

Broadcasting Taste:
A History of Film Talk, International Criticism, and English-Canadian Media

A Thesis
In the Department
of
Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Communication Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

December 2016

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Broadcasting Taste: A History of Film Talk, International Criticism, and English-Canadian Media

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This dissertation examines the history of international and Canadian popular film criticism. Though rarely addressed by media historians, film criticism in print and broadcast has served a variety of functions and mandates related to different periods, places, and institutions: nation building, cultural uplift, public education, popular entertainment, film promotion, and an entry point to the public sphere. In particular, I consider “film talk” in broadcast media as a popularizing force that has invited increasingly broad and diverse audiences to engage with and participate in local and global cinema.

Applying film history, cultural theory, and cultural studies methods to a series of examples, I explore film talk first as a form of cultural uplift on CBC Radio in the late 1940s, then as public education on TVOntario in the mid-1970s, then as a source of satire on *SCTV* in the late 1970s and 1980s, and finally as an amateur hobby in digital podcasts. These case studies demonstrate that film critics in popular culture have been a site of both cultural authority and anti-intellectual resistance. In Canada, this tension has been further complicated by implications for cultural policy and national cinema more generally. Moreover, the case studies illustrate the fact that film talk in English-Canada has failed to mobilize gender and ethnic diversity in a way that would make it meaningful to contemporary Canadians. Even as film criticism was made accessible in broadcast formats, parodied on television, and “democratized” on the internet, the faces and voices of critical authority remained remarkably consistent.

The precarious profession and status of culture critics has become a prominent topic in the press in the past decade. This thesis shows that popular film critics have indeed always had to respond to threats to their legitimacy, whether from populist backlash or new technological formats. The newest challenge for film critics in Canada is to adapt to—and help forge—a more plural cinema culture in which diverse voices can both speak and truly be heard.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank:

Charles R. Acland, an educator, supervisor, and ally of great integrity, compassion, wisdom, and brilliance. I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life.

The members of my dissertation examination committee: Haidee Wasson, Monika Kin Gagnon, William Buxton, and Peter Urquhart. I'm honoured by your participation and suggestions.

For research funding and recognition, Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et Culture, Concordia Department of Communication Studies, Concordia School of Graduate Studies, Film Studies Association of Canada, Hellenic Scholarship Foundation, and Champlain College – Lennoxville. Such opportunities are essential for making education accessible to all.

The exceptional librarians and archivists who make the research world go 'round; in particular, Ken Puley (CBC Radio Archives), Eve Goldin (TIFF Film Reference Library), Lee Ann St-Onge (Bishop's University), and JoAnne Stober (Library and Archives Canada). I hope to work with you all again soon.

For opening research doors they could have easily left closed: Risa Shuman, Thom Ernst, Orize Pratley, John Porter, Martha Davis, Shirley Hughes, Barry Chapman, Ed Conroy, Mark Clamen, Kevin Courier, Richard Crouse, James Borsa, Barbara Goslawski, Dominique Trudel, Gerald Peary, and Harry Shearer. You each represent an important and exciting part of this adventure.

Louis Pelletier, for showing particular enthusiasm and support for my work and for giving me the best research leads.

For precious fortification, inspiration, advice, laughter, and memorable work dates: my beloved COMS cohort, Hiromi Inokuchi, Elaine Young, Heather Gibb, Sara Swain, Lina Shoumarova, Danny Baum, Diane Dechief, Kat Sark, Papagena Robbins, Andrew Covert, Kristen Alfaro, Theresa Scandiffio, Lisa Schmidt, Rebecca Schwartz, and Jonas Goliash. You are all my family.

All the colleagues I delight to run into and learn from at conferences.

My friends at Champlain–Lennoxville, for cheering me on in the final stretch.

For their unshakeable belief in me, their extraordinary patience, their sacrifices, and their treasured lessons, my big-hearted mother, Celine Tremblay, and my tenacious father (and editor), Andreas Constantinides.

Sailor, for making me play every day.

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Introduction: Why Does Canada Need Movie Critics?

Middlebrow Movie Love in Mississauga

In my youth, I read movie reviews instead of watching movies. My family did not have the First Choice premium movie network or a lavish home theatre. Going out to the cinema was not a popular pastime in my family and friend circles. Besides, as a bookish child, my film tastes leaned toward the highbrow, but the art house fare that appealed to me was distressingly absent from Mississauga, Ontario, multiplexes and video stores. So instead I read about and longed for the movies. I enjoyed vivid, feisty film reviews by Jay Scott and Rick Groen in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, which was the classiest cultural object to enter our home. I took the critics at their word and believed that every four-star film I did not get to see was a minor tragedy. My relationship with reviews was aspirational; reviews permitted me to participate symbolically in a community of film lovers who appreciated innovative art, even when it came with subtitles. This community seemed worldly and sophisticated to me, a dimension apart from strip malls and subdivisions. Film critics talked about films as potentially transformational, and I was in the market for transformation.

As a popular art form, cinema is widely assumed—including by scholars—to be accessible to everyone. In actuality, various forms of cinema culture reach different people at different times and in different locations, if at all. Blockbusters have the broadest reach thanks to enormous cross-platform marketing campaigns and global simultaneous release schedules. Much of cinema culture, however, is dispersed across a variety of sites, catering to, but also constituting distinct, segmented audiences. Though film distribution reaches farther through online outlets, and ideas and information about cinema circulate freely in the blogosphere, users still face regional limitations (for instance, restricted streaming services in Canada), and discussions tend to coalesce around a small number of central sites. As the primarily Toronto-based case studies in this thesis demonstrate, English-Canadian cinema culture, already inundated by Hollywood, largely moves from the centre to the periphery, from the urban to the suburban and the rural. As such, film culture is not equally accessible to all, even in advanced entertainment economies like those of Canada and the United States. Besides, to the extent that cinema is democratic (itself a contentious claim), *writing* about cinema reaches primarily middle-class audiences.

In my case, my relationship with film culture grew out of newspaper movie reviews and was nourished by an ecosystem of film commentary on radio and television. Television programs like *Siskel & Ebert* and TVOntario's *Saturday Night at the Movies* were part of the televisual flow of my youth and helped foster my sense that movies were exciting and important.¹ I may have missed out on premium movie channels, but my family did have an extended cable package that included specialty channels like Bravo and Showcase, which broadcast films regularly. In the final couple of years of high school, I was particularly taken with the *Showcase Revue*, which featured actors Chas Lawther and Valerie Buhagiar and film critic Cameron Bailey, screening and discussing a different indie film each week. What I missed at the art house theatre, I could now sometimes catch on specialty TV. The Showcase channel, a partnership between Alliance film distributor and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), was licensed in 1994 and based its programming on approximately 24 percent CBC content, 11 percent content from the Alliance film catalogue, and the rest from independent Canadian producers.² Access to the Alliance library meant that some films aired only a few months after their theatrical release. For my part, I would sometimes record films from the Saturday night program then share them with my school friends. Once in a while, I invited a group of friends to watch one of my pirated VHS tapes and we would all chat about the film afterward. The repurposing of an American underground theatrical film into a Canadian Saturday night broadcast into a teenager's bootleg party in the suburbs is an example of what Ramon Lobato calls informal distribution practices, which, as he argues, can help correct the cultural exclusions inscribed in commercial distribution practices, particularly as related to access.³

At one gathering we watched Larry Clark's controversial drama *Kids* (1995), and the film fuelled weeks of discussion and in-jokes. Its theatrical release had received mixed reviews, but few would disagree with Roger Ebert's statement that "*Kids* is the kind of movie that needs to be

¹ The film review show hosted by Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert changed titles several times over the years. During the 1990s, the program was called simply *Siskel & Ebert*.

² "Archived - Decision CRTC 94-280," *Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission*, June 6, 1994, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1994/DB94-280.HTM#archived>.

³ Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15.

talked about afterward.”⁴ In our high school bubble, we were oblivious to the moral panic around the film, which had earned an NC-17 rating in the United States and won Showcase a hearing at the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC).⁵ It had not struck me as remarkable that such a caustic film had been beamed, uncensored, into my childhood home; instead I was taken by the film’s originality and terrifying candour. The *Showcase Revue* curated its programming carefully, and though some of the films were provocative, the hosts consistently framed them with informed conversation. In the case of *Kids*, the CBSC notes, “the airing of the movie was both preceded and followed by a sober discussion of the realities depicted in the film between the host of the *Showcase Revue* series and various authorities on teenage sexual practices, drug use and AIDS.”⁶ The broadcast also featured numerous viewer advisories, as was common televisual practice. Warnings from the old guard aside, my viewing parties were to me opportunities to talk about movies in a social and vital way. Like *The Globe and Mail* reviews, *Showcase Revue* afforded me glimpses of and limited access to a vibrant film culture that always seemed to be happening elsewhere, just out of reach.

The 1990s were exciting years for American indie cinema. Film scholar Michael Z. Newman refers to this period as the “Sundance-Miramax era,” and it can be characterized by “the increasing popularisation of independent cinema as a particular brand of ‘quality’ filmmaking.”⁷ The growth and spread of film festivals in the United States and Canada created an exhibition circuit for and revived an interest in world cinema as well, particularly art films from Europe and Asia.⁸ This was also a rich time for Canadian cinema, which fell somewhere between the categories of indie and foreign cinema, even among Canadians, who, Liz Czach claims, view Canadian cinema as “other.”⁹ Filmmakers Deepa Mehta, Denis Villeneuve, and

⁴ Roger Ebert, “Reviews: Kids,” *RogerEbert.com*, July 28, 1995, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/kids-1995>.

⁵ “Showcase Television Re the Movie Kids,” *CBSC Decisions*, February 3, 1999, <http://www.cbcs.ca/english/decisions/1999/990203d.php>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1; Geoff King, Claire Molloy, and Yannis Tzioumakis, “Introduction,” in *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

⁸ Newman, *Indie*, 49.

⁹ Liz Czach, “Film Festivals, Programming, and the Building of a National Cinema,” *The Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (2004): 81.

Atom Egoyan emerged as globally recognized auteurs, while David Cronenberg continued his transition from genre provocateur to “serious artist.” All of them earned accolades for their films at the Cannes Film Festival in the 1990s. Closer to home, what Sundance was to American independent cinema, the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) was to Canadian cinema, offering a visible platform for small-scale films like *Léolo* (Jean-Claude Lauzon, 1992), *Margaret’s Museum* (Mort Ransen, 1995), *Kissed* (Lynne Stopkewich, 1996), *New Waterford Girl* (Allan Moyle, 1999), and *Emporte-moi* (Léa Pool, 1999), most of which premiered at the festival. In 1998, *Variety* reported that TIFF was “second only to Cannes in terms of high-profile pics, stars and market activity.”¹⁰

The “mainstreaming” of indie cinema and the rising reputation of Canadian feature films were both important trends during my “adolescent window,” to borrow a term from David Bordwell to describe the powerful influence our teenaged cultural pastimes have on our adult tastes.¹¹ Both these 1990s trends came together in the *Showcase Revue*, which, with its close links to CBC and other Canadian media producers, featured plenty of “CanCon” (Canadian content). In fact, Showcase had made an initial commitment to licence “all suitable Canadian drama made by independent producers since 1984.”¹² This included subtitled Québécois films packaged for an anglophone audience. The program’s eloquent hosts treated each low-budget indie film, Canadian or otherwise, as a newly discovered gem. While not all the films delivered on the hype, they certainly added spice to the homogeneous cinematic landscape of 1990s suburban Ontario, where megaplexes and Blockbuster video stores simply reflected Hollywood’s image. The programming on *Showcase Revue* offered me an escape from this hegemony and an entryway to cinematic diversity, as represented in indie, foreign, and Canadian films, which I came to understand as aesthetically and narratively varied, yet somehow equivalent to each other in terms of (superior) cultural value. My understanding was based at least in part on the types of film talk that surrounded the programming and modelled the language of cinema culture. I grew accustomed to paying attention to directors’ names, since directors were presented as authors of

¹⁰ Brendan Kelly and Monica Roman, “New Luster for Toronto,” *Variety*, September 21, 1998, 9.

¹¹ David Bordwell, “The Adolescent Window,” *Observations on Film Art*, November 17, 2007, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2007/11/17/the-adolescent-window/>.

¹² “Decision CRTC 94-280.”

film art. Pierre Bourdieu observed that in 1960s France an individual's knowledge of film directors was an index of their social station that functioned independently of how often they actually watched films. High status or educated individuals were simply socialized to notice directors' names, following high art conventions, particularly at a time when art cinema had considerable cachet.¹³ I intuited this connection as a teen (it would still be many years before I learned about auteur theory and its detractors). Familiarity with the names of reputable film critics would come next. In such ways, film talk in the media shaped my own casual and social forms of film talk. My friends and I used that talk as a tool of distinction to help us explore and articulate our tastes. Thanks to the examples set by *The Globe and Mail* and *Showcase Revue*, I came to see independent cinema and Canadian film as symbols of good taste and valuable to a young person's intellectual cultivation.

Even while cultural studies was dismantling taste hierarchies and arguing for the legitimacy of popular culture, my early exposure to film culture reinforced the stereotype that foreign and independent films were of higher quality and social value than big-budget American cinema. Canadian movies fit comfortably within this prestige category. Jennifer Vanderburgh notes the persistent binary that marginalizes Canadian films: "Canadian cinema is considered intrinsically to oppose mainstream Hollywood narrative films."¹⁴ George Melnyk warns, "While Canadian cinema continues to be embraced solely by the art-house cinema universe, it remains marginalized."¹⁵ The notion that Canadian cinema is out of touch with popular culture also manifests negatively in expressions of what film historian Peter Morris calls "pessimistic nationalism."¹⁶ Demonstrating "cultural cringe,"¹⁷ a concept from Australian literary criticism, Canadian critics and audiences are thought to reject domestic films because they expect or find

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Routledge, 1984), 19; Raymond J. Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie! Films and Critics in American Culture* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 166.

¹⁴ Jennifer Vanderburgh, "Ghostbusted! Popular Perceptions of English-Canadian Cinema," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 82.

¹⁵ George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 234–235.

¹⁶ Peter Morris, "The Uncertain Trumpet: Defining a (Canadian) Art Cinema in the Sixties," *CineAction!*, no. 16 (Spring 1989): 12.

¹⁷ The concept was proposed in Arthur Phillips, "The Cultural Cringe," *Meanjin* 9, no. 1 (1950): 299–302.

them to be esoteric, boring, or poorly made, particularly in comparison to sleek Hollywood offerings.¹⁸ The flipside of cringe is that the characteristics believed to set Canadian films apart may be considered advantageous; numerous critics have championed Canadian cinema as distinctive, quirky, authentic, and smart—qualities associated with prestige indie films. A related school of thought likes to point out that Canadian films seldom triumph at the box office but frequently shine on the festival circuit.¹⁹

Film scholar Michael Dorland ascertained that the founding scholars and critics of Canadian film studies, in establishing the new discipline and its canon and institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, acted as ambassadors of particular views of Canadian cultural identity and national cinema. In effect, “Their work as educators, whether with students, with cultural bureaucrats and politicians, or with radio and television audiences, was truly that of public intellectuals.”²⁰ These representatives treated cinema production and distribution as a nation-building activity. Film critics and journalists are some of the most vocal figures in debates about Canadian movies, the industry, and cultural policy. In studying discursive patterns in Canadian popular criticism from the 1940s to 1960s, Morris found that the traditional critics from major publications favoured conventional but well-crafted narrative films that transcended the Hollywood studio system, while still achieving universal appeal.²¹ According to these standards, Canadian films of the 1960s were always found to be wanting—too formally unorthodox or regionally distinct to achieve broad or even critical success. Yet, Morris acknowledges that certain critics, particularly Gerald Pratley, championed the specificities of Canadian cinema from

¹⁸ Film critic Geoff Pevere describes this tendency in criticism of Canadian cinema in “The Rites (and Wrongs) of the Elder, or The Cinema We Got: The Critics We Need,” *Cinema Canada*, no. 120–21 (1985): 38.

¹⁹ The centrality of foreign and domestic film festivals in the distribution and branding of Canadian cinema is explored in Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Liz Czach, “Film Festivals, Programming, and the Building of a National Cinema,” *The Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (2004): 76–88; CBC News reported on the 2015 success of Canadian films at festivals in “Sundance Film Festival Kicks Off with Record Number of Canadian Films,” *CBC News*, January 22, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/sundance-film-festival-kicks-off-with-record-number-of-canadian-films-1.2927890>.

²⁰ Michael Dorland, *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 6.

²¹ Morris, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 8.

the start. The responses of Pratley and other critics to the vexed question of Canadian cinema, and the strategies these public observers used to promote their views, are at the heart of this thesis.

Informed by the protectionist programming practices of media institutions and by boosters like Pratley, I came to understand Canadian films—both English and French—as often superior to their American counterparts, at least in some of the ways that mattered. It helped of course that I genuinely enjoyed most of the Canadian feature films I watched. My interest in Canadian cinema lingered after my adolescent window closed, throughout my undergraduate studies and in my time working in film distribution and at the Toronto International Film Festival, an organization that continues to struggle nobly to promote Canadian cinema at a time when the national cinema framework has been persuasively undermined. As a master's student in film studies, I too began questioning and critiquing the institutional and rhetorical positioning that undergirded a unified, nationalist construction of what was in reality a set of texts and practices of production, circulation, and reception profoundly differentiated along regional, ethnic, linguistic, class, and even taste lines. Next, as a doctoral student in communication studies, I incorporated additional approaches and literature to advance my inquiry. This thesis thereby continues my search for a deeper understanding of Canada's heterogeneous film cultures and discourses and the persistent centralizing forces that shape those cultures into a national cinema framework.

The Bigger Picture

This thesis argues that popular film criticism can be elemental in facilitating people's access and participation in cinema culture, both through the consumption and the production of criticism. As ubiquitous as cinema may be and as far reaching the hand of the global film industry, film commentary is even more pervasive and reaches where films themselves sometimes cannot. It thereby constitutes a key tool for public engagement with film culture. Popular film criticism is typified by newspaper reviews of recent releases, clustered just before the weekend and with the goal of helping people decide what movies to see. But this conventional view conceals countless other material forms and the fact that criticism functions alternately as promotional, entertaining, informative, and provocative, often at the same time. It

comes from various sources (journalism's "critical industry,"²² academic film studies, studio marketing departments, and movie fans and ordinary filmgoers), appears in myriad sites (from daily newspapers to alternative weeklies, from national public broadcasting to community access programming, and from massive aggregator websites like Rotten Tomatoes to ultra-niche blogs and podcasts) and attends to competing investments and interests. Criticism in the broadest sense, that is, contemplative public discussion of films and cinema culture, is not necessarily overtly evaluative, though it often does have an evaluative component that talks back to the industry or encourages or discourages audiences to consume specific films.

Though film criticism encompasses a wide range of formats, practices, and objectives, all film criticism—from user-generated blurbs on the IMDb website to elaborate cinephile video blogs—shares an implicit commitment to the social and artistic value of cinema culture and to the public, communal exchange of ideas and opinions about this culture. Even the professional reviews in Friday's entertainment section and drive-time radio are much more than mere consumer reports, though one would not know it from much of the existing literature about film criticism (see Chapter Two). To counter the persistent tendency in scholarship to generalize about film criticism and reduce it to its commercial functions, such as promotional blurbs on marketing materials, I want to focus attention instead on the diversity of formats and cultural uses of criticism in debate, public participation, and community. My core questions, then, regard who sets the terms and language of debate, what are the limits of participation, and what kinds of criticism foster a healthy and active community. These are questions of *access*, as the right to participate in and enjoy, and *voice*, as the right to express and influence.

Regarding access, outside of film studies, consuming popular film criticism is the principal connection most people have to intellectual cinema culture, and it influences the public's understanding of everything from individual film texts to the behind-the-scenes business of movies. Film criticism provides ordinary viewers a language for talking about films. Nowhere is this truer than in broadcast *film talk*, the more-or-less informal film criticism found on radio, television, and digital streaming audio and video. If, as mentioned above, print criticism appeals to middle class readers and critical authority typically "revolves around a small constellation of

²² Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 77.

privileged neighbourhoods in cosmopolitan cities and university towns,”²³ then broadcast film talk—such as short segments slipped into the flow of news and talk show programming—speaks to a wider, possibly less invested audience. This populist orientation has in the past caused film talk on radio and television to be dismissed (and more commonly ignored) as the lowest form of film criticism,²⁴ not unlike some reactions we see to the recent popularization of film criticism on the web. This thesis aims through a number of case studies to demonstrate that broadcast film talk can indeed be an important and influential site for rich and engaging discussions, reaching audiences that may otherwise miss out on the communal pleasures and symbolic benefits of participation in cinema culture. In particular, I look closely at the aims of broadcast film talk (e.g. social uplift, public education) and the strategies of authority and appeal used by media institutions and radio and television personalities to reach and mobilize a popular audience. My focus on broadcast criticism also corrects the ahistorical assumption that all meaningful criticism happened before film critics arrived on television.

In terms of voice, producing criticism and film talk involves a fluid hybrid of personal opinion, cultural critique, academic or industry jargon, and promotional rhetoric. Participation is open to anyone interested in cinema, from casual moviegoers to devout fans to filmmakers to film studio executives, all of whom share an overlapping vocabulary and cultural competence despite divergent orientations. However, as the cases herein show, open access to the tools and language of film talk does not mean equal participation, and it certainly does not mean that diverse voices are heard, even when they do get to speak. Too frequently, for instance, the press reduces the voice of the audience to box office statistics. In other cases, the film industry floods the discursive field with publicity and buzz, creating “critic-proof” movies.²⁵ Though the user-generated web offers greater opportunities for moviegoers to talk back to the critical establishment and the film industry, my research shows that some of the loudest voices reinforce

²³ Mattias Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism: The Anxiety of Authority* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 142.

²⁴ See for example, Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (New York: Longman, 1989), 17; Richard Corliss, “All Thumbs Or, Is There a Future for Film Criticism?,” *Film Comment* 26, no. 2 (March 1990): 14–18.

²⁵ See an early discussion of this practice in Roger Ebert, “All Stars Or, Is There a Cure for Criticism of Film Criticism,” *Film Comment* 26, no. 3 (June 1990): 45–51.

reactionary rhetoric and cultural exclusions, reflecting a dominant—and gravely incomplete—portrait of moviegoing and taste in Canada (and the United States). This thesis takes a historical look at the democratic potential of various forms and articulations of film talk, culminating with an investigation of the real and potential diversity of voices in new digital formats and distribution models.

The most visible and authoritative forms of film talk come from professional film critics (most often white men), positioned as expert mediators between audiences, producers, and the film industry. Professional critics therefore cater to competing demands, including those of their employers. As journalists with special access to screenings, junkets, and press kits, they communicate film culture and industry news, in adherence with studio release schedules. As audience proxies and arbiters of taste, critics provide information about the content, quality, and value of individual films. Most importantly, though, film critics vocalize, cultivate, and challenge the symbolic field of cinema culture. In this regard, the critic is a public intellectual, an expert reaching a broad audience and operating at some distance from both the academic and commercial realms. Because of this public role in the cultural field, film critics frequently find themselves at the heart of debates around national culture and cultural identity.

Political scientist Nelson Wiseman notes a general reluctance in English Canada to celebrate popular intellectuals. He contrasts the Canadian situation to the intellectual cultures of the United States, Britain, and France, where public intellectuals “take for granted the worth of their work and the sturdy cultural foundations of their societies.”²⁶ Wiseman notes that francophone Québécois have been more supportive than anglophones of a public intellectual culture, resulting in the solid success of television programs such as *Tout le monde en parle*, a popular talk forum for artists, thinkers, and politicians based on a French show of the same name. In these instances, culture experts “are not dismissively cast as eggheads.”²⁷ Quebec-based film magazines like *24 images*, *Séquences*, and *Ciné-Bulles* attest to an engaged and prolific community of francophone cinephiles. As elsewhere, Quebec daily newspapers regularly publish film features and reviews, and websites like Films du Québec generate buzz about local film production. Quebec also produces plenty of film talk on radio and television. See, for instance,

²⁶ Nelson Wiseman, “Introduction,” in *The Public Intellectual in Canada*, ed. Nelson Wiseman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4.

²⁷ Ibid.

filmmaker and long-time critic Georges Privet, who appears in print, radio, and television. In the 1980s, René Homier-Roy and Nathalie Petrowski entertained Quebec television audiences with reviews and news of local cinema and film festivals on *À première vue*, which aired on CBC's francophone partner, Radio-Canada. They are so well known and well regarded that the duo's taste for esoteric foreign films was even spoofed on the popular sketch comedy program *Rock et Belles Oreilles*.²⁸ Both Petrowski and Homier-Roy remain active in print and broadcasting, and, along with other outspoken critics like Odile Tremblay (*Le Devoir*), animate vibrant debate and discussion in the Québécois community. Journalist and film critic Matthew Hays has noted, "The television shows in Quebec reflect the populace's love of the movies. There are shows on the regular networks where hosts chat about cinema (both local and American)."²⁹ There is certainly plenty to mine in Quebec's critical culture and industry, and it is auspicious that scholars Germain Lacasse and Hubert Sabino have begun documenting Quebec's popular film criticism history. Their research finds that whereas English-Canadian criticism links back to early film criticism in the United States, film writing in Quebec has its roots in France, where many major Québécois critics studied and lived.³⁰ My thesis likewise focusses on the critical culture of English Canada as distinct from the Quebec tradition, culturally and linguistically, and also in its reticent relationship to public intellectuals (as Wiseman posits).

The notion of film critics as public intellectuals perhaps seems naïve when attention has been so focussed on the victory of promotional rhetoric over critical autonomy, the fragmentation of mainstream film commentary into niche blogs and social media, and the proliferation and influence of non-expert voices. But the case studies in this thesis show that the public intellectual is an apt and productive concept for considering the historical and recent developments of popular film criticism. Wiseman's definition of the public intellectual encompasses several characteristics: resistance to "excessive professionalization," a desire to capture "a public culture" even amid public fragmentation, the communication of ideas to a wide audience beyond an immediate peer group, transcendence of a specific subject or area of

²⁸ *Homier-Roy-Petrowski Commentent Leur Parodie*, streaming video, Rock et Belles Oreilles, 1987, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kMKOolqiT0>.

²⁹ Matthew Hays, "TV Nation: The Answer to English-Canadian Cinema's Woes? The Boob Tube, Of Course," *Take One*, December 2004, 38.

³⁰ Germain Lacasse and Hubert Sabino, "Émergence de La Critique de Cinéma Dans La Presse Populaire Québécoise," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 49.

research, and a commitment to political and social issues.³¹ I have described here my own experience with film talk as a valuable entry point to the public sphere of arts and culture, especially for accessing local culture rendered invisible by the ubiquity of global cinema. Mid-twentieth century freelance critic Vernon Young describes being delighted when he learned “numerous people read my criticism (not just mine, of course) who never, or seldom, went to a movie! They simply liked to read about movies if they found the critic’s point of view interesting and the content vividly re-created.”³² Fascinated by Soviet cinema, newspaper writer Evelyn Gerstein traveled to Moscow in 1935 to report on Sergei Eisenstein films, films most of her readers would never have the opportunity to see; this example illustrates the way film writing could evoke the experience of rare films through words.³³ Popular writing in venues such as fan magazines similarly “gave audiences a way to experience the magic of the movies beyond the theatre.”³⁴ Film critics and film talk can thus work as a crucial bridge to cultural participation. Critics, whose film expertise is typically non-academic, speak as generalists to a heterogeneous lay community about the intersections between cinema and numerous social, political, and cultural concerns.

In Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the public sphere, art critics performed a special function of social mediation and leadership: “Marked by their expertise and specialist knowledge, critics functioned as both members and leaders of the public sphere’s opinion formation; critics were simultaneously representatives and teachers of the public.”³⁵ Habermas’s art critic resonates with Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the “organic intellectual,” an individual who emerges as a class leader from outside the ranks of top-down, sanctioned power.³⁶ Writing in 1962, Habermas suggested that personalized responses to art offered ordinary people a critical means for participating in the public sphere, after they had become alienated from

³¹ Wiseman, “Introduction,” 3–5.

³² Quoted in Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2010), 143.

³³ Antonia Lant, ed., *Red Velvet Seat: Women’s Writing on the First Fifty Years of Cinema* (New York: Verso, 2006), 386.

³⁴ “Fan Magazine Collection (1911-1963),” *Media History Digital Library*, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://mediahistoryproject.org/fanmagazines/>.

³⁵ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 52.

³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

institutionalized scientific knowledge.³⁷ While film critics have diverse roles, one of the founding assumptions of this thesis is that popular critics are instrumental in mediating, circulating, and perpetuating the knowledge, concepts, attitudes, and sensibilities at the core of cinema culture and culture more broadly. Following from this premise, this thesis wonders what it means for Canadian film culture to be mediated through popular film criticism and film talk, and in what ways film critics influence popular notions of Canadian cinema.

The recent clamour in the press about the decline of popular film criticism based in expertise, autonomous opinion, and journalistic freedom prompts questions about the significance of film critics in the first place. How do they negotiate and perpetuate cultural hierarchy? In what ways do they democratize film talk? Where do they fit in the market economics of cinema? If amateurs and marketers rule the day, can film talk continue to contribute to a vibrant and diverse public sphere? What is lost if criticism no longer offers opportunities for viable, stable employment? On the flipside, in what ways do new digital formats break down barriers to participation and intervene in discursive hegemony? How might these new forms of criticism best support diverse and exciting cinematic art, in Canada and elsewhere? This thesis addresses these questions through a historical view of the developments in film criticism's industrial practices and cultural meanings. It seeks to find out what the recent transformations in the critical establishment mean for ordinary movie lovers (like my adolescent self) looking for a way in to cinema culture. Perhaps today my adolescent self would start a blog.

Film scholar Mattias Frey encourages such a historical view of film criticism; he points out many of today's questions have been around for some time, even since the origins of cinema and professional film criticism. Covering that history from an international perspective, with case studies from various eras in the United States, Britain, France, and Germany, Frey shows that the field of film criticism has never been stable and has struggled with an insistent set of concerns:

Establishing film as a worthy object of critique; comparing or contrasting film to other arts in order to justify its cultural import or aesthetic value; invoking authoritative critics from the past; broaching questions of objectivity and critical distance; defining and policing the profession; negotiating the relationship to the industry; grappling with the

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

ability to influence and lead opinion; functioning as both an avatar of and mediator for the public: these themes recur again and again in the history of film criticism right up to the present debate.³⁸

My thesis came from a similar intuition that the rising panic about the state of film criticism in the mid-2000s (as documented in Chapter Seven) was perhaps rooted in short sighted misconceptions about the culture and industry of film criticism. I believed historical context would go a long way in clarifying the “crisis of film criticism” and sought to provide some of this context with the case study approach I describe below. My findings show, like Frey’s work, a non-linear trajectory in which the conditions of film talk are always in flux.

Next to historicizing popular film criticism, my second major objective is to consider popular film criticism’s role in shaping, reflecting, and perpetuating ideologies of Canadian cinema, cultural identity, and national culture. Popular film criticism—commonly overlooked in film studies—is in fact a key site for testing and crystallizing concepts of national cinema that in turn influence audiences, filmmakers, and policymakers. Canadian cinema historian George Melnyk suggests, “Any analysis of Canadian film, whether as a review of a contemporary film or as a historical narrative, is part of shared mythologies about Canadian culture in general.”³⁹ Drawing on Tom O’Regan’s work on Australian cinema, Charles Acland notes that the bulk of Canadian cinema culture is oriented not to domestic movies but to the dominant international cinema.⁴⁰ Yet, though the majority of English Canada’s arts and entertainment reporting focusses on Hollywood, the media—print, broadcast, and online—are also the main nexus for news, information, and commentary about homegrown film production and circulation. According to O’Regan, “National cinemas provide a means to identify, assist, legitimate, polemicize, project, and otherwise create a space nationally and internationally for non-Hollywood film-making activity.”⁴¹ Popular film criticism is critical for creating and maintaining just such a discursive space of difference and distinction for Canadian cinema. O’Regan emphasizes that local cinemas are “structurally dispensable” and their continuation requires consistent advocacy: “The local

³⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 57.

³⁹ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 243.

⁴⁰ Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 166.

⁴¹ Tom O’Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 50.

cinema needs to be worked for anew and presented to every new generation of critics, viewers, exhibitors, distributors and politicians.”⁴²

So I do not think it goes too far to say that local Canadian film cultures survive, in part, through awareness generated by film journalism. Whereas in the past Canadian critics frequently promoted domestic cinema, recent online venues have adopted a post-national generic cosmopolitanism that denies any investment and silences interest in Canadian film production and circulation. If English-Canadian film talk has decreased in quantity and enthusiasm—and my research herein suggests it has—the question is not only what will become of professional film criticism in Canada, but also what will become of Canadian cinema without locally engaged criticism. Here too, a longer historical perspective offers insight into the shifting significance of national cinema in film talk. In issues of national cinema, posits Acland, “at stake is not only economic viability or artistic freedom but the very fabric of a national community [...]”⁴³ In the wake of an era during which Canadian critics alternately disparaged and championed Canadian cinema, I have to ask what happens if the critics simply stop paying attention.

This thesis presents a series of case studies with examples of film talk, broadcast formats, and media institutions and personalities. The chapters address the complexity and nuance of each case; however, some general conclusions can be drawn:

- Film talk in broadcast media is an important (and largely overlooked) site in the public sphere for negotiating the language and concerns of cinema culture;
- The ideological tension between populism and cultural authority is a deeply rooted and defining aspect of film talk;
- Film talk has become increasingly populist in its orientation since the 1940s, even as cinema has secured its status as “art”;
- Though film talk continues in residual forms on radio and television, the dominant examples are now found online;
- Mainstream film talk has generally reflected the dominant culture, with few opportunities for commentary by women and people of colour;

⁴² Ibid., 47, 48.

⁴³ Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 166.

- The venues where women and people of colour have spoken about film suggest significant alternatives to film criticism hegemony;
- The anti-intellectual mode of address typical of current film talk is partly a response to the perceived snobbishness and insularity of past film criticism styles;
- Overt cultural nationalism has virtually disappeared from recent English-Canadian film talk, perhaps due to a frustration with the prescriptive and hegemonic nature of earlier commentary on Canadian cinema.

Frey points out that cinema has for decades been “understood as an art with specific formal properties to be learned and applied, but nonetheless as a popular medium of universal comprehensibility.”⁴⁴ Each of my case studies demonstrates this paradox in a unique way. Perhaps the most democratic film talk format yet, the film criticism podcast, has for the past ten years offered an inexpensive, low-barrier option for producing and circulating amateur and underground film talk. However, instead of engendering greater diversity and inclusion, my survey of the Canadian and American podcast landscape shows substantial stylistic standardization and cultural exclusion, anchored in anti-intellectual rhetoric (see Chapter Six). On top of that the quality of film talk in podcasts generally leaves much to be desired, even for the most open-minded observer. From a conservative vantage, Wiseman suggests that traditional public intellectuals can offer “salutary antidotes” to the “trivialization of public debate” evident in “loud” internet exchanges.⁴⁵ French film critic André Bazin similarly argued that maintaining a rich and lively film culture required refined critical engagement, claiming “no art, not even a popular one can do without an elite.”⁴⁶ Erudite and masterful popular film criticism is no doubt integral in maintaining a lively public cinema culture, and certain standards are thus worth preserving. However, the examples of English-Canadian film talk I present indicate that even the most vernacular forms can exhibit innovation, provocation, and a commitment to a thriving critical culture. If Bazin proposed that cinema could not thrive without a critical elite, I would argue that domestic cinema cannot prosper without attentive and supportive media commentary, an element largely absent from English-Canadian film criticism’s leading edge.

⁴⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 52.

⁴⁵ Wiseman, “Introduction,” 7.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 60.

Notes on Method

This thesis is a work of cultural history, drawing on archival research, analysis of written artifacts, cultural and critical theory, media studies, and cultural studies to develop a history of popular film criticism in English Canada, particularly film talk in broadcast media. The focus is on four historical case studies, chosen to represent a broad sample of film talk modes and formats and to highlight moments of technological and cultural transition. These cases are: the emergence of nationally-oriented authoritative film talk on CBC Radio in 1947; the integration of film talk into TVOntario's public education mandate in 1974; *SCTV*'s satirical response to film critics as public intellectuals between 1977 and 1984; and the proliferation in the past decade of amateur film podcasts across English Canada. Certain themes recur: technological developments and their impact (real or perceived) on the industry and culture of film criticism; the adaptable institutions, practices, and conventions of media talk; the complex manifestations of cultural authority and hierarchy in film talk, and the implications of all these factors on the contemporary discursive positioning of Canadian cinema. To explore these themes, I collected and analyzed original works of film talk—i.e. primary sources such as radio programs, television footage, and podcast recordings—in conjunction with contextual materials, such as policy documents, biographies, press articles, and scholarly histories.

My attention to language, texts, and cultural artifacts attempts to reconstruct “the mood of the age.”⁴⁷ The case studies allow for a Foucauldian “archaeology” of discursive formations, wherein I attempt to excavate the conditions of existence and grounds of acceptability of certain widespread ideas and attitudes. This approach is also related to Antonio Gramsci's critique of “common sense,” which encourages the questioning of widely held assumptions in order to de-naturalize cultural hegemony. Both Michel Foucault's and Gramsci's techniques involve deconstructing the complex interrelation of knowledge and power, and my focus on cultural authority provides a theoretical lens for looking at the subtle and fluid forms of power embodied in film talk and critics as cultural arbiters, tastemakers, and public intellectuals. This project is part intellectual history and part institutional history, highlighting a set of popular critics, their affiliated media organizations, and their audiences, against the background of broader social, cultural, and economic developments.

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 32.

Relevant here is Pierre Bourdieu's statement about the methodological challenges of reconstructing social history:

One of the major difficulties of the social history of philosophy, art or literature is that it has to reconstruct these spaces of original possibles which, because they were part of the self-evident givens of the situation, remained unmarked and therefore unlikely to be mentioned in contemporary accounts, chronicles or memoirs. It is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field and which all contemporaries immediately invest in their reading of works: information about institutions—e.g. academies, journals, magazines, galleries, publishers, etc.—and about persons, their relationships, liaisons and quarrels, information about the ideas and problems which are 'in the air' and circulate orally in gossip and rumour.⁴⁸

Following Bourdieu, my project is concerned with the "connotations of words" and "the 'common sense' of an intellectual generation."⁴⁹ The largest impediment I encountered to building this cultural history were the limitations on access to the artifacts of popular broadcast media. My several fishing expeditions in the waters of commercial and community radio and television yielded little; producers and stations explained that their broadcast footage was either never catalogued, is inaccessible to researchers, or, most frequently, is presumed lost. Where footage does exist, commercial broadcasters charge prohibitively heavy viewing fees. I fared much better with public broadcast institutions, which were more likely to have a mandate and resources allocated to preservation and access. Even in these cases, however, institutional efforts have been piecemeal and subject to the unstable funding, mercurial priorities, and stretched resources characteristic of audio-visual preservation. These circumstances do not bode well for Canada's broadcast heritage. The lack of availability of historical evidence limited the possible directions of this project and necessitated certain organizational choices. As a result, the case studies focus on the dominant and central institutions of film talk in their respective periods and cast shadows over the more commercial, alternative, and marginal critical outlets and practices. Nevertheless, the case studies present a variety of contexts: national public radio, community public television, national commercial television, and web-based podcasts and television. Many

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31–32.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 32.

of the examples have reached unanticipated domestic and international audiences through syndication or online distribution.

My research is also attentive to cultural politics, making the marginal visible, and challenging the classism, sexism, and racism of the dominant culture. Even if we permit the problematic notion that cinema culture is in essence accessible and welcoming to everyone, the politics of participation that emerges in film talk are cause for concern. My case studies underline the fact that male, white, anglophone members of the intellectual class have dominated the history of film criticism, both in Canada and the United States. In Canada, white Torontonians have monopolized the face of broadcast film talk. This is perhaps unsurprising in the case studies from the 1940s and 1970s. It is disheartening, however, that much of the film talk in podcasts emanating from the “democratic” web reinforces cultural exclusions and openly reiterates regressive attitudes towards racial, gender, and sexual diversity. The examples in Chapter Seven are a valuable reminder that cultural democracy involves both ease of access *and* a true plurality of voices. Here especially an understanding of the mechanisms of cultural authority and its relationship to social inequality is useful for a meaningful analysis of the culture and industry of film talk.

Highlighting popular forms of film culture, this research contributes to correcting the high culture bias in Canadian cultural studies. Media studies scholar Aniko Bodroghkozy found that an elitist streak imbricated with cultural nationalism had marginalized popular culture studies in Canada, even as the United States and the United Kingdom moved to embrace popular culture as a valid object of inquiry. Focussing on television viewing, Bodroghkozy points out that associations with American imperialism have marred both Canadian-made genre programming and American imports. She finds that the dominance of political economy approaches in Canadian cultural studies has produced a dead end in which the appeal of American (or American-style) television is seen as “nothing more than a manifestation of monopoly capitalism.”⁵⁰ Drawing on the work of Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Collins, Bodroghkozy also describes a legacy of cultural snobbery among Canada’s anglophone intellectual classes, and a “suspicio[n] of populist tendencies,” which has led to a “dearth of

⁵⁰ Aniko Bodroghkozy, “As Canadian as Possible...: Anglo-Canadian Popular Culture and the American Other,” in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, eds. Henry Jenkins, Jane Shattuc, and Tara McPherson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 569.

serious writing about Canadians' engagement with entertainment media."⁵¹ Trends in Canadian film studies support Bodroghkozy's assessment: for instance, Peter Urquhart has critiqued the elision of some of Canada's most commercially successful films from national cinema history.⁵² Though Canadian popular film culture has received increased scholarly recognition in recent years, change has been slow, and my research seeks to advance this intervention in Canadian film and media studies by foregrounding the undervalued contributions of popular film talk.

I weave questions of national culture throughout my analysis and combine my eagerness for a thriving film scene and critical culture in Canada with scepticism towards cultural nationalism. Although national cinema remains a relevant framework, sensitivity to Canada's regional, linguistic, and cultural particularities and an "intellectual cosmopolitanism" that appreciates the globality of cinema are both paramount to considering the specificities and international resonances of film criticism in Canada.⁵³ My research shows that leaders in English-Canadian film talk—whether national cinema champions, deniers, or something in between—have always engaged with cinema topics on every scale (global, international, national, regional, and community), in keeping with the industry and the news of the moment. As one might expect, the case studies demonstrate considerable attention on the part of Canadian critics not just to American films but also to American critical practices, institutions, and prominent critics. As a result, the history of Canadian film criticism cannot be written without the history of American criticism, and my approach is international throughout. Additionally, my perspective is highly intermedial and interdisciplinary, comparing film commentary in print, radio, television, and the web, and combining approaches from film studies and media studies.

Chapter Summaries

The chapters present a chronological account of the case studies and the conceptual and historical context that informs them. Chapter One introduces a three-part theoretical framework

⁵¹ Ibid., 568, 569.

⁵² See Peter Urquhart, "Cultural Nationalism and Taste: The Place of the Popular in Canadian Film Culture," in *Screening Canadians: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Canadian Film*, ed. Wolfram R. Keller and Gene Walz (Marburg: Universitätsbibliothek Marburg, 2008), 35–57; Peter Urquhart, "Meatballs Matters," in *Visual Communication and Culture: Images in Action*, ed. Jonathan Finn (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2011), 340–49.

⁵³ Will Straw, "Shifting Boundaries, Lines of Descent: Cultural Studies and Institutional Realignments," in *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Faurschou (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 463.

that runs through the thesis. I discuss each conceptual axis—film talk, cultural authority, and Canadian cinema—and its associated literature in some detail. The notion of film talk explores the cultural significance of the exchange of information, ideas, and opinions about cinema, particularly in the form of news and entertainment in broadcast programming. Purveyors of film talk, such as film critics, construct personas that claim varying degrees of influence and authority, and the chapter considers the politics of this authority in relation to culture and the public sphere. Broadcast film talk and the authority of film critics have both been instrumental in the discursive construction of Canadian cinema, at least since the 1940s. Chapters Two and Three present a contextual history of film criticism in Canada, the United States, and internationally, from early film commentary in print publications through to the emergence of film talk on radio, television, and eventually online. The themes of access, voice, professionalization, and standardization recur throughout. The case studies that follow unfold against the backdrop of this bigger picture, zooming in on situated iterations of film criticism and their politics.

Chapter Four outlines the official introduction of film talk on English-language national public radio. Toronto newcomer Gerald Pratley, whose programs *This Week at the Movies* and *The Movie Scene* debuted in 1948, would later be referred to as CBC Radio's "first film critic and commentator."⁵⁴ In his first two years, Pratley's radio scripts highlighted several issues that proved to be central to his long, illustrious career as a critic, programmer, and educator: moral uplift, anti-censorship advocacy, international cinema culture, and promoting Canadian national cinema. I researched these and other themes across 162 CBC radio episodes: eighty-seven scripts stored in the Gerald Pratley Fonds at Library and Archives Canada and seventy-five audio recordings at the CBC Radio Archives. Fortunately, Pratley himself preserved a vast collection of his professional materials. I focussed my analysis on all scripts from the year 1948, the first year Pratley's programs aired. My sample also included numerous scripts from the subsequent years, including the first episode of each new program Pratley created and scripted. Moreover, the Toronto Film Reference Library acquired the archives of the Ontario Film Institute, which Pratley headed for twenty years, so they hold several more boxes of materials documenting Pratley's life and career. Additionally, a 1946 report on the activities of the Canadian

⁵⁴ Michael Posner, "Pioneer of Movie Critiques Boosted Canadian Cinema," *The Globe and Mail*, March 15, 2011, S8.

Broadcasting Corporation figures prominently in my analysis, along with secondary materials for interpretation and context.

Analysis of the text and audio shows that Pratley's scripts—sometimes read on the air by other presenters—took the form of monologues, and both his film reviews and essays on cinema culture used formal language and a serious mode of address. This formality was a fitting strategy at a time when cultural hierarchies were in turmoil and popular cinema was still gaining legitimacy as an art form and as a suitable object of discussion by a public broadcaster dedicated to cultural growth on a national level. Pratley's contemporary and fellow CBC film critic Clyde Gilmour adopted a different strategy, emphasizing his status as a discerning but average filmgoer with no patience for pedantry. By comparison, material on Clyde Gilmour was harder to come by, so I consulted every audio recording of Gilmour's appearances as a film critic I could find at the CBC Radio Archives. This constituted thirty recordings, dated between 1947 and 1987. Though Pratley's many film programs and his somewhat decorous mode of address were the dominant mode of film talk on national radio for decades to come, Gilmour's laidback, no-nonsense populism prevailed in other venues, and is more familiar to audiences of today's film talk.

Pratley's CBC Radio work coincides with the beginning of what Rónán McDonald calls "the age of criticism," between 1948 and the early 1970s.⁵⁵ During this time, cultural criticism, including film criticism, became a regular feature of journalism in print, radio, and, eventually television. Popular film criticism peaked in the mid-to-late-1960s, when film critics like Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, John Simon, Judith Crist, and Gene Shalit achieved celebrity status, not just in print but also as broadcast personalities on radio and television talk shows. Chapter Five examines the film talk programming on TVOntario (TVO), a groundbreaking community television channel with a prominent public education mandate. In 1974, TVO and one of its producers, movie buff and educator Elwy Yost, introduced two new programs: *Saturday Night at the Movies (SNAM)* and *Magic Shadows*. In researching this chapter, I consulted footage of the original programs: fifteen segments of various lengths from *SNAM* housed at Library and Archives Canada (viewing copies made on request); twenty-five episodes in the online TVO Archive (archive.tvo.org) of *Talking Film*, a program edited together from existing *Magic Shadows* and *SNAM* footage; and several snippets of video posted on YouTube. Past *SNAM*

⁵⁵ Cited in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 13–14.

producers Risa Shuman and Thom Ernst told me that despite their concerted efforts, TVOntario has never managed to catalogue its archives and most audio-visual content is unavailable to researchers. The online TVO Archive launched in 2011 made available over 325 general programs and segments from forty years of TVO programming.⁵⁶ However, the videos are missing dates and basic production information that would be valuable to historians. Since 2014, TVO's Media Archives Project has been raising funds for improved preservation initiatives.⁵⁷ I consulted additional videos, books, and printed materials through organizations including the Film Reference Library, National Film Board, and the Toronto Film Society. Also useful were annual reports, publications, and research reports by the Ontario Educational Communication Authority, the ministerial body behind the television channel.

While the main draws on *Magic Shadows* and *SNAM* were the feature-length Hollywood films, the programs were also known for Yost's genial film talk, which bookended the film presentations. Yost's reputation rode on his abiding "love" for the movies, and he implicated himself in the family living rooms of thousands of Ontarians with his warm and familiar second person address. Yost's mode of film talk was dialogue, sometimes literally in the form of onscreen interviews with film industry stars and professionals, but also figuratively in the way he interpellated the home viewer through direct address, greetings, and even rhetorical questions. Yost's down-to-earth demeanour and colloquial speech mitigated the programs' educational aims and demonstrated a more audience-friendly strategy than the one Pratley developed for CBC Radio. I also compare TVO's programming with the dialogic format of the contemporaneous program *Sneak Previews*, the Siskel and Ebert vehicle that began on Chicago educational public television in 1975, before achieving syndication on the national level on PBS and also in Canada. My analysis is based on footage available on Siskelandebert.org. The chapter also examines the pushback against the populist strategies used in film criticism on television. The resistance to new voices and modes of expression in criticism parallels recent concerns over the alleged dumbing down of film criticism in online venues.

⁵⁶ "About the Archive," *TVO*, accessed July 13, 2015, <http://archive.tv.org/about-archive>.

⁵⁷ Michelle (TVO customer relations), email to author, March 27, 2015; "Save TVO's Archive!," accessed July 13, 2015, https://secure3.convio.net/tvo/site/Donation2?df_id=2940&2940.donation=form1.

Even while some critics begrudged the popularization of film commentary on television, there is evidence that the Canadian and American public in turn became wary of highbrow critics in the wake of the 1960s and early 1970s “golden age of criticism.” Chapter Six considers the wave of parodic representations of film critics that emerged in popular media in the late-1970s and multiplied throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. These depictions poked fun at the film-critic-as-public-intellectual trope at the core of the brand of film talk described in the preceding two case studies. For this chapter, I looked at close to forty Canadian and American parodies of film critics in various forms: radio talk show sketches, poetry, comic strips, satirical magazine pieces, and several live-action and animated television shows and feature films. I found copies of the texts on the web and through university interlibrary services. My analysis focusses mainly on the popular Canadian sketch comedy program *SCTV* (*Second City Television*), which started on national commercial television, migrated to CBC and American network television, and eventually petered out on Canadian and American pay television. Between 1977 and 1984, *SCTV* aired several sketches mocking film critics, especially celebrity critics from the United States. Though I viewed most of these episodes on commercially released DVD sets, I had to reconstruct one missing scene based on unofficial online descriptions and transcripts. Wherever possible, I have provided web links to videos of the sketches so that readers can test my interpretations and consider alternative readings.

The dominant mode of address of *SCTV*'s and other parodies was irony and satire. The humour usually relied on enacting a clash between high and low culture and expert and popular taste. In other words, these caricatures uncovered—and, in some cases, critiqued—the subtext of cultural hierarchy in authoritative film talk in the media (as illustrated in Chapters Four and Five). Satirical representations suggested a “crisis of legitimacy” that arose as a response to the perceived arrogance of the highbrow critics of the golden age. Even the more benign parodies turned “snobbish” film critics into figures of ridicule. The chapter seeks to diagnose what made these parodies entertaining and how they presaged the alleged decline of critical authority in recent years.

If hit television shows like *Saturday Night at the Movies* and *Sneak Previews* and parodies like those on *SCTV* helped to deflate highbrow criticism and establish more accessible, “ordinary” modes of film talk, then the recent populist trends in online criticism can be viewed as a continuation of these developments, though not a strictly linear one. As each of my case

studies shows, the authority of film critics has long been contested, and film critics were forced to continuously proclaim their status within the field of popular culture and the profession of film criticism. Mattias Frey declares, “The need to assert critical authority, and the anxieties over challenges to that authority, are longstanding tropes; they have, I argue, animated and choreographed the trajectory of international film criticism since its origins.”⁵⁸ Building on this historical perspective, Chapter Seven investigates the “end of criticism” rhetoric that characterizes the web as, alternately, a force for criticism’s popularization, de-professionalization, democratization, renaissance, and/or decline. In particular, I explore podcasting as a significant new format for film talk that foregrounds collective conversation. To this end, I consulted over thirty different podcast series and analyzed multiple episodes of each one. These episodes were all available to download at no cost through iTunes, and, in most cases, could also be streamed or downloaded on websites dedicated to each program. One methodological challenge of working with podcasts is that they tend not to carefully document information about their origin, production credits, and precise dates, especially on the amateur level. Where possible, I have provided links to the audio content under discussion. My analysis contributes to the debate over whether widespread amateur digital criticism signals a death knell for the “critical industry” or a new golden age of criticism.

Due to their vast number and variety, film podcasts resist generalization; still, the kinds of film talk disseminated online do offer insight into the current cultural role and status of film critics. In many cases digital distribution is treated as an ancillary, audio-on-demand market, where mainstream and community radio programs like CBC’s *Eli Glasner on Film* and York University’s *Cinephobia Radio* can find a long-term and international second home. In other cases, podcast technology offers a low-barrier, highly cost-effective do-it-yourself (DIY) primary broadcast model, where ordinary people can record and upload audio and video content using simple equipment, without concern for censorship or broadcast licenses. The model allows for a profound expansion of the diversity of voices in film talk and a concomitant challenge to the cultural authority of traditional professional critics. Indeed, amateur English-Canadian film podcasts like *The JoBlo Movie Podcast* (Montreal), *Film Junk* (Toronto), *Jobless Film Reviews* (Toronto), and *Robocop Vs. the Nazis* (Edmonton) harness libertarian and anti-intellectual

⁵⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 12.

sentiments to destabilize and decentralize film criticism and disavow conventional cultural authority. These programs foreground casual, non-expert film commentary reinforcing an individualist, pluralist, and egalitarian notion of taste, even as they enact and reproduce certain social exclusions. Where CBC Radio in the late 1940s featured film talk as monologue and TVOntario in the mid-1970s operated in the mode of dialogue, these film podcasts typically feature a conversational mode of address, in which three or four participants shoot the breeze about movies. Despite the minimal barriers to podcast production, these amateur programs are overwhelmingly white and male, and they often deliberately flaunt social privilege. As such, this form of media film talk contradicts optimistic narratives of internet democratization and questions the inclusiveness of English-Canadian public film culture. Accompanying the populist orientation of these amateur film podcasts is a notable absence of overt references to national and local cinema. Though traces exist, gone is even the restrained (and perhaps naive) boosterism of earlier figures like Gerald Pratley and Elwy Yost, replaced here by an individualistic and confident cosmopolitanism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the *Sound on Sight* podcast (Montreal), which exhibits the anti-authoritarianism of current film talk while preserving an admirable degree of inclusiveness and diversity.

The conclusion summarizes the thesis's key arguments and revisits the question of the cultural value of film critics and film talk. It proposes the true crisis in criticism is the lack of a diversity of voices, especially in English Canada, where multiple identities and perspectives would help reinvigorate over-familiar discussions of Canadian cinema. Particularly in the context of Canadian national cinema, film talk is crucial to an accessible and active film culture.

