The Society of Cinematologists

ROBERT GESSNER, President
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
HUGH GRAY, Secretary
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES
GERALD NOXON, Treasurer
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL
Erik Barnauw, 1963
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
George Amberg, 1962
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Richard Griffith, 1961
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Arthur Knight, 1960
CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK

THE FIRST NATIONAL MEETING

April 11-12, 1960

New York University Faculty Club
22 Washington Square North
New York City

Monday, April 11, Green Room:

2:00 p.m. Old Business: Reports by the President, Secretary and Treasurer.

2:30 Report by George Amberg, Conference Director, S.O.C. Conference, University of Minnesota, March 19-21: "A Definition of Cinema: Relative Values in Narrative, Dramatic, Pictorial and Cinematic Illusion."

Discussion: Significance of the Minnesota Conference for the interdiscipline curriculum, Hugh Gray, U.C.L.A.; for the communications curriculum, Gerald Noxon, B.U.

"Raising Standards in a New Field," George D. Stoddard, Chancellor, N.Y.U.

Refreshments will be served.

Tuesday, April 12, Madden Room:

10:00 a.m. Panel on Sources:

Thomas Brandon, Brandon Films
Leo Dratfield, Contemporary Films
George Pratt, George Eastman House
Robert Gardner, Harvard University
Richard Griffith, Museum of Modern Art
Rosalind Kossoff, Film Images
Herman Weinberg, International Critic

12:30 Luncheon

Presentation of Honorary Membership to Erwin Panofsky

Speakers: Eric Larrabee, American Heritage
"Learned and Unlearned Societies."
Dwight Macdonald, Critic.
"Taste and Judgment."
Robert Gessner, President
"Cinema and Scholarship."

Discussion

3:30 New Business: Plans for 1960-61
Publications
Election of new members
Election of officers

Attendance invitational, except business sessions.
Registration fee: $2.00
Luncheon: $2.75 and includes morning refreshments.

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Minutes of the First National Meeting of
THE SOCIETY OF CINEMATOLOGISTS
April 11-12, 1960
New York University Faculty Club
22 Washington Square North
New York City

Monday, April 11, Green Room:

The first session of the two-day First National Meeting was called to order shortly after 2:00 p. m. The President, Robert Gessner, cited the American Council of Learned Societies' definition of a learned society: an association of scholars concerned with a humanistic and/or scientific subject; a representation which is national; and a journal regularly published. As for membership qualifications, Mr. Gessner read from the announcement "For Those Concerned" which has been sent to applicants: "Concern means devotion to the medium as craft and art, regardless of an individual's academic or professional position. A scholarly posture must be the measurement of concern as well as proof of individual competence. Scholarship is tangible, in writing and in works and in teaching. The Society is a fellowship in spirit, in mind, and in performance."

In order to achieve more national and qualified representation, Mr. Gessner reported , open meetings had been planned for California, the Midwest, and New York City. The third objective, a journal, remains to be planned.

The objectives of The Society were brought to the attention of the University Film Producers Association at their annual meeting in August at Lafayette, Indiana, by Mr. Gessner. The President reported on his efforts to inform Mr. Turner B. Shelton, Motion Picture Service, United States Information Agency, who heretofore had assigned overseas representation to the UFPA. The question of informing UNESCO was mentioned, and the prospect of their support for a learned cinema society. The President reported on his experiences in seeking support for regional meetings on a definition of cinema from the A. C. L. S., Ford, Rockefeller, and the Motion Picture Association. The Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation in Minnesota made a grant of $4,000 for a National Conference, thanks to George Amberg.

The President concluded his report with the reading of invitations from both the George Eastman House of Rochester, N. Y., and the Dept. of University Extension, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, each offering to serve as host for the April, 1961, Second National Meeting.

Gerald Noxon gave the Treasurer's report: $140, in dues have been collected from 28 members as of that date. Total expenditures have amounted to $71.32 (including $31.15 for stationery, printing, duplicating, phone, postage, etc.), leaving a balance of $68.68. The balance of the first-year dues were expected momentarily.

Mr. Gessner announced voting action would be taken on the following day on two proposed By-laws (which he read) to the S. O. C. Constitution,

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and on three applications for membership (which he read).

At this point four invited guests, non-members, entered the meeting.

Mr. Amberg, Conference Director of the March 19-21 Minnesota Conference and scheduled to report, deferred to the exact record of proceedings recorded on tape and to Mr. Hugh Gray's "extensive notes." "Whether we succeeded in defining ourselves," Mr. Amberg said, "I really don't know. (But) I was very much impressed by the Unifying spirit (of the Conference) ... What we did was open up a world of discourse about the subject..."

