through this, that you had the notion of the personal experience of attending these theatres, and not just the lobby, but of course the experience within the theatre itself. And you have a great line in your article that says, "This is an environment that primes a body for certain orientations of reception." I really like that idea of the notion of the space, kind of like what you said already about the notion of

like carving out this VIP space, but the space itself, preparing the spectator to feel a certain way or to kind of be prepared for a certain experience.

[00:17:01] You note here then the luxury cinema seems to be less about, of course, the particular film being viewed, more about the conditions of movie going and so you've got a great line in here, "VIP cinema it seems is not for filmgoers but for patrons who are willing to have a movie play in the background while enjoying two hours of luxury treatment."

[00:17:16] At the same time though you note that there are downsides to this, and in particular the idea that some of these amenities, so called amenities, could get problematic, so the idea of servers repeatedly walk in front of you. And I'm curious about this going forward because I have students who have talked about this is class, that they hate that. They don't want to have servers going in front of them, but then again that's a draw for some people to go out and have it be like a night out. It's an event. Not just going to the movies.

Juan: Yeah.

Christine: [00:17:42] So I'm curious if you have any thoughts, having done this research, does any of this get reconciled going forward? Like this is like what the luxury theatres want us to have and so we're going to have it, whether we like it or not, or is there a way you see this going forward where – you know, and you also have a phrase in there of the theatre seat as like pods of comfort. Will that even be extendable? Will we end up being in like literally little pods in theatres?

Juan: [00:18:08] Yes, I think so. I would definitely say the pods are coming.

Christine: OK, pods are coming. You heard it here first.

Juan: [00:18:14] The pods are coming, yeah. I was interviewed for the UT Dallas newsletter about the article and the communications person ended by saying, "Do you have any predictions?" and I was like, "No, no, no, I'm a serious scholar, I don't do predictions." But yeah, the pods are coming; that is the prediction right there.

[00:18:31] And I think by the time I finished – I had already finished the article so I couldn't really include it, although one of the images you will notice from the app is trying to buy tickets for *Crazy Rich Asians*, and I wanted to include that image because at that point I couldn't change the body of the text. But I think going to the Dallas Cinepolis luxury cinema to watch *Crazy Rich Asians* was a fantastic experience, and sort of that doubling of the on-screen and the experience itself – because they have that scene where they get upgraded to first class on the plane and she's just like in these pods where they're literally sleeping as they go to Singapore, right?

[00:19:03] Now it's like this is us, we're like sitting – we're like doing it in these pods in the theatre watching them being in the pods, so I think that is something that's probably going to continue, especially in the more luxury experience ones.

[00:19:15] And then in terms of the sort of disconnect between trying to create this sort of really pompous experience, but at the same time always being interrupted by the wait staff. One of the things I noticed, especially once I moved to Texas was that they hadn't – Cinepolis hadn't contended with this in the design aspect.

[00:19:35] One of the things I noticed is Alamo has perfected that a lot more. The design of the Alamo Theatres are made so that if the wait staff serve sort of hunches a little you won't notice them as much, right, because they originally started thinking about that as one of the things that they were selling. Cinepolis didn't think about that.

[00:19:51] They were thinking about how do you make this as [plush] – so the seats are so much better in the Cinepolis one but they're not setup in a way that you won't notice the wait staff going back and forth, right, whereas the Alamo one is, and that's why Alamo can get away with their policies of like no noise and you can't be talking, so on and so forth, whereas Cinepolis and much later theatres won't do that kind of thing because they themselves are replicating the kind of noise and the interactions.

[00:20:18] But at the same time, I think when I mentioned this is mostly not for filmgoers, it's not the Alamo [crowd], which is no sound in my movie because I want to be [engrossed] in the movie. It's more just like, well, I'll watch some crazy rich Asians" on the screen while I'm eating some fancy nachos and I'm drinking a cocktail and just sitting in this like pod of comfort. It's actually a pretty rewarding experience but a very different experience from what we assume is supposed to be the theatre experience.

Christine: [00:20:43] I think a thing that's really good about the article, towards the end you kind of nuance this idea of there is this simplistic way of thinking that will have then the movie theatres that are just for the luxury experience and not the film, versus then the theatres that are just for the film and not the experience. And you seem to indicate it's much more complicated than that, so is that the case?

Juan: [00:21:01] Yeah, for sure, yeah. It was in the research about how the VIP cinemas had been received in Mexico I noticed there was this great line which I quote – well, I translated it but then I quote directly which is essentially saying – a critic in Mexico was saying, "Is there life after the multiplex?" Like multiplex is the end of history moment, like we've completely ruined the

cinema experience. At this point everything just kind of looks the same and what else can we do except resign ourselves to that?

[00:21:28] I think I end by saying I think it's the opposite, right? And other media scholars have made the argument of saying we always think this will be – this new technological development will be the thing that kills everything that came before it, and it actually doesn't. What it does is perpetuate all sorts of changes and adaptations that create actually new things in the old things that we have, right?

[00:21:48] So actually, I mean even the streaming services and the move towards all sorts of individual consumption of media probably won't kill the theatres, they'll actually just make them into a completely different experience of what we used to think of going to the movies, right?

Christine: [00:22:02] Yeah, I think that's where academics like us come in handy then, right, because we have that sort of long scope. We're historians. We understand – you know, especially the repeated themes of things, of like the death of cinema, like how many times cinemas has been proclaimed to be near death and people say, "Well, wait a minute, this time though for real."

[00:22:17] But also then there is evergreen of capitalism throughout this, and of course we have – if we want to talk about [evolution], notion of late capitalism what we've got now, but I think that's another fascinating aspect that we can see running throughout film history. And then in your article this kind of tussle between – again, because this is all about them trying to make money off of us and we are trying to get something we want, but they're trying to get us to want it the way they want us to want it, if that makes any sense.

Juan: Yeah.

Christine: [00:22:42] That also seems fairly evergreen.

Juan: [00:22:44] For sure, and I think one of the things is – because this started as a seminar where we read a lot of film historians, and particularly historians who were writing about what used to be the movie houses, right, which was also about being sumptuous and baroque and creating an experience of going to the theatres.

[00:23:03] And so I [contend] with that by saying one of the things that has happened with what is now called luxury cinemas or VIP cinemas, is it has adapted to the multiplex. So it is this sort of capitalist factory, multiple made, rather than the movie house which was kind of unique and one of its own. There is a luxury aspect but it's very much mass produced, in a way.