In attempting to answer the question (heading this chapter) about Canada's need for film critics, we must consider not only the history and culture of film criticism, but also its politics. Meaghan Morris argues, "It is only when all criticism (and not just that which signifies itself as 'feminist', 'marxist', etc.) is seen as political, that one can talk sensibly about changing criticism, and about using criticism to change something other than itself—even if the change desired is something as small-scale and difficult as an improvement in the conditions in which film-makers

make, and above all screen, their films.”⁵⁹ She is referring to Australia’s film scene, but the same applies to Canadian national cinema. Sure, studying popular film criticism helps us better understand our domestic cinema. But even more significantly, critical speech is active speech and it helps determine the kinds of films we make and see and how these films are received at home and elsewhere. The health of national cinema is dependent on the health of “the sense-making apparatus that allows cinema to be meaningful in society.”⁶⁰ As a teen in suburban Ontario, I relied on criticism in newspapers for access to elusive art cinema, including Canadian films; my access was otherwise limited by my geographic location and class status. Access for me of course meant enjoying (from afar) all the good movies, but it also meant the power of tapping into one of the defining cultural forces of contemporary life. Today the loci of participation in cinema culture have moved online. Blogs and social media overflow with debates about films and the film industry. But “film—and the cinema—matters for reasons other than and beyond that mythic entity, ‘itself’,”⁶¹ and the internet also uses movies to argue about history, politics, gender, sexuality, race, and economics. These conversations are broad and often loud, but that should not imply that access is open and participation unfettered. The rest of these pages investigate who gets to speak and who gets to listen in the public arena of English-Canadian media film talk.

⁵⁹ Meaghan Morris, “Indigestion: A Rhetoric of Reviewing,” in *The Pirate’s Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (New York: Verso, 1988), 110–111.

⁶⁰ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 493.

⁶¹ Morris, “Indigestion,” 121.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework: Film Talk, Cultural Authority, and Canadian Cinema

“Media film talk,” a defining category for this thesis, covers a wide range of discursive phenomena at the heart of cinema culture. This chapter lays the foundation for this concept and examines the cultural authority attributed to popular film critics who perform film talk. I explore the role of film critics as public intellectuals and situate them within the Canadian context. I also discuss literature on broadcast talk and key theoretical works by Pierre Bourdieu, Herbert Gans, Andrew Ross, Antonio Gramsci, and Peter Urquhart. The chapter makes the case that media film talk is constitutive of film culture, insofar as public film commentators shape audiences’ interactions with cinema. Film talk is thus a key component in sustaining Canadian cinema culture, as distinct from global popular cinema. Here, the groundwork is laid for the primary thesis question: How might a national cinema culture that relies on committed, democratic, and diverse critical leadership regarding domestic films, filmmakers, and the film industry thrive with less clearly defined public intellectual discourse?

Media Film Talk

Public film commentary takes many forms: the Friday review section in newspapers, television banter bookending a film broadcast, annual DVD guides, drive-time commercial radio segments, and diverse online outlets, both amateur and professional. Differentiating among multiple formats, audiences, and uses helps to clarify who participates in film commentary and to what ends. For example, the online magazine *Slate* has produced *Spoiler Specials* podcasts, in-depth twenty to forty-minute “postviews” meant to be heard only after watching the film under discussion.¹ The *Spoiler Specials* acknowledge the commonplace practice of consulting reviews *after* watching a movie in order to engage in dialogue with a critical community. Similarly, the podcast *The Canon* announces the classic movies they address a week ahead of time so that listeners can watch them in preparation for upcoming episodes.² And this is not just a recent phenomenon; in 1959, the German film magazine *Filmkritik* explained to readers of its reviews, “The [initial] notices are merely supposed to serve factual information before the cinema visit,

¹ “Slate’s Spoiler Specials,” *iTunes Preview*, accessed June 24, 2016, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/slates-spoiler-specials/id163297674?mt=2>.

² “The Canon,” *Wolfpop*, accessed June 24, 2016, <http://thecanon.wolfpop.com/audio/playlists/3968>.

the [subsequent] critiques are for the later testing of your own judgement.”³ While there is an assumption that moviegoers read reviews primarily to help them decide what to watch, it is clear that they are also used for other purposes as well. The too-often unexamined perception of movie reviews as consumer guides with tips for spending one’s movie time and money does not account for the varied practices and pleasures of engaging with popular film commentary: audiences not only save reviews to read after watching the film, but also enjoy reviews of films they may never even intend to watch. Melanie Selfe cites BBC listener research from 1944 that shows that members of the audience for their film review program *The Week’s Films* attended the cinema “rather less often than the average British person of the time.”⁴ According to film scholar David Sterritt, “For some, the only thing better than a good movie is a good movie review, preferably one that outdoes the film itself in creativity, entertainment value, and chutzpah.”⁵ The existing scholarship about journalistic criticism tends to overlook these less obvious but quite prevalent uses of film writing.

The *Spoiler Specials* also point out that audiences frequently *listen* to reviews rather than read them. Podcasts are just the latest innovation in a long history of broadcast film criticism spanning back to the early days of radio and television. One of my aims is to establish speech about cinema as an important but neglected aspect of popular film culture. At its core, spoken film talk is an ordinary, pleasurable social activity for exchanging opinions, ideas, and experiences of cinema culture, while also sharing cues about taste, worldview, cultural capital, and social membership. Going beyond casual person-to-person conversation, the concept of media film talk helps make sense of the diverse forms of film commentary broadcasted on radio, television, and online. Paddy Scannell, who edited a seminal early volume on the topic, defines broadcast talk as “a communicative interaction between those participating in discussion [...] designed to be heard by absent audiences” through a broadcast medium.⁶ In many cases, the home viewing audience is strongly implied or explicitly addressed as the intended recipient of

³ Quoted in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 85.

⁴ Melanie Selfe, “‘Intolerable Flippancy’: The Arnot Robertson v. MGM Libel Case (1946–1950) and the Evolution of BBC Policy on Broadcast Film Criticism,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 3 (2011): 387.

⁵ David Sterritt, “Artists In the Audience [review],” *Cineaste* 25, no. 3 (2000): 59.

⁶ Paddy Scannell, “Introduction: The Relevance of Talk,” in *Broadcast Talk* (London: Sage, 1991), 1.

the talk, which problematizes Erving Goffman's characterization of the members of the TV audience as unratified "overhearers" or "eavesdroppers."⁷ Media talk hosts have long invited audience participation through feedback forums, such as call-ins, letters, and social media, practices now common also among podcasters. Even listeners who choose not to "talk back" are interpellated as interactive participants through rhetorical techniques such as direct address and friendly greetings that "construct" a "quasi-interactive" space for "*potential* interaction."⁸ Moreover, conceptions of audiences as both active in a phenomenological sense and selective suggest that listeners shape their experience of media talk and are never merely passive overhearers.

Scannell identifies "talk" as primarily onscreen interaction and Bernard M. Timberg defines a "talk world" as a "site in which a small group talks to itself while simultaneously addressing an invisible but clearly defined collective audience," usually in a broadcast studio.⁹ Other researchers, however, include direct audience address. Andrew Tolson explains, "In the direct form of address, the first person of the broadcasting institution ('I' or 'we') talks to the audience in the second person ('you') often with a view to constructing a collective identity ('us')."¹⁰ This definition echoes the work of Margaret Morse, who attributes television's "impression of discourse" to, among other factors, the trope of the talking head, which creates an illusion of inter-subjectivity between television hosts and viewers.¹¹ Television events may be pre-recorded, sometimes with a live studio audience, and transmitted at a later time. As John Ellis's work on television found, even pre-recorded broadcast talk is typically treated rhetorically as "live."¹²

In general, the media talk category includes informational and spontaneous (that is, not entirely scripted) content, as differentiated from fictional entertainment and news or documentary reportage. Goffman used the term "talk" instead of "language" to emphasize the

⁷ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 132–133.

⁸ Andrew Tolson, *Media Talk: Spoken Discourse on TV and Radio* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 9–10.

⁹ Bernard Timberg, *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

¹⁰ Tolson, *Media Talk*, 7.

¹¹ Margaret Morse, "Talk, Talk, Talk," *Screen* 26, no. 2 (1985): 6.

¹² Cited in Tolson, *Media Talk*, 12.

situated, routine, and functional nature of the utterances and gestures.¹³ Studies of media talk are rooted in conversation and discourse analysis, which focusses on the things talk *does* rather than what it *says*.¹⁴ Some examples of media talk include daytime and late night talk shows, political commentary, radio call-in shows, celebrity interviews, sports commentary, radio DJ chatter, televised debates, and film and book review programs.¹⁵ As a subset of media talk, film talk can take numerous forms, including the film review programs mentioned, but also “best of” lists, panels on special topics, awards recaps, speculation on upcoming releases, “making of” accounts, and interviews with celebrities, critics, and film industry personnel.

Like other forms of media talk, the success of film talk depends on establishing its authenticity through content, positioning, and performance. Scannell observes, “the design of talk on radio and TV [...] attempts to bridge the gap” between the institutional space of the broadcast studio and the “home” audience by “simulating co-presence with its listeners and viewers.”¹⁶ Scannell’s research establishes the historical specificity of media talk conventions, showing that formal modes of address had to be adjusted to accommodate the casual domestic settings of most viewing and listening. He notes that British broadcasting began shifting from “an earlier authoritarian mode to a more populist and democratic manner and style” around the late 1950s.¹⁷ This shift finds a parallel in my English-Canadian case studies, which also move from authoritarian to populist to hyper-populist between the late 1940s and the present. According to Scannell, the goal of intimacy “powerfully drives the communicative style and manner of broadcasting to approximate to the norms not of public forms of talk, but to those of ordinary, informal conversation [...]”¹⁸ Though Scannell refers to the place of broadcast talk in “social arrangements of households,” I would also include other personal and intimate listening spaces, such as cars and workspaces.¹⁹ Scannell described media talk as doubly articulated, in that it is produced and received locally by the immediate participants but also communicates on a second level intended for the audience. Because of this duality, media talk “cannot be other than

¹³ Paddy Scannell, *Broadcast Talk* (London: Sage, 1991), 7.

¹⁴ Tolson, *Media Talk*, 6.

¹⁵ Tolson, *Media Talk*; Timberg, *Television Talk*.

¹⁶ Scannell, *Broadcast Talk*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

its performance: the adoption of certain markers and production formats that may be validated as authentic by [its] intended audiences.”²⁰ Based on the performance of talk, audiences may judge a broadcast personality’s self-presentation and even public identity as “cynical, sincere or playful.”²¹

Goffman used “fresh talk” to designate speech that was skilfully performed to appear spontaneous and natural, even when it was scripted for broadcast.²² He identified three possible “speakers,” that is, three actors in the “production format” of talk: the principal—the source of the ideas and messages; the author—responsible for the composition of the content or script; and the animator—the person physically performing the talk.²³ When these three align, the speech generally appears authentic, as the performer is seen to “talk about their own experiences, beliefs, opinions.”²⁴ In non-fiction programming, where there is usually at least a degree of preplanning and scripting on the part of multiple producers, animators may attempt to conceal the fact that they are not the original sources of ideas and words to achieve the illusion of fresh talk. Strategies for establishing authenticity and audience rapport include personal storytelling, selective self-disclosure, emphasizing lay status over expert status, and using colloquialisms.²⁵ Tolson observes that contemporary media talk favours the performance of “being ordinary,” as achieved through markers such as unexceptional dress and appearance (at least for men) and adopting casual voice and speech mannerisms.²⁶

Following these claims and concepts, this thesis explores the key roles of authenticity and ordinariness in the performance of cultural authority in film talk. I suggest that these modes are important signifiers not only of entertaining talk but also of the ideological and political orientations of popular film commentary in relation to cultural hierarchy, critical authority, and the democratization of cinema art and culture. Another aim of this thesis is to investigate the ways and reasons that displays of “expertise” in film talk have so often been treated as

²⁰ Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse: Analysing Language in the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41.

²¹ Scannell, *Broadcast Talk*, 10.

²² Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 146, 254–255.

²³ *Ibid.*, 226, 144–146.

²⁴ Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 80, 42, 83.

²⁶ Tolson, *Media Talk*; Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 80.

undesirable, especially in the wake of “the golden age” of criticism of the late 1960s and 1970s. This period saw the rise of renowned, opinionated film critics like Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, John Simon, Stanley Kaufmann, Judith Crist, and Rex Reed. Critical commentary proliferated across a wide range of magazines and newspapers, there was a boom in the publication of books about film, and film reviews became a major tool in film advertising.²⁷ Throughout the 1970s, critics increasingly took to radio and television; participating in broadcast film talk amplified the celebrity status of already high-profile print critics.²⁸ Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert first appeared on television in 1975, and they were household names by the end of the decade. But by the 1980s, film critics emerged as fashionable objects of parody and satire, a trend explored in Chapter Six. Parodies of film talk persist today, commenting on the tidal wave of film criticism on the participatory web. These days film talk on television, radio, and podcasts exhibits a strong anti-intellectual and populist leaning, as if to correct the insularity and snobbery attributed to film criticism of the past.

The performance of ordinariness and authenticity adopted by today’s film critics, a stance that simultaneously challenges and conceals social inequalities, and elides and reinforces consumerist paradigms, raises intriguing questions about a) the status of film culture in everyday life, b) recent developments in broadcasting culture, and c) the nuances of current cultural hierarchies. The cultural authority of today’s film talk rests, paradoxically, in a denial of authority through popular appeals, as achieved through strategies of address, voice, physical appearance, setting, and other aural and visual cues. Mattias Frey asserts, “The negotiation of a proper tone towards and relationship with the audience is a key matter in creating authority” and many critics “established legitimacy by reminding the reader of their shared experiences or worldview or by creating the appearance of their conspiracy against elites’ tastes.”²⁹ Chapters Four and Five show these strategies were already in place in earlier examples of film talk on radio and television, though populist rhetoric was usually in competition with mandates of social uplift and public education.

²⁷ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 198; Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 138.

²⁸ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 198.

²⁹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 19.

Theorizing Cultural Authority

My interdisciplinary theoretical framework draws on the sociology of art and culture to better understand the mechanisms of cultural authority and taste hierarchies. Pierre Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* (1984) on the relationships between taste preferences and socioeconomic class is key, as is his work on the social and economic structures of art worlds in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). I will give an overview of these works and some responses to them, addressing the continuing applicability of Bourdieu's theories.

Underlying Bourdieu's work, wherein artistic hierarchies correspond in oblique ways to social hierarchies, is the issue of cultural democracy in the context of class struggle: "To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class.'"³⁰ According to this structure, members of the dominant classes are initiated to cultural preferences appropriate to their social positions, and, in turn, their tastes are socially sanctioned, at the expense of "lower" tastes:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.³¹

As such, hierarchies of art and taste offer opportunities for individuals and groups to establish "distinction," as well as social mobility, through symbolic resources, such as social capital (social networks), educational capital, and cultural capital (proficiency in cultural knowledge, particularly as regards high culture). Cultural competence, then, functions as a relatively autonomous indicator of social status, though it does also intersect with other determinants in the social space. The synthesis of individuals' various positions vis-à-vis the social fields (economic, educational, artistic, political, etc.) produces their general worldviews and orientations towards the world, which Bourdieu terms "habitus."

³⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xxx.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu reports the results of his large-scale empirical study exploring possible correlations between cultural preferences and class markers such as education and occupation. Bourdieu conducted the study between 1963 and 1968; it consisted of extensive surveys and qualitative interviews with 1217 participants in urban and rural France.³² Analyzing the results, Bourdieu concludes that an individual's habitus, or "disposition," as partly determined by their class position, does indeed compel their attitudes and behaviours in both conscious and unconscious ways:

Whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin. The relative weight of home background and of formal education (the effectiveness and duration of which are closely dependent on social origin) varies according to the extent to which the different cultural practices are recognized and taught by the educational system, and the influence of social origin is strongest—other things being equal—in 'extra-curricular' and avant-garde culture.³³

Bourdieu finds that formal education and familial learning and social origin are forceful influences in shaping disposition, and that in realms outside education's purview—he gives the examples of jazz music and comic strips—social origin is a dominant factor in cultural tastes and competencies. For Bourdieu, then, cultural hierarchy and social inequalities are reproduced at the most fundamental and ordinary levels, which is all the more reason that these divisions are experienced as natural and just.

Disposition influences one's taste not only in a positive sense, but also by designating particular cultural forms and genres as inappropriate to an individual's social position, so that "distinction" is both about identification with the appropriate culture and distance from the "wrong" culture: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful

³² See "Some Reflections on the Method" in *ibid.*, 503.

³³ *Ibid.*, xxiv–xxv.

and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.”³⁴ Bourdieu finds that high or “legitimate” culture classifies more clearly than popular culture, and it is associated with the “dominant” class, particularly those “richest in educational capital.”³⁵ Predictably, mainstream “bourgeois” taste is associated with the middle class (e.g. office workers and administrators), and popular taste correlates with the working class (e.g. manual workers and clerks). However, it is important to acknowledge that Bourdieu qualifies these more schematic results with extensive elaborations that attempt to account for the complex uses of cultural texts. He warns that “the apparent constancy of the products conceals the diversity of the social uses they are put to,” and he wishes to explore the heterogeneous and constantly changing relations that inform negotiations of cultural capital and social power.³⁶

Cinema, as an art form that was at the time in the process of being legitimated, occupied an ambiguous position. In the case of cinema, Bourdieu hypothesizes that although it was not typically taught as a subject in educational institutions at the time, educated individuals would develop a particular disposition towards the fledgling “art” commensurate with their social position and the attitudes and practices they were used to at school. For instance, knowledge about directors (as artists) could be considered more important than having seen numerous films, insofar as that knowledge exhibited a socially advantageous disposition towards art in general.³⁷ Moreover, Bourdieu finds that displaying an aesthetic orientation towards film was more common among those from an upper-class background, with a “large cultural inheritance,” even when educational capital was equivalent.³⁸ This example suggests there are limits to the degree of social mobility one may achieve through educational capital alone. Bourdieu claims “high” social origin imbues individuals with confidence and ease in relation to legitimate culture that the less privileged cannot replicate through education (though they may try and come across as

³⁴ Ibid., xxix.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Ibid., 18.

³⁸ Ibid., 55–58.

imposters). Otherwise put, truly legitimate taste obscures its acquisition so that it appears totally natural and reinforces a long historical pedigree.³⁹

Bourdieu invokes a cultural hierarchy in his conceptual opposition between the “popular aesthetic” and the “aesthetic disposition.” The popular aesthetic, which corresponds to the working class audiences of popular art and culture, is described as an orientation towards art that experiences representation as a direct and unmediated reflection of the world. The popular aesthetic takes representations literally and appreciates functional art that expresses a clear and morally sound message that entertains and moves. In this mode, a photograph of a beautiful object or a virtuous scene is a beautiful photograph, while an image of something unpleasant or disturbing (Bourdieu gives the example of a photo of an old woman’s deformed hands) is viewed as less artistic.⁴⁰ Bourdieu explains that the popular aesthetic is “based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function.”⁴¹ As a result, the popular aesthetic has very little tolerance for formal experimentation or “art for art’s sake,” partly because audiences recognize and resent their exclusion from the club.⁴² By contrast, the aesthetic disposition (or “pure aesthetic”), describes an intellectual orientation towards art, typically exhibited by the wealthy and highly educated. This disposition is mediated by educational capital in art and literary history and a tendency to “believe in the representation— literature, theatre, painting.”⁴³

The aesthetic disposition typically corresponds with a better sense of “cultural investment,” increasing one’s “chances of using cultural competence profitably in the different markets.”⁴⁴ These advantages are most accessible to those whose privilege is based in social origin: “What is learnt through immersion in a world in which legitimate culture is as natural as the air one breathes is a sense of the legitimate choice so sure of itself that it convinces by the sheer manner of the performance, like a successful bluff.”⁴⁵ This self-assured disposition creates the conditions of and belief in its own legitimacy, thereby reproducing itself with minimal effort.

³⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁴¹ Ibid., xxvii.

⁴² Ibid., 25.

⁴³ Ibid., xxviii.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 84.

Importantly, though, cultural hierarchies for Bourdieu, as products of class struggle, are mercurial and made up of constantly evolving micro-relations. This is what allows for those without much traditional or scholastic cultural capital to use “middle-ground,” not-quite-legitimate arts like cinema to improve their status and challenge more regimented hierarchies: “These arts, not yet fully legitimate, which are disdained or neglected by the big holders of educational capital, offer a refuge and a revenge to those who, by appropriating them, secure the best return on their cultural capital (especially if it is not fully recognized scholastically) while at the same time taking credit for contesting the established hierarchy of legitimacies and profits.”⁴⁶ Nuances such as the distrust or devaluation of scholarly capital (based in either an opposition to upward mobility through education or in a rejection of calcified power) allow for such fissures, making room for power plays and disruptions of hierarchy. Bourdieu states that “manifestations of anti-intellectualism” are part of class struggle, even though they can mean different things in different contexts.⁴⁷

This is an important insight for my analyses of cultural authority in media film talk, where critics frequently adopt a populist, anti-intellectual posture. In film talk, an apparently natural facility with film culture combined with a lack of formal training can give audiences the impression that certain film critics have been almost “born to it” or preordained. Historically, the best-known and most influential film critics in Canada and the United States have been middle class, well-educated, white men and women (but mostly men). While this profile has changed little over the decades, the performance of “ordinariness” in film talk has grown significantly more pronounced. In other words, today’s film critics are as privileged as ever, but they more often use populist rhetoric to conceal their higher social origin and thereby reinforce their authority. The connection between social origin, habitus, and taste is thus relevant to my claims about the persistent lack of diversity in the voices of film commentary, where not only class, but also gender and race are contributing factors.

In *Popular Culture & High Culture*, Herbert J. Gans takes the case across the pond and investigates cultural hierarchies in American arts and media. It was first published in 1974, a few years before *Distinction* arrived in the United States and it has inevitably aged. In 1999, Gans

⁴⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 86.

published a revised edition and commented on what he saw as the work's continued relevance.⁴⁸ Gans's study contains less empirical data than Pierre Bourdieu's and is less theoretically ambitious, which Gans readily concedes.⁴⁹ Like Bourdieu, Gans took a close look at the distinctions between high culture and popular culture and found correlations between class status and taste. Gans also incorporates and sharpens some popular ideas about cultural hierarchy that were popularized by Russell Lynes in *Harper's* magazine in the late 1940s (see Chapter Four).⁵⁰ Where Lynes had identified three cultural strata—lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow—Gans claims five “taste cultures” consisting of “shared or common aesthetic values and standards of taste.”⁵¹ Unlike Lynes, Gans refuses to rank the relative merits of these cultures, though he still uses a vertical metaphor: high culture, upper-middle, lower-middle, and two categories of “low” culture.⁵² Gans's ultimate end is to promote cultural democracy, and he insists that “all taste cultures are of equal worth” and that “all people have a right to the culture they prefer, regardless of whether it is high or popular.”⁵³ These principles motivate Gans's recommendations regarding public media policies. Though they seem utopian in light of the increasing conglomeration and privatization of the American media, some proposals regarding access and marginalized markets—“everyone should get the culture they want, even if they cannot afford to pay for it”—still resonate with the goals of Canadian public broadcasting.⁵⁴

Where Bourdieu's emphasis on symbolic social resources allowed a fair degree of cultural agency, Gans's view is more deterministic, and he accounts for the shape of the media industries and popular culture primarily through the lens of economic interests. Yet the relationship Gans proposes between class and taste is not entirely straightforward, even in the earlier edition: “The available research still indicates, as I suggest in the original edition, that class explains only part of why people choose the culture they do, some choices producing large

⁴⁸ Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 213n21.

⁵⁰ See Russell Lynes, “The Taste-Makers,” *Harper's Magazine* 194, no. 1165 (June 1947): 481–91; Russell Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” *Harper's Magazine* 198, no. 1185 (February 1949): 19–28.

⁵¹ Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xv, xi.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

differences by class but others only small ones.”⁵⁵ Though “‘higher’ and ‘lower’ taste cultures” do not correspond clearly and easily to higher and lower classes, Gans finds that symbolic and material resources do influence choices in arts and entertainment. In general terms, education level has the largest impact in cases where the appreciation of cultural products requires special training (e.g. conceptual art), occupation has a greater influence when training is less important (e.g. musical genres), and income level is a larger factor when the cultural product is expensive (e.g. opera and legitimate theatre).⁵⁶ In 1999, twenty-five years after the influential book’s initial publication, Gans considers how the correlations have shifted: “True, the class hierarchy has changed somewhat since this book first appeared, and many old rules about what cultures and tastes are acceptable in each class have been liberalized or abolished. As a result, people are freer to roam across tastes, kinds of culture, and media that were off-limits when there was a bit more prestige in being ‘cultured’ than there is today.”⁵⁷

Gans finds that age, gender, and race have possibly become greater factors in cultural preferences than in the past, due to a diversification in cultural products appealing to subcultural groups, though even then, cultural choices within these groups appear to be stratified according to class. Moreover, people move between taste cultures with enough freedom and frequency as to challenge a straightforward correlation between taste publics and taste cultures. In particular, taste publics associated with higher culture enthusiastically use products from the lower cultures. Sociologist Richard Peterson used the term “omnivorousness” to describe the phenomenon.⁵⁸ Gans refers to the blurring of taste cultures as “convergence” and notes that a combination of the growth of the American middle class, a rise in the average level of education, and a “decline in the use of culture as a status indicator” (in other words, the decreasing importance of cultural capital) has helped to flatten the sociocultural playing field.⁵⁹ Gans speculates that increases in

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., viii.

⁵⁸ See Richard A. Peterson and Albert Simkus, “How Musical Taste Groups Mark Occupational Status Groups,” in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152–86; Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern, “Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,” *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (1996): 900–907.

⁵⁹ Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 18.

economic inequality would conversely result in greater divergences in taste cultures and a greater correlation between taste cultures and their associated taste publics.

Indeed, Depression-era-level income inequality has been extensively reported in the American press since at least the 2008 recession.⁶⁰ In Canada, the wealth gap is also increasing: according to a report by the Broadbent Institute based on Statistics Canada data, the median net worth of the top ten per cent of Canadians grew by forty-two per cent, while the median net worth of the bottom ten per cent of Canadians shrunk by 150 per cent, between 2005 and 2013.⁶¹ Meanwhile, trends in entertainment and communications technology (digital television, smartphones) price out the poorest users, encouraging a concomitant gap in cultural capital.⁶² Though the post-war growth of the middle class and increased access to education helped to level the field, buying into the neoliberal myth of absolute cultural democracy denies the persistence of real social inequalities. This is an important factor to bear in mind when reading optimistic claims about the egalitarian world of online film talk.

Bourdieu saw the use of cultural capital as a constant in the class struggle, but he stressed that the ways in which symbolic resources are used, and the meanings of these resources, change continuously, ultimately reinforcing class privilege in whatever ways are appropriate for that time and its particular ideas of legitimacy, competence, and authority: “a true comparative study would have to take account of the specific forms that the struggle and the themes in which it is expressed take on when the objective relations between the class fractions change.”⁶³ In this view, Bourdieu’s findings about correlations between class and cultural competence need not be invalidated because contemporary class relations and cultural distinctions in Canada and the United States appear different. It is more productive to consider the subtle reconfigurations of cultural hierarchy, based on changing manifestations of social privilege in different times and

⁶⁰ Examples include “The Unequal State of America: A Reuters Series,” *Reuters.com*, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/subjects/income-inequality>; Chris Matthews, “Wealth Inequality in America: It’s Worse than You Think,” *Fortune.com*, October 31, 2014, <http://fortune.com/2014/10/31/inequality-wealth-income-us/>.

⁶¹ Dana Flavelle, “Canada’s Inequality Growing: Stats Can,” *Thestar.com*, September 11, 2014, http://www.thestar.com/business/personal_finance/investing/2014/09/11/rich_gaining_more_waalth_study_shows.html.

