

74th EASA Media Anthropology Network E-Seminar

"The Making of Film Photography in French Cinema"

Julie Peruch (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Politique, EHESS, Paris)

2–16 December 2025 | EASA Medianthro Mailing List

Working paper available at: <https://easaonline.org/event/e-seminar-starting-the-production-of-film-photography-in-french-cinema/>

From: John Postill (RMIT University) john.postill@rmit.edu.au **Date:** Tuesday, 2 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Starting now: Julie Peruch e-seminar on the making of film photography in French cinema

Dear All

Welcome to the 74th EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar!

As previously announced, this time we'll be discussing a working paper by Julie Peruch (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Politique, EHESS, Paris) titled "The making of film photography in French cinema" for a period of two weeks ending on Tuesday 16 Dec.

You'll find a PDF of the paper here: <https://easaonline.org/event/e-seminar-starting-the-production-of-film-photography-in-french-cinema/>

A reminder that this list is open to anyone with an interest in the anthropology of media. If you've been forwarded this message and are not yet on our mailing list, you can subscribe here: <https://lists.easaonline.org/postorius/lists/medianthro-easaonline.org.lists.easaonline.org/>

Unfortunately, Cathy Greenhalgh has been unable to share her full discussant's comments in time owing to pressing commitments but I'm hoping she'll be able to join us in the coming days.

Instead, here are some quick reactions from me to get the conversation going. After Julie has responded to these, we'll open the discussion to everyone on this mailing list.

I really enjoyed reading the paper, especially a second time as it's unfamiliar terrain and I struggled at times with the technical language, not least with one or two of the acronyms. The ethnographic vignettes and interviews with Lisa, Simon and other film professionals were rich and insightful, as were Julie's descriptions of her difficulties accessing her field sites.

At the heart of the paper is the question of value and its relation to the transient worlds where film photography is made in and around Paris. These are socio-technical worlds 'in which everything is ordered' (p. 6) yet with room for manoeuvre, especially for those professionals who are allowed to 'deviate' (in Julie's etic term) from the hierarchical norms (p. 10). These deviations, she argues, 'reveal the articulation between the value of things and the value of persons' (p. 12). What kind of value is this? It's a market value (p. 2).

This got me thinking about the key emic distinction between art and technique that Julie found throughout her long-term fieldwork (2017-2020). I'm wondering how this distinction informs the value these practitioners assign to the images they produce. Presumably the artistic dimension of these images has more than merely market value? What does market value mean in this context?

I also found very interesting the destabilising effects of digital imaging technicians (DITs) on the filmmaking world's hierarchy, an indirect technological effect mediated by a new occupation/specialist practice. Could you say a bit more about this? In discussions of practice theory and socio-technical change we tend to hear less about occupational than technological effects, in my experience.

Speaking of practice theory, you describe the photographic gaze as being both situated and dispersed. This reminded me of Schatzki's (1996) distinction between integrative and dispersed practices, although your dispersal takes place within the shared production environment, e.g. when the director of photography asks a subordinate for a second opinion (or gaze). (This is more of a comment, I suppose!).

Finally, on your methodology, could you expand a little on your difficulties accessing 'the field' and how you managed to gather enough materials in the end. Did you find any useful materials online or via teleconferencing, etc? Any advice for future researchers who may face similar access problems?

Many thanks

John Postill RMIT University

Reference: Schatzki, T. 1996. *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Wednesday, 3 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Starting now: Julie Peruch e-seminar on the making of film photography in French cinema

Hi everyone, and thank you again for inviting me to this e-seminar.

In response to your comments, John, here are a few points that I hope will help enrich the discussion.

The notion of value that I focused on in this research is primarily market value. I approached it as a factor shaping logics of action and interaction within the field of photographic production, among other factors that I did not examine in this study.

Regarding the distinction between art and technique in the production process, I observed in my interviews that when image professionals spoke about their investment in pursuing artistic effects, their approach was embedded in the broader workflow that brings the project into being—such as using a high-performance camera or lens, or drawing visual inspiration from earlier films that achieved commercial success through their artistic recognition. "Art," as invoked by image professionals, is embedded within a cinematographic art market. Within the film market, it is understood as the driving force behind the value of cinematography (Gutfreind 2006).