Christine: [00:23:24] You also conclude by reflecting not just on theatres, but also on media studies because that's kind of at the heart of what you're exploring this article, "Global Flows and Exchanges" and you call your study in fact "A Cautionary Tale for Critical Theory Projects that Aim for a Totalizing Globality." So speaking to your fellow media researchers out there what do you want them thinking about anyone who is embarking on this kind of research?

Juan: [00:23:46] Well, a number of things. One, and this isn't really my conclusion from the scholars that made it throughout, but situated research is usually key, right? You start from a situated example rather than assuming that you can [see] sort of the view from nowhere or the universalizing theory that then can be applied to individual cases. Rather start from the individual case and draw some connections through that.

[00:24:07] And the other I think – I think it's, and I may be wrong – but I think it's Aswin Punathambekar who has put it this way – but the claim is that if you want to say you want global media studies it shouldn't be just media studies that studies the globe, quote/unquote. So without getting rid of the US-centrism and just, "Well, now I'm just pursuing this project in Nigeria or pursuing this project wherever."

[00:24:29] But rather it's media studies that starts from the globalizing assumption, so starts thinking about outside of the US-centrism. How do you bring in concepts that don't necessarily imply one directional, that don't necessarily imply the media imperialism model that can be attuned to differences but also similarities, without assuming that similarities are just because McDonalds came in and made everything the same.

[00:24:55] So I think that's one of the things that I think is more interesting in global media research, but I think it's one of the hardest things too. Most of it also structural because so much of what we learn, as a standard media theory or film theory, still very much remains at the US-centrism, so having to make that move to thinking about other concepts of other frameworks is in itself the big move. Then you have sort of thinking at the individual project, so I don't think necessarily it's easy but I think it will be mostly helpful moving forward.

Christine: [00:25:27] One of the last questions, because we started the idea of thinking about a seminar and then we've worked through your research, and I'm actually thinking back then to your own teachings; as I said you've just given some advice to scholars out there. How does this kind of working inflect your teaching? Are you able to teach any classes on these issues? Are these ways in which you try to get your own students to think through some of these ways?

Juan: [00:25:45] Yeah, so I got hired at UT Dallas. The call was looking for someone who did transnational media and there was a need for a class on global media as part of those core curricula for media studies, and so that's the class that I get to teach every three semesters.

[00:26:01] And one of the things I start by doing – it presents a problem in itself that it's called global media, so I just teach the globe, which is precisely the issue that Aswan sort of points to. But after the second try, what I started doing is the first three weeks, all we do is look inward, so I think of Ien Ang's work on the reception of the soap opera *Dallas* around the world.

[00:26:25] So we look at all of these examples of how the world sees the US, and in particular sees *Dallas*, and as soon as they start seeing the disconnect of, well, this isn't really what *Dallas* really is, so this isn't really what my experience is, it allows for that framework of, well, we just can't take media representations at face value.

[00:26:44] And so that then allows them to start thinking about like once we move into other areas of the world, that's assuming we'll always think that's sort of the critical edge, and that's I think how I've managed to start moving around that US-centrism.

[00:26:58] And again, it presented some problem because for a lot of students it's the first class where they don't encounter a content that is US-based or US-centric, right, so doing all of that in one class is nearly impossible, but I try a little at poking at the US-centrism and that helps I think.

Christine: [00:27:15] Always a challenge for our work as well. You've got like one class, one student. You do what you can with what you've got.

Juan: [00:27:22] Exactly, and it helps. I don't expect them to get all of it at the end, but if at the end they're like, "You know, I went to ..." I ran into a student at the Dallas Film Festival who started working there, and then he was in my class a year and a half ago – a year ago, yes – he was like, "Oh, you know, this reminded me of that thing we talked about in class," and I was like, "Yeah." I mean, yes, we're good. Yes, that is what I was getting at. We are at the International Film Festival so I'm glad those connections were being made.

Christine: [00:27:47] That's great. Those are some of the most glorious moments of teaching, when you get an email from a student or talk to them a few years later and it's like, "Oh, yeah, that reminded me in your class of when you said this," and you're like, "Oh, my God, it worked. At least something got in there.

Juan: [00:27:58] Yes, thank you. Yeah, for sure, yeah.

Christine: [00:28:01] Yeah, it's been great catching up with and it's really thrilling to see you going from someone who had just started attending SCMS and now here you are with books in the works and a great article and great classes, so it was great catching up with you, Juan.

Juan: Thank you. Thank you for having me again.

Michael: [00:28:22] It was a good interview. Thank you, Chris, for doing that.

Christine: [00:28:24] Yeah, it was a fun conversation. The kind of implications of what's happening here, and especially the idea of, you know, this modular cosmopolitanism idea, this kind of spreading. I was especially struck in the article that idea where he's sitting in a lobby – I think it was in India – and he said he wouldn't know which one he is in, if not for an Indian movie screening on one of the TVs in there.

Michael: [00:28:46] Yeah, absolutely, and that's a really nice counterpoint to the kind of work that's been done on distribution and exhibition cultures in the US, that are in their own way offering a kind of modular cosmopolitanism too.

Christine: [00:28:59] And speaking of distribution and exhibition, as you just were –

Michael: Right on, that's pretty good for the Dog Days of Summer.

Christine: [00:29:06] Uh-ha; we want to turn to Joel Neville Anderson's piece here, because he was really interested in this conversation coming up. It started on Twitter, then moved to film journals and is now out in the wider world, especially because of news that was breaking right as he was speaking with his two interviewees.

[00:29:25] So it's been big conversation over the last week about this and what this is about is Kanopy, which is according to their website, an on-demand streaming video platform for public libraries and universities that offers viewers a large collection of award winning films and documentaries.

[00:29:41] You may have heard recently, as of July 1st, the New York Public Library system will no longer offer Kanopy access and this is the news that broke in the middle of this interview.

[00:29:52] And so kind of jumping back a little bit, Chris Cagle wrote an article for *Film Quarterly* exposing the financial challenges for institutions that subscribe to Kanopy, and so Joel Neville Anderson went to talk to him more about that, and they also got involved Nedda Ahmed, who is a College of the Arts librarian at Georgia State, as well as the Co-Chair of the New

Libraries and Archives SIG in SCMS. So there's a really compelling conversation here, and as timely as today's headlines.

Michael: Just like that; here we go.