⁶² D. Watkins, “Too Poor for Pop Culture,” *Salon*, February 4, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/02/05/too_poor_for_pop_culture/.

⁶³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 66.

places. As Gans observes, cultural hierarchy “continues to exist because of the educational, occupational, and other inequalities in the country’s population and because it remains useful as a sorting and segregating device.”⁶⁴

So cultural hierarchy persists, with its attendant implications for cultural democracy, and not just at the extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum. Gans asserts, “most of the sociological studies of culture and class undertaken during the past quarter century indicate how much cultural choices are still affected by class,” pointing to studies by the leading researchers in the area: Paul DiMaggio, Judith Blau, David Halle, and Richard A. Peterson.⁶⁵ Not only do such studies continue to reveal social inequalities, but notions of high culture and popular culture also retain discursive force. Gans contends that cultural hierarchy remains easily recognizable to people and the continued use of terms like “high culture,” “popular culture,” and “high-/middle-/lowbrow” “suggest that most people still notice a relationship between culture and class.”⁶⁶ Nowhere is the prevalence of these terms more obvious than in contemporary cultural journalism, where writers debate and challenge cultural hierarchy, while continuously reinforcing it simply by invoking it.⁶⁷

For Gans, culture critics are associated with “high culture,” along with creators, where they “defend [their] turfs” against encroaching cultural democratization.⁶⁸ According to Gans in 1974, “Critics are sometimes more important than creators, because they determine whether a given cultural item deserves to be considered high culture, and because they concern themselves with the aesthetic issues which are so important to the culture.”⁶⁹ Gans credits film critics, for instance, with developing “auteur theory,” which not only helped illuminate the art of filmmaking but also encouraged directors to be more inventive. It is perhaps because of critics that films could be included in high culture at this time at all.⁷⁰ Critics also play a significant part in upper-middle culture, which Gans suggests circulates through “class media or quality mass

⁶⁴ Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 159.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁷ Elaine Lui, “In Defence of Low Culture,” *The Walrus*, March 13, 2015, <http://thewalrus.ca/in-defence-of-low-culture/> is just one of many examples. For its part, Slate magazine’s culture blog is actually called “Brow Beat.”

⁶⁸ Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

media,” including magazines like *Harper’s* and *The New Yorker*, foreign films (shared with high culture), independent Hollywood productions, public television, and prestige television.⁷¹ Gans attests to the role of critics in perpetuating cultural hierarchy, referring to the influence they have on certain taste publics. For instance, he alleges that the upper-middle public

relies extensively on critics and reviewers, who help it to differentiate between high and upper-middle culture content—and also between lower-middle and upper-middle content—when these are provided by the same media. Some but not all of the critics who review films, books, art, and music for the *New York Times* and upper-middle magazines carry out this function by disapproving of content which they perceive as too experimental or philosophical on the one hand, or too clichéd and ‘vulgar’ on the other hand.⁷²

So critics police the boundaries of taste cultures, with middlebrow critics protecting their territory against both lowbrow culture and avant-garde high culture. My research shows that in recent decades media film talk has aligned itself increasingly with lower taste cultures, guarding against the implicit pretensions of the higher classes. Populist criticism in radio, television, and podcasts also leaves little room for considerations of national culture, an issue rightly or wrongly associated with an out-dated conservative agenda.

Gans challenges the popular wisdom that critics simply help audiences make choices in cultural consumption; he points out that criticism is often disconnected from popular habits:

Film, theater, and television critics writing for newspapers and mass magazines are even more aware of them [high culture standards], although their criticism usually applies upper-middle standards despite the fact that much of their audience is lower-middle. Moreover, they criticize mainly high and upper-middle content, regardless of the taste levels of their readers, so that, for example, the critics for the *New York Daily News*, with a principally low culture readership, sometimes review plays and foreign films that most of their readers never see.⁷³

On the other hand, Gans points out, the most popular forms of culture, such as commercial television—are ignored by critics, leaving lower taste publics to “become their own critics,

⁷¹ Ibid., 109.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 144.

disseminating their criticism with family members, friends, and fellow workers.”⁷⁴ This kind of word of mouth is said to be able to create popular culture “hits” in a way that professional critics cannot. Forty years later television criticism is flourishing in the form of blogs, web magazines, and podcasts, but a more lasting observation emerges: that critics are socially significant less in determining popular success than in maintaining and mediating mercurial cultural hierarchies and taste cultures.

Critics have an important social role to play in culture for Bourdieu, as well. Where *Distinction* addresses culture in the broadest sense, including science, law, and philosophy, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) concerns itself more narrowly with the arts—literature, painting, photography, theatre, music, and cinema—which together form the cultural “field.” Bourdieu defines the field of cultural production as an elaborate set of relations between all the agents (artists, writers, critics, art dealers, etc.), works (paintings, plays, films, etc.), and institutions (galleries, publishing houses, schools, theatres, etc.) that operate at a given time. All of these elements are in symbolic conversation with all other elements within the field, as well as with the entire history of the field, defining the “space of possibles.”⁷⁵ The role of each agent is a “position,” which can be as formal as a job title or as informal as a hobby, and each position is affected by all other positions in the field. An act of “position-taking” refers to a conscious or unconscious power play to assert or improve one’s position within the field. Each position-taking has a ripple effect across the field, even if it backfires and serves only to reduce the agent’s relative cultural power.⁷⁶ The logic of power that determines, for example, the consecration of art works and genres or the strategies of the avant-garde, is based on negotiations of cultural capital that function relatively autonomously from the field of economic power, though there is overlap, particularly when it comes to established (“bourgeois”) art and popular culture. Cultural capital—the symbolic value of an artwork, the credibility of a critic, the reputation of a writer—is constantly in the process of being challenged and overturned by the “new.”

In response to philosophical aesthetics, and in particular Kantian “disinterestedness,” Bourdieu proposes that artistic value is nothing if not determined by the competing interests of the positions in the field:

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

In short, the question of the meaning and the value of the work of art, like the question of the specificity of aesthetic judgement, along with all the great problems of philosophical aesthetics, can be resolved only within a social history of the field, along with a sociology of the conditions of the establishment of the specific aesthetic disposition (or attitude) that the field calls for in each one of its states.⁷⁷

Critics are afforded a fair degree of authority in this system, in that they, along with the other agents in the field, help to produce the field and its terms of participation. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu refers to a “whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worthy of the name.”⁷⁸ Critics do not only help to define the cultural field, but they are also part of the conditions of the production and enjoyment of art; they affirm the recognition of the value of art, and, insofar as each piece of criticism is a position-taking, they also affirm their own position in the field as legitimate judges of artistic value.

Bourdieu does not say much about popular criticism; he deals mostly with the role of critics in the reproduction and legitimation of high culture, including the avant-garde. He notes, “It is significant that the progress of the field of restricted production [art produced for the appreciation of other artists] towards autonomy is marked by an increasingly distinct tendency of criticism to devote itself to the task [...] of providing a ‘creative’ interpretation for the benefit of the ‘creators’. [...] This new criticism, no longer feeling itself qualified to formulate peremptory verdicts, placed itself unconditionally at the service of the artist. It attempted scrupulously to decipher his or her intentions, while paradoxically excluding the public of non-producers from the entire business by attesting, through its ‘inspired’ readings, the intelligibility of works which were bound to remain unintelligible to those not sufficiently integrated into the producers’ field.”⁷⁹

Not only does highbrow criticism tend to be rather hermetic, says Bourdieu, but professional critics engaging with a semi-legitimate art form (including at the time cinema and jazz—today pop music might be a better example) tend to “ape the learned, sententious tone and the cult of erudition characterising academic criticism,” and they aim towards a niche audience, in order to

⁷⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 20.

⁷⁹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 116.

improve their position within the cultural hierarchies.⁸⁰ Another strategy in criticism is to expound contrarian views in an effort to target specific taste publics, secure a readership, and stand out from more conventional critical opinions. The notion of criticism as position-taking is useful for understanding the ways critics distinguish and establish themselves, particularly when the job of “film critic” has been so unstable over time. My analysis in the subsequent chapters considers the precarious professional and social position of film critics responding to complex audiences within a strained and swiftly changing cultural field and industry.

The discursive role of critics in constructing and disseminating cultural hierarchy is the premise of a study by sociologist Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. In *Fringe and Fortune* (1996), Shrum analyzes critical reviews from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe from 1988 to 1996 in an effort to determine the relationships between critics, theatre audiences, and artists. The study follows in the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu and Herbert Gans, but it also attempts to offer some correctives to their views about the connections between taste cultures and socioeconomic class. Shrum emphasizes that the relationship between class and actual cultural consumption has proven in studies to be too complex to fit Bourdieu or Gans’s models. In particular, empirical studies have shown that the groups that use the lower forms of popular culture are actually quite plural and diverse, and that “cultured” individuals tend to value and enjoy variety, rather than limiting themselves to high-status taste cultures.

However, Shrum proposes that the porousness of distinctions does not mean that the importance of cultural hierarchy should be discounted.⁸¹ With reference to the scholarship and to Shrum’s own data, it seems “the differences between high and popular art are neither intrinsic to the art itself, nor simply an effect of the kinds of people that produce and consume cultural objects.”⁸² He wonders, then, “why does the distinction between high and popular art persist in spite of postmodern predictions that it should vanish?”⁸³ His study concludes that the explanation for the “phenomenon of persistence” is that cultural hierarchy results from “the discursive practices that mediate the relationship between art and its public.”⁸⁴ In other words,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁸¹ Shrum, Jr., *Fringe and Fortune*, 11.

⁸² Ibid., 7.

⁸³ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 7.

the power of notions of distinction is primarily discursive and culture critics and other commentators perpetuate cultural hierarchy by circulating such notions. Following Shrum's view, the proliferation of television criticism mentioned above has been a key factor in legitimating scripted television as an art, which counters the intuition that critics started writing about television in response to higher quality programming.

Shrum's argument prefigures Gans's 1999 redux, in that it attributes the resilience of exclusionary ideas about quality and prestige to the critical discourses that constantly invoke such distinctions and privilege certain types of culture above others. It also could explain Gans's observation that cultural hierarchies are still readily recognizable to ordinary people, even while sociological studies show that hierarchical behaviours are not as prevalent as previously thought. At the same time, this discursive basis helps account for the fluidity and contradictions in outlooks on cultural distinction. The ideological categories of "high" and "low" persist, but their content is far from fixed.

Shrum views critics as cultural "mediators." Himself a theatre critic, some of his data nevertheless extends beyond the theatre realm, even analyzing, among others, a large set of Roger Ebert's film reviews. Shrum generalizes his results to develop an overall theory of the critic's social role. In short, the mediator function means critics share authority with artists and audiences, working with them to co-create the status of a work. Mediators wield a degree of power, but the power is less top-down. Rather than tell audiences what to see and what to enjoy, critics work to inform and foster exchanges of opinion via their own expertise. Shrum defines experts here as "those who have some claim to knowledgeable ability by virtue of a distinctive professional activity," which marks them as separate from and more influential than amateur connoisseurs or fans.⁸⁵

Shrum's study found that the more closely works were associated with higher taste cultures, the more critical opinion became a factor in audiences' engagement. Likewise, highbrow taste publics were more likely to pay attention to criticism. In short, highbrows not only engage with more culture, but they do so differently, being more willing to trade in an

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

unmediated experience of art in exchange for the benefits of expert judgment and language, in what Shrum calls a “status bargain.”⁸⁶ The following passage summarizes Shrum’s thesis:

Cultural mediation is best viewed as *discursive intervention between art and its public*, between object and consumer. The process of mediation encompasses the way that talk and text change the differentiation, perception, and assessment of cultural objects. At higher levels in the cultural hierarchy, mediation gains greater significance and affects our relationship with culture in ways that are yet to be fully understood. At lower levels, mediation is less important and the relationship between object and spectator tends to be direct, much as Bourdieu describes responses governed by the ‘popular aesthetic.’⁸⁷

Shrum does not go so far as to suggest a causal relationship whereby either a greater volume of “secondary discourse” confers highbrow status on certain artworks or else certain artworks beget more critical commentary. He does, however, challenge Pierre Bourdieu’s equation of unmediated responses to lower art with the lower classes—“working-class people expect every image to explicitly perform a function”⁸⁸—claiming instead that the relationship of *all* classes to popular culture is less mediated, both because there is less existing discourse about popular culture and because audiences are less likely to seek out commentary about it.

Ultimately, though, Shrum underestimates the significance of critics in popular culture, as do Gans and Bourdieu. The seemingly boundless proliferation of cultural commentary and criticism in publications like *Entertainment Weekly*, *Salon*, and *Slate* demonstrates a healthy supply and demand (to use Gans’s economic terms) for discourse about popular culture. The feast of critical content in print, blogs, social media, radio, television, and podcasts surrounding every new comic book action movie, each Beyoncé music video, every Super Bowl half-time show, and the annual Oscars ceremony suggests that audiences are hungry for the communal experience, cultural capital, and entertainment value this kind of commentary provides. Journalists and bloggers help to expand audience engagement with popular culture well beyond the temporal parameters of discrete events, and also solicit greater and more varied participation across taste cultures. It could be argued that the dominance of popular culture criticism is a recent phenomenon, a symptom of the mainstreaming of the internet and diversification of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxviii.

culture in the twenty years since Shrum published his study. My research here on broadcast film criticism strongly suggests, however, that critics such as Gerald Pratley, Clyde Gilmour, and Elwy Yost have long trafficked in legitimating popular culture and carving out space for public conversations about media culture. These critics functioned variously in their times as entertainers, educators, and mediators, offering competing renditions of film talk and negotiating complex cultural hierarchies. Motivating all their work was a democratizing impulse; they each engaged seriously with popular culture and brought a variety of cinematic forms to a mass audience.

Popular Critics as Public Intellectuals

In *No Respect*, Andrew Ross maintains that the postmodern axiom that distinctions between high culture and popular culture have dissolved may be overstated. He warns, “Before we accept, at face-value, the delirious claim of postmodernism to have transcended the problem of elitism or paternalism, it would be best to examine the historical grounds for such a lack of conscience.”⁸⁹ He suggests, instead, that high-low distinctions have grown more nuanced, which, by extension, implies that the terms of cultural authority are less visible, which might in turn actually reinforce this authority as essential and legitimate. Ross insists upon the far-reaching power of these processes, and asks that we pay attention to the “ways in which the overlap between culture and authority establishes its sense of popular sovereignty within everyday life, and reshapes, molecule by molecule, one’s identity and subjectivity.”⁹⁰ The social, political, and personal stakes are high.

Ross identifies the realm of popular culture as the locus for battles over popular authority, consensus, and hegemony: “The struggle to win popular respect and consent for authority is endlessly being waged, and most of it takes place in the realm of what we recognize as popular culture.”⁹¹ Importantly, for Ross, authority is never static or guaranteed, and this is because hegemonic culture contains contradictions that offer the tools for its own undoing: “popular culture is far from being a straightforward or unified expression of popular interests. It contains elements of disrespect, and even opposition to structures of authority, but it also contains ‘explanations,’ as I have suggested, for the maintenance of respect for those structures of

⁸⁹ Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

authority.”⁹² After all, the defining principle of popular culture is that it articulates and constitutes the preoccupations, values, ideologies, and tastes of “the people,” however disparate; as such, popular culture encourages or validates what Ross calls “self-respect”, which operates in opposition to centralized, external, hierarchical authority. Nevertheless, popular culture continuously reinforces authority, even as the parameters of that authority change, and Ross identifies this tension between the audience’s self-determination and the forces of hegemony as the dialectic at the heart of popular culture. He points out that “this dialectical view of popular culture as an appeal to self-respect and cultural authority at the same time is counter to the view of audiences as passive dupes of ‘mass culture’ in the service of profit and complacency.”⁹³

Perhaps the struggle between cultural authority and diverse popular experiences and tastes plays out most clearly in the realm of popular cultural criticism, where journalists adopt the role of cultural expert, distinguished aesthete, and public intellectual. Here, “what is dialectical about the historically fractious relationship between intellectuals and popular culture” is somewhat literalized and published for mass consumption.⁹⁴ Popular criticism simultaneously embraces contradictory opinions and tastes, while also asserting the primacy of a certain intellectual class to make such distinctions. Ross insists that we must probe the dialectic between intellectuals and popular culture:

Only then can we expect to make proper sense of the linked material power, in our culture, of elitism and anti-intellectualism, vanguardism and populism, paternalism and delinquency. Only then can we see how categories of taste, which police the differentiated middle ground, are also categories of cultural power which play upon every suggestive trace of difference in order to tap the sources of indignity, on the one hand, and *hauteur*, on the other.⁹⁵

Where, but in popular cultural criticism, do we see overt expressions of both populist indignation and intellectual “hauteur” in matters of taste? Where else is “every suggestive trace of difference” explored and exploited and put on display? There is evidence in popular criticism of both the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

continuing power of cultural distinction as well as of the ever-increasing complexity of these distinctions and their relationship to authority, class, and various identity categories.

The connection of popular critics to the intellectual class is not a straightforward one. To put it most simply, critics act as intermediaries between intellectuals and average audiences, externalizing the struggle over cultural authority in explicit ways. Ross insists on the continued relevance of this struggle, despite postmodern claims about the democratization of the cultural landscape:

While relations of disrespect/deference/contempt/paternalism are always felt and expressed subjectively, there is no point in ignoring that some form of objective antagonism is at stake here, even if that antagonism cannot be reduced simply to relations of class. Insofar as that antagonism can be thought of, for the sake of shorthand, as an abstractly objective relation between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘ordinary people,’ it is fractionated, in reality, into countless arrangements of minute differences of taste and consumption, each governed by the authority of cultural competence, whether inherited or else *explained* by reference to an occupational hierarchy based on education and training.⁹⁶

Though “cultural competence” is not strictly dependent on occupation, education, or training, some form of officially recognized expertise certainly helps to legitimate competence and locate it on the spectrum of cultural authority. As discussed above, professional critics are interesting figures in that they are expected to exhibit tremendous mastery of cultural history and aesthetics, but they often lack formal intellectual training and credentials to back up these competencies. At the same time, their professional role in itself legitimates their authority, even if their expertise was, typically, self-taught and not formalized until the day they began collecting pay cheques in exchange for their film reviews.

Ross allows for a broad definition of the “education” that contributes to cultural competence: “Education (which covers much more than formal schooling), and not material prosperity, is our culture’s way of ‘earning’ respect.”⁹⁷ For Ross, again, informal cultural competence and knowledge—“cultural capital,” as Bourdieu would call it—grants more social

⁹⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

“respect” than wealth or even formal training, reminding us that the inner workings of class status can be contradictory. Popular critics again offer a literal example, whereby their expertise might be self-taught or otherwise unconventional. Yet, even under these unstable conditions, many highly regarded critics have achieved highbrow status and some have even become legends.

Ross observes an interesting tension for intellectuals who wish to avoid the trappings of the hierarchical social position that comes with cultural competence. Likewise, a critic must appear to be a specialist but still accessible and relatable. The critic seeks the organic trust, or “respect,” of the public—a difficult proposition for members of the intellectual class. In this, a lack of formal education might actually work in the critic’s favour. Recalling Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual, Ross finds that instrumental, vocational practitioners—rather than intellectuals—earn greater favour and respect in an anti-intellectual milieu sensitive to the inequities of class privilege. I submit then that critics are respected *because of*, not *in spite of*, their lack of formal training and education, especially if they can take on, “like a kind of elaborate blackface, the discourse of anti-intellectualism.”⁹⁸

Many of Andrew Ross’s ideas on the meanings and functions of intellectuals are based on those of Antonio Gramsci. Ross finds that “Gramsci’s distinction between organic (affiliated) and traditional (independent) intellectuals is much too useful to ignore,” though he is careful to apply this distinction in a “non-class reductionist way.”⁹⁹ In *Selections from The Prison Notebooks*, published posthumously in 1948, Gramsci outlines the changing conditions of intellectual leadership in response to the rise in Europe of a professional class. For Gramsci, this emerging class, comprised of professors, consultants, policymakers, *et cetera*, was vocational in nature, though it was concerned neither with manual labour nor with traditional, non-institutional academia.¹⁰⁰ Gramsci is thinking from a Marxist standpoint wherein the matter at hand is no less than the revolution of the working class to overthrow the ruling class and achieve true democracy and self-determination. In the traditional Marxist schema, intellectuals are required to bring enlightenment to members of the proletariat so that they can become aware of the conditions of their own oppression and take up arms against the *status quo*. The intellectuals

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 26.

have grown out of the ruling class but have rejected the terms of capitalism and have chosen to become leaders of the revolution, albeit from the outside. Their role is crucial, but there is an inherent challenge in marrying their privileged leadership with the culture of the subordinate working class.

Gramsci's conceptualization of the "organic intellectual" proposes to solve this problem. He asserts that all groups, including those of the working class, naturally produce leaders who help to articulate and strengthen the identity of their group: "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields."¹⁰¹ In this view, intellectuals need not come from the bourgeoisie, but, indeed, can form without traditional academic training. This claim is in keeping with Gramsci's democratically minded assertion that all individuals have the capacity for intellectual and philosophical thought, though society tends to recognize only those intellectuals and philosophers who fulfill a specific social role, often tied to class status. In his words, "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals."¹⁰² The organic intellectuals can help bridge this gap by solidifying group identification and collaborating with the traditional intelligentsia in the context of a political entity that can ultimately advance working class interests.

He observes that, as much as some traditional intellectuals have presented themselves as refugees from the class hierarchy, it is more the case that they experience their privilege as normalized and so their intellectual debt to their class roots has simply been concealed: "Since these various categories of traditional intellectuals experience through an '*esprit de corps*' their uninterrupted historical continuity and their special qualification, they thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group."¹⁰³ Gramsci suggests that intellectuals have over-relied on philosophies that idealize their social role as exceptional, and this allows "intellectuals [to] think of themselves as 'independent', autonomous, endowed with a

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰² Ibid., 9.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 7.

character of their own, etc.”¹⁰⁴ One may be reminded here of Bourdieu’s proposition that cultural leaders commonly experience their authority as ordained or natural, rather than structured by complex socioeconomic factors. If traditional intellectuals simply reinforce class ties and privilege—albeit, and perhaps worse, unknowingly—it is difficult to see how they can truly lead the working class in its best interests. Gramsci’s point is that intellectual leadership must come from within the social group, organically and democratically, in order to truly address the material specificities of that group’s experience. The traditional intellectual claims to work to advance democracy, while the organic intellectual actually *is* democratic, in both form and function.

Gramsci’s intellectuals are thus defined by where they fit in a system of social relations. He identifies the term “intellectual” as a professional category; it labels the type of labour an individual does. For Gramsci, “non-intellectuals do not exist,” for the same reason one would not refer to a class of people as non-mechanics, non-doctors, or non-painters.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, “in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity.”¹⁰⁶ For Gramsci, even the most menial labour does not indicate menial intellect. Regardless of the work, “There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*.”¹⁰⁷ If the technical human cannot be divided from the thinking human, likewise manual labour cannot be isolated from intellectual labour.

Even beyond the skills demanded by a specific type of work, intellectual competency is open to everyone: “Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a “philosopher”, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Gramsci suggests that ideologies are not developed and applied from the top down, but are built and reinforced from the bottom up, through conscientiously

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

lived social and material circumstances. This statement proposes an interesting view that the everyday activities of the “ordinary” individual, as they go about their work and their lives, are in fact productive, and, even, creative. That everyone is a “philosopher,” “artist,” and “man of taste” suggests that the most mundane cerebral activities “bring into being new modes of thought” and can potentially constitute worldviews that can influence action. That “taste” counts as one of these creative, intellectual activities open to individuals of all classes is a suggestion later taken up by Pierre Bourdieu, Herbert Gans, and Andrew Ross. It is also a foundational principle of popular film criticism.

Importantly, Gramsci’s “new type of intellectual,” the organic intellectual, combines intellectual work (broadly defined) with hands-on participation in the activities of the group.¹⁰⁹ Gramsci explains, “The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator.”¹¹⁰ Instead, “technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.”¹¹¹ This technical knowledge is what can speak to the working class, engender group identification, and lead to self-awareness and mobilization.

The characterization of the organic intellectual in contrast to the traditional intellectual raises an interesting question about where the popular critic might fit into this model. Anna Everett has documented the ways the “organic intellectuals” of the twentieth century black press tapped into cinema culture as a counter-public sphere for discussing issues of race in the United States.¹¹² Film critics rely for their influence on the kind of eloquence Gramsci attributes to the traditional intelligentsia; however, critics usually emerge without the trademark credentials of the intellectual class. This humble provenance positions them well as organic intellectuals and allows them to don the cloak of anti-intellectualism. Former film critic Meaghan Morris recounted a tale about a film review she published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in which she

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹² Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 53.

narrowly escaped a gauche display of intellect by crediting her own Derrida allusion to a pedantic “friend.” She remarks, “This is one of the most widespread and poisonous of media-intellectual tricks: knowledge is flaunted and yet denied, wielded and yet apparently neutralized by the simple expedient of admitting ideas *only* on condition that they be attributed to someone else, who is then made to seem slightly comic. [...] Thus is theory rendered ridiculous, yet maintained as the province of the few.”¹¹³ Morris’s anecdote captures well the paradox of critical authority: that it denies its own value in order to be accepted as legitimate. Such are the conditions of an anti-intellectual culture. A. O. Scott describes anti-intellectualism in the United States as “virtually our civic religion.”¹¹⁴ Morris suggests that the same is true in Australia. The rest of this chapter will begin my investigation of the role of critical authority and anti-intellectualism in international and Canadian film culture.

Critical Authority in Film Culture

Even two of the world’s most powerful film critics have questioned whether those in their profession have any real authority. Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott, chief film critics at *The New York Times*, reflected on the legacy of perhaps the most influential film critic of all time: Pauline Kael, superstar reviewer for *The New Yorker* from 1968 to 1991. Dargis remarks that some “professional opinionators” now perceive “an assault on critical authority” from the likes of Rotten Tomatoes and Yelp, websites that aggregate and average ratings from dozens of professional and amateur sources, appearing to oversimplify, commodify, and—most troublingly—democratize criticism.¹¹⁵ She notes that such claims are based on a disputable “notion that critics once had power.”¹¹⁶ Scott replies, “the idea of critical authority has always struck me as slippery, even chimerical. Authority over whom? Power to do what?”

The impact of reviews on audience consumption patterns is the most obvious and quantifiable measure of critical influence. According to Matthew Smith, the earliest reviews had minimal impact because audiences saw them after the films, which played for only one night; in

¹¹³ Morris, “Indigestion,” 116.

¹¹⁴ A. O. Scott, *Better Living Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 10.

¹¹⁵ Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott, “Mad About Her: Pauline Kael, Loved and Loathed,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/movies/pauline-kael-and-her-legacy.html?_r=1&emc=eta1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

this context, critics worked to “educate the public.”¹¹⁷ Various contemporary studies have tested the effects of reviews on box office performance. The results are inconclusive. Some researchers found that film reviews did to some degree influence or at least predict the success of individual films, particularly in the case of independent movies and narrow-release films.¹¹⁸ A 2003 study concluded that negative reviews have a bigger impact on movie sales than positive reviews.¹¹⁹ Other studies have determined that the public does *not* rely on film critics to make movie choices, so, at best, reviews may coincide with audience behaviour, but they do not significantly affect it.¹²⁰ Critics may not always or even often wield authority over readers’ film choices and the box office; so what kind of influence does the average reviewer have?

