

# “Something Old, Something New”

An essay on Sight & Sound Film  
by Ginny Mohler



When I took Sight & Sound Film with Professor Rick Litvin, it was the fall of 2007. The Panasonic HVX was at the high end of digital video cameras, recording to HDV tape at a maximum resolution of 1080i. A 400GB external hard drive went for \$399. The cutting edge of editing software was Final Cut Pro 6. The first generation iPhone had just made its debut, and while the OS1 operating system couldn't support outside applications, it *was* compatible with the iPod Touch. (The OS1 is now designated as “*Obselete, unsupported.*”) In sharp relief to the literal weight of the new tech above (those hard drives were heavy) there was the ARRI-S.

The ARRI-S had three lenses to choose from. Wide, medium, close. Without a mag (as ours were) it could hold up to 100 feet of film, which equated to two and a half minutes of footage. If you shot reversal film (as we did), the processed footage would come back as a positive, not a negative, and you could hold it up to the light to check if your exposure had worked.

Then you'd go to the edit room on the 11th floor with the Steenbecks, thread the footage through, flip the light on, and watch the frames flick by. The room was constantly full of the sounds of film being cut and taped and recut and rewound and fast forwarded. It was louder than the other edit rooms, where students worked on computers with headphones. There was no undo button here. It was *measure twice, cut once*; or for many of us, measure six times, cut once, play it back, retape it, cut six frames farther down, play it again, and live with a choice that may or may not be two frames away from perfection; splicing tape can only support so many iterations.

Everyone in Professor Litvin's class was part of a four-person crew; we chose collaborators at the start of the semester. There would be five assignments; each one a short film to be shot on the ARRI-S and cut on the Steenbeck, before being projected in class. Each crew member would participate in every production; so, in the fall of 2007, our 4 person crew produced 20 short films together. The films we screened in class every week were shot in New York City in the early 21st century... made with film technology from the 1930s. The first 3 assignments were "mit-out sound" or MOS; the 4th assignment introduced sound. It was the dawn of the talkies. I was there.



"Something Old, Something New," 2007

The 5th assignment had no parameters, as I recall. It was the final film of the semester, and the course. December 2007. Midterms were over, final exams were around the corner for other classes. There was a prop closet at the Todman Center soundstage where I found an old, broken ARRI-S. It was a mirror of the one our crew had been issued, except that two of its lenses were gouged out, giving it an eerie, plaintive gaze. Glass or no glass, it was still staring straight at you: Wide, medium, close. I thought about Maya Deren. And 8 ½. And making films.

My final film was called "*Something Old, Something New*." I edited it twice: once for the final screening in class, and once again, after I was given the chance by Professor Litvin to take an incomplete and do a recut. I'm glad I did, even though I didn't know how to transform the film from what it was into what it wanted to be. I untaped almost every splice. I don't remember when using black leader to throw the room into darkness became the key. I think it was one of my crewmates who brought *Singin' in the Rain* to my attention when I had picture locked, but not sound. While the audio I sampled from it, "*A talking picture!*" could have been the first piece of the puzzle that was making this film, it was one of the last. Sight first, then sound.