Joel: [00:30:32] This is Joel Neville Anderson with *Aca-Media* and I'm very happy to be speaking with Nedda Ahmed and Chris Cagle. Nedda is College of the Arts librarian at George State University and Chair of SCMS Libraries and Archives Scholarly Interest Group, and editor of media industries' journal reviews.

[00:30:53] Chris is Associate Professor in the Film and Media Arts Department at Temple University and author of *Sociology on Film: Post-war Hollywood's Prestige Commodity*, so thank you both for talking with us.

Chris: Thank you.

Nedda: My pleasure.

Joel: [00:31:06] This conversation came up initially through a publication of Chris' *Film Quarterly* piece in their quorum section titled "Kanopy: Not Just Like Netflix, and Not Free." To begin, Chris, could you talk about the Twitter thread that preceded your *Film Quarterly* quorum piece and what inspired you to write it?

Chris: [00:31:29] I think a lot of us have been facing these issues, right? We've been either using Kanopy or have heard about Kanopy. Maybe our libraries have sort of restricted some of the Kanopy access or maybe they didn't have it, but I think slowly word has gotten around to film scholars and others of us in the field, that there are some pricing issues with Kanopy.

[00:31:49] So really my thread started when Kate Rennebohm had a really kind of good thread, kind of a series of tweets about this on Twitter, where she was reflecting on the trade-off between the streaming cost and physical acquisitions, and I thought it was a really enlightening discussion.

[00:32:09] But it was clear to me and some of the way that that thread played out, that not everyone was really clear about how pricing really works for either Kanopy, but also for other kinds of film media and acquisitions. I'm obviously not a librarian, I don't work in that field, but I just had a sort of passing knowledge of kind of a little bit how some of these distribution questions play out, so I decided to put that in a thread as a kind of explainer based on what I knew.

[00:32:38] And I had some errors in there, and I think I've gotten some good feedback based on that, but it caught on I think because a lot of us had been asking these questions.

[00:32:48] So I had a lot of really great dialogue based on that Twitter thread – and then Girish Shambu at *Film Quarterly*, one of the editors, along with B. Ruby Rich of that quorum column they have that's some more online sort of blog entry pieces – he asked me if I would write up something a little bit longer based on the Twitter thread so I happily did so, and his comments and B. Ruby Rich's were really useful in that as well.

[00:33:13] So that's the process of how it came about. I've been really thrilled with the cord it struck and the dialogue that it's ensued. I've learned a lot in the process myself.

Joel: [00:33:23] So Nedda, how has the librarian archives, SIG, discussed this issue and has the conversation shifted, or how have you responded to a larger community of people addressing these issues through the specific Kanopy controversy, and indeed we can also define what the Kanopy controversy was as an inciting incident?

Nedda: [00:33:49] First of all, I should say that the Libraries and Archives SIG is very brand new. This was our first year so the meeting at the most recent conference was our second only ever meeting and we dedicated a portion of that to discussing what various members, institutions are going through with their streaming video services, and nearly every academic librarian in the room identified the same problems with Kanopy and other streaming platforms, which were burning through all this money.

[00:34:21] And so I put that on the agenda because that's what we were experiencing at Georgia State and just kind of wanted a sanity check of like is it just us? Are we just addicted to streaming video at Georgia State? But no, it's across the board; everywhere that I talked to from California to the East Coast, everywhere.

[00:34:39] Everybody is experiencing the same thing where, you know, they're signing on with Kanopy, they're really excited, they get their faculty excited about using these tools and then it becomes a little too popular and then we ran out of money and we have to ratchet everything back down.

[00:34:56] You know, Chris' piece was really well timed because at the end of our meeting we talked about different ways we could maybe help educate the SCMS membership and get these issues more to the forefront, because we were actually approached by someone who is a professor at UNC Chapel Hill and he was saying what they experienced at Chapel Hill was what I just described.

[00:35:18] They got this thing, everyone was enjoying it and then the library had to basically shut it down because they ran out of money. And as a faculty member he said he wasn't really aware of all the stuff going on behind the scenes. It just kind of seemed like the library was pulling a fast one on them, you know, like offering this thing and then having to relinquish access to it.

[00:35:39] So that's the conversation that we're interested in having in the Libraries and Archives SIG because most of us are librarians and archivists working within higher education. You know, we really want to help SCMS members understand what these tools are, what they cost and what they mean to your institution's long term collections.

[00:36:02] I mean, for me that's the biggest issue with these products, is they are sucking money away from permanent collections, whether that's audiovisual, books, whatever, journal subscriptions, whatever, they are siphoning off a lot of money from our annual budgets and we're getting nothing permanent in return, so to me that's the biggest issue.

[00:36:28] And that's also something around which the archivists in our group can rally because, you know, archivists are very concerned with these issues of long term access to things. And so when we're leasing – effectively leasing things for one to three years there is nothing at the end of that – there is nothing that we get to keep. There is nothing permanent in our collection for the money that we've spent, so those are kind of – that's sort of what our conversation was like at the Libraries and Archives SIG.

[00:36:57] We've been looking for ways to get the word out and to help educate and to really not recruit teaching faculty members, but to sort of get them back on our side because there is this weird thing in libraries where – I don't know why – but libraries seem to not want to let their own teaching faculty know how the sausage is made. Like why don't we tell faculty we have this new thing but it's funded this way, so like why don't we share those details?

[00:37:30] I don't know why because it's put libraries in a very awkward position where Kanopy has done a very good job selling their product to professors and instructors and so it makes the library look bad when we have to – the library as a whole, not me personally – but makes libraries kind of look mean when we have to then take access away.

[00:37:51] So we want to help educate, that people understand you know is this sustainable? We need to just have this dialogue of what is this for, how can we best use it and balance these other concerns that we have, so that was very long explanation.