The impact of critics may be difficult to quantify, but their leadership in the public sphere of everyday film culture is easier to see, even as it takes numerous different forms. Mattias Frey turns to Jasmina Kallay’s potent 2007 piece “The Critic Is Dead” for a definition of “critical authority” that entails the critic’s power “to shape taste,” “to make or break films,” and “to establish hierarchy.”¹²¹ Critical authority is, Frey adds, “the ability to influence filmmakers or the industry; the capacity to affect attendance numbers, box-office returns, or ‘make or break’ a film (‘short-term authority’); the power to define a film’s cultural value and place in a canon (‘long-term authority’).”¹²² This is the type of authority film critics hope to harness when they champion unknown films and filmmakers. Frey asserts material properties of print criticism can

¹¹⁷ Matthew Smith, “Introducing a New Medium: Newspaper Reviews of the First Film Screenings in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York in 1896” (MA, Concordia University, 1996), 79.

¹¹⁸ David A. Reinstein and Christopher M. Snyder, “The Influence of Expert Reviews on Consumer Demand for Experience Goods: A Case Study of Movie Critics,” *The Journal of Industrial Economics* 53, no. 1 (2005): 27–51; Michael Peress and Arthur Spirling, “Scaling the Critics: Uncovering the Latent Dimensions of Movie Criticism With an Item Response Approach,” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 105, no. 489 (2010): 71–83.

¹¹⁹ Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee, and S. Abraham Ravid, “How Critical Are Critical Reviews? The Box Office Effects of Film Critics, Star Power, and Budgets,” *Journal of Marketing* 67, no. 4 (2003): 103–17.

¹²⁰ Bruce Austin, “Critics’ and Consumers’ Evaluations of Motion Pictures: A Longitudinal Test of the Taste Culture and Elitist Hypotheses,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 10, no. 4 (1983): 156–67; Jehoshua Eliashberg and Steven M. Shugan, “Film Critics: Influencers or Predictors?,” *Journal of Marketing* 61, no. 2 (1997): 68–78.

¹²¹ Jasmina Kallay, “The Critic Is Dead,” *Film Ireland*, no. 118 (2007): 26–27; as cited in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 13.

¹²² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 18.

help establish a critic's authority, such as font, size, and formatting; even better when the publication is prestigious.¹²³ Critics can also gain influence by joining professional associations. National cultural institutions also tend to legitimate critics that work under their auspices.¹²⁴

Film critic David Denby more humbly claims, "Critics seldom make things happen, but they can spark the dialogue, the good talk that is one of the prime pleasures of moviegoing."¹²⁵ But critical talk is more than a simple pleasure; critics frequently set the terms and articulate the language of film commentary for the general public. Film historians Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery point out that film reviews do not tell "audiences what to think so much as [...] what to think *about*."¹²⁶ Mark Jancovich borrows and expands on this concept:

As part of the process of contextualisation by which interpretations are framed and incorporated in struggles between different taste formations, reviews cannot be read as giving automatic or unproblematic access to the ways in which audiences interpret films. Any review, or any other act of criticism, is in itself 'an affirmation of its own legitimacy,' a claim by the reviewer of his or her entitlement to participate in the process by which cultural value is defined and distinguished, and thus to take part not only in a legitimate discourse about the film, but also in the production of its cultural value. Reviews cannot, then, simply be taken as *traces* of readings, nor as providing a straightforward access to the discourses that produce interpretations; rather, they give a sense of the very different ways in which people are supposed to 'talk' about films.¹²⁷

Film writing refers indirectly to the surrounding taste landscape and suggests strategies for navigating it. Jancovich's distinction between consuming films and talking about films recognizes that film talk, like film taste, involves fluctuating cultural hierarchies. Film critics participate in claiming and establishing the legitimacy of certain orientations towards film culture. For Barbara Klinger, film reviews "signify the cultural hierarchies of aesthetic value

¹²³ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 384.

¹²⁶ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 90.

¹²⁷ Marc Jancovich, "Genre and the Audience: Genre Classifications and Cultural Distinctions in the Mediation of *The Silence of the Lambs*," in *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 37.

reigning at particular times. [...] They also offer insight into broader cultural attitudes toward art and the public during given historical periods.”¹²⁸ Haidee Wasson traces the influence of film reviews on the public back to the 1920s: “Like fan magazines, popular film criticism constituted an important site for generating particular sensibilities about cinema.”¹²⁹ She continues, “it helped to define what it meant to think about and know about cinema for a vast reading audience, constituting a mode by which one might engage with the cinema without actually going to a theatre or watching a film,” again reinforcing the idea that film reviews can have a rich life apart from the films they reference.¹³⁰ Film criticism also has a didactic function; film scholar Noël Carroll writes about film critics as “disseminators of new ideas.”¹³¹ The ubiquity of popular film criticism in the 1960s, for example, gave average readers more sophisticated knowledge of film production techniques, aesthetics, and film history.¹³²

Film critics tacitly reinforce film culture itself as a relevant and meaningful social field, with economic as well as cultural implications. Critics model dynamic, lively film talk in a way that keeps audiences talking about and caring about cinema. Andrew Tolson explains that television relies not just on rhetorical “liveness” but also the performance of “liveliness,” based on spontaneity and the illusion that media talk is occasioned (or called up) by imminent and germane circumstances.¹³³ In this way, lively media talk constructs its topics as pressing and worthwhile. Further, in establishing the desirable language and conditions of public film talk, the critical industry helps determine the politics of participation, in terms of who speaks, who gets heard, and, by extension, who listens. Historically, the voices and audiences of film talk, like the middle class readers of Dargis and Scott at *The New York Times*, have tended to reflect and reproduce broader social inequalities. Not only is the vocation of film critic an unusual and privileged one, but readers that follow criticism also tend to belong to the educated class. In 1926, British film critic Iris Barry wrote that most people do “not care for real criticism;” “only the

¹²⁸ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 70.

¹²⁹ Haidee Wasson, “The Woman Film Critic: Newspapers, Cinema and Iris Barry,” *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 157.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³¹ Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.

¹³² Roberts, *The Complete History*, 184.

¹³³ Tolson, *Media Talk*, 13.

smaller special public, which really goes shopping for the best films and plays [...] welcomes real criticism.”¹³⁴ In 1943, French critic André Bazin claimed only “a sophisticated urban minority” reads film criticism.¹³⁵ Frey contends that criticism continues to be a middle class pursuit. Studies by Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. and Reinstein and Snyder (discussed above) show that reviews are significantly more relevant for highbrow culture than for popular entertainment. The final chapters of this thesis investigate the supposed democratic turn in recent film criticism and consider to what extent trends in online and print criticism have actually made media film talk more inclusive (or not) for both critics and users.

The irony is that film criticism is frequently thought of as a mass audience sport. Film critic and academic Phillip Lopate observes, “When it comes to movies, everyone regards himself as an expert. With reason: 1) the average adult has seen thousands of motion pictures, and 2) mass entertainment promotion reassures the audience that no special expertise is required to appreciate its product.”¹³⁶ The logic goes that everyone watches movies, everyone has opinions about them, and, now more than ever, everyone has the means to share those opinions in the public sphere. However, as my own suburban youth in Canada’s sixth most populous city illustrates, movies are not always as available as we think. In the case of limited-release, independent Canadian features, the time lag between a short urban theatrical run and release on home video and pay TV can be enough to lose suburban and rural audiences.¹³⁷ Film critic for *The Village Voice* Stephanie Zacharek revealed that she too had few opportunities to watch films in her youth, besides what she found on television. Instead, she watched Pauline Kael talk about movies on *The Dick Cavett Show* and read Kael’s reviews in *The New Yorker*, reviews of films Zacharek would not see until years later. Zacharek explains these early encounters with popular film commentary not only gave her a taste for movies but also showed her that taking films

¹³⁴ Iris Barry, *Let’s Go to the Movies* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972), 190; cited in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 42.

¹³⁵ Cited in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 59.

¹³⁶ Phillip Lopate, *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically: Essays and Criticism from a Lifelong Love Affair with the Movies* (Toronto: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1998), x.

¹³⁷ Simon Houpt, “What Is Wrong with the Canadian Film Industry?,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 4, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/awards-and-festivals/tiff/the-shaky-future-of-canadiancinema/article26225432/>.

seriously was common sense and common practice.¹³⁸ Implied in her origin story is a sense of the formative influence of media film talk in inspiring would-be film critics. Indeed, Zacharek later became one of Kael's protégés.

One could learn the language of film commentary by consuming reviews, but becoming a recognized, professional film critic was another story. In the first half of the twentieth century, the film beat constituted the lowest rung on the ladder for the professional reporter, nothing more than a pit stop on the way to a more prestigious position, such as drama critic. With time, the job of film critic became a vocation; a small coterie of self-taught enthusiasts was established. But even as film criticism gained in respectability in the 1960s and 1970s, many film writers started out with a journalism degree and experience in theatre, art, book, or even restaurant reviewing rather than formal training in film theory, aesthetics, or history. This was the professional formation of Roger Ebert, Pauline Kael, and Andrew Sarris, for example.

Despite recent substantial job losses in the critical industry and concerns about the prevalence of amateurs and upstarts in the blogosphere, most public film commentary in fact still comes from professional critics and journalists. The Broadcast Film Critics Association, for one, attempts to uphold professional standards through strict membership criteria that exclude most critics who work in community radio, television, and podcasts. The BFCA is the largest film critics association in Canada and the United States, and it requires, for instance, that radio critics must be heard in a minimum of six markets, unless they serve one of a handful of major urban centres, such as Los Angeles or Toronto.¹³⁹ The eligibility requirements of film review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes are similarly rigorous.¹⁴⁰ Such criteria attempt to protect the value of membership as well as policing the professional boundaries of criticism itself. Pierre Bourdieu notes that in the fluid field of cultural production, establishing boundaries is key to reinforcing social position and ensuring job stability: "The boundary of the field is a stake of struggles" and

¹³⁸ Alan Scherstuhl and Stephanie Zacharek, *We Have to Hold Filmmakers Responsible, and If They Make a Piece of Crap, Too Bad*, streaming, The Village Voice Film Club, 2014, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2014/06/film_podcast_we_have_to_hold_filmmakers_responsible_and_if_they_make_a_piece_of_crap_too_bad.php.

¹³⁹ "BFCA - Broadcast Film Critics Association," *Critics' Choice*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.criticschoice.com/bfca/>; "BFCA/BTJA - Application for Membership," *Critics' Choice*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.criticschoice.com/membership/>.

¹⁴⁰ "Tomatometer Criteria," *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed July 31, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/help_desk/critics/.

it may be “protected by conditions of entry that are tacitly and practically required (such as a certain cultural capital) or explicitly codified and legally guaranteed.”¹⁴¹ To audiences, however, professional consecration does not necessarily mean legitimacy as a tastemaker. A critic’s lack of academic training or official recognition “may be considered a virtue,” conferring on them greater authenticity and popular appeal.¹⁴²

The “golden age” of film criticism in the 1960s and 1970s was known for critics who flaunted their film knowledge through overt displays of cultural capital and even arrogance, à la John Simon and Rex Reed. Forceful statements of taste reinforced symbolic hierarchies and claimed the authority to adjudicate cultural matters: “All critics declare not only their judgment of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it.”¹⁴³ Even Pauline Kael, whose major contribution was to have pierced intellectual arrogance and brought film criticism down to earth by focussing on popular films and the ordinary, sensual pleasures of cinema, nevertheless reinforced her own cultural authority in the process. By contrast, current modes of film talk favour a performance of ordinariness that involves downplaying one’s cultural authority. Now, statements of opinion are often framed as personal and egalitarian. “Did you like it?” is the first animating question in casual talk about cultural texts, Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. points out.¹⁴⁴ Where the film sophisticates of the past insisted that critical judgments be grounded in conspicuous expertise and cultural capital, recent film talk tends to treat opinions as markers of communality and cultural democracy. Appropriating an amateur stance deflects anti-intellectual backlash by emphasizing authenticity and ordinariness. Ironically, by masking their acquired cultural capital so that taste appears “enchanted” and natural, critics can theoretically reinforce their cultural authority.¹⁴⁵

For Jürgen Habermas in 1962, personalized responses to art offered ordinary people a critical means for participating in the public sphere, after they had become alienated from institutionalized scientific knowledge.¹⁴⁶ However, Habermas hoped for such responses to find

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 42, 43.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr., *Fringe and Fortune: The Role of Critics in High and Popular Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxvi; Shrum, Jr., *Fringe and Fortune*, 36–37.

¹⁴⁶ Habermas, *Public Sphere*.

common ground and form an oppositional consensus. Frey's research attests to persistent anxieties throughout film criticism history, one of which is the perpetual sense that film criticism is becoming more personalized and atomized and that "consensual" critical standards have been replaced by relativistic self-interest. It is true that media film talk emphasizes difference, at least in terms of individual taste and perspectives, although much of it shares a common language; a language partly constituted and eagerly appropriated by the commerce of cinema. Nevertheless, film talk and the critical industry can be quite exclusionary, and the research presented in this thesis shows a patent underrepresentation of cultural diversity throughout the history of Canadian and American film criticism.

Canadian National Cinema Culture

As a contested, fragmented, postcolonial, and profoundly diverse "nation," Canada has always struggled with constructing a so-called cultural identity. Similarly, the aging, problematic concept of "Canadian national cinema" is better thought of as a somewhat arbitrary (yet institutionalized) aggregate of regional and linguistic film cultures, each one of which is itself complex and contradictory. Scholars have proposed various alternatives to the national cinema framework: Jerry White and William Beard make a case for a "two national cinemas" approach as "more reflective of the cultural reality in both English Canada and Québec."¹⁴⁷ Here they draw on Pierre Véronneau's recognition of multiple, specific Canadian cinemas and Thomas Waugh's argument that Ontario-based film scholarship has too often naively glossed over the distinctiveness of Quebec cinema in an effort to create a unified national cinema. Michael Walsh decoded and challenged various theorizations of Canadian national cinema in "National Cinema, National Imaginary" (1996).¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, White borrows John Ralston Saul's "triangular reality" to claim the unassailability of Canadian cinema's foundations in English, French, and Aboriginal traditions.¹⁴⁹ Jim Leach's introduction to *Film in Canada* offers a useful overview of these debates.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ William Beard and Jerry White, "Introduction," in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), xviii.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Walsh, "National Cinema, National Imaginary," *Film History: An International Journal* 8 (1996): 5–17.

¹⁴⁹ Jerry White, "Introduction," in *The Cinema of Canada* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 1–2.

¹⁵⁰ Jim Leach, *Film in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The literature on the topic effectively demonstrates that Canadian cinema is a discursive construct created, maintained, and invoked by the state, policymakers, scholars, and journalists to serve ideological interests regarding film production as an economic and cultural enterprise. The Canadian national cinema concept also interpellates a Canadian cinema *audience*, even if it is characterized mostly as an “absent” audience, uninterested in domestic films.¹⁵¹ Institutions like public broadcasting perpetuate the discursive construct by regularly addressing audiences as part of a national cultural community. This “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s sense, is materially replicated in the federally defined and regulated systems and policies that continue to sustain cinema culture in Canada, such as Telefilm Canada, the Production Services Tax Credit, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and Canadian content requirements.¹⁵²

This project assumes that popular film critics help shape the discourses of cinema culture, and I look at how that has taken place in the context of English Canada. Here I take a cue from Andrew Higson’s generative essay, “The Concept of National Cinema” (1989), in which he argues that studying national cinema should include reckoning with “the activity of national audiences and the conditions under which they make sense of and use the films they watch.”¹⁵³ Higson implicates a nation’s “critical tradition” in the “mythologising” of national cinema and thereby makes a case for paying attention to “the range of and relation between discourses about film circulating within that cultural and social formation, and their relative accessibility to different audiences” in order to better understand the nuances of a nation’s cinema culture.¹⁵⁴ In Higson’s formulation, a holistic and accurate picture of a nation’s cinematic commitments and dispositions requires a consideration of domestic moviegoing practices, including critical discourses.

Though my research goes off the beaten track, foundational works of Canadian film history provide an indispensable backdrop: Peter Morris’s *Embattled Shadows* (1978), Loren Lerner’s

¹⁵¹ Charles R. Acland, “From Absent Audience to Expo-Mentality: Popular Film in Canada,” in *A Passion for Identity: Canadian Studies for the 21st Century*, ed. David Taras and Beverly Rasporich, 4th ed. (Scarborough: Nelson, 2001), 275–91.

¹⁵² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2006).

¹⁵³ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 52–67.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37, 45.

reference guide *Canadian Film and Video* (1997), William Beard and Jerry White's *North of Everything* (2002), George Melnyk's *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (2004), and Jim Leach's *Film in Canada* (2006 and 2011).¹⁵⁵ Major efforts in Canadian film studies have been devoted to theorizing, defining, historicizing, and questioning the concept of "national cinema" itself, often with a focus on building, expanding, or subverting a Canadian film canon. The 1970s and 1980s can be described as the first generation of canon formation, as proposed by Peter Morris in "In Our Own Eyes: Canonizing of Canadian Film" (1994).¹⁵⁶ Critics and scholars clashed over the desirable aesthetic and ideological values of cinema in Canada, notably in the "Cinema We Need" debate (described in Chapter Three).¹⁵⁷

As "Canadian national cinema" began to crystallize around internationally-fêted narrative films such as *Goin' Down the Road* (1970) and *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971), the understanding that "a stable and coherent national identity can only be successful at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions and contradictions—differences of class, race, gender, region, etc." inspired a rich tradition of expanding and subverting the canon of Canadian cinema.¹⁵⁸ Robin Wood championed a handful of "feminist" films in *CineAction!* (1989), and Bruce Elder advocated for experimental film practices and their connection to Canada's realist documentary heritage (1989).¹⁵⁹ Later, Bill Marshall highlighted the cinemas of Quebec as a unique cultural formation in his superb *Quebec National Cinema* (2001).¹⁶⁰ Pierre Véronneau shone a light on

¹⁵⁵ Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978); Loren Lerner, *Canadian Film and Video: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); William Beard and Jerry White, eds., *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002); Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*; Leach, *Film in Canada*.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Morris, "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 27–44.

¹⁵⁷ See Bruce Elder, "The Cinema We Need," *Canadian Forum* 10, no. 44 (1985): 32–35; Bart Testa et al., "A Debate Around 'The Cinema We Need,'" *Cinema Canada*, no. 120–21 (1985): 26–38.

¹⁵⁸ Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," 43.

¹⁵⁹ Robin Wood, "Towards A Canadian (Inter)National Cinema: Part 1 of a 2-Part Article," *CineAction!*, no. 16 (Spring 1989): 59–63; Bruce Elder, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989).

¹⁶⁰ Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

Acadian cinema (1999 and 2003).¹⁶¹ Brenda Longfellow (1996), Mary Alemany-Galway (2002), and Christopher Gittings (2002) questioned the validity and politics of “national” cinema in a postmodern, postcolonial context of demographic diversity and globalized film culture.¹⁶² Gittings’s book also reflected the growing attention to Aboriginal cinemas, with the corpus showing a heavy emphasis on National Film Board production.¹⁶³ Erin Manning (2003) continued to probe the profoundly exclusionary tendencies of “Canadian national culture,” particularly cinema, while various books focussed on regional specificities and illustrated Manning’s point about the primacy of community.¹⁶⁴ Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault (1999) and Brenda Austin-Smith and George Melnyk (2010) asserted the contributions of women in Canadian cinema; and Thomas Waugh brought queer cinema in Canada into focus (2006).¹⁶⁵ Malek Khouri and Darrell Varga (2008)

¹⁶¹ Pierre Véronneau, “Le Cinéma Québécois Aux Etats-Unis a-T-Il plus de Chances D’être Mieux Reçu En Anglais?,” *Cinémas* 7, no. 3 (1997): 81–118; Pierre Véronneau, “Jacques Savoie, Scénariste de Ses Romans : Une Identité Entre l’Acadie et Le Québec,” in *L’Acadie Plurielle : Dynamiques Identitaires Collectives et Développement Au Sein Des Réalités Acadiennes* (Poitiers/Moncton: Institut d’études acadiennes et québécoises/Centre d’études acadiennes, 2003), 699–716.

¹⁶² Brenda Longfellow, “Globalization and National Identity in Canadian Film,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 3–16, among others; Mary Alemany-Galway, *A Postmodern Cinema: The Voice of the Other in Canadian Film* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002); Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁶³ See, for instance, Jerry White, *The Cinema of Canada* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006); Bruno Cornellier, “Je Me Souviens (maintenant) : Altérité, Indianité et Mémoire Collective,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 99–127.

¹⁶⁴ Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Mike Gasher, *Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002); Bill Marsden, *Big Screen Country: Making Movies in Alberta* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2004); Darrell Varga, ed., *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2009).

¹⁶⁵ Kay Armatage et al., eds., *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women’s Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Brenda Austin-Smith and George Melnyk, eds., *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010); Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

foregrounded representations of the working class.¹⁶⁶ Wolfram R. Keller and Gene Walz (2008) took as their starting point Canadian cinema's involvement in global distribution and reception.¹⁶⁷ An innovative recent collection *Cinephemera* (2014), edited by Zoë Druick and Gerda Cammaer, goes beyond theatrically-oriented feature and documentary cinema to consider phenomena such as home movies, educational films, found footage, and film performance art, among others.¹⁶⁸

Of particular relevance to my work, scholars have also questioned the tendency of Canadian film studies to canonize prestige art films while ignoring domestic commercial features, United States-driven “runaway productions,” and cross-cultural co-productions; see essays by André Loiselle, Jennifer Vanderburgh, and Peter Urquhart.¹⁶⁹ In a similar vein, canonical Canadian film history has downplayed the extraordinary impact of popular film commentary on Canadian cinema culture. Though Canadian film scholars occasionally use journalistic sources as evidence, few works document or closely examine the history and practices of public film criticism. There are some exceptions, including Santiago Hidalgo's Master's thesis, “The Emergence of Film Criticism in North American Film Trade Journals, 1907–1912.”¹⁷⁰ The works of Peter Morris and Peter Urquhart have been especially helpful to me, methodologically and thematically.

Peter Morris explored the formative impact of popular discourses on Canadian canon formation in two articles, “The Uncertain Trumpet” (1989), about attitudes towards English-

¹⁶⁶ Malek Khouri and Darrell Varga, eds., *Working on Screen: Representations of the Working Class in Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁷ Wolfram R. Keller and Gene Walz, eds., *Screening Canadians: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Canadian Film* (Marburg: Universitätsbibliothek Marburg, 2008).

¹⁶⁸ Zoë Druick and Gerda Cammaer, eds., *Cinephemera: Archives, Ephemeral Cinema, and New Screen Histories in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ André Loiselle, “Subtly Subversive or Simply Stupid: Notes on Popular Quebec Cinema,” *Post Script* 18, no. 2 (1999): 75–84; Vanderburgh, “Ghostbusted!”; see, for instance, Peter Urquhart, “You Should Know Something - Anything - About This Movie,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 64–80; Urquhart, “Meatballs Matters”; Peter Urquhart, “Film and Television: A Success?,” in *Cultural Industries.ca: Making Sense of Canadian Media in the Digital Age* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2012), 17–32.

¹⁷⁰ Santiago Hidalgo, “The Emergence of Film Criticism in North American Film Trade Journals, 1907-1912” (MA, Concordia University, 2006); Another Canadian thesis uses newspaper reviews to consider responses to the first film screenings: Smith, “Introducing a New Medium.”

Canadian “art cinema” during the 1960s, and “In Our Own Eyes” (1994), where he considers the effects of Canadian cultural nationalism on film journalism of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷¹ Morris argues that studying popular film criticism yields insight into developments in Canadian cinema, and, while he says in “The Uncertain Trumpet” that he is most interested in the influence of critics on filmmaking choices—citing the French *nouvelle vague* as an example—his findings in both articles are more valuable as an index of the discourses circulating around and through audiences, scholarship, and policy bodies. Morris criticizes the divide between scholarship and criticism and urges a closer examination of the cultural power and intellectual assumptions of popular critics.¹⁷² In the 1989 article, Morris cites a number of popular film commentators, including some I explore more closely in subsequent chapters (Clyde Gilmour, Gerald Pratley, and Elwy Yost). In 1994, however, Morris’s methodology moves away from popular criticism and towards more specialized discourse: “Since at that time [1989] there was virtually no scholarly criticism of Canadian film, that study was based on writing in newspapers and magazines in the forties, fifties and sixties. This current discussion is based on texts written primarily for film magazines and journals, mostly between the late sixties and late seventies.”¹⁷³

Despite Morris’s move away from investigating film writing for general audiences, many of his observations would not have been possible without it. In “The Uncertain Trumpet,” for instance, he offers five “critical assumptions” that emerged from his survey of ten general circulation newspapers and magazines, including *Maclean’s*, *Saturday Night*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Montreal Gazette*, and *Vancouver Sun*. Morris demonstrates that common threads, such as “film as commerce *versus* film as art” and “film is an international language” could be traced back to the 1940s, and certainly many of these notions are readily discernable in the rhetoric of Clyde Gilmour and Gerald Pratley on CBC Radio in 1947 and 1948 (see Chapter Four). Tracing the genealogy of these ideas offers much-needed distance and context to better understand the naturalized inclusions and exclusions of the Canadian national cinema canon. Deconstructing such rhetoric is therefore critical for unveiling the ideological foundations and historical erasures of today’s Canadian film studies.

¹⁷¹ Morris, “The Uncertain Trumpet”; Morris, “Eyes.”

¹⁷² Morris, “Eyes.”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Peter Urquhart follows Morris's lead in his work on media accounts of the commercially oriented tax shelter films of 1978–1981.¹⁷⁴ Urquhart's premise is that "biases" largely circulated in the popular press "have resulted in a limited, skewed, and inaccurate perception of what actually constitutes the Canadian national cinema, by rendering numerous films invisible—specifically the films of the tax-shelter boom."¹⁷⁵ Urquhart convincingly argues that the standards of taste informing, and formed by, popular critics have had a lasting impact on Canadian film history. Journalists' reports and complaints about the quality and reputation of the tax shelter films are not simply supporting evidence but are positioned front row centre as determining discourses leading to these films being exiled from Canadian cinema studies for decades. The language of critics and journalists is particularly pronounced in "Cultural Nationalism and Taste," where Urquhart foregrounds the following sources: contemporaneous press accounts of the Capital Cost Allowance for Canadian film production, including an episode of CBC's television current affairs program *The Fifth Estate*; popular reviews of some of the resulting films; journalism surrounding Canada's presence at the 1980 Cannes Film Festival; and reports from American trade publications on the Canadian tax shelter film phenomenon. Meanwhile, Urquhart points out, print and online fan communities, offering an alternative, even oppositional, response to the *status quo*, have actually celebrated the derided tax shelter films.¹⁷⁶ His other articles further examine the force of popular film discourses in founding and reproducing mythologies of Canadian cinema, for instance regarding the "perception of failure" surrounding Canada's cultural industries.¹⁷⁷

Media Film Talk in Canada

The subsequent chapters demonstrate that media film talk in English Canada going back to the 1940s has shown a great deal of ambivalence about the notion of a Canadian national cinema, at times underplaying the distinctiveness of Canadian-made films, or pointing out the exceptionality of Quebec cinema, or even ignoring the connection of specific films to Canada. Sometimes media film talk has ignored domestic films all together. At other times, critics have shouted Canadian cinema from the rooftops, actively promoting and even sometimes

¹⁷⁴ Urquhart, "You Should Know Something"; Urquhart, "Cultural Nationalism and Taste."

¹⁷⁵ Urquhart, "You Should Know Something," 66.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁷⁷ Urquhart, "Film and Television: A Success?," 17.

exaggerating the Canadian-ness of certain films. In her book *Weird Sex & Snowshoes* (2001), Katherine Monk brazenly posits her passion for Canadian cinema—“I love Canadian film. I really, really do”—and invokes Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* (1972) as a framework for her own thematization of Canadian cinema.¹⁷⁸ Monk’s book is unabashedly popular in its orientation and includes a chapter on English-Canadian and Québécois commercial hits like *Air Bud* (1997) and *Les Boys* (1997). The book was also adapted into an Omni Film documentary in 2004.