Mr. Gessner suggested the subject, "Towards a Definition of Cinema" be a continuing title, whether stated or implied, for all future meetings. "Minnesota was a starting point by testing associations with allied disciplines," he said, "such as literature, drama and fine arts, and then going on to what is uniquely cinematic."

Gerald Noxon said, "The importance of the Minnesota Conference was that people were willing to sit around for three days and talk about nothing else but film." He said he hoped the record of the Conference would be published in toto. He believed Mr. Gessner's yardstick of 19 Plus elements was "a theoretical basis, capable of standing up to scrutiny, whether we agree with it or not..."

George D. Stoddard, Chancellor, New York University, now appeared, having come directly from a Lincoln Center of Performing Arts meeting. He spoke on "Raising Standards in a New Field," emphasizing the difficulties and means of acquiring academic status as juxtaposed to instruction in and practice of the arts. Mr. Stoddard raised the problem of cinema being associated administratively with other departments, such as Speech. In the discussion which followed it was the general belief that cinema was better off, administratively and pedagogically, as a separate subject, which it is. Mr. Stoddard recalled that such has been the history of the academic growth of Fine Arts, which he inaugurated in Iowa.

Some of those present were now invited to speak on their curricula, an individual course, or a seminar. Those responding included Elmer Oettinger (University of North Carolina), Mrs. Frances Flaherty (Flaherty Seminar, Brattleboro, Vermont), Paul Falkenberg (Columbia University) and Robert Gardner (Harvard University).

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 12, Madden Room:

The second session of the First National Meeting opened at 10:00 a.m. with a "Panel on Sources." Those who spoke on films available in commercial catalogues, in circulating and non-circulating museum collections, and in private collections included: Thomas Brandon(Brandon Films), Leo Dratfield (Contemporary Films), George Pratt (George Eastman House), Robert Gardner (Harvard University), Richard Griffith (Museum of Modern Art), and Herman Weinberg, critic. Rosalind Kossoff (Film Images), listed

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on the program, was unavoidably absent. Mr. Albert Rosenberg (McGraw-Hill) was an invited guest.

It was suggested that Mr. Weinberg's compilation of "off-beat" films, which he read and explained, be printed for circulation among S. O. C. members. Mr. Weinberg graciously granted permission.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Gessner pleaded for "special consideration for individual scholars who need to hold film in their hands in order to study it at length." In reply, Mr. Brandon acknowledged the problem of rental costs and recommended some method "of accreditation (of the scholar) and an evaluation of the teaching situation" to guide the distributor. Certain instructors wear different hats before different audiences, but rent at one price. Mr. Gessner asked, "Should the S. O. C. operate as an accreditation bureau?" Mr. Griffith recommended the formation of a committee to consider the question, "as a matter of the first importance."

Mr. Brandon pointed out that between 1938 and 1955 "we had to insert about 150 Odessa Steps sequences into prints of Potemkin" which had been returned mutilated from renters. Mr. Griffith concluded, "Since we face the problem of pedagogy by film buffs, and even worse -- balletomanes -- some form of accreditation must be determined."

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p. m. for refreshments and lunch.

At the luncheon, Erwin Panofsky, Siegfried Kracauer, and Parker Tyler were among the 29 persons present. The post-luncheon session was opened by Mr. Gessner welcoming to honorary membership "most appropriately at this first meeting the first scholar in the field.... the man who wrote the extraordinary essay in 1934, "Style and Medium in Motion Pictures" -- Erwin Panofsky."

In a short acceptance speech, Mr. Panofsky said, "I had the courage to go to movies in 1903... I have tried to preserve an innocence of soul in judging movies... I have simply tried to rationalize my own feelings as to what constitutes a good film or a bad one... Good luck to your efforts!"

The first of the scheduled speakers was Eric Larrabee, an editor of Harper's and American Heritage, whose subject was "Learned and Unlearned Societies." His advice: "Stay small and confine yourself to people who attain the scholarly posture." However, "your struggle (to get your learning taken seriously) is faced by all the popular arts." He drew certain parallels between scholarship in the fields of jazz and cinema.

The second speaker, Dwight Macdonald, critic, discussed "Taste and Judgment." He posed the question: "What is wrong with the Hollywood films, and why is their best inferior to the best of Europe and Russia?" Some of his answers: "Foreign films seem to be made by actual people, ours are made by technicians... who make no creative use of the medium... In foreign films one sees real people... (while in this country producers hire) cliche actors..... I would say the last creative film to come out of Hollywood was Citizen Kane (1941)."