- Chris: [00:38:06] One complicated – I think I could try to get this in my piece a little bit – I think one reason Kanopy has been so successful at marketing is that they have taken the idea that we have from Netflix, that this is just a subscription service, that you just pay like a monthly fee and you get everything free.
- Nedda: Yes.
- Chris: [00:38:22] And it's not like that, and I think it's really useful for us to know how the sausage is made, so to speak, right, because we do have this idea that we're just – Kanopy presents itself as something else, right, and so I really wanted to kind of educate a little bit about what that pricing model is for them.
- Nedda: [00:38:40] And for academic libraries, they have two different ways that you get content. One is the public library model where, if I understand correctly, you deposit money with Kanopy and then every time an individual user streams something it's \$2, right, so that just counts down and that film gets leased I think for three days or something like that.
- [00:39:03] But the academic model is called patron-driven acquisition, which means that if a user – if there are four views of an individual film, four films – four views of I believe it's 30 seconds or more, that triggers a purchase of a one year license, and that one year license costs \$150.
- [00:39:26] Now, we all know you can't tell anything about a movie in the first 30 seconds, or even in the first 60 seconds. I mean that barely gets you through the credits, so that's why everyone runs out of money because, you know, this patron-driven acquisition model, it triggers a lot of purchases, even if it's just one person hitting the same film on separate viewings it triggers a purchase. There, that's how some of the sausage is made. I've just revealed.
- Joel: [00:39:58] Yeah, I think a lot of what gets missed in this moment in which Kanopy became more popular, both within universities and through these fairly innovative collaborations with public libraries, is the importance of building university collections through academic licenses of DVDs or other physical media that add to a collection and circulate through inter-library loan.
- Nedda: Right.
- Joel: [00:40:35] I think that within that discussion there is a bit of a conflict that I've observed where, say in New York City – in New York, Queens and Brooklyn, the different public library institutions of the city, promoted this new deal with Kanopy where you can watch the ten titles in this limited package that is available to you just by having a regular public library account. And that was promoted with the sort of civic pride and awareness of

this opportunity to more educational content or content that has a social and/or cultural awareness to it, versus profit-driven models of Netflix and Hulu.

[00:41:26] And in talking with students and other faculty members there is a lot of enthusiasm for both the opportunities for people to access this content freely without a paid subscription through public libraries and through university accounts.

[00:41:45] But I think there is also this civic responsibility to institutions and the role that university library media collections can play to that community of scholars and researchers and students. I'm wondering what do you see as – perhaps an ideal balance between a physical and streaming media for a university library that invested in it through library sources for a film and media study's program or department?

Nedda:

[00:42:16] I can speak to that a little bit and then I'd like to hear what Chris has to say as one of the professoriate who teaches this stuff. When I look at whether we're going to pick up a streaming license there is a whole calculation that I do on my head which is – I mean is this a one time – is this just a single user that wants to use this? Like a student who wants to maybe watch this film for pleasure?

[00:42:40] That's a different consideration than is this a film that's going to be used in a large lecture class and it's required reviewing and there is no streaming – we don't have screening sessions for our film class at Georgia State anymore, so the students are required to do the viewing outside of class time.

[00:43:00] So for a large class the cost per use on something that costs \$150 is pretty good, right? If it's 120 students in a class, that makes financial sense for us to pick up a license. If it's an individual person asking me to pick up something, streaming that's \$150, and they can go stream it themselves on iTunes for \$4, then I usually say no to those requests because it's cheaper for them – much cheaper for them to use something that's maybe only going to get used once. That's part of it.

[00:43:35] The other thing that is getting left out here is there are other streaming platforms, like we have Swank Digital Campus also, and Swank is a little bit different where it's not a patron-driven acquisition model. You can buy whichever titles you want for the year or you can get a package from them that include a certain set of titles.

[00:43:56] And so we find that that's very useful for our large film history classes because Swank has more of the film history cannon, Western film history like Hollywood stuff, that Kanopy doesn't have. So you know for us we – and we fund that differently. The library doesn't actually pay for Swank.

We have a tech fee at Georgia State, and the tech fee funds that the students pay into covers like the annual package with Swank Digital Campus.

[00:44:28] So I feel good about that because, you know, it's really a question of the library already owns most of these films on DVD so we're already covering our sort of long term access and preservation mandate that we have, and that I agree with, and so we're really talking about ease of access for these students in these large classes where they can't possibly all use our one or two copies of the film on DVD.

[00:44:55] So you know it's something – it's this weird triangulation of like class size and other availability online and how many times it's going to get used within the year. You know I've also gotten Kanopy requests where I turn around and we buy the DVD because I say, "Oh, well, that's actually going to get used beyond just this one year license, so let's just go and buy the DVD."

[00:45:19] And you know, the professors are more than happy to use the DVDs for making clips and whatnot and using in class, so it's a whole complex sort of decision making process. I don't know if that answers your question?

Joel: [00:45:35] No, no; yeah, that's a great overview of the practical decisions that can be made and the opportunities, as well as [drop] access, the balancing of streaming and physical media and building collections.

Nedda: [00:45:52] I see physical media as like – that's our long term use plan. If it's something that's just going to be used for one semester then, you know, that's a different consideration. That's more appropriate for streaming, or if it's going to be used by a large group then that pushes it into the streaming realm as well. I guess that's the simple way of saying it.

Joel: [00:46:14] Yeah, Chris?

Chris: [00:46:16] Yeah, Nedda and I are at similar institutions, both research institutions and I think that also – I mean there might be not one ideal but certainly research institutions I think have a very strong mandate to have a very solid physical media collection, and particularly for our program. We teach a lot of experimental film, video art, documentary, foreign films and I think that particularly has – in some ways this is sad because this is what Kanopy is also sometimes very good at, but it also means that we also realize that, you know, this is an important part of our mission.

[00:46:55] But that said, I mean I think other institutions like liberal arts colleges may have a different balance between that. They may think that the undergraduate instructional needs surpass the kind of acquisition – kind of archival acquisition needs, so I wouldn't say one size fits all.

[00:47:16] You know I think with Kanopy – I mean understand there are these trade-offs, I agree, like the large lecture classes have priority. That's true for our own university as well. Sadly we have a fixed streaming budget so even the Swank and other one-off – like Cinema Guild or whatever – that all comes out of the same budget for us as Kanopy or anything else.

[00:47:40] But you know, I do think something is lost. I think one good thing about the patron-driven acquisition, it's not efficient economically, but there was something nice about our students having that process of discovery and that's something I think – I mean they can go and look through our DVD collection but often they don't. I understand exactly why we can't afford that always but it's something that is a nice thing I think that Kanopy did provide.

Nedda: [00:48:07] Yeah, that's both a blessing and the curse, is their stuff is so easy to find. I don't know what they did to get their Google algorithm search better than other stuff, but I mean students nine times out of ten will find something in Kanopy just from random Google searching that they won't find in our catalogue or in our holdings, so Kanopy has made their stuff very discoverable and they have done a very good job with that as evidenced by the fact that every day I get requests for Kanopy licenses for things that we own on DVD.

