The Scholarship of Sound and Image:
Producing Media Criticism in the Digital Age
A Multimedia Breakout Session Proposal

In his 1975 essay "The Unattainable Text" – written immediately in advance of the video revolution that enabled cinephiles everywhere to possess film libraries of their own – Raymond Bellour speculated about that day in the future when people could own movies in the same way that they own books and records. Considering the implications of such ownership of movies for cinema scholarship, Bellour wrote, "If film studies are still done then, they will undoubtedly be more numerous, more imaginative, more accurate, and above all more enjoyable than the ones we carry out in fear and trembling, threatened continually with the dispossession of the object."

That future Bellour imagined is with us now – and in her recent book *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey considered how movies on DVD, and the intersection of cinema and other digital technologies, have the potential to change film studies in ways that Bellour in 1975 could not have imagined. "New ways of consuming old movies on electronic and digital technologies," she wrote, "should bring about a 'reinvention' of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia."

Beyond simply having movies on DVD, the full range of digital video technologies enable film scholars to *write* using the very materials that constitute their object of study: moving images and sounds. As Victor Burgin has demonstrated, digital technologies have "expanded the range of possibilities for dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects offered by narrative cinema." Thus, while such technologies provoke a new way of watching and thinking about films, they also offer a new way of conducting and presenting film research.

Unlike their colleagues in new media studies, film scholars have largely resisted the opportunities offered by these new technologies. In effect, they have continued to treat films on DVD as *stone* – a 'read only' medium – instead of experimenting with the ways that digital technologies have transformed them into *papyrus* – a medium with which one can write as well.

To explore this reinvention of film criticism, this presentation will perform the dynamic digital scholarship made possible by current technology by actively writing with video. Through a collection of short video essays on a single film (in this case Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*) this session will advocate for the possibilities of creative digital criticism and engage with some of the questions brought forward by the intersection of film scholarship and new technologies: How might the use of images and sounds transform the rhetorical strategies employed by the film scholar? How does this kind of creative digital scholarship fit into the expectations of contemporary media education? And to what extent does aesthetics play a role in a discourse that aims to produce knowledge as well as effect?

The Scholarship of Sound and Image: Producing Media Criticism in the Digital Age will be presented by Christian Keathley (Middlebury College), Andrew Miller (Sacred Heart University), Eric Faden (Bucknell University), and Jason Mittell (Middlebury College), and will also include material produced by Craig Cieslikowski (University of Houston)

The format of this unusual session will start with a brief overview, presented by Christian Keathley and Andrew Miller, of various ways that the discipline of film studies has previously engaged with the tools of writing with sound and image. We will map the range of possible approaches via the use of moving images as a critical language, from expository visual analysis to associative creative meditations. We will then show a series of short videos produced by the participants that exemplify the range of approaches and possibilities afforded by the video medium. Following the videos, Jason Mittell will discuss the ways that this mode of criticism might remap the field of film and media studies, focusing on the specific opportunities that this mode of scholarship poses for publishing and pedagogy, while considering the challenges of copyright and peer review.