Damon Young: Hi, I'm Damon Young. I'm an Assistant Professor in the Departments of French and Film and Media at the University of California, Berkeley, and I'm here today, on Saturday, May the 2nd, 2016, in Atlanta at the Hilton, the SCMS Conference, with the great pleasure of speaking to Thomas Waugh, who is the Concordia University Research Chair in Sexual Representation and Documentary. It seems like a title that was created specifically for you.

Thomas Waugh: If not by me.

Damon Young: Okay, by you. It captures two of the major fields of your contributions to film studies. And since 2008, but I believe that you began your career at Concordia in 1976, which makes this the 40th anniversary of your position at Concordia. And of course, Professor Waugh's wide-ranging work has helped fundamentally shape the fields of queer and gay film studies, documentary studies, the study of activist's cinema, Canadian cinema, and he's also worked in the Indian cinema. We're gonna talk about all of those things. I wanna talk a little bit about your intellectual trajectory, but also try to talk a little bit about the formation of the field of film studies, and it's institutionalization along the way as well.

So, you are unusual, in you've spent your entire career at one institution, in Montreal at Concordia. And before that, I believe you did an MFA, followed by an M-Phil, or a Master's of Philosophy, or whatever it is. And then, a Doctorate at Columbia University, in film in the… would've been the late '70s. Which also makes you unusual, 'cause I don't think that there that many film PhD programs at the time. And so, I'm wondering if you could just reflect back on your graduate school experiences, and talk first about the MFA, and then I'll ask you about doing the Doctorate in film at Columbia.

Thomas Waugh: The MFA was actually just an MA.

Damon Young: Oh okay.

Thomas Waugh: And since it was in the film section of the School of the Arts, it got that degree, MFA, but it was really in film studies. Although we did have one filmmaking course, that we had to do. So yeah, there's nothing mysterious about that. And I guess it was one of the early programs in film studies. I was taught by Andrew Sarris, and Eric Barnouw, and Leo Braudy, and a couple of others in that program. And got my MFA in 1974. I went to Columbia because, basically, they gave you the most money, and I had done my undergraduate degree in English Literature, which I hated, because it was so irrelevant, according to-

Damon Young: Was that in Canada?

Thomas Waugh: In Canada. I think I was part of the generational rejection of traditional academia, and then took off for a couple of years to India. And then, came back to do my graduate work in '72.

Damon Young: So, was doing the graduate work in film, also a rejection of traditional-

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: Academic disciplines.

Thomas Waugh: Yes, I loved movies, and didn't really know much about film history, or film culture, but during my BA I had written a little bit about film, and I really had decided, in my two years off, that this is what I wanted to do.

Damon Young: And then, you went on, pretty much continuously, to do the PhD-

Thomas Waugh: That's right.

Damon Young: And stayed at Columbia.

Thomas Waugh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Damon Young: But it seems like you were employed as an Assistant Professor at Concordia-

Thomas Waugh: I was ABD.

Damon Young: ABD, yeah.

Thomas Waugh: So, I had finished all my coursework by '76, and started my research, which was on Ivens, and continued writing for the next five years, and defended in '81.

Damon Young: So, this was a moment in which film studies was taking shape as a discipline. Do you have any memories about those early days of the formation of the discipline? And who you were in dialogue with, what you were reading, what the forums were for discussing formative ideas and texts in what became film studies?

Thomas Waugh: Sure. I don't think I was aware that, or I thought much about it being a discipline that was emerging.

Damon Young: Yeah.

Thomas Waugh: It seemed fully established at the time.

Damon Young: Oh okay.

Thomas Waugh: And other than the influence of my profs, especially Sarris and Barnouw, I was looking for Marxist film theory and film studies, and I guess “Screen” provided lots of that, or enough of that. And then, I began to look elsewhere. I don't think I was ready to look for queer film theory yet. It was really, that was really yet to emerge. I think all I had read was Parker Tyler, at the time.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: And the reviews in the gay media. And I really wasn't out at Columbia, or anywhere else, during my MA, so that was just a gleam in my eye, at the moment. And otherwise, I was very interested in modernist cinema. I wrote on Godard, and Vertov, and genre cinema. Very much a product of Columbia, at the time.

Damon Young: How did you come to be interested in Joris Ivens? Who I believe your book on him is in production now? Or is it-

Thomas Waugh: It's finished. It's at the printers and we're launching it in October.

Damon Young: This is the longest period between dissertation and book. It's been 40 years between dissertation to book.

Thomas Waugh: You think? When I defended the dissertation in '81, I tried to publish it as a book on Joris Ivens, but it was Reagan America and no one would take it. So, I published little bits of it, and it's maybe a good thing I persisted, because I was able to cover all of his career, which was still en cours, it was still moving ahead. He hadn't died, he was still working. And he produced, what some people have called his greatest film, in 1989-

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Before he died. In 1988, I guess.

Damon Young: He died in '89, right?

Thomas Waugh: Yes. So, maybe it's a good thing that I waited, and finally it's out. And I think that working through, retroactively, some of the things that I was writing in the '70s, was a good process. A good intellectual process. Especially about politics. I had to shape, at the time, when I was writing about Ivens' work on the Cultural Revolution, which was then, ongoing in China, I wrote it for “Jump Cut”, and they were very important to me, as part of a cohort of Marxist film studies. I received criticism that I was “naïve”, politically-

Damon Young: From the editors?