Chris: [00:48:45] Part of that I think is the way that library congress cataloging has not really been designed for finding movies. I mean like to our system sometime I have a hard time finding things that I want. I mean, if I know the specific title, sure, I can find it, but like the kind of browsing, like in the library catalogue it's not always the easiest for media I think.

[00:49:07] I mean this is a little bit off-topic but it goes back to, Joel, your comment about public libraries and their mission. While we were talking I just got a notice of a press release from the New York Public Library that they're cancelling Kanopy access entirely.

Joel: [00:49:21] I just received the same email. I wasn't going to bring it up.

Chris: [00:49:27] [Unintelligible] multitasking, but yeah, it really does kind of speak to that, that even public libraries are facing this [crunch].

Nedda: [00:49:35] I heard about something similar in LA where they were running into – I think it was LA, somewhere in California – some college or university was telling students to use the public library for Kanopy access and they had a user cap of – like you could only request two films per month or something, but they were still sending their students to the public library which I thought, come on, guys, they have less money than money that you do.

Chris: [00:50:04] That's really [unintelligible]. Our library doesn't have general – you know we have been very limited in our patron-driven but we have the library-driven acquisition of Kanopy now, and if I want to have streaming in my class – I haven't done it yet but it was something I honestly was considering – I don't have any other alternative.

Joel: [00:50:23] Yeah, the whole situation, especially receiving this kind of abrupt July 1st cutoff for the New York Public Library Kanopy access, reminds me of Movie Pass from several months ago. And enthusiasm that I saw within friends who had, in recent years, basically had sworn off going to the movies because they couldn't afford the \$20 or so that they would spend per person on the trip.

[00:50:57] That had taken to watching a movie every day of the weekend, several days over the course of a work week, and how much viewership habits and cinephilia are adapting between physical, theatrical environments, as well as online streaming and how quickly these changes can occur indicating a real state of flux within general public appreciation of film viewing, and it's interesting to see how that has impacted the university and university cultures.

Nedda: [00:51:36] Right, I would just add to that. I think part of this is the PR job that Kanopy has done to make their stuff look like Netflix, where it just seems like it's all in there and it doesn't cost anything. It's like a one-time fee. I think that that goes a long way to explaining why in one summer – when we first got Kanopy we left it completely open to kind of see what would happen and we blew through a very large chunk of money in one summer.

[00:52:04] Now, there are not as many students on campus, there are not as many classes being taught, yet we used up a significant chunk of money and I think it was honestly just people, “Oh, let me check this out,” and “Oh, I can watch all these things and I'll just keep it going in the background while I'm working at my desk over the summer.”

[00:52:22] And I think honestly that's how – because we also know that most of the usage was on campus. So you know, you're talking about this Movie Pass idea, like I can go as much as I want, I think that kind of translated to the rollout of Kanopy, at least on our campus because people weren't seeing what was behind and what we were actually being charged for. So yeah, that was a rude awakening, I can tell you.

Joel: [00:52:47] And rather than ripping off Hollywood distributors or exhibiting institutions, Regal, AMC, these fees are going directly towards university library purchasing budgets.

Chris: [00:53:01] I mean there is also the bigger issue – and I think I've tried to put a little bit of this in my *Film Quarterly* piece – is that consumers, since Netflix

started have gotten used to really cheap content in ways that might not be sustainable, and it's particularly not sustainable for independent or niche cinema, experimental work, documentary and I think that's one real tension I'm seeing.

[00:53:25] I think that film scholars who see themselves as supporting this kind of niche work often want it really cheap, and so they're like, well, how are the filmmakers going to get a living off of that? I'm a little bit more aware of this I think because my colleagues are mostly filmmakers and so they make money from Kanopy. It's actually better for them than, you know, than Amazon or Netflix.

[00:53:49] So I'm not saying that excuses the way that Kanopy markets, I mean I think there are some kind of issues with that, but nonetheless, the reason the prices are high is because it goes to the distributors and, you know, filmmakers in addition to Kanopy, and in addition to the aggregator.

Nedda: [00:54:06] I would just say I don't – I mean when I am purchasing things for my art film program I don't have a problem paying the fee, the charges that we get for the institutional version of a DVD that we're purchasing because we're keeping it. I mean to me that's the kicker. You're asking me to pay almost what I would pay for the DVD but I'm only going to get to keep this for a year, you know.

[00:54:32] So I mean I think most librarians that are in higher education, we're used to seeing those sticker prices for buying DVDs, so for us it's not a shock, but you know the shift from permanent collections to these temporary holdings is the pill that we're finding hard to swallow I think.

Joel: [00:54:52] That's why I think this is an opportunity for a broader impactful education, not only unveiling the distinction that Kanopy doesn't function like Netflix and that there is not a single subscription pricing where the way in which distributors and filmmakers are paid for their work is somewhat mysterious and often based on individual deals and behind this algorithmic façade, but it kind of opens the door to understanding the way in which distributors that do offer academic pricing and exhibiting licenses for university campuses can inform researchers and scholars, and importantly students as well. What that sticker price is and how it does support distributors and makers.

[00:55:48] So I'm curious if you both have further thoughts about how this issue can impact the larger space of filmmaker's and distributor's sustainability, and if there is a kind of broader context that you'd frame this within concerning the institutional subscriptions through universities, as well as public libraries – or former in the case of New York Public Library – and then those kind of general audience individual subscription models with

Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hulu and their own shift from offering a clearinghouse of content to moving into studio production?

[00:56:31] And then maybe more hopefully the distributor-centric operations like Criterion Channel or these coop-based models like OVID where a number of distributors have come together to form a streaming network that assembles the shared content of these distributors, which kind of moves away from the independent branding of platforms like Fandor and Movie that really retain the overall financial arrangement of models like Netflix or Hulu?

Nedda: [00:57:07] I think one of the reasons Kanopy was so successful was it was – except for Swank Digital Campus which has been around for a few more years – Kanopy was the first streaming platform that was made available to academic institutions on an institutional level. All of the companies that you’ve mentioned, none of them have an offering, as far as I know – I mean I don’t know about some of the newer ones that you mentioned – but none of them have an institutional subscription available.

[00:57:35] I mean I talked to the people at Fandor and I said, “You know, you guys should really consider doing something because we want this content. I mean our students want to be able to stream stuff but no one is – no one is offering this to us.” And then we get Kanopy and I think that within that streaming industry there is probably a lot of eyeballs on this news from New York Public Library because, I mean, Kanopy has got to be worried how they can be sustainable now too if they’ve got a huge system like that dropping their stuff.

