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Report from SCMS: Friday, AKA Humpday in LA

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Report from SCMS: Friday, aka Humpday in LA

March 20, 2010

By [Tim Anderson](#) |



The third day of SCMS 2010 has passed and Friday is our humpday. And, yes, I am over the hump with some midway thoughts...

1) SCMS is big and small at the same time – This is my fifteenth year since my first SCMS and I see a lot of the same faces I have seen over those years in the hallways but less so in the seminar rooms. The effect of growth and specialization within the organization has effectively made it possible for TV scholars to see nothing but TV panels, film scholars to pursue their interests, and so on. On Friday my interest in sound and music drove me to three panels, one on radio, one on music in TV and film (in which I presented) and another on music in Japan's Imperial Cinema of the late 1930s. The care and quality of the work was terrific, however I fear the serendipitous connections that come from a lack of choice are being lost through emergent specialization. No doubt, this should be a topic for future conference committees who wish to foster both specialization and cross-pollination of thoughts and ideas.

2) Workshops are worth their weight in noisy buzz – Following the #scms hashtag (by the way I tweet at #scms and #scms10 as I believe that the #scms10 is simply more specific for this conference), the postings for the workshop I was in, "The Future of the SCMS conference" made quite a splash. This despite the lack of WIFI and in-and-out phone connectivity. It was easily the best attended most robust workshop I have ever been involved with and the importance of it will come as attendees become more involved through their demands and concerns. As someone who really hates conferencing (the logistics of travel and uncomfortable lodgings, combined with a longstanding aversion/anxiety over obliged socialization make four days in another town quite stressful), I have found that new modes of social networking extremely beneficial. In fact, Twitter has singlehandedly made my experience conferencing one of great joy by giving me a new mode of association. The workshop allowed me and others to bring this up and demand adequate WiFi. As we will see, this kind of noise is no substitute for organized engagement, but I believe that what result from this and other "noisy workshops" such as yesterday's other most tweeted moment, "The future of publishing workshop", will most likely be a spur for change.

3) The future of SCMS will be one of more transparency – SCMS is not an evil organization, nor is it secretive. However, to scholars like myself, someone who has wanted to be involved, it is

formidable because it has never been clear to me how to be involved. Nominations to committees seem to require self-promotion, which I tend to find an unseemly necessity, and the question of “how do I get involved?” seems to betray a careerism that scholars of all levels must engage. Something that the “great economic reset” is offering us is a new moment of valuation and we must make ourselves valuable. The best way to do this will be with robust metrics and the exposition of best scholarly and career practices. For example, I am happy that it looks like the executive committee is interested and actively pursuing a membership census to better understand and promote who we are. I am openly advocating for a survey that better understands a variety of metrics devoted to understanding the value gained from conferencing and precisely how members invest in the experience. Having such information at our disposal will not only allow us to articulate to administrators what the value of conferencing is, but also for us, as an organization, to be exacting and honest as to what we need to value and let go of over time.

Finally, my favorite comment of the time came from a graduate student who noted that she was looking for mentoring and career guidance from a future conference experience. Despite what many may believe, these questions of “how do I go forward?” and “how can I contribute?” still feel like secrets to many of us. While not every conversation need be recorded and every favor recorded, it feels like there is a demand for a new openness, an openness and transparency that will better enable our members and organization to operate and protect their interests. It is an attitudinal change that I have never felt before at any other SCMS conference. Stay tuned...