Film talk has also expressed ambivalence about critical authority. Canada has seen few if any film critic stars, a phenomenon American critic Jonathan Rosenbaum suggests is unique to the United States.¹⁷⁹ But a number of Canadian film critics have cultivated an “authorial voice,” through “repetition over time of certain pet clichés, favoured syntactic structures, rhythms, jokes, [and] didactic obsessions.”¹⁸⁰ Chapters Two and Three introduce numerous critics who have been meaningful for Canadian audiences and influential in film criticism history. Monk’s championing of popular cinema and feminist interests separates her from a field of critics characterized by maleness, whiteness, and highbrow proclivities, all tendencies reflected in my case studies. The few women in the history of English-Canadian film criticism—Ray Lewis, Joan Fox, Germaine Warkentin, and Wendy Michener—have been given only limited scholarly attention. Even until very recently, white men still wrote the vast majority of film reviews at *The Globe and Mail* (particularly house critics Liam Lacey, Rick Groen, and Brad Wheeler).¹⁸¹ After a massive personnel reshuffling, the newspaper is showing a new commitment to women’s voices in film criticism; the reviews published in June 2016 were roughly evenly distributed between men and women: Kate Taylor, Barry Hertz, Johanna Schneller, and Brad Wheeler. Taylor was recently appointed lead film critic. However, Chapter Seven’s analysis of current film review podcasts in Canada shows there is still much work to be done in diversifying the critical landscape. Monk’s location in British Columbia also sets her apart. My case studies illustrate the Toronto-centrism of most of English-Canadian film talk history. Toronto

¹⁷⁸ Katherine Monk, *Weird Sex & Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (Vancouver, BC: Raincoast Books, 2001), 5.

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

¹⁸⁰ Morris, “Indigestion,” 114.

¹⁸¹ Based on a survey of all film reviews published on the eight Fridays between January 2 and February 27, 2015.

individuals and institutions have long been the focal point of English-Canadian film culture. Examples in this thesis of nationally (and sometimes internationally) distributed film talk based in Toronto include Gerald Pratley, Elwy Yost, Brian Linehan, *SCTV*, *Film Junk*, and Review Raja. It is therefore important to remember that media film talk happens everywhere in Canada, through local radio, television, and podcasts.

Canadian national cinema persists as both a popular and academic paradigm, mostly because of the primacy of the nation-state in the political economy of Canadian film production and the enduring sense that Canada's struggling film artists are in perpetual need of support from critics and scholars, even in the relatively prosperous Quebec scene. For example, Matthew Hays notices that English Canada no longer benefits from the kind of television film talk found in Quebec:

The CBC currently has no movie program. Nor does CTV. Or Global. (I'm taking the liberty of counting out the dreary *Entertainment Tonight* clones.) Hard to believe, but in a country that, on a per capita basis, consumes more films than the U.S. there is not one national movie show. Torontonians and Vancouverites have local movie shows but lamentably they don't reach a national audience. Despite the repeated calls for more and better promotion for our national cinema, a national television show on movies is not in the works, anywhere.¹⁸²

Besides advocating television film talk on a national scale, Hays offers recommendations for what such a program might look like: "In order to work, the show would have to stick to certain guidelines. First, it would have to be international in scope, including Canadian movies as a key component but never restricting itself to them."¹⁸³ Hays is clearly familiar with the cultural cringe thesis, which says audiences are presumptively put off or embarrassed by Canadian films; a television program dedicated just to Canadian cinema simply would not fly. He continues, suggesting a panel of critics from across the country, to avoid Toronto-centrism. This vision of film critics as custodians of national culture and of film talk as a crucial site for audience building and nation building is intriguing. As my case studies show, however, film criticism in Canada has actually been moving away from these concerns. Centralized (yet diverse) film

¹⁸² Hays, "TV Nation," 38.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

criticism is rarer even on the internet than on television. Where public critics from previous eras attempted to serve a broad range of Canadian experiences and tastes, the current landscape, especially online, shows a combination of hyper-commercial Hollywood film talk and niche programming for specific demographics. Neither trend incorporates much talk of Canadian cinema. Chapter Seven and the Conclusion of this thesis will return to questions about the suitability of the free market approach to film criticism and the potential for do-it-yourself formats like podcasts to both democratize and diversify film talk in English Canada. But first, I will go back to the beginning and reveal the underappreciated role of media film talk in the history of English-Canadian cinema culture.

Chapter Two: Early Film Criticism and Cultural Democracy

The label “film criticism” has been used as a catchall to describe a wide range of discursive practices, from pithy capsule reviews of new releases in newspaper entertainment pages to long form analyses of cinema culture in middlebrow publications and even cinephilic video essays interpreting classic films. I begin here by laying out an expansive and inclusive definition of film criticism that better reflects the range of practices that constitute film commentary as an indispensable part of the economy and culture of cinema. Next I explore the international history of early film criticism, up until the point when institutions and standards of film commentary began to take root, around 1920. The long and global view of film criticism history shows that, though the field has lacked diversity, women and people of colour have found ways to use film criticism as a form of cultural participation and empowerment. Unfortunately, this has been less the case in Canada, where the film voices have generally been more conventional. I will present some exceptions and reflect on what is lost in a stubbornly hegemonic film criticism climate like Canada’s.

Much of the existing scholarship on film criticism prioritizes prestige publications, such as *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Sight & Sound*, and *Senses of Cinema*. David Bordwell’s *Making Meaning* (1989), Noël Carroll’s *On Criticism* (2009), and Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan’s 2011 anthology *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* all demonstrate this inclination. These volumes offer keen insight and sometimes polemics about the ontology and stylistics of film criticism, and on the place of interpretation and evaluation. But in ignoring mainstream, popular film writing, and downplaying the material conditions, cultural context, and heterogeneous audiences of popular film writing, such books have only a limited connection to my research, which is concerned first and foremost with everyday, accessible public film talk.

The “film criticism” I am interested in, then, is journalistic and intended for a general audience. Until very recently, popular film writing has essentially only received attention from film scholars interested in reception studies, where film reviews and journalistic commentary serve as historical evidence of critical and public reactions to specific films and cinematic developments. But as film historian Melanie Bell remarks, film reviews have fallen out of favour even in reception studies, where oral history techniques and attention to discursive context have

emerged as more precise tools for approximating audience response.¹ “The critic is widely assumed to occupy a position outside of the film industry and more readily connected to histories of journalism and broadcasting,” she explains.² She rightly observes that the existing scholarship on film criticism has tended to revolve around a limited number of “heroic” and exceptional figures of criticism history, a method that problematically marginalizes most mass-oriented critical film discourse, as well as significant critical traditions such as women’s fan writing and “talking back” about cinema in the African-American press.³

I wish to contribute to correcting this lacuna by engaging with some of the most casual and quotidian expressions of film criticism, and with the material and institutional settings that produce these utterances. My working definition of “film criticism” is therefore flexible and acknowledges the vicissitudes of the multiple and evolving formats, sites, venues, and voices of public film commentary. In her essay, “Indigestion: A Rhetoric of Reviewing,” cultural theorist Meaghan Morris objects to “the idea of a unity of criticism,” and she denies “that film criticism/reviewing is a single entity defined by the ‘IT’ to which it refers—i.e. ‘film’.”⁴ Many theorizations of film criticism posit and rely on an unrealistically abstract, uniform, and narrow definition of the object under analysis. Some treatments of film criticism limit their object even further by prescribing what it ought to be.⁵ Morris points out that often a film review is a product more of the venue in which it appears than of the film it purports to comment on. In the end, it is “a bit of a newspaper, a journal, a radio programme, a television show,” a characterization that also recognizes a range of delivery formats too-often ignored in film criticism scholarship.⁶

¹ For example, Jeff Smith engages with film criticism on a discursive level to explore the received wisdom among critics about the relationship between postwar Hollywood cinema and the Cold War in *Film Criticism, the Cold War, and the Blacklist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

² Melanie Bell, “Film Criticism as ‘Women’s Work’: The Gendered Economy of Film Criticism in Britain, 1945–65,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 2 (2011): 191.

³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴ Morris, “Indigestion,” 121, 116–117.

⁵ See, for instance, Walter Metz, *Engaging Film Criticism: Film History and Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁶ Morris, “Indigestion,” 121.

While much of the literature on film criticism focusses on the critical texts themselves, I propose a greater emphasis on film commentary as a set of practices that shape and are shaped by specific material, institutional, and ideological conditions. Here again I find an ally in Morris, who insists on film reviewing as a form of writing and a mode of work that operates within industrial circumstances and expectations. Morris suggests, “newspaper and magazine reviewing is an activity carried out at a site of intersection of several cultural practices and institutions: the media, the ‘arts’, the film industry, advertising, propaganda, the academy, promotion and marketing.”⁷ The combination of these forces results in “pre-existing formal constraints [that] are primary and determining.”⁸ Then a newspaper film critic herself, Morris describes some of the limitations of the genre introduced by seemingly innocuous requirements of space and layout and the preference for shorter words, sentences, and paragraphs. She points out that editorial decisions are made according to what is deemed “*interesting, important and essential*, [...] all names for ideological decisions referring not just to the personal tastes of the editor but to a professional consensus about ‘what really matters’ when writing about film for the audience of that publication.”⁹ This professional consensus is in turn informed by a broader cultural consensus about the generic conventions and appropriate content of film writing. For Morris, attention to this interplay between ideological convention and material form reveals the underlying politics of all types of film writing, from Marxist polemics to “the three-line consumer guide.”¹⁰ She finds, “editorial and critical administration of the limits of much of what can be said about cinema is, broadly speaking, political (and thus open to the kind of change which consists in producing *different* limits).”¹¹

Colloquially, popular “film critics” are understood primarily as “reviewers,” whose profession involves watching new releases in advance of the general public and publishing their opinions according to a precise, industry-driven calendar in order to advise consumers about what to watch. The literature on film criticism has emphasized a strict divide between this commercial practice of “reviewing” and the higher status craft (or even art) of “criticism.” In

⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹¹ Ibid., 113.

their *Introduction to Film Criticism* (1989), Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack distinguish between “reviewers” who simply describe and recommend films in magazines and daily newspapers, and true film critics, “whose primary aim is to investigate the medium as an aesthetic, social, and historical phenomenon,” namely, academics who publish in scholarly journals and for university presses.¹² The book nevertheless elevates some prestigious film journalists such as Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, Stanley Kauffman, Otis Ferguson, and James Agee, who performed “more like critics than reviewers,” in keeping with Melanie Bell’s assessment of the prioritizing of the “heroic individual” in film journalism.¹³ Noël Carroll and co-authors Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan reproduce similar distinctions, the latter stating, “criticism has been too often conflated with cursory forms of reviewing,” and their book aims to recognize the more meaningful and literary products of an otherwise debased and venal mode of film discourse.¹⁴ Explicitly tracing “reviewing” to the celebrity gossip and promotional traditions of film journalism in the 1930s and 1940s, Richard Maltby laments, “Review discourse accepts Hollywood on its own terms, implicitly endorsing its production system, and is often hostile to other kinds of criticism.”¹⁵ He suggests true film “criticism” needs to establish a systematic methodology that can help it avoid not just the studios’ corporate influence but also the subjective opinions of its practitioners.

Film reviews are commonly thought to be evaluative of a specified film text, yet they frequently involve social and political analysis, aesthetic theory, reflections on film history, genre analysis, and contemplations of cinema as art and industry. In some cases, the evaluative element may be sublimated or even absent all together. Different genres of film writing regularly overlap and merge. Scholarly film writing, for instance, often contains aesthetic appraisals. Film critic Girish Shambu argues that academic writing “is generally suspicious of personal involvement with films and apprehensive of value judgements,” but it nevertheless, “in its choice

¹² Bywater and Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism*, xii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14; Bell, “Women’s Work,” 192.

¹⁴ Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan, “Introduction,” in *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, ed. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

¹⁵ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 522.

of films and examples, and in its assumptions, either contains remnants of film criticism, or is haunted by its absence.”¹⁶

Film scholar Jonathan Lupo suggests academic film criticism even ought to be a little more like popular film writing. Lupo finds the movement away from evaluation and canon formation on the part of academic film studies has been an “abdication” of the discipline’s responsibility to contribute to public film culture and the “wider film community.”¹⁷ As a result, journalism has filled the vacuum by setting the standards and modes of participation for moviegoing audiences. He cites Jim Collins on the “incommensurability of the public spheres imagined by journalists and academic critics.”¹⁸ Collins writes, “The conflicts between two types of cultural authorities—journalistic critic, posing as a gifted amateur speaking from the front lines of actual experience, and the professional academic as mere model builder who keeps his/her distance—continue to intensify as journalist attacks on the insularity of elitism of the academy grow increasingly commonplace.”¹⁹

One such critique of the “elitism” of academic criticism comes from Meaghan Morris. She describes a tendency to privilege the scholarly critic as an “*intellectual superhero* – artist, teacher, philosopher, someone ‘very, very intelligent’. The reviewer is vulgar, untrained and (by implication) very, very dumb.”²⁰ The distinction, she claims, relies on conceptions of different publics: the reviewer represents the average moviegoer, while the critic speaks for and to a special subgroup consisting of “informed lovers of the arts.”²¹ Morris seeks to neutralize this hierarchy by identifying defining elements of the two practices “without setting up an opposition between intelligent Persons and dumb ones, good writers and bad, or between superior and inferior versions of the same thing.”²² Instead of attributing the differences to the writers’ expertise or talent, she finds that reviewing simply has a different orientation towards industrial

¹⁶ Girish Shambu, “The Language and Style of Film Criticism (review),” *Girish Shambu*, June 17, 2011, <http://girishshambu.blogspot.com/2011/06/language-and-style-of-film-criticism.html>.

¹⁷ Jonathan Lupo, “Loaded Canons: Contemporary Film Canons, Film Studies, and Film Discourse,” *The Journal of American Culture* 34, no. 3 (2011): 220.

¹⁸ Jim Collins, *Architectures of Excess: Cultural Life in the Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 206; cited in Lupo, “Loaded,” 228.

¹⁹ Collins, *Architectures*, 208.

²⁰ Morris, “Indigestion,” 108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²² *Ibid.*, 117.

and institutional factors, including the temporality of studio release schedules and the expectations of both popular audiences and editors: “reviewing produces novelty, and assumes that the reader has not seen the film, while criticism takes it that the reader has, will, or should have. Criticism refers to the film retrospectively, reviewing prospectively.”²³ Reviewing, then, is more deeply implicated in the logic of late capitalism. Though Morris defends reviewing’s status vis-à-vis criticism, she does demonstrate hints of the pessimistic economism that frequently undermines the cultural value of film reviewing as a site of pleasure, intellectual exchange, and participatory agency for a wide and diverse portion of the general moviegoing audience. Antonia Lant adds another important consideration: the practice of separating reviewing from criticism in the scholarship (and then privileging the latter) has ghettoized popular, non-cinephilic film discourse, not least in regards to women’s writing about film.²⁴ She notes that quite often, film reviews do far more than simply evaluate film; they also engage with wide-ranging and significant cultural issues, both within and beyond the cinema.

Canadian cinema scholar George Melnyk offers another inclusive and less judgmental definition of popular film criticism: “Journalism, whether low- or high-brow, provides a daily, weekly, or monthly commentary for the film-going public based on value judgments presented in ordinary language in which common sense attitudes prevail about what is good and what is bad and what the public ought to spend its money on.”²⁵ Melnyk’s definition captures the populist orientation of much film journalism and he admits that reviewing is crucial to “the capitalist system of promoting consumption of cultural products,” but he also points out that film writing protected by journalistic integrity can actually help counter the aggressive marketing of the global film system.²⁶ Film criticism then (much like cinema itself) is both profoundly industrial *and* cultural, occupying a fraught space between the poles of art and commerce. After all, the average film review is cobbled together from both the writer’s independent taste and cultural knowledge and information provided by distributors in press kits and junkets. Melnyk cites legendary film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum’s cynical condemnation of the “institutional glibness” of both academic and mainstream film criticism, the latter of which he describes as “dangerously

²³ Cited in Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 384.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 225.

²⁶ Ibid.

close to simple news reporting (at best) and unabashed advertising (at worst).”²⁷ On the other hand, Melnyk romanticizes film criticism as shining a light on and legitimizing worthy films, filmmakers, and performers; in other words, film critics can also be elemental champions of the cinematic art.²⁸ Film reviewers have even been rumoured to motivate filmmakers and affect decision making in the industry, though such speculation about the impact of reviews on either the box office or film producers rarely references solid research.²⁹ In any case, it is clear that the operations of critical influence are complicated, and, especially in light of recent protestations about the decline of the film critic, additional study of the role of criticism in industry and culture is needed.

In light of the problematic ideology underlying the distinction between “reviewing” and “criticism,” I use instead the more inclusive “public film commentary,” and, in particular, “film talk,” of which the latter refers especially to spoken commentary, primarily in broadcast formats. Film talk in various media often takes place as part of larger conversations about culture, imbued with competing voices and cultural and institutional interests. Film talk addresses the casual moviegoer but also reaches cinephiles and industry insiders. One may occasionally seek out film talk, but it also regularly reaches incidental listeners, viewers, and users as a seamless part of broadcast and online flows (radio programming, television news, social media feeds). Melnyk explains, “Every review and news item cries out to its readers to ‘pay attention’ to the importance of film and its personalities.”³⁰ The same is true of film talk. Critical speech is active speech, and film critics are instrumental in creating the conditions of possibility of popular film culture. Morris declares, “We [critics] do not decree what should be thought about any particular *film*; but we do help to patrol the limits of what is safely *or* adventurously think-able as *cinema* at any given time.”³¹ Criticism is political, Morris argues, and it has the power to change the conditions of film production, circulation, and reception. It thus has implications for cinema culture at the personal, local, regional, national, and international levels.

²⁷ Rosenbaum, *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism*, 11, 12.

²⁸ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 225.

²⁹ See Chapter One for studies on box office influence, as well as Morris B. Holbrook, “Popular Appeal versus Expert Judgments of Motion Pictures,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 26, no. 2 (1999): 144–55.

³⁰ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 225.

³¹ Morris, “Indigestion,” 111.

It is the mediation and advocacy capacities of popular film criticism that I am most interested in, and though these elements may be rooted in market motives, their historical and everyday implications and manifestations far exceed the reach of the film industry. Cinema culture, as we know, has a mind of its own, and film criticism is one key place where creativity and surprises flourish. My project looks at the ability of popular film commentary to shape and propel film culture by defining communities and avenues of participation, setting the terms of engagement, and establishing discursive parameters. Indeed, criticism is the most substantial apparatus through which casual moviegoers, fans, cinephiles, academics, and industry insiders alike can interact with each other within a widely inclusive public conversation. Mass sites such as print and online newspapers, television, magazines, and aggregator websites (i.e., Rotten Tomatoes, discussed in Chapter Six) offer an increasingly rare panoramic snapshot of cinema culture, encompassing highbrow and lowbrow taste publics, diverse genres, local and international movie news, home video, and celebrity gossip. On the other hand, blogs and podcasts burrow deep into niche subcultures, from horror cinema to family viewing, facilitating multiple fandoms, exhibition sites, and national cinemas. On the global and local scales, film criticism both unites communities and generates new ones. This is as true, if not truer, of casual and mass-oriented film commentary as it is of specialized and academic film discourse.

Some recent developments suggest academics are paying more attention to popular film commentary's cultural power, perhaps as a response to the perceived "crisis" of what Matt Hills calls the "critical industry."³² Large-scale shifts in the logics of journalism have manifested in web formats supplementing if not replacing traditional print criticism and allegedly contributing to the de-professionalization of the labour of film reviewing, not least in the form of job lay-offs. In 2010, Columbia University hosted the roundtable "New Directions: Re-Imagining Film Criticism in the Digital Age," with film critics David Denby (then *The New Yorker's* film critic), A. O. Scott (*The New York Times*), and Stephanie Zacharek (then of *Movieline*, now of *The Village Voice*).³³ In spring 2011, Northwestern University hosted "Film Criticism in Focus," a

³² Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 77.

³³ "Columbia University School of the Arts - Film - Film Program Co-Presents: 'New Directions: Re-Imagining Film Criticism in the Digital Age,'" October 21, 2010, <http://arts.columbia.edu/film-program-co-presents-new-directions-re-imagining-film-criticism-digital-age>.

three-day conference featuring several eminent film critics, such as Michael Phillips (*Chicago Tribune*), Dave Kehr (then of *The New York Times*, now a curator at the Museum of Modern Art), Farran Smith Nehme (freelance blogger and critic), Karina Longworth (then of *LA Weekly*, now of *You Must Remember This*), Wesley Morris (then of *The Boston Globe*, now of *The New York Times*), and Jonathan Rosenbaum (formerly *Chicago Reader*).³⁴ Around the same time, the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute presented the panel discussion "Web-Slinging: Film Criticism Online," with film festival programmer James McNally, artist and blogger Margaux Williamson, and freelance film critic Adam Nayman (then of *Eye Weekly*).³⁵ In fall 2014, A. O. Scott moderated the panel "Criticism Now! A Conversation on the State of the Art" at Wesleyan University, where he was deemed Distinguished Professor of Film Criticism.³⁶ At the same time, several cinema studies departments have recently offered undergraduate- and graduate-level courses that critically explore popular forms of film reviewing and criticism, including those at Columbia, Wesleyan, York University (Toronto), and Concordia University (Montreal).³⁷

The description of the "Film Criticism" graduate course taught by Donato Totaro in Winter 2015 at Concordia situates the topic within recent cultural and economic trends:

³⁴ "Illuminating the Shadows: Film Criticism in Focus," *Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art*, accessed June 17, 2015, <http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/muse/podcast/2011/illuminating-the-shadows.html>.

³⁵ "Web-Slinging: Film Criticism Online," *University of Toronto - Cinema Studies*, accessed June 17, 2015, <http://sites.utoronto.ca/cinema/article-2011-007.html>.

³⁶ David Low, "A. O. Scott Moderates Talk on Arts Criticism," *News @ Wesleyan*, November 12, 2014, <http://newsletter.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2014/11/12/criticismnow/>; "A. O. Scott," *The New York Times - Movies*, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/critics/A-O-Scott>.

³⁷ "Film MA - Elective Courses," *Columbia University School of the Arts - Film*, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://arts.columbia.edu/film/ma/elective-courses>; Low, "A. O. Scott Moderates"; Temenuga Trifonova, "FILM4280 Film Criticism Syllabus Fall 2013," accessed January 26, 2015, http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCYQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffinearts.yorku.ca%2Fcourses%2Fdownload-pdf%3Fcourseid%3D7354&ei=9G3GVOfsEoOmyAS3lYDIBQ&usq=AFQjCNFPG-wnZUwde_-Jf1bYJ5D5HU4NKg&sig2=wL4_L8DawWizDKIs-17wEA&bvm=bv.84349003,d.aWw; "Courses - MA Course Descriptions 2014-2015," *Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema*, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://www.concordia.ca/finearts/cinema/programs/graduate/film-studies-ma/courses.html>.

This course comes at a crossroads moment in film criticism, with the growth of the internet in the process of revolutionizing how film criticism is written and performed (blogs, online film journals, online academic research engines, video essays, interactive writing, video streaming, etc.). This impact is especially felt because film criticism, more than other forms of writing, has always been closely tied to the medium in which it has appeared (newspapers, fanzines, magazines, cultural journals, radio, museum and art galleries, Laserdisc/DVD/Blu ray liner notes, online, etc.).³⁸

Current developments in popular film discourse and its changing place in the academy are also evident at the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS). A look back at ten years of conference programs reveals a noticeable (though minor) spike in presentations on popular film criticism, particularly since 2010.³⁹ Scholars such as Greg Taylor, Jason Kelly Roberts, and Rachel Thibault presented papers about highbrow film criticism and prestige critics, including a panel dedicated to the work of Pauline Kael. Far fewer papers have addressed issues of cultural authority in commonplace popular criticism; papers by Jonathan Lupo and Kevin Hall and my own 2012 presentation on television film critics are exceptions in this regard. Unsurprisingly, the topic of broadcast film talk, as a subset of popular criticism, has been virtually absent from the SCMS conference. These absences in North American film studies support Melanie Bell's observation (above) that critics have been perceived instead in the context of histories of journalism and broadcasting.

So, despite the longstanding importance of popular film criticism among cinema audiences and within film cultures, academic boundaries have excluded popular film criticism as a suitable object of inquiry, even while the rest of popular culture penetrated the ivory towers. Clayton and Klevan note, "as Film Studies became institutionalised, criticism was thought lacking in analytic and scholarly rigour; socially, politically, culturally or historically blind; purposeless in its failure to address 'important' issues; theoretically unsophisticated and not suitably self-reflexive; and linguistically naïve in its attachment to ordinary language."⁴⁰ Despite these biases, books such as Stanley Kauffmann's *American Film Criticism* (1972) and Myron

³⁸ "Courses - MA Course Descriptions 2014-2015."

³⁹ "Past Conferences," *Society for Cinema and Media Studies*, accessed January 27, 2015, http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=past_conferences.

⁴⁰ Clayton and Klevan, "Introduction," 2.

Lounsbury's *The Origins of American Film Criticism* (1973) began the work of building a historical account of journalistic film criticism, at least in the United States, and featured chronological examples of early film writing by prominent critics.⁴¹ Such books emerged during a boom in film criticism from the late-1960s to the mid-1970s and contributed to constructing a popular canon of earlier work that included critic-auteurs such as Frank E. Woods, Robert E. Sherwood, Hugo Münsterberg, Otis Ferguson, and James Agee. These canonical treatments of film criticism history thereby helped establish distinctions between criticism and reviewing and relatively narrow conceptions of what kinds of film discourse matter.

In addition to building on this canon, Bywater and Sobchack's 1989 book includes a rare discussion of television reviewing, though their assessment of TV critics is largely negative.

Based on their observations of *Siskel and Ebert: The Movies*, the authors comment:

Though often entertaining, the journalistic approach as practiced on television sometimes seems as shallow as the average review in a daily newspaper: simply the unsupported opinions of the reviewers about a recent film. But it does have its purposes. For one thing, it exposes a vast audience to the fact that reviews of films are available and valuable (surveys have shown that the vast number of moviegoers seldom read *any* reviews before going to the theater). In other words, television critics attempt to raise the audience's standards of critical judgment, suggesting by example that films should not be taken for granted. Despite its current mode of presentation, one can visualize the potential of serious television criticism, with the possibility of using freeze frames, of rerunning a sequence, or of illustrating the points being made with specific film clips. The kind of in-depth analysis provided by reviewer/critics in some weekly and monthly publications might be transferable to the TV screen if the right mix of format and personality were [*sic*] found.⁴²

The authors recognize the value of television in bringing film discourse to the masses but claim the side effect is "shallow" criticism. I further explore (and counter) the view that television film talk "dumbs down" film discourse in Chapter Five. Notably, a version of the authors' vision for

⁴¹ Stanley Kauffmann, ed., *American Film Criticism: From the Beginnings to Citizen Kane: Significant Films at the Time They First Appeared* (New York: Liveright, 1972); Myron Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973).

⁴² Bywater and Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism*, 18.

“serious television criticism” has come to fruition in the trend of online video essays, such as those by Kevin Lee, Matt Zoller Seitz, and Jim Emerson.

Indeed, the emergence of a multitude of internet platforms has changed critical practices and brought the business of film criticism to the public’s attention. Between 2000 and 2008, the film magazine *Cineaste* published a series of lengthy symposia on the changing state of popular film criticism, featuring a diverse group of critics (though mostly from print).⁴³ Biographies published in 2011 of superstar critics Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert earned considerable media attention, indicating renewed public interest in film criticism and perhaps nostalgia for the form’s supposed golden age.⁴⁴ News of Ebert’s death in April 2013 was met with an outpouring of grief on social media and in the international press. Perhaps Ebert’s consecration signals the legitimizing of a more accessible kind of film criticism. As film critic A. O. Scott has pointed out, in keeping with Bywater and Sobchack’s assessment, there was a time when Roger Ebert’s television show was considered the lowest common denominator in film discourse.⁴⁵ Elsewhere for *The New York Times*, Scott observed, “In the 1950s, intellectuals were looking down their noses at movies.” The late culture journalist David Carr chimed in, “Now snobs write about movies.”⁴⁶ The interdependency between trends in film criticism and cinema’s cultural legitimacy is a recurring theme in my research.