Chris: [00:58:08] I think Docuseek is the institutional library, institutional side of OVID. I know that has like an institutional face. But the one set are like Movie or Fandor, they just probably don’t have the rights for educational streaming, you know, and so there has been that split in the market.

[00:58:30] I would like – of course it would be great to see the educational streaming prices come down, but that said there’s probably a reason they price it the way they do. I don’t know the discussions they have. They probably get the sense that they’re not going to get volume and so they’re just going to price high. You know, again, I would love to see something a bit more sustainable, but again, it’s out of my hands. It’s more the distributors.

Nedda: [00:58:59] You even talked about like if Kanopy was – if the trigger wasn’t so low, like four viewings of 30 seconds is like nothing when you’re talking about a large institution like mine or like Temple, and so even something like that would help us out. Or like New York Public Library, that’s another huge user base so how do you – I mean there has to be some kind of a scale there. Like if you’re at a really large institution four viewings is not a lot, so yeah, I

don't know what the future is for any of this stuff, quite honestly. I'm still buying DVDs.

Joel: Which is good; which is good.

Chris: [00:59:42] I'm very much committed to DVDs and Blue Rays for various reasons. I think as a researcher it's hard not to use them and rely on them just because you can rep and do things that you just can't do with the digital files. But my students are not of that same mindset, you know? They're less likely to go use the DVD collections unless I can encourage them, and I do encourage them, but you know I think we often as instructors particularly want you to have some kind of streaming to meet our students halfway at least, you know? I think that's kind of what we want for all our students.

Nedda: [01:00:20] We're actually rolling out – we actually just bought five portable DVD players because we recognized that students don't have DVD players at home or in their dorm rooms. They just don't have – a lot of laptops nowadays don't have DVD drives on them so we're in the process of starting to loan out portable DVD players and portable – I think we're also getting some portable DVD drives that people can plug into their laptops through a USB connection.

[01:00:50] You know, we're hoping to facilitate use of the DVD collection that way by providing people with the devices. No promises, but I'm going to try to make it look really cool. I figure like if vinyl can have a comeback maybe DVDs can have a comeback too.

Joel: [01:01:08] Yeah, I think that gets to another questions I have. We have spoken to the kind of discovery that navigating Kanopy can open up, even though search engines like Google leading one to a title and its existence on Kanopy. But I think there is also a lot to be said for the discovery that can be opened up by media rooms at universities.

[01:01:34] And just personally, I spent hours and hours of my undergraduate life at SUNY, Purchase in the basement of the library in this complex of ten or so private rooms where you did need to cover up the door window in order for it not to shine light onto a screen, but you could kind of create a somewhat theatrical viewing experience accessing the library of DVDs, laser discs, VHS tapes.

[01:02:07] And from my currently navigating various campuses as a graduate student and now a visiting professor, I have run into this issue where assigning viewing material for a DVD university library collection, students will take out the material, sit down in the only space provided to them in a brightened room and not have the ability to either connect it to the single computer that they have access to, or find a darkened space because they can't take it out of the actual library itself. So I think that institutional work is also important in

building the cultural shift or the second renaissance of the DVD that you refer to.

Nedda: [01:03:00] Right, I mean this is the other pieces that we talked about in the Libraries and Archives SIG is, you know the other reason we want to help educate professors and instructors and make them aware of all these issues, is because at a lot of institutions the library administration is thinking it's OK to just send the DVDs to this inaccessible like off-site storage or somewhere that's inaccessible because they think no one needs that stuff anymore.

[01:03:27] And I think that, you know, as film and media scholars and librarians we just say, no, this is actually still very much in use. Maybe we don't have media rooms anymore but we still need to keep this stuff accessible because, as we're seeing, the streaming marketplace is very volatile and unreliable and very expensive.

[01:03:51] So this is the other piece that we want to make people aware of, is please advocate for yourselves and tell your libraries not to get rid of the DVDs. I think the University of Texas, I believe they put most of the DVD collection in some kind of off-site storage, which that's a huge – the RTF program is there and that's kind of bizarre to me that the library administration would make that decision with such a huge fund program, but you know, there you go.

Chris: [01:04:22] Yes, I think it does speak to – you know maybe it's been over-generalized, but certainly I feel that the librarians are on our side on this, and probably even more so than we are, but I feel like the upper administration at many institutions is more excited by the future of the digital, rather than the past of – I mean of course DVDs are digital too but, you know the kind of – they're not as excited by the things that have to do with maintaining the physical collections, you know, and investing in that.

[01:04:53] But of course their cost – but maybe they don't want to pay for the streaming, so I think there is a broader kind of issue about what's considered sexy for expenditures and what's not, and I think media rooms are not considered sexy. I was like [unintelligible]. You're totally right, it totally changes how students interact with DVDs rather than with other physical media, to have a proper way to watch or exhibit them.

Joel: [01:05:26] Just to wrap up I'm wondering if there are any other technical issues of managing library collections, especially you, Nedda, that you think aren't properly widely appreciated that could be relevant to this discussion?

Nedda: [01:05:40] Well, I mean I feel like kind of a moron sitting here arguing how we need to have DVDs when I'm well aware that DVDs are not a very permanent medium either. You know, this is where it gets back into

discussions of neoliberalism because what is the incentive for the industry to come up with something to replace DVDs?

[01:06:02] They have no incentive because they're very happy to sell us one year licenses over and over again or even three year licenses over and over again, or whatever kind of licenses over and over again. I think the industry would rather not ever again distribute any kind of permanent physical format, you know, but how do we respond to that as institutions of higher education where we have a research mandate?

[01:06:33] So you know, as much as I cling to our DVDs I recognize that they're going to go bad, you know, some day and some of them already have, so I wonder what's next. You know, what's going to happen when we don't have DVDs anymore and we only have the streaming environment, and what is that going to do for filmmakers when streaming is the only option, and if people don't like your content you don't get paid. You can't survive as an artist, right? So I mean, these are all things that I wonder about even as we sit here and talk about the importance of physical media.

Joel: [01:07:10] Yeah, I think that's an important point and it gets to some of the dual tensions within this, where one doesn't necessarily want to argue entirely against the general concept of the Kanopy streaming model, because the way in which it's problematic for libraries is precisely because of the way in which it upholds these fairly standardized licensing fees for universities compensation distributors and creators.