Thomas Waugh: No, no. From critics. And so, maybe it's a good thing that I processed this for 40 years. I think I may be less naïve now, or maybe equally naïve in another way.

Damon Young: It's become quite a volume, right?

Thomas Waugh: It's quite a volume. It's huge. It's almost 800 pages. And I'm glad I've got it out of my system.

Damon Young: You've been working on this topic for your entire career, in fact.

Thomas Waugh: On and off. It was under contract for a long time, and I kept coming back to more exciting queer topics, and documentary topics, and putting it on the back burner. And then, I kept coming back to it. The publisher got so angry with me. And then, I went to another publisher, and I finally have published it.

Damon Young: Fabulous. I can't wait to read it. And so, did you ever have a chance to speak to him about your work, because your work-

Thomas Waugh: Ivens?

Damon Young: Yeah, Ivens, overlapped with-

Thomas Waugh: Oh, yes. I interviewed him several times. Yeah, he's one of those filmmakers who I don't think gave a very good interview. Maybe just to me. Maybe I'm a bad interviewer, but I felt he couldn't distinguish between what had been written about him, and what he remembered.

Damon Young: I see.

Thomas Waugh: So, I write about this a little bit in the book, but the interviews I did with him, of course, I treasure. But I always a little disappointed in them.

Damon Young: Right. He was confusing the myth of him, or like, the reported accounts of him.

Thomas Waugh: He couldn't get it straight that I already had the basics.

Damon Young: I see.

Thomas Waugh: He didn't need to give me plot summaries of his films-

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Kind of thing.

Damon Young: Yeah. Do you think he was aware of the kind of sophisticated analysis you were doing of his work?

Thomas Waugh: No. No.

Damon Young: You've worked a lot with filmmakers. You've written a lot about living and working filmmakers throughout your career. You have a book on John Greyson, an anthology that you wrote an introduction for. And part of your scholarly practice, seems to me, to have always been engaged with film production, commitment to alternative film production, documentary production, queer

film production. Do you consider that work on, and with filmmakers to be an important part of your intellectual process?

Thomas Waugh: I think it's very important, in general, and maybe my relationship with Greyson, which dates more than 30 years, has made it a success story. Because I make use of that friendship, that evolving friendship, in the book on Greyson.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: I'm not sure my interviews with other filmmakers, like Emile de Antonio, and Ivens, were as successful or extended. It's a good point. I interviewed, when we did the book on Challenge for Change, the Canadian activist documentary project, we interviewed some of the elder filmmakers who were still living 30 years later, but there was memory loss, and other issues, and I don't think I've ever got the secret of making maximum use of this kind of a situation.

Damon Young: You mean where you can be in dialogue with someone who's making work that you're writing about?

Thomas Waugh: Or has made in the past, work I'm writing about.

Damon Young: Yeah.

Thomas Waugh: It's still a challenge.

Damon Young: It's a tricky thing.

Thomas Waugh: Maybe I'll work it out before I retire.

Damon Young: I gave a paper on Paul Schrader yesterday, and he was in the audience.

Thomas Waugh: Are you kidding?

Damon Young: I'm serious.

Thomas Waugh: Oh, wow. He would be a tough one.

Damon Young: It was a little stressful.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah.

Damon Young: So, let's get back to the late '70s. You were working at Concordia. You were writing your dissertation on Ivens. You were reading “Screen”, I guess Mulvey's essay came out in '76 or something. This was the moment of high psychoanalytic and Marxist film theory, the translation of texts from France. Not that you needed them to be translated, but everyone was reading them at this moment. But gay, or what later became queer film studies didn't really exist yet.

It seems like, already in the late '70s, you were one of the first people to begin publishing essays on gay film, and on, I guess, gay or queer film theory, in “Jump Cut”, it seems to me, you wrote an essay with the title called, “A Fag-Spotter’s Guide to Eisenstein”, in “Jump Cut” in '77.

Thomas Waugh: That was actually in “The Body Politic”.

Damon Young: Oh, that was in “The Body Politic”. Excuse me.

Thomas Waugh: Which was the Toronto community newspaper.

Damon Young: Okay, so it wasn't an academic journal, per se.

Thomas Waugh: No, although, of course it was an academic article, and I refuse the distinction between academic work, and community based work, and I got in trouble later for that, when the Kinsey Institute tried to sue me for publishing my Kinsey research, in a community newspaper, rather than an academic journal, but-

Damon Young: Why would that be a problem for them?

Thomas Waugh: Well, they're hysterical about confidentiality-

Damon Young: I see.

Thomas Waugh: At the Kinsey Institute. The fact that I had published my research there, in “The Body Politic” again, they didn't realize, until they discovered it by accident, and then the shit hit the fan. So, I-

Damon Young: For them, it's okay to publish in the scholarly venue, but they consider it-

Thomas Waugh: At the time, yes.

Damon Young: I see, I see.

Thomas Waugh: Yes, but I worked out that relationship, also. So yes, so in the late '70s, I started writing on gay film, mostly, at first, in the community newspapers. But then, in “Jump Cut” in '77. It was a special issue on gays in film, where both Richard Dyer and I published.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: And that, was the year also, of his “Gays in Film”, and Robin Wood had published his “Coming Out as a Gay Critic”, which was a very important article. So that, was really a kind of inaugural moment, and I was really glad to be on board, but of course, it also meant coming out at work, before I got tenure.