Market value is not explicitly expressed by professionals when they speak in "technical" or "artistic" terms. I noticed that these two notions function more as discursive categories—products of a historical trajectory—that are applied to image-creation and image-production practices. The trace of the use of art or technique is not visible in the images themselves; what emerges above all is the artistic form. What is considered "technical" is discursively erased in the image in favor of the visibility of the "artistic." Since art is valued more highly than technique, the discourse of visible artistry and invisible technique within the image helps confer value on the cinematography. This implies that the work of technicians is rendered invisible by this discourse emphasizing artistic visibility. In this context, where two notions carry unequal value in the market, value serves to promote one professional category at the expense of another.

Regarding the occupational effects of DITs, their presence is highly ambiguous because the DIT's position sits just below that of the director of photography, and at the same time, the DIT is integrated into the camera crews, placing them in direct competition with the first assistant camera (traditionally positioned just below the director of photography). Unlike the location scout or the colorist, who each form a two-person working relationship with the director of photography, the DIT works directly with the camera assistants on set. It is this relational configuration that destabilizes the relationship between the DIT and the first assistant camera. Another source of hierarchical tension arises from the fact that the DIT sometimes expresses artistic intentions to the director of photography under the cover of technical considerations. This approach can be unwelcome to some directors of photography, while others may see it as an opportunity.

Thank you very much, John, for this reference on variations in practice within an organizational context. I will certainly take note of it for the development of my work. To connect this to Schatzki's practice theory, I would say that the dispersed perceptual practices I observed form a whole that exceeds the individual actor. The actor cannot access this broader perspective, as their perception is embodied and thus situated.

Concerning field access, I was indeed strongly inspired by academic works to accept my difficulties, analyze them, and reshape parts of my ethnographic methodology. Most of my access to film shoots came directly from encounters in the street. The production manager or the director generally granted me a few days, then eventually asked me to leave because they

mistook me for a journalist. Gaining access to equipment-rental companies was much easier; the managers opened their doors to me. My ethnography therefore consists of periods ranging from a few days to a few weeks of observation, conducted over several years and across several film projects.

The references I found are (some are in French):

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- Bühler, Nolwenn, Hertz, Ellen, et Schulze, Marion. 2023. « Ethnographier en féministe : l'art des conséquences ». https://www.ethnographiques.org/2022/Schulze_Bulher_Hertz.
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- Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén A., et Adam Howard. 2012. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 43(3):289–305.
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- Ortner, Sherry B. 2010. « Access: Reflections on Studying up in Hollywood ». *Ethnography* 11(2):211–33.
- Souleles, Daniel. 2018. « How to Study People Who Do Not Want to Be Studied ». *PoLAR* 41(S1):51–68.

Best regards,

Julie

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From: John Postill (RMIT University) john.postill@rmit.edu.au **Date:** Thursday, 4 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Julie Peruch e-seminar: discussion now open to everyone

Many thanks, Julie, for your thoughtful response to my initial comments.

The floor is now open to all on this mailing list for the next 12 days!

To post your comment or question, simply email directly to medianthro-easaonline.org@lists.easaonline.org (cc. me so I can check that it has reached the list).

Please keep your post brief and watch out for formatting issues. It's best in my experience to write it as a normal email to retain the quasi-orality of this medium, or to remove all formatting if you're pasting your thoughts from elsewhere, e.g. a Word document.

You're welcome to write up to 2-3 follow-up posts during the session (i.e. there's a 4-post seminar limit per person).

John

PS. A reminder that the working paper we're discussing is available here:
<https://easaonline.org/event/e-seminar-starting-the-production-of-film-photography-in-french-cinema/>

From: Francisco Osorio (Anthropology Department, University of Chile) fosorio@uchile.cl
Date: Saturday, 6 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Julie Peruch e-seminar

Thanks, Julie, for your paper and for your commitment to continuing efforts to gain access to fieldwork, despite some polite invitations to "leave the premises." For readers outside the world of cinema production, it can sometimes be a very technical essay. Nevertheless, the anthropological pursuit remains the same: to understand a cultural group that has its own language and customs.