[01:07:45] But then in order to make it more sustainable for the university one doesn't want that to be lowered and increase pressure on independent documentary distributors to persist and continue putting out work. And at the same time one can't rely entirely on the physical collections of DVDs, so it seems like another – these points must be reconciled in some manner.

Chris: [01:08:13] They may not be reconciled in the way that we want them to be.

Joel: Right.

Chris: [01:08:18] You know something will give; I mean something is not sustainable clearly. Kanopy's model is not sustainable. The expectations that both scholars and students sometimes have are not sustainable, but something has to be. You know, independent filmmaking might not be sustainable in the way it's been before, but maybe the future could be better, you never know. You never know what's going to happen.

Joel: [01:08:40] Yeah, and just in closing – and thank you both again so much for participating in this conversation – rather than determining what that reconciliation will be or to the degree it could be a reconciliation of these

competing ideas, how do you think, aside from producing engaging podcast conversations, we can educate the SCMS membership on this topic? People who are maybe peripheral to SCMS as a group because it doesn't need to be quite so insular, but the institutional work within SCMS and its special interest groups and caucuses are also very important.

Nedda: [01:09:23] I mean I'm willing to talk to anybody, so you know I have these conversations with my teaching faculty all the time and all our grad students who I see as the future of the profession, so just making them aware of all these complex issues is important to me.

[01:09:42] With the Libraries and Archives SIG we had talked about maybe doing something around streaming video broadly with *Cinema Journal* and *Focus*. Like one of the – I'm sorry, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, the new title of the journal – maybe doing an in-focus section on streaming media and using that as a platform.

[01:10:05] SCMS is still the – you know it is the main place for the people that I work with, at least, so I feel like if we can have good dialogue within SCMS we're hitting a lot of the people that are – at least my main users of these tools so I don't think it's a bad place to start.

Chris: [01:10:26] Yeah, very pleased to see the Library and Archives SIG up and running and engaging, and hopefully the organization as a whole can promote kind of what their educational function can be within – I mean, obviously they have more than an educational function but that's part of what you can really provide I think too.

[01:10:44] I have a couple of other thoughts too. I think for scholars one thing – I mean like I said I'm not a librarian, I don't have kind of training in pricing of media – but one thing that made me a little bit more aware is actually renting films and videos for classroom use.

[01:10:59] And I think if scholars just went to the distributors just to see how much stuff costs and just to get a sense of what it is that, you know filmmakers and distributors charge for work. I think that this just makes us more aware of things. We might not like the price or we may actively kind of get more involved with supporting independent work or whatnot, but I think that kind of knowledge in some ways just kind of comes from engaging with the world outside of our scholarship.

[01:11:26] And also Twitter – I mean like I said, I feel like seeing the discussion on Twitter it extends outside of SCMS. It's a way for people within the organization, a way for librarians and scholars to be in dialogue with cinephiles or everyday users, and I think that has a real potential there.

- Joel: [01:11:47] Yeah, once you've negotiated with the distributor for streaming prices on campus or off-campus you think much more carefully about the prospect of, in the case of Kanopy, hitting that play button for 30 seconds.
- Nedda: [01:12:02] Yeah, and this is also why we started the Libraries and Archives SIG, was to connect. I don't understand why librarians and teaching faculty don't talk more, but they really don't. Not enough anyway. I mean, whenever someone asks me for an independent film to purchase on DVD I go back to them and say, "This is going to cost us \$295." I'm OK with that, but does that change your thinking about whether we need to have this or not?
- [01:12:28] So like what you were saying, Chris, about looking at those prices, you know I try to be very transparent with my teaching faculty because they're my partners. I'm not spending the money. We're spending the money together, and if I buy this for \$295 it is going to affect my ability to buy your colleague's book that's coming out in two months or, you know, your book that's coming out in two months.
- [01:12:53] So part of the reason the SIG was established is to connect – we're all in this together and to connect us all and to keep us all in dialogue and to facilitate that dialogue.
- Joel: [01:13:05] Well, that's a perfect note to end on. Thank you both again for participating in this.
- Nedda: Thanks so much.
- Chris: Thank you.
- Christine: [01:13:22] A ton of stuff to talk about by the way –
- Michael: Loads and loads.
- Christine: [01:13:24] – of that interview, everything from the institutional decisions that are having to go on and the difficult positions that libraries are being put in, to then just personal use. You know, piracy comes up and the issues for us as instructors of being able to rip from DVDs or make clips, and that's rubber meets the road kind of stuff. It's not these abstract concepts of philosophies of neoliberalism and, you know money.
- [01:13:51] It's like how do I come up with clips tomorrow in class, and if the internet won't work then do I have backups and all those kinds of stuff, and that's really had a significant impact on how we teach our classes in the last just few years.

- Michael: [01:14:03] Absolutely, and for you more than me because you teach so much more stuff that is really contemporary and streaming-based and international. More of my screening materials tend to be historical so they tend to be the kinds of things that I can find in DVD form, although not always. And I'm pretty old fashioned. I really like to have physical copies and my own electronic copies before I can even remotely consider something to be available.
- Christine: [01:14:40] Yeah, well, and this has also changed our courses. It comes up in the interview that I think at Georgia State. Nedda Ahmed mentions that they no longer do in-class screenings. The students on their own time watch the screenings. That's a huge change, and not just a logistical or practical one, but it's a pedagogical one.
- [01:14:59] The idea of like watching TV in a group or watching a film in a group, in a darkened room together. Like how does that change how they are going to take it in versus I do assign most of my – almost all of my screenings now online, and I know my students are probably going to be multitasking while they do that. I've also had students tell me, you know, they watch on one and a half – on 1.5 speed to be able to fit it in and this is –
- Michael: [01:15:25] I haven't done that since –
- Christine: Well, I was going to say, OK, I want to criticize but I did that in grad school with silent movies.
- Michael: That was when you – exactly.
- Christine: [01:15:34] Well, yeah, because it was like studying for your MA exams and you have – you don't have three hours to watch *Birth of a Nation* when you're studying for your MA exams.
- Michael: No, and if you did you wouldn't.
- Christine: [01:15:43] Right, so you know, I understand but there are implications for that, and so I don't know if that's better or worse than forcing a student, many of whom have difficult schedules to show up and they're going to fall asleep during a movie. All these things get weighed. But the technology, and especially because it's driven by who can make money off of it, is making decisions for us and that's where the problem really comes in.
- Michael: [01:16:11] And I'm not sure how much I should say in a public forum, but my inclination is to hoard things as much as I possibly can. I generally don't, just because I haven't like got a streamlined system for ripping things from streaming, but if there is a physical medium available I absolutely have it in multiple formats so that it's accessible to me, you know, and probably just

because I'm a flake, right? So if I leave the DVD sitting on my desk at home I want to be able to bring the clip up, right?