Damon Young: So this was your moment of coming out, then, as a ... professionally.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah. I mean, I don't know if any of my colleagues read “Jump Cut”, or my students, probably not, but it was in the university library, so I guess I was officially out.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: So that, was like, a tense moment for me, but of course, everything went very smoothly, and it's a wonderful community at Concordia, that I've always been a part of, and so it worked out fine.

Damon Young: Intellectually, who were you reading, or in dialogue with that led to your desire to write about homosexuality in film, or gay film?

Thomas Waugh: Good question. In my first course on film history that I taught at Concordia, I assigned Parker Tyler's ... what's it called?

Damon Young: He wrote so many things.

Thomas Waugh: Sex in the ... no. Sex in the Cinema? Or, we'll think about it.

Damon Young: It has sex in the title, yeah.

Thomas Waugh: 1970. So, I was already reading that, but other than that, there wasn't a lot of stuff out there. I think Dyer's work was so important in '77, because it was really the first scholarly focused book on LGBT issues in cinema.

Damon Young: “Gays in Film”, you mean.

Thomas Waugh: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And what else was I reading along those lines? Feminist work, of course.

Damon Young: Feminist work, but at that moment, the feminist film theory wasn't particularly queer, it was-

Thomas Waugh: It certainly wasn't. And I found Mulvey's piece somewhat, if not, homophobic, short-sighted.

Damon Young: Right. It kind of ignored the existence of-

Thomas Waugh: Absolutely.

Damon Young: Gay and lesbian spectatorial positions. Is that one of the things that led you to want to make an intervention by speaking about gay film or gay film spectators?

Thomas Waugh: One of many things, yes. I was part of a circle, a network in New York City, before I moved to Montreal, where it was a very activist circle. And we paid very much attention to what was going on, cinematically. I think we all went one day,

to the Museum of Modern Art to see “L.A. Plays Itself”, in a group. So, we were finely tuned to what was going on. And I think we saw a preview of “Word is Out”-

Damon Young: Oh wow.

Thomas Waugh: And maybe I even interviewed Peter Adair, I can't remember. So, when my first scholarly publication… it was about the Peter Adair film, “Word is Out”.

Damon Young: Although, if I remember, you were quite critical of that film when you first wrote about it.

Thomas Waugh: We were quite condescending to it, as militant activists, we thought it sold out. But at the time, now I-

Damon Young: Because it was assimilationist. It was liberal, in the soft tense.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, I'm much more generous with it. I think, I mean, we published, as you know, a Queer Film Classic-

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: On “Word is Out”, by-

Damon Young: Greg Youmans.

Thomas Waugh: Greg Youmans, a couple years ago, so I guess I've done my penance.

Damon Young: The film has aged well, actually. In retrospect it's-

Thomas Waugh: It's true, though. It's aged well, and it's true, it doesn't talk about politics or collective-

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Work.

Damon Young: In fact, as Greg says in his book, it anticipated a current moment of gay politics, which is very much rights driven, and assimilationist, but it's still ... anyway, the film has a poignancy that-

Thomas Waugh: It's very effective. I cry every time I see it.

Damon Young: Me, too. Me, too. And so, it was perhaps during this time, or maybe a little bit later that you started writing about pornography as well. It was in the mid-80s, that “Jump Cut”, again, doing a special issue on pornography, or pornography studies, in which you had a piece-

Thomas Waugh: Right.

Damon Young: Called, “Men's Pornography: Gay vs. Straight”.

Thomas Waugh: Right.

Damon Young: One of the very early pieces to be written about pornography.

Thomas Waugh: Right. I started working on pornography after I defended the Ivens dissertation in '81. I didn't know what I was going to do next, and I mean, I was continuously writing about gay stuff, but I wasn't sure that, that was going to be the major focus. Chuck Kleinhans, my pal at “Jump Cut”, suggested I should go to the Kinsey Institute, because he had, had his eyes opened there, and seen lots of very interesting vintage queer stuff that I needed to look at. And I went there, and just was blown away. I couldn't believe it. And that, sort of changed my career. And I started publishing about this material. This heritage of homoerotic photography and film, in “Body Politic”. And that, led me to want to talk about contemporary pornography, which led to the 1985 “Jump Cut” piece. Which in fact, had been written two or three years earlier. It just took them a long time to publish something. It was written at the height of the sex wars, around the time of the Barnard Conference.

Damon Young: Wow.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah.

Damon Young: So, what was your relationship to those debates within feminism, about the evils vs. the virtues of the world?

Thomas Waugh: Oh, there was no question whatsoever. I was on board with the bad girls, absolutely. Pro-sex, pro-pornography.

Damon Young: I wasn't questioning that. I guess I meant, did those debates play into the way that you formulated-

Thomas Waugh: A little bit. A little bit. Julia encouraged me to acknowledge, in the porno piece, women's stake in all of this.

Damon Young: I see.

Thomas Waugh: About gay men participating in an androcentric culture, by consuming gay pornography, and the issue of safety for women. And so, I did acknowledge all of that. And I still think it's an important issue. But the anti-pornography movement was very scary to me, and I was furious with them collaborating with the police. The Canadian film, “Not a Love Story”, that came out in '81 or '82 I think, blatantly collaborating with the enemy. The police. I couldn't believe it. It was shocking. In bed with the state.