You focus on how people organize themselves in film production. One answer you provide is that the social order is imposed because it already exists as a hierarchy. Even the titles make this clear: the director of photography is, after all, the director. The first assistant follows, then the second assistant (and sometimes a third, depending on the budget). Occasionally, there is even a first assistant's assistant. This social hierarchy dates back to analogue film production.

In digital production, however, you argue that the Digital Imaging Technician (DIT) challenges this hierarchy to some extent. John had already noticed this line of thought. Your response in the first reply is that the role has an ambiguous presence. Do you think digital cinema has a different social organisation compared to traditional analogue forms? Is the DIT a sign of change in how cinema images are produced?

Although it is not mentioned in your paper, we can anticipate that the first AI-generated feature film will soon arrive, given the significant advances already made in that area. Do you think your research can shed light on how these new forms of cinema production will develop? What I would like to propose in this e-seminar is that Julie's work on digital cinema may offer us clues about what lies ahead for this social form—the one that makes films.

Francisco Osorio Anthropology Department University of Chile

From: Raúl Castro-Pérez (Media and Communication Faculty, Universidad Científica del Sur, Lima) raulcastro69@yahoo.es **Date:** Monday, 8 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar

Dear Julie, John and colleagues in the list:

A cordial note to everyone. Below I share some reflections and questions that Julie's stimulating text inspired.

Your work, Julie, offers a rich and compelling ethnographic account of socio-technical organisation of the visual production in contemporary french fiction filmmaking. By tracing the micro-relational dynamics, and hierarchical negotiations, you construct a sophisticated model of how the professional gaze of the people in film industry is produced, reproduced and operationalised in the crafting of images. This is, let me emphasise, one of the major strengths in your work: we the readers walk away with a dense, textured understanding of the multilayered networks of labour, tools, knowledge and interpersonal strategies designing the cinematic image long before it appears on the screen. It is, indeed, a process of materialisation and value production embedded in professional practice.

In this way, your argument implies that the socio-technical and hierarchical labour and knowhow system has direct consequences for the visual structuring of cinematic narratives. This claim is both plausible and highly stimulating, but I guess I find it a bit analytically underdeveloped in the text. For sure my reading may have missed a lot of your rich arguments, but probably the manuscript would be even more compelling if it offered concrete demonstration, through visual analysis, of how these production dynamics translate into specific aesthetic forms in contemporary French cinema. I mean, the ethnography shows how professionals work, but the readers still wonder: how does this work shape what we actually see on screen?

Do you think that a few paragraphs explicitly deconstructing these consequences could strengthen your thesis?

For instance, how do the distributed forms of authority, or deviations, manifest in the visual design of some films? At this point I recall a couple of outstanding French movies I saw recently. How could the collaborative yet asymmetrical labour practices you describe materialise textures, tonalities or narrative rhythms in films like *La Fanfare* (Courcoul, 2024), or *L'Été Dernier* (Breillat, 2023)? These films are widely viewed—one a social portrait, the other a gendered statement—and perhaps they are illustrative of your arguments? I think that, as in the mega-production of *Emilia Pérez* (Audiard, 2024), the films immerse users and spectators in an intercultural design process—or even more, if I may digress, in early classics such as *Amélie* (Jeunet, 2001), whose visual stylisation became globally iconic. Do they all work with your statements?

This thought-provoking work has also made me reflect on the extent to which epistemological bridges can be built with the traditional theoretical corpus in media anthropology. One wonders,

for instance, whether the systems of labour, valuation, and creation of meaning you describe contribute to what might be understood as a distinctive visual order in contemporary French cinema... an order produced not at the level of auteurs or genres alone, but at the level of professional organisation and hierarchical collaborative practices. This would allow your work to dialogue with debates on visual orders or visual regimes, such as Deborah Poole's articulation as a "visual economy" in her *Vision, Race and Modernity* book (1997). Poole shows how postcards in the Andean region condensed racialised, colonial, and materially mediated conventions of looking. Your findings could invite a parallel question: does a specific professional visual regime—disciplined by tools, knowledge and a kind of market-driven anticipation—structure a cinematic creative sensibility in contemporary French fiction film?

