

The Tripod Metaphor

(The essential role of non-profits in the infrastructure of the motion picture art/science/industrial complex.)

- **Honorary societies** are primarily responsible for the “ethos” and the excellence of the professional practice of their institution and the profession they serve. These institutions are the repository of the ideals, ethics, aspirations to excellence, and essentially the “conscience” of a profession. E.g. AMPAS, ASC, BAFTA, SMPTE, VES, etc.
- **Guilds** and **unions** are primarily responsible for the personal well-being, in terms of income, health and working conditions of the practitioners of a profession. E.g. DGA, SAG/AFTRA, WGA, ICG, IATSE etc.
- **Trade associations** are primarily responsible for the commercial well-being of the corporate entities of the industry. E.g. MPAA, NATO, AMPTP, etc.

Together, these non-profit entities comprise the essential three “legs” of a tripod which supports the larger entity of the for-profit art/science/industrial complex.

While ultimately they all share a common goal: the commonweal of the art/science/industrial complex, they necessarily must remain discrete entities, as fulfilling their specific responsibilities demands a degree of healthful “adversarial tension” between them. Just as with a tripod, it is this “adversarial tension” when appropriately deployed, that provides the equilibrium necessary to keep the whole enterprise stable and upright. The lack of any one of them, or *inappropriate* “adversarial tension” will destabilize the whole. Thus, our metaphor teaches: each leg of a tripod provides just enough force, and no more, against the other two, as to keep the whole assemblage both stable and very strong; a mutually beneficial and essential alliance.

Of the three institutions, the latter two, each usually having to satisfy the disparate goals of several constituencies within their own camp, are subject to internecine “real politick” conflicts, often leading to “alligator” syndrome. Thus

it falls to the honorary societies, whose simpler ethos is essentially “excellence,” to hold them all to a high standard and remind them that their common goal is to “drain the swamp.”

Of course, a mutual understanding of their role as a tripod is a prerequisite to their being a successful tripod.

- Jonathan Erland, VES