Perhaps partly due to film’s status as a lower genre, the history of film criticism has been preoccupied with legitimization and canonization, particularly through establishing a predominantly male, white literary tradition. Collections of US film criticism like *American Film Criticism* (1972) and *Awake in the Dark* (1977) offer sparse examples of women critics (Susan Sontag, Molly Haskell, Pauline Kael) and even fewer examples of African-American critics and

⁴³ “Film Criticism in America Today: A Critical Symposium,” *Cineaste* 26, no. 1 (2000): 27–45; “International Film Criticism Today: A Critical Symposium,” *Cineaste* 31, no. 1 (2005): 30–44; and “Film Criticism in the Age of the Internet: A Critical Symposium,” *Cineaste* 33, no. 4 (2008): 30–45.

⁴⁴ Brian Kellow, *Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark* (New York: Penguin, 2011); Roger Ebert, *Life Itself: A Memoir* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁵ A. O. Scott, “A Critic’s Place, Thumb and All,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/04/movies/04scott.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁴⁶ David Carr and A. O. Scott, “The Sweet Spot: July 27,” *Arts Beat* (*The New York Times*), July 27, 2012, http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/27/the-sweet-spot-july-27/?_r=0#postcomment.

other people of colour.⁴⁷ A more recent effort, *American Movie Critics* (2006), expands the list of noteworthy female critics (H.D., Cecilia Ager, Martha Wolfenstein, Penelope Gilliatt, among others) and also recognizes film criticism by a few writers of colour (Melvin B. Tolson, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Armond White, and bell hooks).⁴⁸ Antonia Lant's anthology (with Ingrid Periz) *Red Velvet Seat* (2006) is a significant contribution that includes numerous examples of journalistic film writing by women and also offers a sustained and insightful feminist critique of film criticism history and historiography.⁴⁹ Jerry Roberts's *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (2010) lacks an explicit feminist consciousness but includes an unusually high proportion of women critics in its chronologically organized account of "important" contributions.⁵⁰ Single-author collections, however, still typically celebrate white, male critics, such as Otis Ferguson, James Agee, Stanley Kauffman, Anthony Lane, and Roger Ebert. The several volumes reprinting Pauline Kael's work, from *I Lost It at the Movies* (1965) to *Movie Love* (1991), are a rare but important exception. Although women have figured prominently in film criticism history, as discussed below, they are generally underrepresented in collections of film criticism, as Antonia Lant attests.⁵¹

Anna Everett's study *Returning the Gaze* (2001) goes some distance in addressing the major lacuna of race in the history of American film criticism.⁵² Using the discourses of newspaper film criticism (reviews and editorials) Everett makes connections to the broader cultural history of black spectators, intelligentsia, and American cinema. In the process, she reclaims and reprints pieces of early black film criticism—many for the first time—and draws attention to important thinkers and community leaders on the margins of the film criticism canon. Writings that were previously thought disposable are given new life and linked to major cultural movements such as the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north, the Harlem Renaissance, the fallout of the Depression, and the racialized social upheavals

⁴⁷ Kauffmann, *American Film Criticism*; David Denby, ed., *Awake in the Dark: An Anthology of American Film Criticism, 1915 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

⁴⁸ Phillip Lopate, ed., *American Movie Critics: An Anthology from the Silents until Now* (New York: The Library of America, 2006).

⁴⁹ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*.

⁵⁰ Roberts, *The Complete History*.

⁵¹ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 384.

⁵² Everett, *Returning the Gaze*.

of the war years. Everett's history traces specific developments in the film industry as they affected black stakeholders and spectators. The book is effective in demonstrating the value of general-circulation film discourse for revealing and influencing cultural forces, tensions, and resistances, especially where these have not been documented in more official formats. In particular, Everett finds that the early history of black film criticism was instrumental for "talking back" to the mainstream Hollywood industry, in response to pejorative representations of black America and barriers to diversity behind the scenes in film production.

Everett's book is one of a handful at the turn of the millennium that started to treat popular film criticism as an important locus for producing and circulating popular ideas about cinema culture. Gaps are now being addressed. Key texts include Greg Taylor's *Artists in the Audience* (1999), Raymond J. Haberski, Jr.'s *It's Only a Movie* (2001), Shyon Baumann's *Hollywood Highbrow* (2007), Jerry Roberts's *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (2010), and Mattias Frey's *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism* (2015).⁵³ Together these texts form the basis of my overview of the history of film criticism in the second part of this chapter.

In Canada, popular film criticism remains an overlooked branch of film history. George Melnyk offered a brief chapter, in which he highlights film journalism (along with scholarship) as fundamental in articulating an "intellectual framework" and canon for Canadian cinema studies.⁵⁴ Yet he claims "engaged film criticism" did not really begin in Canada until the 1960s, whereas I am interested in the longer view.⁵⁵ William Beard and Jerry White also calculatedly included journalists in their anthology *North of Everything* in an effort towards a "heterogeneity of critical styles and a diversity of critical perspective," noting:

Critical writing is too often constrained by a desire to be 'scholarly' and a fear of being 'popular' or, even worse, 'journalistic,' an attitude that illustrates a binarism and acceptance of conventional definitions of low and high that would be unthinkable if they formed a scholar's view of cinema itself (the distinction between low and high art has

⁵³ Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*; Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*; Roberts, *The Complete History*; Frey, *Permanent Crisis*.

⁵⁴ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 224, 225.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

become pleasantly blurry over the last few decades and yet the boundary between low and high critical work is too often puzzlingly intact).⁵⁶

Beard and White find irony in the fact that the cinema studies discipline has forcefully advocated for the inclusion of popular film texts, yet persists in excluding vernacular film writing. Jim Leach's textbook *Film in Canada* also begins to correct this lapse by including references to numerous influential international popular critics, such as Robert Fulford, Barbara Goslawski, Rick Groen, Roger Ebert, John Harkness, Molly Haskell, Martin Knelman, Katherine Monk, Geoff Pevere, Gerald Pratley, Isa Tousignant, and Amy Taubin. In addition to the work of Melnyk, Beard and White, and Leach, historical research by Peter Morris, Michael Smith, Germain Lacasse, and Louis Pelletier and Paul Moore has revealed important pieces of the puzzle.

Even the courses on film criticism at Canadian universities, mentioned above, largely ignore home-grown literature, perpetuating the shortage of scholarship on the topic. Many of the most influential English-Canadian critics—Joan Fox, Jay Scott, Robert Fulford, and Brian D. Johnson to name just a few—have received scant attention. My own research aims to not only expand our existing picture but to alert other scholars of the value of continuing such a project. I hope to highlight the historical depth and richness attainable through the study of popular film criticism and to foster a greater appreciation of its contributions to English-Canadian cinema culture. My case studies feature highly visible sites of film talk that demonstrate that English-Canadian film criticism, too, has been dominated by white men backed by a small number of powerful media institutions. The parodies of film critics that will be discussed in Chapter Six betray the public's frustration with this tradition of privilege and remind us that there is much work to be done towards diversifying the voices of public film talk and expanding our understanding of popular criticism as an influential factor in an inclusive and flourishing cinema culture at the regional, national, and international levels. Observation of the dynamics of access and social stratification in our most popular forms of film discourse allows for a more holistic view of, and greater insight into, the politics of participation in our domestic and global film cultures.

⁵⁶ Beard and White, "Introduction", xxii.

No discussion of Canadian cinema culture is complete without recognition of Quebec's thriving tradition of cultural criticism. Melnyk insists on the separateness of Canada's francophone and anglophone critical cultures; he notes that Quebec and English Canada "have their distinct personalities and hierarchies in both journalism and academia," and that "the work of journalists, film scholars, and film historians in either society is not readily available in the other, and is not considered in the other society except by a few specialists."⁵⁷ While I agree that Quebec cinema and its critical heritage is distinct, I also see multiple points of historical overlap, and I include Quebec in my overview of film criticism history (though it is mostly absent from my case studies). As such, the rest of this chapter will outline the overlapping histories of Canadian, Québécois, American, and international film criticism, while taking a closer look at the scholarship that has built these histories.

Early Film Criticism in Canada and Internationally

Popular film writing has been integral to cinema culture dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. Santiago Hidalgo identifies four periods of early film criticism: pre-1895, 1895-1897, 1898-1905, and 1906-1912. Pre-1895 corresponds to moving picture criticism before film, that is, responses to pre-cinematic technologies such as magic lanterns, dioramas, and kinetoscopes.⁵⁸ In their *Film Review Index*, Patricia King Hanson and Stephen Hanson—borrowing from film historian George C. Pratt—identify Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1838 critique of a diorama in *American Notebooks* as the first review of "projected moving images."⁵⁹

The arrival of early movie projection systems such as the Lumière Cinématographe and Thomas Edison's Vitascope in 1895 and 1896 led to a "flurry" of response in general circulation newspapers that constituted what Hidalgo deems the second phase of early film criticism.⁶⁰ On April 24, 1896, *The New York Times* published perhaps the first report on a public showcase of the Vitascope.⁶¹ Newspapers from numerous American cities including New York City, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Denver, reported on early presentations

⁵⁷ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 225.

⁵⁸ Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," 3.

⁵⁹ Patricia King Hanson and Stephen L. Hanson, eds., *Film Review Index, Volume 1: 1882-1949* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1986), vii.

⁶⁰ Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," 4.

⁶¹ "Edison's Vitascope Cheered," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1896, 5; as discussed in Smith, "Introducing a New Medium," 35–36.

of the American Mutoscope Company's Biograph in 1896 and 1897.⁶² In Canada, the front page of *La Presse* covered the first screening of a film in Canada, which took place in Montreal on June 27, 1896.⁶³ Ottawa followed with a film presentation on July 21, 1896, which was reviewed the next day in *The Ottawa Daily Citizen*.⁶⁴ Following performances in Winnipeg and Brandon, Carberry, Manitoba reported on the arrival of the Vitascope on August 14, 1896.⁶⁵ The Vitascope and Cinématographe arrived in Toronto in late August and early September 1896, and these were covered in *The Toronto World* and *The Mail and Empire*.⁶⁶ According to Matthew Smith, the "reputation of Torontonians as enthusiastic filmgoers" can be traced all the way back to these early beginnings, with the city hosting several projection systems at the same time.⁶⁷ In Montreal, on the other hand, newspapers virtually ignored these new fads, allegedly due to their lowbrow status. But, according to Peter Morris, "To the citizens of Montreal the movies were as exciting as others elsewhere found them. The parochialism of their local newspapers affected their response not one whit."⁶⁸ Paul S. Moore offers an alternative explanation: Montreal's English press was simply not invited to an advance screening.⁶⁹

Many film historians do not consider the early press coverage to be film criticism proper. Smith notes that there was "little division between editorial content and reporting, or even advertising," and he demonstrates that promotional materials—particularly those distributed by Ottawa's Holland brothers—figured heavily in notices of upcoming films and "reviews" alike.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company used reproductions and collections of "press opinions" to create handbills and pamphlets for exhibitors in the United States and Canada from 1896 to about 1899.⁷¹ Already in Canada in 1896, film companies

⁶² Kemp R. Niver and Bebe Bergsten, eds., *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908* (Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1971).

⁶³ Matthew Smith, "Film Reviews and Announcements from 1896: Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto," *Loneragan Review*, no. 6 (2000): 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11, 15.

⁶⁵ Paul S. Moore, "Mapping the Mass Circulation of Early Cinema: Film Debuts Coast-to-Coast in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012): 59.

⁶⁶ Smith, "Film Reviews," 17–19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 9.

⁶⁹ Moore, "Mapping," 62.

⁷⁰ Smith, "Introducing a New Medium," 84.

⁷¹ Niver and Bergsten, *Biograph Bulletins*, 11–22.

facilitated preview screenings for the press, resulting in coverage characterized by uncritical excitement.⁷² Furthermore, reporting focussed more on the reception of new technological marvels than on the content of the films.⁷³ Film content lent itself to this kind of commentary, featuring brief spectacular or humorous scenes designed to showcase the apparatus, with next-to-no narrative development. Mattias Frey explains that during this period, commentary treated film as an extension of the photograph.⁷⁴ As Smith points out, at this time there were no cinema experts, so journalists and audiences both approached film with naivety.⁷⁵ Hidalgo's analysis, however, leads him to conclude that, despite key differences, "early film criticism shares an interpretive gesture with contemporary film criticism, and should therefore not be excluded from the history of this discursive practice."⁷⁶ Hidalgo uses the more inclusive term, "film commentary." As with my concept of "film talk," even the promotional copy of this early period would have interpellated moviegoers and begun to build a vocabulary for participating in the pleasures of the new popular medium.

Following the initial buzz, film writing slowed down in 1898 to 1905, and the existing histories offer little information about this time. In his seven-volume collection of film criticism up to 1960, Anthony Slide contends that no national American publications printed film criticism during these early years, since films were buried within vaudeville variety acts.⁷⁷ What film commentary did exist continued to be promotional in nature, and Hidalgo notes that the material about film published in variety trade publications like *Billboard* and *New York Clipper* largely came straight from the film manufacturers and exchanges.⁷⁸ When nickelodeons flourished across North America in 1905, the variety show trade publications cut down their coverage of

⁷² Smith, "Film Reviews," 20.

⁷³ Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," 4; Charles Tepperman observes that reportage on the earliest film screenings in Canada in fact treated moving pictures as just one part of intermedial visual culture, alongside other novelties such as public light design and live spectacles, in "'Stolen from the Realm of Night: Modernity, Visual Culture and the Reception of Cinema in Ottawa,'" *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 2–25.

⁷⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 27.

⁷⁵ Smith, "Introducing a New Medium," iii.

⁷⁶ Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," iii.

⁷⁷ Anthony Slide, *Selected Film Criticism, 1896-1911* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), ix.

⁷⁸ Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," 4.

films, since they had become direct competitors for audiences.⁷⁹ Richard Abel explains that since exhibitors did not initially need to advertise in newspapers, coverage was scarce, and this rendered nickelodeon culture “more or less ‘invisible.’”⁸⁰ But naturally the subsequent growth in film exhibition did create greater demand for film coverage, leading to the establishment of trade and fan publications in 1906 and 1907 in the United States and Europe, and constituting the final phase of early criticism according to Hidalgo.⁸¹ Frey notes, “by 1907, as the length, ambition, and sophistication of film narratives increased and the economic and mass-cultural potential of the new medium was rapidly becoming apparent to those in the industry and beyond, calls for film criticism arose.”⁸²

Evaluative film reviews solidified into a genre in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, first through trade publications. Reviews appeared in *Views and Film Index* in April 1906 in a “New Films” column.⁸³ *Variety* started publishing film reviews for industry insiders in 1907; most reviews appeared without a byline, until the 1930s.⁸⁴ Dedicated film trade magazines also appeared, most notably *Bioscope* in London in 1906, *Moving Picture World* in New York in 1907, and *Ciné-Journal* in France in 1908. These publications advised exhibitors and distributors on numerous subjects and functioned to cohere branches of the industry (including marketing), to ensure equitable business practices and to form a united front against cinema’s vocal detractors at the time.⁸⁵ The trade publications included information on developing technologies, patent conflicts, rental and exhibition, and production companies. They also contained feedback from readers, critiques of the industry, essays on cinema culture, and, to varying extents, reviews of films.⁸⁶ Over time, the film reviews expanded in scope to include analysis and evaluation of acting, direction, photographic technique, and storyline, reflecting

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁰ Richard Abel, “A Marriage of Ephemeral Discourses: Newspapers and Moving Pictures,” *Cinema & Cie*, no. 1 (2001): 60.

⁸¹ Ibid.; Louis Pelletier and Paul S. Moore, “Une Excentrique Au Cœur de L’industrie: Ray Lewis et Le Canadian Moving Picture Digest,” *Cinémas* 16, no. 1 (2005): 65; Hidalgo, “Emergence of Film Criticism,” 5.

⁸² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 29.

⁸³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 21.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁵ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 65–66.

⁸⁶ Hidalgo, “Emergence of Film Criticism,” 5.

films' increasing length and narrative sophistication.⁸⁷ Plot descriptions were included to lure film advertisers to trade publications.⁸⁸ Between its first film reviews in January 1908, under the column "Our Visits," and 1912, the format and terminology used in *Moving Picture World* changed constantly, reflecting "the journal's internal struggle to establish a critical paradigm appropriate to cinema."⁸⁹ Smith explains that drama critics saw career opportunities in film reviewing, and "their input began the serious study of film techniques, as they employed existing theatre standards and terminology to establish the foundations of film literacy in the general public."⁹⁰ Frank E. Woods's work at *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, which introduced a page on moving pictures in May 1908, was instrumental.⁹¹ Jerry Roberts notes that historians typically view Woods—who signed his column "The Spectator"—as "'probably' the first American film critic," and under his watch, the publication's film section grew steadily in size and sophistication until 1912, sometimes reaching up to eight pages in length.⁹² Such commentary served to educate both the moviegoing public and film producers, building a common language and criteria. Fan magazines also sprouted up in the United States around 1907–1908, in which drama critics took up the task of covering film news and reviews.⁹³ Film columns started appearing in mainstream newspapers in France in 1908 and a bit later in the United States and Germany.⁹⁴

Cinema was a thriving business in Canada as well, with nickelodeons booming and Léo-Ernest Ouimet opening a prototypical movie palace, the Ouimetoscope, in Montreal in 1907.⁹⁵ Despite Canada's enthusiasm for film exhibition, it would be several more years before it published its own trade and fan magazines, albeit to cover films mostly coming from beyond its borders. In the meantime, trade publications considered Canada part of the American domestic market and reported news about the mostly American-controlled industry.⁹⁶ Indeed, the

⁸⁷ Smith, "Introducing a New Medium," iii, vi.

⁸⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 28.

⁸⁹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 22; Hidalgo, "Emergence of Film Criticism," 6.

⁹⁰ Smith, "Introducing a New Medium," 90.

⁹¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 17.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Smith, "Film Reviews," 9.

⁹⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 28.

⁹⁵ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 24.

⁹⁶ Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 66.

dominance of the American entertainment industry in Canada had a long precedence in theatre, burlesque, and vaudeville. Still, the British magazine *The Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal* reported in 1906, “In Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal we saw better performances than in America, and there was desire shown to elevate and instruct by using films with an educational side,” thereby offering an early example of the cinema-as-uplift rhetoric prevalent in later Canadian film commentary.⁹⁷

The social uplift rhetoric, too, was imported, mostly from Britain and the United States. In 1907, the American national weekly magazine *Saturday Evening Post* published an article about the movies as a vehicle for the trickle-down of “civilization” to women, children, immigrants, and the poor.⁹⁸ Cultural historian Raymond J. Haberski Jr. has explored the ideologies of class and education that permeated popular film writing. He noted that though early film writing generally considered cinema to have tremendous democratizing potential, it was unclear whether this power could be harnessed effectively to elevate cultural standards:

Millions of people who rarely went to plays, the opera, symphonies, or art museums went to the movies. The motion picture had the ability, therefore, to refine popular taste. It could be used to spread the gospel of truth and beauty more effectively than any other cultural experience. The question then became: Would movies serve as an elevator, raising the level of taste in the country, or as a bulldozer, reducing all taste to one level?⁹⁹

Many early critics accepted the “elevator” view. Among the idealists were Frank E. Woods, who wrote the film page for *The New York Dramatic Mirror* from 1908, and Louis Reeves Harrison, Woods’s contemporary at *Moving Picture World*.¹⁰⁰ Similar views would resurface in the writings of James Quirk and Julian Johnson at *Photoplay*, a trendy fan publication founded in 1911 that included opinion pieces on censorship, audiences, and cinematic art, and also presented the works of heavyweight cinema critics Vachel Lindsay, Hugo Münsterberg, and Victor Freeburg.¹⁰¹ Concerns over cinema’s social impact, educational potential, aesthetic value, and

⁹⁷ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 17.

⁹⁸ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 17, 23.

¹⁰¹ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 21, 16.

ensorship led to coverage beyond the trades, in general circulation politics, arts, and literature magazines, such as *Life* and *The American Magazine*.¹⁰²

American film trade publications continued to proliferate until 1912.¹⁰³ Film fan magazines were also abundant, as discussed by Anthony Slide in *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine* (2010). *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of early film publications. Film reviews also began to take out their own real estate in general circulation newspapers around this time. According to Roberts, the first American newspaper to publish a page on motion pictures was the *New York Morning Telegraph* in January 1910.¹⁰⁴ *The New York Times* started regularly publishing film reviews for a wide readership in 1913, though Roberts writes that its coverage during the silent era was anaemic compared to many other outlets.¹⁰⁵ Abel notes the prevalence of film culture in newspapers of the early 1910s, in the period between nickelodeons and the rise of movie palaces: “as the managers of these new theaters bought advertising space on a regular basis, local papers, in turn, devoted stories, columns, and even pages to the ever more popular ‘movies’ and picture shows.”¹⁰⁶ According to Frey, the film industry encouraged early film critics to defend cinema against pushback from both proponents of theatre and moral crusaders. Production companies even established public relations departments to court the favour of film journalists.¹⁰⁷ He explains, “film criticism has always been a service sector, but, rather than consumers, the original task was to guide the industry.”¹⁰⁸

Film trade publications arrived in Canada in 1915 with the launch of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Prior to that date, film reviews and news could be found in the general circulation press. For example, in 1912, *Maclean's* reprinted an article from *The American Review of Reviews*, in which the writer Robert Grau speculated that the new feature-length films would take the entertainment world by storm and become serious competition for legitimate

¹⁰² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 28; Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, 24; Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 30.

¹⁰³ Hidalgo, “Emergence of Film Criticism,” 5.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, 114; Roberts, *The Complete History*, 69.

¹⁰⁶ Abel, “A Marriage,” 60–61.

¹⁰⁷ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

theatre.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the press was preoccupied at the time with the implications of increasingly sophisticated moving pictures for the live theatre industry. In 1916, *Macleans* reported that “Movies” were revolutionizing Canada’s economy, bringing in up to one million dollars annually in economic benefits from employment, duties, and secondary manufacturing.¹¹⁰ The author noted the remarkable success of film theatres, even during wartime, and enthusiastically predicted, “The time has not yet come in Canada when large companies are formed to build moving picture theatres or to produce the pictures themselves; but it is coming. The industry is in the swaddling clothes stage here. It is showing symptoms of precocity, however, and its development will be amazingly rapid.”¹¹¹ Though 1914 to 1922 would prove relatively active years in Canadian film production, American and British films still dominated, and by 1918 “almost every Canadian newspaper had printed editorials condemning the quantity and quality of American war films.”¹¹² These nationalist appeals bore fruit in the establishment of all-Canadian newsreels and federal and Ontario film bureaus. The civic-minded work of the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau, for instance, founded in 1917, caused one journalist to claim, “Ontario now leads the world in visual education work.”¹¹³

Mattias Frey illustrates the historical continuity of the contemporary rhetoric of crisis surrounding professional film criticism. Perhaps the earliest challenge was to establish the respectability of cinema itself, particularly in relation to the live stage. In 1912, German critic Herbert Tannenbaum wrote “Kino und Theater,” in which he advocated for the role of newspaper criticism in elevating the cinematic art.¹¹⁴ Film criticism of the period generally mimicked theatre criticism, with emphases on *mise-en-scène*, plot, genre, artistic quality, and entertainment value.¹¹⁵ Still, there were concerns that the newspapers treated film journalism as secondary to theatre coverage. Calls arose for “a new criticism for the new art and the erection of professional rules and standards.”¹¹⁶ In fact, claims of legitimacy often came from the film

¹⁰⁹ Robert Grau, “The Rise of the Silent Drama,” *Macleans* 23, no. 6 (April 1912): 634–35.

¹¹⁰ Hugh S. Eayrs, “Our Newest Industry: The ‘Movies,’” *Macleans* 29 (April 1916): 21–23.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹² Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 56.

¹¹³ From *Canada Weekly* in 1918; cited in *ibid.*, 141.

¹¹⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 33.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

industry itself in the hopes of attracting middle class audiences and “expanding and consolidating its markets.”¹¹⁷ In turn, critics addressed their reviews to directors, studios, and exhibitors in the interests of improving the quality of films. Debates began in the 1910s, says Frey, about the relationship between critics and the industry, with some arguing that close proximity to film producers allowed critics better knowledge and influence, while others argued that distance preserved critical integrity.¹¹⁸

A related theme in early film writing was the role of cinema as a public good. Enthusiasm over the educational potential of cinema went hand-in-hand with concerns over the morals depicted in films. The twin subjects of education and censorship have inflected popular film discourse for several decades since then, as subsequent chapters will highlight. The discourses that circulated in the 1910s, implicating “the public [as] a key stakeholder in evaluating the dimensions and standards of cinema,” reflected the aesthetic and moral concerns of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures (founded in 1909 in New York as the National Board of Censorship) and would in time lead to the establishment of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association in 1922 and initiatives like the Payne Fund Studies of the late 1920s and early 1930s on the effects of cinema on children.¹¹⁹ The National Board of Review informed and guided the public regarding the content of films, reviewing and classifying movies in the interests of raising both producers’ and audiences’ standards. In 1919, the body released the first annual top ten list, which has since become a ubiquitous journalistic ritual.¹²⁰ *The New York Times* followed suit in 1924, and *Sight & Sound* inaugurated its decennial all-time top ten critics poll in 1952.¹²¹ Critics like Roland Schacht in Germany and Louis Reeves Harrison, who joined *Moving Picture World* in 1911, similarly positioned themselves as mediators between the great works of cinema and the “uneducated mass public.”¹²² Apparent in these approaches is a tradition of didacticism and cultural uplift from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—

¹¹⁷ Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 18.

¹¹⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 44.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51; Groening, “Timeline,” 400.

¹²⁰ Groening, “Timeline,” 401.

¹²¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 31; Nick James, “The Greatest Films of All Time 2012,” *BFI*, accessed July 1, 2016, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-sound-magazine/greatest-films-all-time-2012-homepage>.

¹²² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 51.

represented by notable literary critics Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Matthew Arnold—that was influential in the works of many Canadian popular film critics, particularly in regards to cultural nationalism.