Another possible strand is that of Steve Caton's analysis in *Lawrence of Arabia: A Film Anthropology* (1999). Caton suggests how cinematic representation can consolidate a cultural imaginary—there 'Orientalism', here perhaps a form of 'Frenchism'? Not in a nationalist sense, but a constellation of shared professional standards and value visual clues that circulate as markers of communal identity within globally flowing media economies. Something we could also explore in highly developed industries like the Hong Kong film industry or the Indian one?

Let me offer a final personal note. May your work suggest the intriguing possibility of a particular "perfect cinema", in sharp contrast with the anthropological attention traditionally given to "imperfect cinema"? From 'Third Cinema' (García Espinoza, 1979) to the regional Andes emerging film production (Quinteros, 2011; Castro Pérez, 2016), and drawing also on production studies of Nigerian cinema and the aesthetics of distortion (Larkin, 2008), scholars foreground amateurs or insurgent modes of crafting the visual, seeking to denounce or to bear witness to the social and political crises in their respective contexts. Your ethnography invites us to think about a different model, in which industrial machinery and market correlation would lead us to a different analytical agenda.

Overall, thank you very much for your insightful study. Your manuscript provides a powerful framework for understanding how cinematic images are socially constructed, opening rich avenues for further research in the intersections of professional practice in culture and media, public visual narratives and indeed market dynamics.

Raúl Castro-Pérez Media and Communication Faculty Universidad Científica del Sur Lima, Peru

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- Castro Pérez, R. (2016). Cuentos de la cripta. *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual* No 27.
- García Espinoza, J. (1979). For an Imperfect Cinema. *Jumppcut* No 20.
- Larkin, B. (2008). *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Duke University Press.
- Quinteros, A. (2001). Entretejidos de imágenes. In: *Imaginación visual y cultura en el Perú*. Fondo Editorial PUCP.

- Poole, D. (1997). *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*. Princeton University Press.
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From: Lotte Hoek (Professor of Cultural Anthropology, University of Edinburgh) lotte.hoek@ed.ac.uk **Date:** Wednesday, 10 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar

Dear Julie and colleagues,

Thank you for a thought-provoking paper and the engaging comments that followed. I've read your account with interest and some nostalgia. Anyone who has spent time on soundstages and location shoots will rejoice in the familiarity of the ethnography you provide.

Your account of the tensions between technical and artistic work, and the associated values, the training of the gaze, hierarchical labour relations and changing regimes of value read persuasively as a description of the life of film and television production. It is a testament to your dogged fieldwork, despite being told no repeatedly (!). The ethnography of the industrial context of production that you unfold for us is highly familiar from those described by other anthropologists who have spent many hours on sets and in editing rooms as part of their ethnographies of filmmaking. These include the extensive work by Chihab el Khachab on the hierarchies of labour and the use of technical objects orienting the futures of film production in Egypt (2021), whose findings resonate profoundly with yours; but also Tejaswini Ganti's long-term ethnographic fieldwork of the changing nature of investment and hence labour conditions and professional identities in the Bombay film industry (2012); Rossoukh and Caton's edited volume on modularity as a central organising structure of film industrial production globally (2021); Anand Pandian's immersive account of the Tamil film industry and the question of creativity (2015); Sherry Ortner's engagement with the precarity of filmmakers in the US (2013); Katrien Pype's account of producing Pentecostal melodramas in Kinshasa (2012); and my own ethnography of below the line workers in the action cinema of Bangladesh (2014).

Given the long ethnographic record that lays out the practices you too describe, the question that arises, as Raúl notes in his detailed comments, is to what extent the industrial formation and its visual outcomes that you describe in your paper is distinctive of the place in which your fieldwork took place or whether indeed these hierarchies, forms, and communities of practice are modular. This of course is the age-old question about cinema's apparatus and its emplacement. As Brian Larkin recently phrased the question, "to what extent [are] media technologies ... autonomous forces that reorganize the environment around them in [and] to what extent are these technologies responsive to the milieu they grow within" (2021: 313). This is a significant question to revisit in the light of the work you have undertaken, and which, while not the focus of your analysis, suggests a number of rapid transitions in the technological and financial infrastructure of film industries globally. New software and new lenses are accompanied by new production conditions embodied by the brief mention of Netflix in your paper. What do these changing conditions mean for the nature of film photography beyond the questions about labour

hierarchies and divisions between craft and art that are important but not singular to our contemporary moment?

