

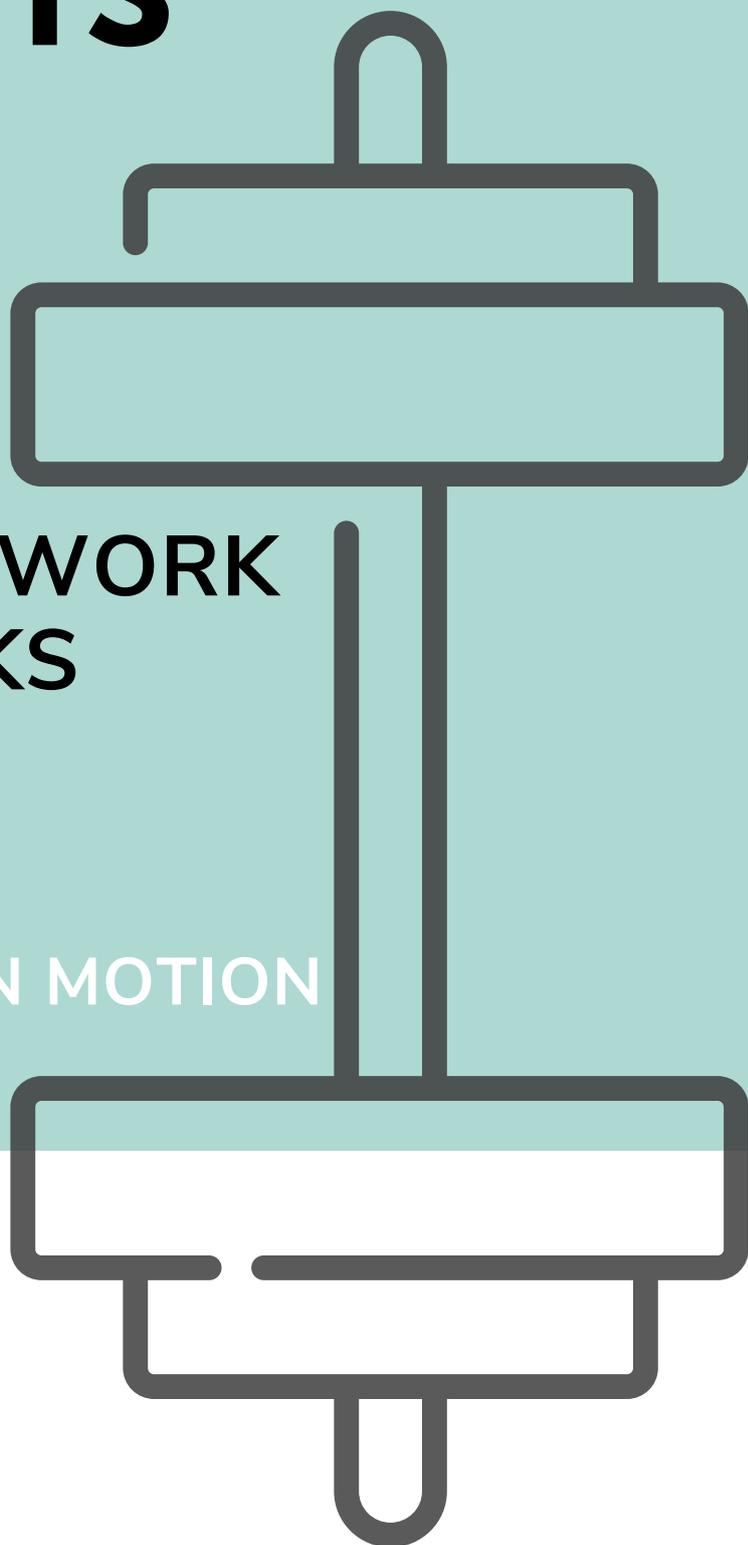
# OA BOOKS WORKOUTS

## SCHOLARS AT WORK WITH OA BOOKS

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AN INTERVIEW  
WITH MIKLÓS KISS  
ON FILM STUDIES IN MOTION

**The Open  
Access  
Books  
Network**



# MIKLÓS KISS



MIKLÓS KISS IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF AUDIOVISUAL ARTS AND COGNITION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS. HIS RESEARCH FOCUSES ON CONTEMPORARY AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA, INTERSECTING THE FIELDS OF NARRATIVE AND COGNITIVE FILM THEORIES.

## **Film Studies in Motion: From Audiovisual Essay to Academic Research Video**

Audiovisual essaying should be more than an appropriation of traditional video artistry, or a mere audio-visually upgraded extension of our analytical practice. What we expect from it is a form of expression that is autonomous and self-sufficient, that would both maintain and refine traditional academic values, and ultimately could lead to a 'true' audiovisual turn in communicative discourse as well as about films.