In the second part of his speech Mr. Macdonald attacked American film criticism as lacking in taste and judgment. (In his introduction the President commended Mr. Macdonald for employing specific shot reference in his March Esquire reviews.) Mr. Macdonald read from his much-discussed review of

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film books in The New Yorker of March 15, 1958, the gist of which was that judgments were rendered without attempts at substantiation, or that tastes were conditioned by a pro-Industry attitude. "The convention," Mr. Macdonald concluded, "...is that books on the movies, like the movies themselves, must have a happy ending."

The final speaker was Mr. Gessner, who began his subject, "Cinema and Scholarship," by paraphrasing the opening sentence of Panofsky's celebrated essay: "Film scholarship is the only scholarship the development of which men now living have suffered from the very beginnings; and this development is all the more interesting as it took place under conditions contrary to scholarship."

Mr. Gessner analyzed the three roles of the scholar: The clerk is concerned with names, titles, dates, and depends too often on others' facts and reports of films not seen with his own eyes.

The scholar as judge must evaluate what the clerk presents. Mr. Gessner cited the puzzling existence of two versions of Porter's The Life of an American Fireman (1902), which in a print from Pathe (acquired in 1944 by the Museum of Modern Art) contains 26 shots, but a Library of Congress print (also at George Eastman House) contains only 14. Mr. Gessner described the discrepancies.

The scholar as interpreter "...the rarest of the three, is a man with a private lantern...(who has) a room with his view." This scholar is not satisfied to treat cinema "either as a visualization of the novel or a slice of sociology." He needs two tools: "a methodology which only the shot approach can provide. . . analysis primarily in terms of shots...(which are) the footnotes, the lawyer's brief, the proof...as well as the sentence, the brush stroke in this art." The second needed tool is "an aesthetic measurement, a critical yardstick." Mr. Gessner concluded by outlining his "Atomic Chart" of 19 Plus elements which constitute a motion picture.

In the general discussion Mr. Weinberg asked, "Do you believe in absolute standards for judging a film?" Mr. Macdonald answered, "Standards have to be absolute." Mr. Panofsky observed that Germans found "The Last Laugh disagreeable because of its exposure" ... of unflattering Germanic traits, but American audiences liked it because of its strangeness."

Robert Steele wondered, "Are there some dangers in our 'scholarly posture'?...(Are we) men with white coats who wish to make an autopsy?" Panofsky replied, "Principles are the reverse of children. They should be heard but not seen...(But) if we deny the existence of principles, then there can be no scholarship." Arthur Knight said, "The only danger is a hardening of the critical arteries."

Shortly after, the meeting was adjourned.

At the business meeting immediately following, these members were present: Amberg, Falkenberg, Mrs. Flaherty, Gessner, Hughes, Knight, Noxcn, Oettinger, Pratt and Steele; proxies were held for Barnouw, Falk, Goggin, Griffith and Manoogian.

It was moved that the following two proposed By-laws be incorporated in the Constitution in order to qualify The Society for Federal tax exemption:

"By-laws II: No part of the assets or income of The Society shall at any time inure to the benefits of any officer, member or individual.
"By-law III: In the event The Society ceases to function, any assets remaining, after payment of all existing obligations shall be distributed entirely to one or more organizations devoted exclusively to educational purposes."

Motion carried. (The Constitution was adopted unanimously at the Founding Meeting, March 25-26, 1959).

It was moved that "the invitation (to hold the Second National Meeting in 1961 at the George Eastman House) be most favorably regarded in principle, dependent on the assurance of financial assistance to enable the widest possible representation."

Motion carried. It was agreed to leave in abeyance the Vancouver invitation for the same purpose. Sources of possible grants to finance meetings and conferences were discussed. Mr. Knight moved there be a 1961 Conference in California, provided funds can be raised, in addition to the Second National Meeting. Motion carried.

It was agreed to defer consideration of membership applications until 1961. It was also agreed to defer appointment of committees until after the election of new officers; the committees mentioned were: Program, Publication, and Rental Accreditation.

Discussion followed on the publication of unpublished manuscripts (Terry Ramsaye) and it was agreed such tasks were individual not Society responsibilities. Mr. Gessner asked, "Is it the will of the members that we produce a mimeographed newsletter to be sent to paid-up members, and to film archives here and abroad?" Unanimously, yes.

Mr. Knight said many theses on film exist..." and we don't know what they are." Mr. Oettinger suggested the newsletter might list a bibliography of film theses on file in universities.

The following officers were elected: Mr. Gessner, president; Mr. Pratt, secretary; Mr. Noxon, Treasurer; Mr. Knight, councilman.

George Pratt, Secretary

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