Damon Young: Did you have tenure at this point? When you started writing about pornography?

Thomas Waugh: I had just got tenure. Otherwise, I might not have done so.

Damon Young: I see. So that liberated you to-

Thomas Waugh: '81 I got tenured, yeah.

Damon Young: Okay. And this was before Linda Williams had written “Hard Core”, but there were ... again, Dyer was also writing about pornography, I think, at this moment. There were some other scholars who were moving, not from within the sex wars debates, per se, but from a more scholarly point of view.

Thomas Waugh: Both within, and on the scholarly side. The special issue in pornography had a piece by Dyer, also. And I forget who else was in that. There were some reviews of “Not a Love Story”, an interview, I believe, with a feminist porn star, in that special issue.

Damon Young: So this was, in some sense, the origins of what later became called, Porn Studies. A title that Linda Williams now objects to.

Thomas Waugh: I would say, yeah, and Linda was a part of that circle, also.

Damon Young: Right, right.

Thomas Waugh: But I think it's important to remember that “Jump Cut”, and maybe a few other articles here and there, about pornography, preceded Linda's book. Which she had been working on for years, also.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: For example, there was an article that came out of England, by Greg Blatchford, on socialism and gay pornography, or something, from the '70s, which I used to assign in my courses. So, there were antecedents, for sure.

Damon Young: Were you teaching about pornography, at this moment? And in fact, have you taught about pornography? Is that something that you teach about regularly?

Thomas Waugh: Yes. I started once I got tenure. I started right, maybe I think it was '82, with a seminar, an undergraduate seminar on sexual representation in cinema. I've always brought together pornography with what Linda would call, hardcore art cinema, and popular cinema. I've never isolated pornography as a curriculum.

Damon Young: I see.

Thomas Waugh: I've always brought it together with other forms of sexual representation. So, at the beginning, I was very nervous about teaching it. And I ensured that it was a very safe space, for both myself, as well as, the students. But over the years, I mean, I've continued this, and now it's like, a huge open enrollment course, with 200-

Damon Young: Your course on sexual representation?

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, with 200 students in it, which I taught for the last time, last year.

Damon Young: And does that course include pornographic materials?

Thomas Waugh: Oh, absolutely. I show the whole “Deep Throat”, and they just can't believe their eyes. And it's a very ... I love the course. I love teaching it. I like the fact that it's not a gay course, a queer course. It's a mixed course. And maybe the plurality of the students are women, but there's an important contingent of ... well, the whole sexual spectrum, in the course. And it's fun.

Damon Young: Do you have to give trigger warnings?

Thomas Waugh: I don't give trigger warnings except for one film, that is especially disturbing, even for me. And I think, because once, I showed it, and it's called, “Sado Masochism”, very interesting experimental video from Canada. Because once, a student told me that she'd been very, very perturbed by the film, and I give a little warning about it. But generally, at the start of the course, I say, "This is a very controversial course. You will find materials that you do not agree with, or you may find disturbing." And I think most students find at least one thing that's disturbing.

Damon Young: That's good. They should be disturbed, right?

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, they should be. So, I don't really deliver ... I don't really cater to that culture of trigger warnings.

Damon Young: Is it as much of a thing in Canada, as it is in the States?

Thomas Waugh: Yes. Yes. And we have a very politically correct campus.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Although, it's very tolerant, and diverse, also. So for example, in our Code of Conduct, it treats students and faculty as adults. For example, it doesn't ... I mean, this doesn't pertain to me, especially, but it doesn't forbid sexual relations between faculty and students, for example.

Damon Young: Wow, that's a new one.

Thomas Waugh: It treats everyone as adults.

Damon Young: Right, right.

Thomas Waugh: But of course, warns about harassment, and the rest. So, it's a downtown cosmopolitan community that I love working in.

Damon Young: Yes. You mean Concordia University.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah.

Damon Young: Yeah. So, when did you first teach sexually explicit materials? Was that right as soon as you got tenure? Or when was it?

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, '82, I think.

Damon Young: Okay, and you've done it ever since?

Thomas Waugh: Yeah.

Damon Young: It seems like, in the early days of pornography studies, and also gay and queer film studies, “Jump Cut” played an important role, also “The Body Politic”, the community newspaper or journal that you've been speaking about. Were there other sites? Or were those two ... you published a lot in both places. Were they the main ... we have those journals and publications to thank for the formation, in some sense, of those fields.

Thomas Waugh: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely. And I can't remember other sites. I might've published in other sites.

Damon Young: “Screen” wasn't really doing so much queer stuff at that moment.

Thomas Waugh: Oh, no. “Screen” was hopeless. It was very homophobic, in my opinion.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: What else was there? Before the '80s-

Damon Young: I mean, I think “Camera Obscura” existed, but again, was feminist focused, and perhaps not so queer.

Thomas Waugh: I would agree. I mean, I can't really pronounce on that, I don't remember very well. It's a good question. When did the gay publishing boom, or boomlet really begin? I think it was towards the end of the '80s.

Damon Young: Or maybe with the rise of Queer Theory, in the early '90s, and then the formation of journals like “GLQ”.

Thomas Waugh: If not before that. Yeah, yeah. But community publishing was very, very important throughout the '80s.

Damon Young: And in fact, has been important throughout your career.