Further, your paper made me curious about the wider transnational networks in which the crews you follow are embedded. In light of contemporary production conditions shaped by new technologies and financial backers that you hint at in your paper, how do your findings relate to Kay Dickinson's analysis of the global networks of precarity and outsourced labour that marks contemporary "supply chain cinema" (2024)? What are the connections of your crews to the disaggregated production systems that take advantage of cheap labour, tax breaks and standardisation to produce the complex and composite film image that we see on our myriad screens? That is, how does your ethnographic work help us further the discussions in the anthropology of cinema for a new technological, financial, and industrial age?

Thank you again for sharing your work!

Lotte

References:

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- Ganti, Tejaswini. 2012. *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hoek, Lotte. 2014. *Cut-Pieces: Celluloid Obscenity and Popular Cinema in Bangladesh*. New York: Columbia University Press.
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From: John Postill (RMIT University) john.postill@rmit.edu.au **Date:** Wednesday, 10 December 2025 **Subject:** [Mediantthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar

To add a brief question to the great comments from Francisco, Raul and Lotte, I was wondering about the role of the French state (and the EU) in all of this, if any. As far as I can tell, you don't mention the state in your paper.

I've just revisited, after many years, A.J. Scott's (2000) *The cultural economy of cities: essays on the geography of image-producing industries* where he argues that French filmmaking—at least back in the late 1990s—is subject to 'intense regulatory scrutiny'.

He goes on to say that there is 'virtually no corner of the industry that is not touched in one way or another by the visible hand of the [French] state.'

Could you say something about this visible hand, Julie? How does the state's 'gaze' shape the image-making relationships you observed on the ground?

John

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Thursday, 11 December 2025 **Subject:** [Mediantro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar (*Reply to Raúl Castro*)

Dear Raul,

Thank you for your insightful comments. I have tried to show how professionals see and talk about images they make; my approach deviated from image analysis.

However, I note that this clarification is not sufficiently explicit in my text, and I will take your advice to write a paragraph specifying my point.

Unfortunately, I haven't seen all the movies you're referring to. The practices concern more visual items that will contribute to give a style to photography, but not to the photography as a whole. Because its composition involves many parameters that I have not been able to analyse. Moreover, the success of a film depends on mechanisms that go beyond its making process. I haven't analysed this in my research.

Talking about a French visual style in cinema from the making process has been delicate for me insofar as professionals I have met often use visual references of US movies in their work. Paradoxically, I noticed conflicts between professionals around the image making more "french" or more "US" concerning a film project.

Thank you again for your positive remarks!

Julie

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Thursday, 11 December 2025 **Subject:** [Mediantro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar (*Reply to Lotte Hoek*)

Dear Lotte,

Thank you for your comments and for these references, which I will be sure to consult.

To answer your first comment, regarding the specificity of my field, I would say that what creates a characteristic specific to the place I observed are the social relations and affinities between professionals. Hiring is done by co-optation in the French film industry; these social ties are determined by a strong social cohesion. The place, or the locality to use Arjun Appadurai's words, is made by social ties and the way in which everyone recognizes themselves in each other. On my fieldwork, I often heard professionals who explained to me that they had worked abroad and that work relations were different. Professionals manipulate technologies which condition the frameworks of experience but peer groups also shape modes of action and interaction. This does not mean that there is one "French" way of working, because these professionals are not representative of France.

Technic transformations have an impact on power relations which can have an effect on the organisation composition in the long term. But I have not been able to observe this type of phenomenon.

