

# James Fenwick

Co-editor of *Studying Unmade, Unseen and Unreleased Film and Television*

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James Fenwick is a senior lecturer in creative and cultural industries at The University of Manchester. His research focus is on the history and heritage of British film, television and popular culture. His Ph.D. examined the business of filmmaking and the global financial, production, distribution and exhibition practices of film producers through a case study of Stanley Kubrick.

What inspired you to focus on unmade, unseen and unreleased film and television projects?

I've come across so many archives filled with hundreds and hundreds of unmade films and television projects. But so little has been written about them. It made sense to try and tackle this subject with an edited collection like this to try and think about why there are so many unmade films, the ways they can be researched and understood and the wider meaning for film and television history.

For readers new to the topic, how would you describe what this book is about in a few sentences?

The book presents a series of case studies of unmade film and television projects as a means of thinking about film history and about the wider theoretical and methodological frameworks needed to try and understand and research them. It's a guide for anyone new to the topic, anyone curious about unmade films and for anyone already seriously invested in researching this topic.

Why do you think unfinished or unreleased projects are important for understanding film and television history?

What we actually know about the film and television industries and how they operate is actually very little. It seems like most projects are ultimately never made for one reason or another, so there is an unwritten history of film and television out there. Studying the unmade can fundamentally reframe our understanding of these industries, the people that work in them, and the reasons why we have the films and television shows that we do.

Was there a chapter or case study in the book that particularly surprised or challenged you?

The chapters on creative practice are fascinating. Those chapters present case studies on how to build empathetic bridges between fragments of the unmade in archives and modern audiences through script readings, festivals of the unmade, recreations and many other ways as well.

What does the book reveal about how decisions in the industry affect which projects get made or released?

There is no one reason why so many projects are left unmade or unreleased. It's tempting to think that there is, but it's much more complicated and nuanced than that. Instead, I think that what the case studies do indicate is that the industries often operate in a quite illogical and irrational manner, condemning projects to development hell out of fear of failure. In that respect, an aversion to risk-taking does seem to be a common problem that scuppers many projects, though it's far from the only reason.

How did working with multiple contributors shape the direction of the book?

Working with multiple authors from across a range of backgrounds, disciplines and regions allowed us to present a fairly comprehensive collection that encompasses differing perspectives, methods and national industries. There's much more work to be done, of course, but it's a start.

What kinds of readers do you hope will find this book most useful or inspiring?

I think most people interested in film history will find this book useful. We hope it offers new ways to think about film history and maybe even inspire new approaches to researching it.

How do you see this field of research developing in the future?

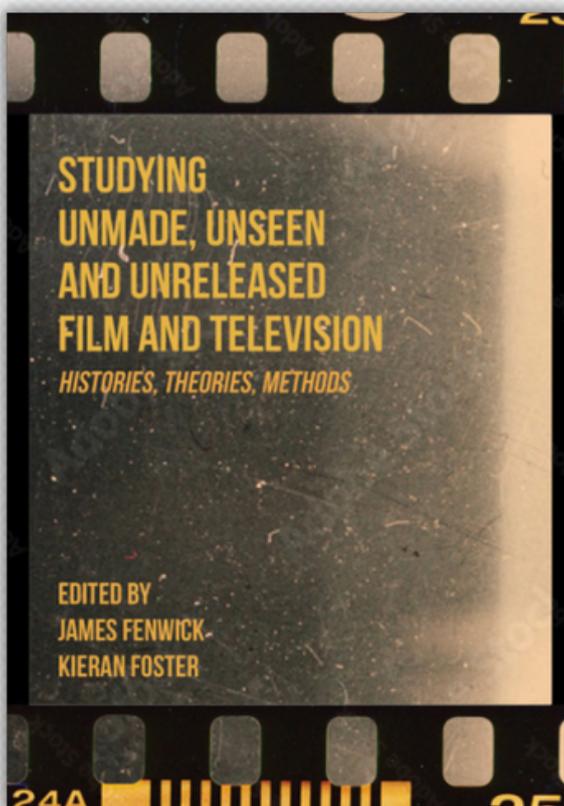
I think the field will primarily develop through case studies for now. There are so many unmade projects in archives, many of which haven't been catalogued. Building up a picture of the scale of the unmade is vital.

Has working on this book changed how you think about unfinished or unsuccessful projects?

Working on the book – and on the unmade in general – has reframed my understanding of the notions of 'success' and 'failure'. Just because something wasn't produced doesn't mean it was a failure.

What would you most like readers to take away after finishing the book?

I would like readers, on finishing the book, to be left with the realisation that the film history that we have is only the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more that we don't know.



*Studying Unmade, Unseen,  
and Unreleased Film and  
Television: Histories,  
Theories, Methods*

Edited by  
James Fenwick  
and Kieran Foster