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: And you often publish with presses that have a crossover audience, or like Arsenal Pulp Press, where you do your Queer Film Classics series with Matthew Hays. Do you want to speak about that a little bit?

Thomas Waugh: Sure.

Damon Young: Is that important to you?

Thomas Waugh: Yes. I mean, I love the fact that they're a community based publisher, in Vancouver. And they have published both the Queer Film Classics Series that began in 2008, and we're up to, we just published book number 15, which is, “C.R.A.Z.Y.”, the Quebecois film, by Robert Schwartzwald. It gets it into bookstores that might not have scholarly books, but since it's a small press, they're not very good at marketing and distribution, which is a drawback.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: But I like the fact that they insist on accessible, readable style, and are a little bit loose with footnotes and things, and they're open to different styles. They also published my porno picture books, which I'm very proud of, in the 2000s, “Outlines”, and “Lust Unearthed”. And a couple of others.

Damon Young: Can you talk a little bit about those two books?

Thomas Waugh: Yes. They were archival explorations, pre-Stonewall collections. Collections of pre-Stonewall, vintage eroticism. Graphic erotics. Those two, which I was... I had always been aware of, but I increasingly felt that they were being forgotten by gay and lesbian studies, or just ignored. And it was such a rich heritage of this underground, amateur materials that I had accumulated a little bit of. So the first book, “Outlines”, was a collection, basically my collection, my materials stuffed in old drawers, and crummy copies of them, usually. And there was such an amazing response to this, these cartoon-like, obsessive drawings, from the pre-Stonewall, queer imagination, that I did the second one. Which, more systematically, used archival sources, than my own collection. But even there, though, the quality was not good, because that's the characteristic of the archive in this field. And the response has been amazing. Those books are the only ones I've ever broken even on.

Damon Young: Oh wow.

Thomas Waugh: And the letters I got from people. Some of them, who had actually participated in the original production.

Damon Young: Oh wow.

Thomas Waugh: And yes, so they were a nice compliment, I think, to my more scholarly, historical works, like “Hard to Imagine”. Just recycling the original imagery. Which of course, “Hard to Imagine”, also did, in 1996, but in the picture books, a decade later, they're just picture books. The captions are there, and they're very important, but there's no accompanying text.

Damon Young: I see. Preserving archival elements that have otherwise been overlooked or forgotten, has also been part of your scholarly publishing practice throughout your career.

Thomas Waugh: In those cases. And I'm not an art historian, so it was unusual for me, to try to develop some expertise, in thinking about the history of amateur drawings. So, I hope I manage to do that all right. I don't know.

Damon Young: It sounds like the books have been well-appreciated.

Thomas Waugh: Well, they have, but not necessarily by art historians. I don't know.

Damon Young: Right, right. Let's talk a little bit about “Hard to Imagine”. I mean, we've skipped ahead a little bit here, because we've skipped over your first book, which was, in fact, was a collection of essays about documentary.

Thomas Waugh: Right.

Damon Young: “Show Us Life”.

Thomas Waugh: Right.

Damon Young: But we'll come back to it. “Hard to Imagine” came out in 1996. The subtitle was, I think, Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from its Origins, until Stonewall.

Thomas Waugh: It's something like that, yes.

Damon Young: Something like that. So where did that project come from?

Thomas Waugh: It came from the original Kinsey research in '81 or '82. And I'd been working on it for all those years. It had been so hard to publish, partly because of the harassment by Kinsey, and partly because no one would touch hardcore publications. No publishers would touch anything with erect penises in them, or penetration. And I insisted that this history had to show the money shots.

Damon Young: You wanted the book itself to have, to be a visual record-

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: Of some of the images you were writing about.

Thomas Waugh: Definitely. It has several hundred illustrations, and this was inextricable from the project.

Damon Young: And was that partly, also, this impetus to preserve an archive that otherwise risks dispersing or disappearing?

Thomas Waugh: Right. Absolutely. I visited archives throughout North America and Europe, for that book. I can't believe it, what I went through to do that. This was the pre-digital era.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: And I had a copy stand. A big, bulky thing, with a tripod that I put my camera on. And I was wheeling it around Europe on a bicycle. Like, around Berlin.

Damon Young: It's very glamorous to me.

Thomas Waugh: No, it's more like Mary Poppins, or the Wicked Witch of the East or something. No, the Wicked Witch of the East definitely. I can't believe it. And I did all those myself. That's why the-

Damon Young: Wow.

Thomas Waugh: The pictures are not necessarily very sharp. Well, the original quality wasn't so great, but also, my technical skills are not so great either.

Damon Young: Right. So that was a real labor of archival research and collation, as well as analytic brilliance, in fact. That book has been so important to so many people. I guess, I mean, I'm not entirely sure. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like, at that moment, this history of gay male eroticism had been very little commented on, and analyzed, especially in film and visual studies. And so, you were really addressing-

Thomas Waugh: It was the property of private, obsessive collectors, who were of maybe a pre-Stonewall generation, and who continued their practice of being discrete, and I had to encounter a lot of these obsessive collectors, and use their works. And some were so generous with me. This Dutch guy, I forget his name already, who shared a lot of his materials with me, just as an example. Or the elderly man in Silver Lake, in L.A., who shared with me his materials that I had discovered at Kinsey, and I used detective work to track down his identity, because Kinsey wouldn't tell me.