Unfortunately, I couldn't do ethnography on French films abroad, neither outside the Paris region. Mainly for financial reasons and difficulties in accessing the field. But some discussions with professionals reveal modes of exploitation of foreign professionals on film shoots abroad. Generally, when productions are almost entirely French, the production company hires department heads and their first assistants in France by co-optation, and all the junior technicians are hired near the film sets. The film sets are often sought because some of them are less expensive than French sets. Since there are few film shoots in the same location, these subordinate technicians do not find enough work and rarely move up the hierarchy. This makes me think that the exploitation of foreign (and inexpensive) technicians (and technicians from outside the Paris region) is longstanding. Which shows the centrality of Paris and France over countries with small film industries.

I hope my answers have been helpful and understandable.

Thank you again for your helpful comments.

Julie

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Thursday, 11 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar (*Reply to Francisco Osorio*)

Dear Francisco,

Thank you for your comments!

To answer your first comment, I can say that French cinema has embraced digital technology for about twenty years. Professionals have embraced tools by making comparisons between digital

and analog technology. This means that work relations have changed little, even if work processes have been partially modified. DITs are arriving on film sets for only a few years. It is clearly a new profession but the digital production line was already in place before DITs. Their ambiguous presence disturbs power relations. However, I have not gathered enough data on the possible transformation of the production process due to the presence of DITs. They are not always hired on projects, for budgetary reasons, but also because some directors of photography don't want them on their team.

The question of the place of AI in photography making is very interesting. My fieldwork ends in 2022 and I hadn't heard of AI until that date. It is only in 2023 that I heard about the Hollywood writers' strike concerning, among other things, the place of AI in their work. It is at the same date that I spoke to a respondent met on the street who talked to me about AI and the fear among professionals of losing their jobs. So, I didn't have the time to investigate this question. One of the fears among professionals is that their jobs will be taken over by machines. One might wonder how these technologies will be embraced or rejected. What is interesting for me to study for future research is the content of fears about AI, the conflicts that this technology may generate among professionals and its ability to disrupt professionals' self-image. The expression "machines will replace us" reflects a fear of losing control over one's own actions, while AI raises political questions about who manufactures this technology and for what purposes.

Thank you again for these enlightening comments.

Julie

From: Tom McDonald (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Hong Kong) mcdonald@hku.hk **Date:** Friday, 12 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar

Dear Julie,

Thanks for sharing this illuminating paper. The end of semester 'crunch' means that I am only just able to make time to read it and prepare comments. I must also confess that I haven't yet been able to review the (no doubt valuable) suggestions made by other discussants, so forgive me if my contributions echo points that other persons have already made.

I really enjoyed reading your text. The paper, and the photographic images that complement it, beautifully depict the busy-yet-focused activity permeating movie sets in Paris, and how the relationships that are 'acted out' in such venues become mediated in very material ways. The paper also sparked three key thoughts in my mind, which I share below.

1. On the distinction between 'art' and 'technique', which is the motor powering your analysis, I wondered whether your participants ever expressed this distinction themselves using such terms directly? Furthermore, it is mentioned that "The separation between 'art' and 'technique' is the product of a social and discursive history within the French film

sector" (pg. 6). I'm really curious if you might expand on what that history actually was, the social reasons for why it came about, and to what extent it might have previously been challenged at times even prior to the widespread proliferation of digital filmmaking technologies? What was unique about the French film sector that made this distinction so pronounced?

2. The discussion of "hierarchies" and even "deviations from the rules" almost conjured up an image in my mind of a Weberian bureaucracy (forgive me, I've worked in a sociology department for over a decade!). However, the ethnographic description itself did not particularly feel like your participants were individuals trapped in an "iron cage" of bureaucracy, especially given that these project-based *intermittents* were constantly moving from production to production and, in so doing, having to re-establish their social roles and positions. Rather, your description pointed towards social actors who were aware of the art/technical distinctions and intentionally sought to 'traverse' or 'blur' them. I wonder if shifting the language towards one of 'negotiations' rather than 'hierarchies', and 'norms' rather than 'rules', might aid the analysis?
3. I would love to know a little bit more about the extent to which this art/technique distinction in image production, and its subsequent muddying owing to the adoption of digital production technologies, might be unique to the French (or even Parisian) context. Or how much might it reflect an increasingly globalised film production industry, and the standardization of formats and technologies that propel that? Does film production occurring in other parts of the world share these distinctions? To what extent do the specificities of French culture, employment relations and film economies influence these dynamics?