The leading question for this book is 'How can the traits and rhetoric of a traditionally text-based scholarly work, characterized by academic lucidity and traceability of information and argumentation, be optimally incorporated and streamlined into an autonomous, audiovisual container?'

# 1

## **Looking back at the Film Studies in Motion (FSiM) project, can you give examples of the kinds of open practices that have been applied?**

Although written on a word processor, my co-author, Thomas van den Berg, and I looked at FSiM as a project instead of a traditional textual publication. Perhaps biased by the nature of the topic, the project somewhat naturally culminated into a multimedia e-book we made available online for free.

Indeed, the unfolding research--on the history, theory and practice of videographic criticism as a scholarly research method and communication form--wouldn't have made sense without

its audiovisual illustrations. Just like the then-emerging practice itself, our project aimed to bridge the long-existing medial gap between a dynamic and available multimodal art and its discourse locked in static, monomodal, and hard-to-access paywalled writing.

These bottom-line considerations regarding multimodality and accessibility brought us to discover and embrace a variety of open practices. Most important of these is the online web-authoring tool called *Scalar*, which became the home of the project. The platform ticked all the boxes we needed for the publication of our research by being:

- free and open access (free to create and consume content),
- *media-rich* (seamlessly incorporating



websites, documents, audio and video files),

- *visually compelling* (aesthetic attractiveness was vital to lock our readers with shorter attention spans to our digital screen),
- *multiform* (offering high compatibility with a variety of devices),
- non-linear (allowing for recursive, nested, and thus non-linear reading experience),
- annotated (supporting easy-access multimedia annotations),
- collaborative (essential for co-authored projects),
- flexible (open for updates—a feature that suits the continually evolving field of videographic criticism),
- easy to use (Scalar’s interface is not only user-friendly but also producer-friendly),
- interactive (open for facilitating dialogue with the project’s readers and viewers).

Beyond these, Scalar actively supports ‘fair use’ policies: the platform is equipped with a built-in and easy-to-integrate media hosting engine, supporting prominent repositories like [Critical Commons](#) and [The Internet Archive](#). In this project, ensuring our fair use claim, we saved our media in (and then linked from) Steve Anderson’s Critical Commons platform—an open, free, and therefore ‘safe place’ that specializes in hosting user-generated and copyrighted materials for educational projects.

## 2 Why is openness important to you and this project? What did it enable you to do?

To satisfy the project’s key presentation requirements—multimodality and accessibility—the possibilities for publication were narrowed down to the choice of a specific platform. Although initially we considered a print form with access to ‘embedded’ video essays through scanning a QR code, we ultimately settled on *Scalar*, which provided a more natural and elegant solution to address these key needs. Thus, I must admit, we chose an open platform not only out of principle but also out of practical necessity and our gradual understanding of the emerging implications of the project. As the research progressed, we started to feel the absurdity, if not full ridiculousness, of writing a traditional textual book about an audiovisual method and mode of communication (not that Film Studies hasn’t already lived with such absurdity for about 100 years, with its lengthy descriptions, static screenshots, and other desperate attempts to capture the visual and auditive in textual form). Furthermore, we felt that a published project that has been illustrated by, and thus heavily reliant on, almost 100 embedded video essays and plenty of audio files—all created and made freely available on video sharing sites and social media platforms by enthusiastic scholars,



film journalists and fans alike—had to be presented as openly and accessibly as possible.

Beyond the traditional technological and copyright-related applications of ‘openness’, the project and its chosen platform have stimulated a certain open-mindedness within us. Back in those days (the book was written between 2014–2016 and was launched in July 2016 during the annual NECS conference in Potsdam), both our research topic and publishing method were considered to be rather novel; thus, we felt a certain excitement and, perhaps, also some self-imposed mandate to challenge our field and its conventional form of publication.

I remember the little jolts of thrill coursing through me while experimenting with Scalar’s multimedia functions for the first time, fuelling my creativity and ultimately bringing the project’s presentation to a new, initially unimagined level. Proportional to our growing enthusiasm about the developing project and our increasing fascination with its innovative presentation grew our sense of urgency, which further motivated our choice of opting for ‘going open’. Feeling the hotness of the topic and mounting scholarly concurrence, we simply couldn’t wait for the slowly turning wheels of traditional academic publishing and wanted to jump straight away into the lively ongoing discourse.

The open-source self-authoring and -publishing platform of Scalar, in combination with Critical Commons,

provided us with an instant publication option right after the project’s completion and offered immediate access to our book for all potentially interested readers and viewers. Turning a project online with the click of a button during an e-book launch event brings such immense joy, comparable to the emotions that traditional book-launching rituals can bring about. More importantly, while remaining dependent on the technical facilitation of Scalar, publication in this form doesn’t result in an abandonment of ownership regarding your intellectual property—a right that all public-money-funded projects should be able to retain.

## **3** Has the Film Studies in Motion project changed your understanding of open scholarship? Also in view of specific developments (and needs) in the humanities?