Damon Young: How did you track these people down?

Thomas Waugh: I had his initials. It was detective work. It was really hard.

Damon Young: This was pre ... this was like, early internet era, too.

Thomas Waugh: No. There's no internet. It was telephones. And when I first got him on the phone, this guy, Otis Wade, he hung up on me, and took his phone off the receiver. I mean, it was pre-cell phone, and all this kind of stuff. And I really freaked out. But I finally connected with him, and he was a lovely old guy. He died before the book came out, but he was so generous with me, and his material from the 1930s inspired me so much. It was such a flash of discovery.

Damon Young: So once you finally managed to speak to him, he was receptive, but he was afraid of some sort of exposure or something?

Thomas Waugh: I guess he was so traumatized to find an academic phoning him, out of the blue, 40 years later. No, 50 years later. "Hi, I wanna talk to you about your home movies from the 1930s." He freaked out. And I don't remember how I followed up with this, and visited him in his house. And he took the photo of the author photo of me for the book, and Columbia was so stupid, that they cropped the photo, not realizing how special this photo was of me, set against his house.

Damon Young: Oh, that's too bad.

Thomas Waugh: No, I have these very special, sentimental memories of Otis.

Damon Young: That's beautiful. So, a lot of the research for the book proceeded in this way? Through-

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: Doing maybe not quite oral histories, but through meeting people who had been collectors of this material?

Thomas Waugh: In France, in Germany, in the UK, in the U.S., in Canada. It was amazing.

Damon Young: And it took ... you worked on it for a decade or more, while you were looking for a publisher? Or as you were-

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: Doing research?

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: So, how did you get Columbia to publish it, in the end?

Thomas Waugh: I was lucky they were ... Ann Miller, was the name of my editor. She was wonderful. And I guess they felt they were ready to do something like this. Her bosses were less ready than she was, so they were the ones who imposed a cover without any image on it, on the project. And they're the ones who consulted lawyers, and made me doctor some of the photos. This has all been published. This horrible narrative, of substituting people's heads.

Damon Young: Oh wow, yeah.

Thomas Waugh: In the photos. So, we don't necessarily need to go into that, but so, really a mixed experience with Columbia, but she helped bring up the book, and her support was essential, so I want to pay tribute to her.

Damon Young: That's great. This was also the moment in which, well, the new queer cinema was happening. It happened in the early '90s, and queer theory was beginning to make in-roads into U.S. academy, and probably in Canada as well. Were those developments, did you feel swept up in them? Or were they a part of your-

Thomas Waugh: I was aware of them, and they were on my radar. I don't know whether I cited any of this material in “Hard to Imagine”. If anyone, it might've been Gayle Rubin, but I don't remember. Isn't that funny? Good question. And I don't remember whether I was citing Sedgwick, and the others.

Damon Young: Well, yeah. I mean, from memory, not so much, but it's also a different kind of project, 'cause it's very much engaged with the visual, historical materials. But I guess I was just wondering if you felt like you belonged to this changing tide of queer studies, and queer theory, that was suddenly becoming institutionally visible, and viable.

Thomas Waugh: I felt I did belong, but sometimes, reviewers reproached me for not being theoretical enough.

Damon Young: I see. At this moment, a very, very high theory was-

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, I forget, some reviewer, for either this book, or I think it was Romance of Transgressions”, is that, "Waugh has not read Freud."

Damon Young: I've always found your work to be very theoretically astute.

Thomas Waugh: Oh, thank you. And I have read Freud.

Damon Young: Of course.

Thomas Waugh: But whatever.

Damon Young: I wanna talk about your work in documentary, and on Canadian film, but I also wanna ask you about what it's been like to be in Canada, as a film scholar.

Obviously film studies is worldwide, but has been institutionally centered in the U.S., have you felt like, not so far away, but have you felt like your geographical location has impacted your relationship to the field of film and media studies in any way?

Thomas Waugh: In a complicated way. I mean, academia is much less, and the cultural institutions are much less privatized in Canada, than they are in the U.S., so we get public funding for a lot of arts and scholarly projects, that Americans are very jealous of.

Damon Young: Yes.

Thomas Waugh: Because they have to get corporate funding, and foundation funding for, so this is why I think Canadian cinema looks a lot queerer than maybe, an equivalent American cinema. And we get away with more, because we have this built-in protection from the market, in a way, because we're publicly subsidized more than they are in the States.

Damon Young: You mean, in terms of film and art production?

Thomas Waugh: And also-

Damon Young: Or is the scholarship?

Thomas Waugh: Both. I mean, we don't have private universities in Canada-

Damon Young: Yes.

Thomas Waugh: For example.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Otherwise, I did feel like an outlier. I needed my trips to San Francisco, and L.A., and New York, to sort of plug into what was really going on down here. On the other hand, Montreal's a very exciting place to be working on this, partly because of the cultural clash between French and English.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: And the Quebecois queer, LGBT milieu is very dynamic, very exciting, so I didn't feel that I was off in the boondocks at all.

Damon Young: No.

Thomas Waugh: And that I could appreciate the Francophone queer heritage, in a way that maybe my cohort down here might not.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: So for example, I read the interview with Foucault, that I was citing yesterday in “Gai Pied”, just as a matter of fact-

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: When it came out in whenever, '83 or '84, in the original French-

Damon Young: Because you were reading “Gai Pied”.