Overall, I must reiterate how exciting this paper is. I look forward to one day seeing it in published form.

All best, Tom

Tom McDonald Associate Professor Department of Sociology The University of Hong Kong
mcdonald@hku.hk | <http://sociology.hku.hk/mcdonald>

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Friday, 12 December 2025 **Subject:**
[Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar (*Reply to John Postill – French state*)

Hi John,

Thank you for your reference to A.J. Scott about the French state. It is true that I don't mention it in this text. I mention the state in my thesis to reflect the place of cinema in the economy and the French cultural landscape; I also talk about it in my Master's dissertation that I completed a few years ago. In that dissertation, I say that the role of the state is upstream of the situations I observed during my PhD. The state intervenes in the regulation of financing mechanisms and in the direct financing of film projects. The French film financing system is composed of the Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC)—that is, the state—but also French television

channels (public and private), French Regions, film distributors and banks dedicated to cinema. The CNC (the state) finances film projects on the basis of specific criteria, including the genre of the film. The genre of the film includes a type of visual rendering. In my Master's dissertation, I show that these criteria provide a framework for the nature of the project. But I cannot claim that the state controls the entire filmmaking process.

Best,

Julie

From: Julie Peruch julieperuch@gmail.com **Date:** Friday, 12 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Re: Julie Peruch e-seminar (*Reply to Tom McDonald*)

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your comments.

To answer briefly, I would say that professionals have clearly expressed the separation between art and technique during my fieldwork and my interviews. They are formed in art departments or technical departments. The French film industry has been built by borrowing elements from theater and literature (so considered as "art"). French cinema has also been built from photography and cinematographic technical innovation since the beginning of the 20th century and it was perceived as "technical." However, a part of the visual effect of cinema comes from theater's scenic effects, and both are called "technical" effects. Concerning photography in the cinema industry, technique refers to the handling of image capture and processing tools. Art and technique are two terms that are a historical construction insofar as professionals who manipulate tools don't have power over decisions about the aesthetics of photography. This deprivation of aesthetic decision is clearly the mark of a social class distinction. Technical actions made by technicians are considered as subaltern and devoid of interest by artists and artistic institutions. The director of photography occupies a technician-artist position according to some professionals I have interviewed. All image assistants have an artistic formation in the direction of photography, even if they occupy the technician position of image assistant. They can express their artistic formation or gaze on the sly, during certain circumstances, but never officially. It is often about this kind of decision, and border-crossing, that image assistants bypass the hierarchy.

Even if professionals go from one project to another, they often stay together in the same team most of the time. A director of photography trusts more the assistant they are accustomed to working with and tends to be more receptive to their proposals. Therefore, the director of photography accepts more easily bypassing the hierarchy. As you say, assistants are often looking to cross the separation between art and technique, and to withdraw from their technician position.

If I used the terms of "hierarchy" and "rules," it is to signify that relationships of domination are clearly explicit and consciously govern working relationships between professionals. Thank you also for your Weberian analysis. I will take note of it in subsequent reformulations.

I must admit that I have not found any bibliographical references that explain this distinction in other parts of the world. But I will take note of this for the construction of my article or chapter.

Thank you again for your enriching comments and the interest in my work.

Julie

From: John Postill (RMIT University) john.postill@rmit.edu.au **Date:** Tuesday, 16 December 2025 **Subject:** [Medianthro] Julie Peruch e-seminar ending now

Dear all

Our e-seminar on Julie Peruch's working paper is now over. Special thanks to Julie and also to all participants for making an effort to contribute at such a busy time of year!

If you'd like to present a paper or would like to recommend someone for 2026 please drop me a line. We already have one presenter lined up but it'd be great to have a few others as well.

In addition, if there's a media anthropology-related topic you'd like to discuss via the mailing list we'd like to hear from you. In fact, you can go ahead and start a conversation of your own accord; that's what the list is for.

All the best

John

Document compiled from the EASA Medianthro mailing list archive, December 2025. 14 public emails | Participants: John Postill, Julie Peruch, Francisco Osorio, Raúl Castro-Pérez, Lotte Hoek, Tom McDonald