It surely did. Before the development of this project, and the journey I went through with Thomas in finding the most suitable publication form for it, I mainly looked at open scholarship (if I looked at it at all) as an honourable but ‘mere’ ethical choice.

This, of course, should already grant it privilege over closed systems; however (probably due to mindlessly turning academia’s hamster wheel for too long), I thought established publishing structures



must operate for a reason and to our benefit. Believing that using their quality gatekeeping and established distribution ecosystem is necessary to maintain a 'proper' scholarly profile, I kept on playing the publication game up until the point when my work contract was not renewed and, thus, I found myself outside the institutional box. Free from such seemingly self-evident constraints and bureaucratic hurdles that can hamper and discourage a project like FSIM (upon his graduation, Thomas had no academic ambitions), we embraced disruption on all possible levels.

Now back in the academic business, I am still publishing through professional organizations and their commercial, and thus closed, format (open access to these works is ensured by my institution), but I try to maintain a healthy balance between traditional and innovative knowledge distribution practices. Similarly, in teaching, as much as institutional constraints allow it, I invite my students to free themselves from their well-built scholarly boxes, to rethink firm knowledge communication regimes and, thus, to challenge larger outdated and rigid institutional systems which have been slow to implement changes that accommodate original and creative modes of thinking, knowledge production and distribution. In all, especially for ambitious students and early-career colleagues, going open seems to be an essential step towards exposure and visibility.

## 4

**Since you were trying to do something new and experimental with this project, did you have to convince anybody (maybe yourself!) that it could work? How did you do this?**

As previously mentioned, I was out of an academic job during the period within which I experimented with different dissemination options. Therefore, the only two persons that had to be convinced about the publishing choice we ultimately made were Thomas and myself. The research was not carried out to satisfy any institutional quotas, line managers or tenure committees. The only drive was our strong belief in the uniqueness and timeliness of the project. Sure, coming from academia, we had our doubts regarding the lack of traditional peer-reviewing (not that colleagues and friends didn't comment or give enough encouragement in response to the different versions of the manuscript), the potential ephemerality of the publication platform (today, in January 2022, Scalar is up and running; hence, the general fear that the Internet is more fragile than a brick library is not all-out applicable), or the possibility that, without professional distribution channels, no one will know about the project at all (social media, collegiality, and, most importantly, open access, can together compensate for



missing out on the advantages of traditional publishing practices).

Despite its 'official launch', which presented it as an 'academic book' in an academic conference, I think that back then there wasn't (and, in fact, there still isn't) any guarantee for a project like this to be valued as 'valid scholarly output'. It was based on a bet coupled with a strong feeling of doing something right and valuable; we knew that it was simply not worth sacrificing the advantages of using Scalar in order to achieve the traditional markers of an 'official' publication: i.e., a process that would have been useless (or even damaging) to the work itself. Ultimately, the project somewhat remains a bet: the last time I reached out to Scalar to gather some information about visitor numbers, they couldn't provide me with any. Having said that, I have an indirect indication about the unfoundedness of our initial doubts, if not the relative success of the project: some colleagues I know (and many I don't) sometimes email or direct-message me on social media when the Scalar site is down for maintenance, requesting to be sent an alternative link or PDF of the manuscript; I see the book appear in many syllabi on videographic criticism; based on the book, I receive frequent invitations for talks and interviews (like this one).

In all, the 'gamble' has seemingly paid off. While videographic criticism is only my 'hobby project', I receive more invitations and recognition through this project than through my major expertise in cognitive film study for which I mainly publish

through traditional channels and for renowned publishing houses. Through its instant and free availability, easy addition to many course syllabi, multi-platform availability and multimedia integration, and (then) innovative do-it-yourself publication mode, FSIM triggered more academic recognition and appreciation than anything else I have done before or since—a small success for which Scalar and Critical Commons, and their support for open access and self-publishing, contributed a lot.

# MIKLÓS KISS

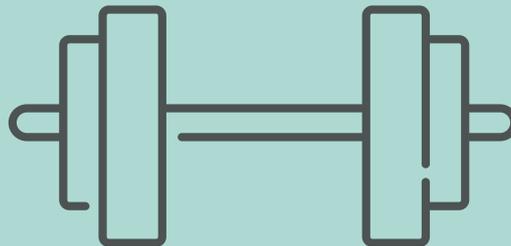


## LINKS

### Film Studies in Motion: From Audiovisual Essay to Academic Research Video

The media rich, open access Scalar e-book on the Audiovisual Essay practice is available online: <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/film-studies-in-motion>

## OA BOOKS WORKOUTS



This interview is one of the outputs of the online series OA Books Workouts: Scholars at Work, a project of the Open Access Books Network. The aim of the series is to share good practices regarding the writing, production, and technicalities of publishing an open access book.

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