Thomas Waugh: Because “Gai Pied” was in the bookstores in Montreal.

Damon Young: I see, yeah.

Thomas Waugh: So, there was that enormous benefit. And I went to Paris a few times and presented, maybe in the late '80s, and early '90s, and felt open to plug into that culture as well.

Damon Young: I see. You've written a lot about queer cinema in Canada. Notably in the book, “The Romance of Transgression”, which is a collection of essays. Is that because you've always been interested in Canadian film? Or is it also out of a sense of wanting to serve the community that you work in?

Thomas Waugh: Both. And I do feel a sense belonging to ... I have a sense of space, and place. I grew up in Ontario, and this kind of recognition that comes from looking at cinema that comes out of your own environment, is very important to me. I love Canadian cinema. And I guess I did want to explore this heritage in a very definitive, and encyclopedic, and exhausted way. Exhausting, also. Since that, also took a long time to write. It was also another huge book. And I'm very proud of it. I also felt that Canadian cinema, and Quebec cinema had always been neglected by the gatekeepers down south, and in Europe.

Damon Young: Xavier Dolan is making up for-

Thomas Waugh: Oh, god. Xavier Dolan, yes. I mean, his work is great, but he's a pain in the butt.

Damon Young: His work is super interesting.

Thomas Waugh: It's wonderful, yeah. I just wish he'd shut up. Yeah, and also, alongside “Romance of Transgression” in Canada, which was 2006, I just want to mention how important the book, “Montreal Main” was to me.

Damon Young: Which is part of the Queer Film Classics Series that we talked about.

Thomas Waugh: It is, indeed. It's about a very obscure Canadian film from '73 about an intergenerational relationship in Montreal. A very docudrama-ish, indie feature

from that time. Which is also, I think, a part of this neglected heritage. Although, it made a few ripples in the U.S. in the '70s, and is still available, it's sort of largely forgotten, so I hope that I've helped people discover it by accident.

Damon Young: Right, which is one of the things that, that series does. In fact, some of the films are very well known, but other films in the series are less well known, so there's again, this archival impulse to preserve a certain queer heritage that might, otherwise, not enter the record.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah, and that was deliberate. Interpreting the notion of classic, very loosely, to include both canonical films and films that are much obscure.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: I think the last film in the series is going to be “Manila at Night”, a Philippine gay film by Joel David, or David. I'm not sure how he pronounces his name, which really needs to be resuscitated, and made known to international audiences. And so, yeah, alongside some of the more canonical works like “Female Trouble”, which is coming out next year, or later this year, at the end of this year. Maybe in the spring of next year. I think it's a good mix.

Damon Young: Is that authored by-

Thomas Waugh: Chris Holmlund.

Damon Young: Chris Holmlund. That's great. I'm excited to read that one. Let's talk ... we skipped over your first book in 1998, which was, “Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary”. And so, you've obviously been interested in the committed cinema of various genres, activists cinema, community cinema, but also, specifically in documentary film from the beginning. Your work on Ivens, and you've written a lot about documentary film. Can you recall the genesis of that book project? And then, of course, you had the Minnesota Collection from 2011, “The Right To Play Oneself”, I think it's called, another collection of essays on documentary. Which seems like it's anticipating your next project, the, I Confess, again, about self representation.

Thomas Waugh: You're absolutely right. It's all cyclical.

Damon Young: But there's a real through line here.

Thomas Waugh: A through line, and also cyclical. I guess “Show Us Life” came out of the Ivens project. It includes a chapter from the dissertation.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: Or half of a chapter.

Damon Young: I'm glad your dissertation has been fueling your publishing career for the past four decades. That's a successful dissertation.

Thomas Waugh: But it came out of my interest in committed left documentary film that had developed as early as '74, or even earlier. My Master's thesis was also on committed documentary in Quebec. So, it was a project, a long time coming. And as an anthology, it, I think, brings together, transculturally, a lot of interesting work, Latin American work, as well as U.S. and Canadian work. It looks at distribution. It looks at the heritage of May '68. Particularly in the French context. And it actually made its way around. An amazing number of people have cited this, even though it's a Scarecrow book, which was sort of the first refuge of people who wanted to publish for the first time, back then, and I'm very grateful to Scarecrow. I think they still exist. I'm not sure.

Damon Young: I'm not sure, either.

Thomas Waugh: For publishing this book, and the introduction, which forced me to sort of theorize this corpus of committed documentary, and to sort of provide a kind of taxonomy of it, or a definition of it, I think, has really made the rounds, and endlessly cited, it's so surprising. And so, I republished that in, "The Right to Play Oneself". I'm pretty proud of it, all 30 years later. But I owe so much to "Jump Cut", and both Chuck, and Julia and John, all three of the co-editors of "Jump Cut" were in that book as well.

Damon Young: Oh wow.

Thomas Waugh: As well as people like Bill Nichols, and Julianne Burton, and a lot of luminaries, or future luminaries-

Damon Young: Of documentary studies.

Thomas Waugh: Yeah.

Damon Young: "Jump Cut" has been in the center of your intellectual life and publishing career from the beginning.

Thomas Waugh: It has. And I send a lot of my students there, and a lot of them do their first publications in "Jump Cut". And Chuck and Julia are so wonderful to work with, because they really nurture a long term editing process for inexperienced grad students who want to publish, and they're so generous.