Christine: [01:16:48] Right, and thinking about that, going and thinking back to grad school and evolution of my teaching technology, so back in the day I'm sure I used clips off of VHS. Then it became burning your own DVD clips. Then it became your – you would create the digital files and now I have things in the cloud that, as you say, if I'm anywhere in the world and giving a lecture I can pop open my cloud folder and drop that in there.

[01:17:11] But each of those times I have to create those new versions and those end up degrading as you keep copying them, and you're really put in this difficult position and all this – of course, a very common thing to say – it's all happening so fast recently too. It's that idea that anything that happens in academia, we want to be able to analyze it backwards and forward, have a couple of committee meetings, write up a report.

Michael: [01:17:34] If there is one thing I love more than a committee meetings, it's a report.

Christine: Yeah, well, maybe, so is this an upside then? There is not even enough time for committee meetings and reports.

Michael: Oh, you might be onto something there.

Christine: We found the silver lining –

Michael: That's the happy place.

Christine: – in this streaming cloud, no pun intended.

Michael: [01:17:51] There is nothing to say because it's all gone by so fast.

Christine: Exactly, no meetings; just got to react in the moment.

Michael: On that note, are you watching anything good this summer?

Christine: [01:18:00] Well, we are speaking right after – the US Women's National Soccer team has defeated France in the World Cup, so they're carrying onto the semifinals, and especially Megan Rapinoe had two goals, and this on the heels, of course, the exchange with Donald Trump, so that was a fun bit on Twitter, seeing everyone say, you know, Megan Rapinoe is our president now. And in fact, someone changed her Wikipedia page, that she is now the President of the United States.

Michael: I love it.

Christine: [01:18:26] Yeah, and this is the World Cup. I don't follow soccer/football for our non-US listeners, except for in World Cups and the Olympics and, boy, I care a lot suddenly about this game where an every – whatever, two years I have to remember all the rules of what is off sides and all that, but it's fun. In the moment, you know that kind of communal sports viewing – I'm actually teaching a class on sports on TV in the fall, so research. That's what I've been doing.

Michael: [01:18:53] There you go. You've been doing research.

Christine: I've been doing research this summer.

Michael: Well, good.

Christine: Yeah.

Michael: I just finished watching *Chernobyl* on HBO.

Christine: Ooh, heavy stuff.

Michael: [01:19:02] Oh, man, and it took a while because, you know, I had to like space them out over a couple of weeks between episodes because it's rough, but it's really quite good and fantastic sound design that was really quite good, and this chilling tale about what happens when politics tries to determine reality.

Christine: Yeah, there are some frightening analogies in there.

Michael: Oh, yeah, I mean it's impossible to watch this and not think about the world in which we live and breathe; dark times.

Christine: [01:19:36] Well, and I'll put in one plug since we're a podcast, about a podcast. I listened to it on a long drive I just had. It's call *White Lies* and it's from NPR and it's about a 1965 murder of a Unitarian priest named Jim Reeb and three men were put on trial for it. They were acquitted and so it's about that case whether – well, we knew the three guys did it, right, there is not too much question there – but kind of all of the racism imbued in that whole situation.

[01:20:05] One of the key themes is the notion of memory and so many people across the spectrum on this podcast, the people who were there at the time say, "Oh, let's just forget about it. It was in the past, it's over, let it go." But of course the notion is we can't let those things go. We have to sit and stew in those things and think through them, and I think that's another aspect

of our time, of a story about 1965, sadly is extremely relevant for today because of – you know especially systems of racism in our justice system.

[01:20:38] So yeah, we've given you some really powerful but, you know, maybe a little depressing stuff to listen to and watch. So hopefully, and this will be coming out after – I think after the World Cup – so I hope that doesn't end up depressing. Whoever you are rooting for, whether it's England or US who play each other next week, or the other remaining teams, hopefully that was uplifting for you.

Michael: [01:21:05] All right.

Christine: Bye, Scout. We're done, Scout. Oh-oh, I got Scout up.

Michael: Oh-oh, she's coming in.

Christine: I'm sorry. I made a mistake.

Michael: [01:21:14] Yeah, Scout always shows up fully loaded. All right, that's enough; that's enough. OK, *Aca-Media* is produced with the help of the Department of Communication at Denison University as well as the University of Notre Dame.

Christine: [01:21:28] And also with the assistance of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Thank you so much for underwriting our podcast.

Michael: [01:21:35] We are grateful for that support and we could not do this without that help. We also are incredibly grateful to our team of co-conspirators and collaborators. Todd Thompson, who is obviously you know the guy with the golden ears who does all of the post-production and mixing of the show. He's also the composer and so he is constantly working on news musical themes and new work for us that he tries out on us, and so we're really grateful for that as well.

Christine: [01:22:07] Yeah, those of you regular listeners probably, hopefully know when you hear a new little ditty, ingoing or outgoing from a piece, and that's Todd tinkering with the sounds of *Aca-Media*.

Michael: It's a good thing we don't have a smell desire.

Christine: Oh, no.

Michael: Oh, maybe that's Scout.

Christine: Yeah, I hope Scout's breath didn't go through the microphone.

Michael: The microphone hasn't melted so it's probably OK.

Christine: [01:22:29] No, I hope the pop filter helped out with that, but also we need to thank Bill Kirkpatrick at Denison University and Joel Neville Anderson doing the good work this time with an interview, and he's at the University of Rochester, and also Stephanie Brown who has been at St. Louis University.

Michael: [01:22:47] And also Frank Mondelli at Stanford University.

Christine: Thank you to everyone for your help, and also our guests on this episode, so that would be Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, Nedda Ahmed –

Michael: And that's on finishing up.

Christine: Yeah, exciting.

Michael: And the interesting scholarship.

Christine: [01:23:02] Yes, and then Nedda Ahmed and Chris Cagle. Thank you for that great conversation and for keeping us updated on the latest breaking news in the on-demand streaming world.

Michael: Stay cool.

[End of recorded material 010:23:22]