Damon Young: So, we should also talk a little about your work on film that's outside North America and Europe. I know you've published some essays in Indian cinema, the Queer Film Classics Series has a, kind of, global span, in its objects. And you've also traveled a lot, talking about queer studies, and queer film, all over the world really. Brazil, India, maybe even Australia.

Thomas Waugh: Yes.

Damon Young: Maybe you haven't made to Australia.

Thomas Waugh: No, I have.

Damon Young: Oh okay. So I guess I have two questions. One is, how do you see the role of writing the non-Western cinemas in your intellectual work, and two, if you have a comment on the state of queer film studies, globally?

Thomas Waugh: I'll stretch your question to also include documentary studies, globally, because I think that's also important. There was a chapter on Indian documentary in "Show Us Life", that was very important to me, by Anand Patwardhan, the filmmaker. He's another person that I've interviewed. In fact, I started working on Indian documentary in '88, and did a whole series of interviews on VHS, with about 20 Indian independent documentary practitioners, which I should actually, officially circulate better than I have. But he was one of them. And so, this was a way of expanding my interest in documentary, globally, which was high priority for me. I didn't feel any reticence about going beyond the Euro-American frame at all. I thought it was important to do so. I've always actually, since my days as a volunteer teacher in India, in 1970 to '72, I've always loved that culture, and wanted to go back, and to incorporate it into my scholarly work, and I was able to do that in the '80s with this project. And so, I published a few pieces on Indian documentary in the '90s, which probed the kind of impact cultural difference had on documentary style, which I think is a very interesting issue that is not yet resolved.

And then, once I started continuing academic research in India, queer was inevitably entering the picture. So I published several pieces on queer Indian cinema, as that was beginning to emerge. I mean, of course it had always been there. Undercurrents of it, especially in homo social narratives and mythologies in India cinema, but it began to become more explicit in the late '90s. So I published a couple pieces there, and I guess there are, sort of, gestures of my feeling of great friendship and admiration of Indian culture, and my Indian friends. So, it hasn't been a major focus, but I think those three or four pieces are important parts of my work, and reflect a kind of refusal to be bound by the Euro-American cloister, or ghetto. Did that answer your question?

Damon Young: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Maybe didn't quite get to the part about the actual status of queer film studies in other institutions outside of North America, but I'm not sure maybe there isn't much status.

Thomas Waugh: I just presented at the Bangalore Queer Film Festival, and it was very exciting to see how the growing network of queer film festivals in India have plugged into also, a kind of queer studies network as well. Not a huge one, not everywhere, but very important, and it's a pleasure to be connected, even marginally, to those things happening there.

Damon Young: While we're ... I know we have to wrap up. While we're talking about film studies as a discipline, and institutional site, I guess I want you to comment a little bit on your relationship to the discipline over the ... you've been a very important figure within it, throughout its history, but also sometimes, from the margins, whether it be from the margin of queer film studies, documentary studies of Canada. There's been a lot of turns in film studies, high theory, a historical turn, a turn to affect. Everyone's always talking about turns. Have you felt particularly hailed by any of those turns, or have you felt like you followed the fashions and currents in the emergence of, well now, there's a digital turn of film and media studies? Or have you felt like your distance, geographically, and in terms of your interests, which have remained quite consistent, has given you... insulated you a little bit from the currents and fashions of the discipline?

Thomas Waugh: Probably the latter. I mean, it's a very complex question. My work, I feel, has always been interdisciplinary, and maybe plugged into too many areas to allow me to go very deep, or as deep as I would like to, in any of them. And it's also prevented me from being fully immersed in the currents of film studies, in the narrow sense, as it's practiced at SCMS, or in “Screen”. I've never published in “Screen”.

Damon Young: Have you published in “Cinema Journal”?

Thomas Waugh: Just a dialogue that you facilitated.

Damon Young: Oh yeah, that's right. That was a first time for both of us.

Thomas Waugh: So yeah, no, no, I haven't had time.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: So yeah, I think that's a good question. Maybe outlier is a good word to use, but I don't think I have any regrets.

Damon Young: Well, it's good to be an outlier. Here's my last question. In her Fieldnotes interview, Janet Staiger said, "I would hope that the young people, the younger generation of film schoolers will enjoy teaching, as I'm not sure the rest of the academy is quite as much fun as it used to be." Do you agree with that? And what is your own sense of the future of academic, university film and media studies, as you observe your students moving forward in their careers, finishing... you've had several generations of it. Current ones finishing their dissertations and facing what always feels like an increasingly precarious job market.

Thomas Waugh: It's a bit scary right now. Teaching is a great joy for me, and I hope that for my students, they will find this, eventually. They're having trouble finding jobs right now. And academia is becoming much more regimented and industrialized. There's ominous talk at Concordia of introducing the kind of metrics that are

now official in the UK, for measuring our research input. And this is so obnoxious, the instrumentalization of humanities research is so scary, and it's the legacy of the conservative in government in Canada that we just kicked out.

Damon Young: Right.

Thomas Waugh: So, I would like to be optimistic, but it's hard. But I also have great confidence in young people, and their ability to transform and create their own institutions, so let's hope that they manage, and that... I think it's going to be okay.

Damon Young: You went from pessimism to optimism in the space of one answer. I love it. It's a great way for us to finish.

Thomas Waugh: Okay, good.

Damon Young: Thank you, Tom.