Meanwhile in the United States, criticism was shifting in favour of mass culture and away from the “genteel tradition” of the nineteenth century.¹²³ Haberski notes, America’s “pluralistic society was rich in ambiguities and hidden dilemmas for the new cultural critics.”¹²⁴ The rise of popular culture and its new place within nationalism resulted in reconfigurations of cultural authority: “Whereas older journals of opinion would run lengthy diatribes against motion pictures, the high-circulation magazines for the masses hinted at a transition in power from one group of critics to another.”¹²⁵ Haberski claims the new popular culture forced critics to adopt “new roles as facilitators rather than cultural arbiters. [...] Critics [...] could not simply pass judgment on films and expect the public to follow.”¹²⁶

Coinciding with this new direction, the early twentieth century provided new opportunities for people of colour and women in popular film commentary. Anna Everett pinpoints the post-Reconstruction (1897–1917) era as a moment when black critics both seized on the progressive promise of the new medium of cinema and took it as a bellwether for reactionary racial politics.¹²⁷ The first report on cinema in the black press was a 1909 article in Baltimore’s *Afro-American Ledger*. “Moving Pictures Doing Good Business” celebrated the emancipatory potential of projection technology, highlighting the success of a black man working as a projectionist.¹²⁸ Lester A. Walton wrote “The Degeneracy of the Moving Picture Theatre” in August 1909, decrying the hypocrisy of exhibitors who lured spectators to watch films of black lynchings by labelling these spectacles “educational.”¹²⁹ Walton’s article was endorsed and reprinted by a number of white newspapers. In turn, Walton regularly wrote responses to pieces in the white press.¹³⁰ As editor of the entertainment page of *New York Age*,

¹²³ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

¹²⁷ Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

he became the “cultural arbiter” of “most of black America” until 1919.¹³¹ James Metcalfe also wrote about race issues in cinema in *Life* in 1909.¹³²

Despite the fact that segregation prevented African-American writers from attending screenings of many early film releases, the popular black newspapers *New York Age* and *Chicago Defender* (the former of which had limited international circulation) added film coverage to their regular theatre and entertainment columns at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.¹³³ Where the *New York Age* had a single authorial critic in Walton, the *Defender* featured a roster of theatre and film writers, including Sylvester Russell, Minnie Adams, Columbus Bragg, and Tony Langston. By 1915 the *Defender* had a regular film review section that featured each Chicago theatre by name and a discussion of their weekly offerings. Topics like biased seating practices in local movie theatres and successes in black filmmaking now occasionally made it to the front page.¹³⁴ Coverage of film culture in the black press ramped up with the release of D. W. Griffith’s notorious film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and early enthusiasm for cinema was replaced with trenchant critique of mainstream representation vis-à-vis real-world racial violence. Still, black filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux and William Foster (also known as Juli Jones) enjoyed the support of the black press and used these publications to position their relationship to the film industry. Everett explains, “Micheaux and Foster saw the black press’s [...] textual community as an inclusively populist forum encompassing both film insiders (filmmakers) and outsiders (audiences) alike.”¹³⁵

Women’s role in popular film commentary also intensified in the 1910s. *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, though at times paternalistic, emphasizes the centrality of women writers in the success of dozens of film fan magazines, publications that also enjoyed a strong female readership. Slide points out that few of the writers had more than a high school education.¹³⁶ Antonia Lant shows that women “were some of the first film reviewers, key

¹³¹ Ibid., 18, 19.

¹³² Ibid., 24.

¹³³ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹³⁶ Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 35.

Hollywood columnists, and acolytes of that temple of celebrity, the fan magazine.”¹³⁷ Through the teens and well into the 1950s, the low status and minimal professional barriers to film journalism paradoxically offered lucrative opportunities for women, who had relatively few options in the workforce and could benefit from film writing not only as a source of income but also as a stepping stone into other forms of journalism or even into the film industry (e.g., as screenwriters). Film reviewing’s low status has been noted by several historians.¹³⁸ Reviews were relegated to a minor position next to the funny pages.¹³⁹ Film journalism was amenable to women for several other reasons, including low training requirements, flexible scheduling, and working conditions that accommodated women’s domestic responsibilities, as well as a widespread sense that cinema itself catered to female audiences to whom women writers could naturally speak. Lant explains, “Women also got these jobs because editors thought their sex *should* cover a medium whose scale of female audience was legendary,” and editors were pleased for the opportunity to capitalize on the concerns of women readers, such as fashion, gender roles, women’s work, and so on.¹⁴⁰ Lant also cites World War I as a period during which women gained better access to positions in journalism.¹⁴¹

The precise proportion of women in early film criticism is difficult to determine, since, among other factors, film reviews were often unsigned or listed pseudonyms. Well-known aliases included “Mae Tinee” at the *Chicago Tribune*, whose identity has been cited alternately as “Frances Smith” and “Frances Kurner.” Jerry Roberts claims the *nom de plume* referred to several women critics at the paper, including Anna Nangle in the postwar years.¹⁴² Similarly, “Kate Cameron”—allegedly from “camera on”—was the pen name of women film critics at the *New York Daily News*, namely Irene Thirer and Loretta King, the latter of whom was at the paper for thirty-two years.¹⁴³ Lant credits Thirer with the innovation of the four-star film rating

¹³⁷ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 379.

¹³⁸ See for instance Roberts, *The Complete History*, 101.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 381.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), 681; “Mae Tinee, Chi Film Critic, on Commercial,” *Variety* 117, no. 8 (February 5, 1935): 36; Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 382; Roberts, *The Complete History*, 81–82, 99.

¹⁴³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 81–82.

system.¹⁴⁴ Other reviewers at the paper included Wanda Hale and Dorothy Masters, rounding out the paper's female-dominated film beat. The paper's founder, Joseph Medill Patterson, opined, "I think women film critics are more intuitive and understand movies better," which partially explains his habit of hiring them.¹⁴⁵

Sometimes the pseudonyms masked or inverted gender identities, as in the case of Cal York (representing various men and women for *Photoplay* in the 1910s and 1920s), H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman for *Close Up*), and Norma Mahl (signed on a Robert Herring review for *Close Up*). Lant writes, "Namelessness (as well as the use of pen names) means that we will never establish how many women wrote about film, particularly before 1920, but it was a burgeoning field that certainly concealed female authorship."¹⁴⁶ At the same time, considering the numerous high profile women film critics, represented by both real and fictional names, this was clearly a boom time for women in film journalism.

Women film reporters gained prominence first in daily newspapers. In 1912, the same year that Minnie Adams took up the mantle of entertainment reporter at the *Chicago Defender*, the *Des Moines News* hired Gertrude M. Price, cited by Richard Abel, Louis Pelletier, and Paul Moore as the oldest reported case of a woman film journalist.¹⁴⁷ Drawing on the work of Lant, Pelletier and Moore point out that journalism was then one of the few professional activities open to single and married women alike.¹⁴⁸ In November of 1912, the *News* printed a front-page story by Price outlining the history and structure of the film industry. On the second page, Price was introduced as a new frequent contributor, covering stories about movie stars and asserting cinema as "the biggest, most popular amusement in the world."¹⁴⁹ The newspaper deemed her a "Moving Picture Expert."¹⁵⁰ Price produced stories about (usually women) celebrities, weekly Sunday columns, and capsule film reviews in a column called "The Movies."¹⁵¹ Her reports on film news in New York and Los Angeles were syndicated in numerous American papers, and she

¹⁴⁴ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 380.

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 81.

¹⁴⁶ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 382.

¹⁴⁷ Abel, "A Marriage"; Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 76, fn 61.

¹⁴⁸ Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 76.

¹⁴⁹ Abel, "A Marriage," 59.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Abel, "Fan Discourse in the Heartland: The Early 1910s," *Film History: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 140.

¹⁵¹ Abel, "A Marriage," 63.

was also dubbed the “movie expert” for the *Los Angeles Record*.¹⁵² As for the *Des Moines News*, the paper was progressively oriented, supporting labour and suffragette movements, and during the 1913 suffragette march on Washington, Price interviewed the march’s leader, Rosalie Gordon Jones.¹⁵³ The *News* reflected the interests of the “new woman,” working in the service sector and fighting for gender equality.¹⁵⁴

This new, independent woman was also associated with film fandom and celebrity culture, and the fan magazine’s modes of address resonated in the work of newspaper critics, such as Kitty Kelly (Audrie Alspaugh) and “Mae Tinee” at the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Tribune*—one of the most influential North American dailies—hired the women in 1914, with Mae Tinee responding to readers’ questions about motion picture culture and Kelly writing film reviews. That year, Louella Parsons, previously a screenwriter for the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, also began her column “How to Write Photoplays” at the *Chicago Herald*.¹⁵⁵ Elsie Cohen started writing for *Kinematograph Weekly* in 1915, and Dorothy Day’s “News of the Movies” column appeared in the *Des Moines Tribune* that summer.¹⁵⁶ Several additional women established long-term, substantial careers as film critics in the subsequent years, including Edith Nepean, Adele Whitely Fletcher, Ruth Waterby, and Radie Harris.¹⁵⁷ Richard Abel describes the imbricated pleasures of “reading/viewing/consuming” available to female film spectators and readers of film writing.¹⁵⁸ He suggests that not only were the movie heroines profiled by Price *et al.* meaningful role models for the new professional woman but so indeed were the successful and widely read female film journalists themselves.

Female film writers had considerable cultural influence and in some cases even became celebrities. The *Tribune* for instance published a comic strip based on Kitty Kelly.¹⁵⁹ Louella Parsons eventually settled in Los Angeles in 1926, where she became a fixture on the Hollywood

¹⁵² Abel, “Fan Discourse,” 141, 144.

¹⁵³ Abel, “A Marriage,” 72.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72, 63.

¹⁵⁵ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 77.

¹⁵⁶ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 381; Abel, “Fan Discourse,” 146.

¹⁵⁷ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 381, 383.

¹⁵⁸ Abel, “Fan Discourse,” 146.

¹⁵⁹ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 77.

scene as motion picture editor of William Randolph Hearst's Universal News Service.¹⁶⁰ Her columns reporting on film industry and celebrity news were syndicated across America. Parsons's radio appearances in the 1920s and 1930s inspired the film *Hollywood Hotel* (1938), in which she played herself. Hedda Hopper was a Hollywood actor and a well-known gossip before launching her column in the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁶¹ Hopper played a fear-inducing gossip columnist in George Cukor's film adaptation of *The Women* (1939). Lant claims the public attention paid to the private and professional lives of Parsons and Hopper "undermined these women's professionalism and made them over into grotesque caricatures of prying and censorious femininity."¹⁶²

The high visibility of "sob sisters" and "agony aunts" in the vein of Parsons and Hopper gave the impression that women dominated the field of film journalism. Indeed, Parsons and Hopper had global readerships numbering in the millions.¹⁶³ Still, as Lant points out, the works of these women are underrepresented in collections of film criticism due to persistent biases about the nature of "true" film criticism. Lant suggests, "the hoary distinction between film criticism and reviewing" has worked against women and others who write in the popular cinema mode.¹⁶⁴ She notes that the typical view equating film "reviewing" with the practice of assessing new releases and "criticism" with the more serious contemplation of films and entire oeuvres becomes shaky when one observes how frequently consumer-oriented reviews establish broader connections to history, politics, aesthetics, and various elements of academic film studies.¹⁶⁵ It is also important to remember that while many women in film journalism were quickly slotted into the roles of gossip columnists, they also helped to expand the market for cinema by attracting middle class women in the wake of the disreputable nickelodeon years. The movement to legitimize cinema and the attendant climate of social uplift were compatible with other feminist societal trends such as women's suffrage and prohibition.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*, 387.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 387–388.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 388. Remnants of these characterizations carry over into more recent films including *Hail, Caesar!* (2016), *Trumbo* (2015), and *The Cat's Meow* (2002).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 384.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁶⁶ Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 78.

Though the voices in Canadian film criticism history have generally been more homogeneous, women journalists did figure prominently in Canada's first movie industry trade publication, *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, established in 1915. The *Digest* published weekly, first from Montreal and then moving to Toronto in 1918, where it remained until being absorbed by *Canadian Film Weekly* in 1957.¹⁶⁷ The *Digest* featured short news pieces about production and distribution in the American film industry and Canadian film exhibition. Though the coverage focussed on commercial elements, it also included extensive celebrity news. Most stories did not have bylines, but contributors were sometimes credited, including Dennison Thorton, J. J. Conklin, Robert Lansing, Ward Shaftesbury, and "A. L. Fairweather."¹⁶⁸ Alice Fairweather was a reporter for the *Saint John Standard* (New Brunswick), as well as one of *Canadian Moving Picture Digest's* earliest reporters.¹⁶⁹ She was a regular correspondent representing the Maritime region in the American trade *Moving Picture World* from July 1917 to February 1919, where her byline appeared as "By Alice Fairweather, The Standard, St. John, N. B."¹⁷⁰ In addition to this regular column about the Maritimes film scene, Fairweather contributed longer features, which were likely reprinted from *The Standard*.

Months before her first byline appeared there on July 7, *Moving Picture World* published an April 28 story titled "Praise for Alice Fairweather's Page," celebrating her work in *The Standard* and labelling her "the only woman editor of such a page on any daily published in Canada."¹⁷¹ The piece credited the paper for devoting considerable space to motion picture news and lauded Fairweather's professionalism: "Miss Fairweather attends all screenings of pictures in the private projection rooms, and takes considerable pains in her efforts to make the page attractive and educational."¹⁷² Less than a month later, Fairweather's name appeared in a piece describing her involvement, as a representative of the Young Women's Patriotic Association, in presenting an award for patriotism to New Brunswick film exhibitor Walter H. Golding. The stories appeared under the headline "Trade News of the Week" and the byline "Gathered by our

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁶⁸ Lerner, *Canadian Film and Video*, 431.

¹⁶⁹ Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 77.

¹⁷⁰ See digitized issues of *Moving Picture World* at the Media History Digital Library (<http://mediahistoryproject.org/>).

¹⁷¹ "Praise for Alice Fairweather's Page," *Moving Picture World* 32 (April 28, 1917): 653.

¹⁷² Ibid.

own correspondents,” which does not preclude that Fairweather herself contributed anonymously as an act of self-promotion. It is also possible, however, that the pieces were catalysts in bringing Fairweather on board as a correspondent.¹⁷³ One of Fairweather’s early contributions to *Moving Picture World* demonstrates the way women film reporters could bring attention to the largely invisible work of women behind the scenes of the film industry. In her September 1, 1917 column, Fairweather wrote “A Successful Woman Exhibitor” about “Mrs. R. H. Davidson,” the “proprietress” of Moncton, New Brunswick’s Dreamland theatre. On the occasion of the theatre manager’s purchase of the property, Fairweather describes Davidson’s special aptitude for running the movie house, noting for instance that “As a woman Mrs. Davidson knows how to cater to an audience of women and children as well as to the many men who attend her theater.”¹⁷⁴

Fairweather’s articles resonate with Monica Dall’Asta’s discussion of feminist historiography as an emerging focus on “more or less ordinary professional figures,” instead of auteurs and celebrities.¹⁷⁵ Melanie Bell, moreover, describes the way the emphasis on authors and heroic figures has virtually erased women from early film history, even overlooking high impact but low status professionals such as Parsons and Hopper. The subsequent “lost-and-found” approach adopted by some scholars, seeking to salvage the stories and contributions of high-achieving individual women, ultimately serves to reinforce the heroic paradigm and further marginalizes the unglamorous, behind-the-scenes work of many women.¹⁷⁶ Bell explains that in early cinema (as now) such unexceptional roles “ma[d]e up the majority of film industry personnel employed in roles ranging from distributors, promoters, designers and costumiers, to

¹⁷³ “Exhibitor Honored for Patriotic Work,” *Moving Picture World* 32 (May 19, 1917): 1156.

¹⁷⁴ Alice Fairweather, “A Successful Woman Exhibitor,” *Moving Picture World* 33 (September 1, 1917): 1409.

¹⁷⁵ Monica Dall’Asta, “Challenges Of Researching Worldwide Distribution: On Frieda Klug, Pearl White and Other Traveling Women Film Pioneers” (Women and Film History, UK/Ireland: Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies University of Sunderland, 2010), <http://wfh.wikidot.com/challenges-of-researching-worldwide-distribution>; and cited in Bell, “Women’s Work.”

¹⁷⁶ It is nevertheless worth noting that “lost and found” scholarship has been invaluable in forging women’s film history, early cinema historiography, and even Canadian film history. See, for example, Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique.”

cinema owners and critics.”¹⁷⁷ Fairweather’s output as an industry correspondent and her writing about other women film professionals highlights precisely the kind of “ordinary” work that helps expand the picture of women’s participation in early cinema culture.

Meanwhile at *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, Ray Lewis was hired as the publication’s first woman editor-in-chief in 1918, following runs by Merrick R. Nutting and Raymond S. Peck. Lewis published her first edition in September 1918 and remained editor-in-chief until 1954, editing around 2000 issues of the magazine.¹⁷⁸ During her lengthy tenure, her editorial column “Ray Presents” was one of the magazine’s liveliest and most polemic features.¹⁷⁹ Lewis’s editorials were often as long as two or three pages, and they did not shy away from controversy.¹⁸⁰ The column tackled numerous industry-related topics, taking a hard stance against censorship, monopolies in the film industry, and flag waving in American cinema, among many others.¹⁸¹ At the end of the 1920s, her outspoken attacks on *Variety* editor-in-chief Sime Silverman locked her into a heated feud.¹⁸² Lewis was closely acquainted with the entertainment industry; she had previously acted in, written, and produced plays, and she had worked in film production and screenwriting at Toronto’s Conness-Till, New York’s Equitable studio, and with Isadore Bernstein at Fox Film in California.¹⁸³

Louis Pelletier and Paul Moore’s research “re-inscribes” Lewis’s part in Canadian film history and articulates Lewis’s contradictions and strategies as a powerful woman in film journalism.¹⁸⁴ Operating in a “boys’ club” and addressing a primarily male readership, the authors observe, Lewis (née Rae Levinsky) adopted a chameleon name and identity that allowed her to use her gender and ethnicity flexibly and advantageously in various situations.¹⁸⁵ As such, Lewis’s role and cultural negotiations would have been quite different from film journalists such as Mae Tinee, Kitty Kelly, Louella Parsons, and Hedda Hopper, who catered to popular audiences and, in particular, female fandom. Here Melanie Bell’s research is instructive

¹⁷⁷ Bell, “Women’s Work,” 192.

¹⁷⁸ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 68, 60, 62.

¹⁷⁹ Lerner, *Canadian Film and Video*, 431.

¹⁸⁰ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 62, 68.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

regarding the “superior woman persona” and strategies adopted by British women film critics in the postwar period to distance themselves from associations with fan gossip and to command respect for their critical voices.¹⁸⁶ Lewis used her own reputable position to advocate for Canadian cinema, in which she was deeply invested, although she openly recognized the high quality and pre-eminence of American cinema.¹⁸⁷ “It is not healthy for a country to consume exclusively those products which are produced outside of its own domain,” she wrote in 1922.¹⁸⁸ She was an active supporter of Léo-Ernest Ouimet’s groundbreaking work, but she was also willing to criticize Canadian efforts; she was unforgiving when the producers of *Carry On, Sergeant!* (1928) were caught up in a funding scandal.¹⁸⁹ All the while, Lewis’s film journalism made appeals to high culture and the Western “great books” tradition.¹⁹⁰ Although Pelletier and Moore engage in the lost-and-found scholarship discouraged by Bell, the dearth of information on women’s roles in early Canadian film history (and especially film criticism history) is such that their research proves invaluable in filling in the record regarding both exceptional women figures and ordinary professionals. It also positions the contributions of Canadians like Lewis within the international circulation of film and film culture of the period.

Early film writing’s diversity of voices and embrace of “lower” cultural forms was in keeping with what Raymond Haberski describes as the period’s prominent strand of egalitarian American cultural nationalism.¹⁹¹ Haberski writes, “Cultural nationalists [...] reject[ed] the old guard’s limited vision of culture and champion[ed] an artistic renaissance that included every type of expression, from America’s finest novels to its newest art form, the ‘photoplay.’”¹⁹² The enthusiasm for a homegrown film industry among Canada’s leading advocates suggests that the cinema was likewise viewed as a breath of fresh air that could shake up stale cultural hierarchies and unite disparate classes. Pelletier and Moore point out that patriotism was in fact a major

¹⁸⁶ Melanie Bell, “‘Quality’, Cinema and the ‘Superior Woman’ Persona: Understanding Women’s Film Criticism in Post-War Britain (1945-59),” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 5 (2010): 703–19.

¹⁸⁷ Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 76.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹¹ Cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 32.

¹⁹² Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 13.

foundational principle underlying *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*.¹⁹³ This link between the new popular culture and nationalism (and women's cultural participation) was also found in Alice Fairweather's role in the Young Women's Patriotic Association and the citation of a film exhibitor for patriotic contributions.

Nevertheless, the uplift rhetoric unmasked an underlying bigotry, as Haberski points out: "Most critics writing at that time believed the public had an undercultivated artistic taste and needed direction in developing aesthetic values."¹⁹⁴ Haberski cites a case of a Los Angeles newspaper ranting that American cinema attracted "thick-lipped" types with lowbrow tastes.¹⁹⁵ The term "lowbrow" itself originated from the widespread nineteenth century racist pseudoscience of phrenology, wherein standard head shapes and facial characteristics were associated with traits such as intelligence, criminality, and sexual "perversion."¹⁹⁶ Phrenology associated a high forehead with high intelligence and a low forehead with low intelligence.¹⁹⁷ The terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" in popular use date back to the turn of the twentieth century, and they appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in their modern senses in 1908. Once these terms were "taken for granted," the term "middlebrow" emerged, designating the average American "cultural market that represented normative American taste."¹⁹⁸ The new labels appeared in film criticism as tools for discussing the ambiguous cultural status of the new mass artistic medium. In an editorial called "Mr. Lowbrow" for *Moving Picture World* in October 1911, film critic Louis Reeves Harrison argued for higher standards in film so that the art form could serve the tastes of both highbrow and lowbrow audiences and become an educational contribution of which the nation could be proud.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, in response to the campaign by a number of populist film critics to champion the democratic figure of the lowbrow and elevate cinema's status, Randolph Bourne was not impressed and retaliated in *The New Republic* in July 1915: "We seem to be witnessing a lowbrow snobbery...as tyrannical and

¹⁹³ Pelletier and Moore, "Une Excentrique," 74.

¹⁹⁴ Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 18.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹⁶ Perry Meisel, *The Myth of Popular Culture from Dante to Dylan* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3–5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹⁹ Cited in Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 20.

arrogant as the other culture of universities and millionaires and museums.”²⁰⁰ I will further explore the evolving connotations of the terms in Chapter Four, showing that by the 1940s they had become somewhat satirical and yet still carried considerable force in defining cultural hierarchies.

Following World War I and throughout the 1920s, critical activity continued to increase and diversify, while becoming more standardized in the now-established formats of mainstream dailies and weeklies. By then, reading popular film commentary had become part of everyday life in the United States, Canada, and much of the Western world. In fact, film criticism became a key site for the public to interact with not just cinema culture, but also with the modern and cosmopolitan life around them. The appetite for film criticism allowed unstable early written forms to overcome hurdles such as cinema’s lack of respectability and precarious position between vaudeville and legitimate theatre, not to mention the low status and precarity associated with actually being a critic. These variables opened up central spaces for voices usually on the periphery, such as those of women and people of colour. Cinema culture may have been lowbrow, but it was also a new medium for changing times, and it represented an opportunity to redefine cultural hierarchies through education and through resistance. Since film production remained mostly closed to women and people of colour (and, alas, Canadians), and even moviegoing was heavily prescribed for these groups, popular film criticism was a key place to learn about new trends and hash out new ideas. In other words, film criticism was, for writers and readers alike, an accessible way to participate in public life.

The writing and reading of film criticism entailed practices and institutions somewhat autonomous from industry and moviegoing. In the coming decades, film criticism would become increasingly institutionalized and even regulated. Divergent interests from the film industry, newspaper editors, readers, and critics themselves would compete to define the profession and the material forms of film criticism. But even as written film commentary became standardized, new venues for film talk opened up—in radio, television, and, eventually, the internet—to shake things up all over again, offering novel opportunities for diverse voices and reorganizing cultural hierarchies. The next chapter considers the growth and standardization of written film commentary, the emergence of film talk in broadcast media, the diversity of voices in these

²⁰⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, 14.

different media, and the implications of it all for the critical public sphere of Canadian national cinema culture.

Chapter Three: The Institutionalization of Popular Film Talk

Haidee Wasson writes that British critic Iris Barry's early film writing "indicates that as early as the 1920s, cinema was something that was to a degree always happening, in various forms, at many places, across media."¹ But as film criticism grew ubiquitous its professional conventions and print formats became standardized. In the process, the public space for diverse voices from women and people of colour shrunk and specialized. The arrival of film criticism on the radio in the 1930s initially opened up new venues for female commentators in the public sphere, including the BBC (middlebrow reviewing) and American commercial radio (celebrity news). Film criticism on Canadian radio, however, which emerged a decade later, was male dominated from the get-go. With time and as the profession shifted towards repute and exclusivity, the trend of women in international broadcast film criticism waned. The so-called "golden age" of criticism in the 1960s and 1970s was also a peak of uniformity, with only a few (albeit important) exceptions. During this period, and for many years after it, virtually all film critics on American and Canadian television were white men. In recent years, the diversity of voices in popular film criticism has grown again, especially in the United States. This chapter documents the history of popular film criticism since the 1920s, with a focus on the stubborn homogeneity of Canadian criticism throughout this history, particularly as it pertains to a conservative agenda of cultural nationalism. It also begins to contemplate the potential of diverse film talk for cultivating a rich, resilient, and progressive approach to Canadian national cinema that better serves the interests of domestic filmmakers, industry, and audiences.

With the establishment of the first full-time critics in the early 1920s came firmer professional standards and a burgeoning infrastructure for the industry. The decade brought "the establishment of institutional parameters for film criticism as a profession."² In France and Germany, press screenings were established in response to critics' calls for spaces and materials that helped establish their authority and status as priority viewers. By the end of 1921, film review columns could be found in all major Parisian dailies.³ The early 1920s also saw the founding of the first professional film critic societies, including the Munich Film Critics

¹ Wasson, "The Woman Film Critic," 160.

² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

Association (1922) and the Association of Berlin Film Critics (1923).⁴ In the United Kingdom, the Critics' Circle, founded in 1913 to serve music and drama critics, opened up membership to film critics in 1926, and Iris Barry was one of the first film critics to join.⁵ In addition to standardizing industry practices, such critics' associations effectively buffered critics against pressure from film studios and charges of libel stemming from unfavourable reviews.⁶ For instance, Germany's national press association issued ethical guidelines in the 1920s restricting interactions between critics and the film industry.⁷ Britain's Critics' Circle intervened in attempts to blacklist critics and mediated disputes between critics and theatre managers and film studios.⁸

In 1925, according to Terry Ramsaye, the list of newspaper film critics reached four hundred; the *Film Daily Yearbook* in 1929 claimed that a designated "film critic" was employed at 326 distinct American newspapers.⁹ Wasson observes that the 1920s established "a lasting synergy between the two media" of film and newspapers, and that "reading and knowing about cinema (as opposed to individual films or stars) was increasingly deemed daily fare for the many, rather than the few."¹⁰ Thanks to the growing public audience for film journalism, "talk of the movies" became "common sense" and, due to the gendered address of much early film criticism, a form of "everyday knowledge" associated especially with women.¹¹ In general, "Talking about and knowing about cinema was increasingly fashionable among British cosmopolitans."¹² Discussions about film were indeed becoming common in arts and culture magazines everywhere, including the inaugural issue of *The New Yorker* in 1925.¹³ Wasson suggests the practice of "reading about cinema," regardless of the forum, was key in weaving the movies into quotidian life and of establishing film culture as a significant form of cultural capital.¹⁴

⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁵ Bell, "Women's Work," 194.

⁶ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 39.

⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁸ Bell, "Women's Work," 195.

⁹ Ramsaye seems to refer to the US context. Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights*, 681; Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, 90.

¹⁰ Wasson, "The Woman Film Critic," 155.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 157.

¹³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 67.

¹⁴ Wasson, "The Woman Film Critic," 159.

The founding editor of *The New Yorker*, Harold W. Ross, applied strict ethical conduct standards to protect the journalistic integrity of his film reviewers, even though some early columns were still published without bylines or under pseudonyms.¹⁵ Bylines were becoming common, though, and “star” reviewers began to emerge in the British, French, German, Austrian, and American national press, such as Barry, C. A. Lejeune, Louis Delluc, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, Béla Balázs, Robert Sherwood, and Gilbert Seldes. Mattias Frey explains, “As film criticism established itself in the dailies and in the middlebrow weeklies and monthlies, editors allowed, and in some cases actively encouraged, critics to develop subjective modes or distinctive personalities.”¹⁶ The benefits to the publication included building stronger relationships with readers, increased circulation, and establishing a critic’s authoritative voice within the cultural field. Film writing, previously geared towards the industry, turned towards advising the public on matters of taste and consumption choices, bringing it in line with the other arts criticism of the time.¹⁷

The institutionalization of film criticism was overall slower in Canada. The trade publication *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* had launched in 1915, becoming the primary voice of the film industry for many years. Meanwhile, in the 1920s, the mass circulation press reliably reviewed the substantial number of Canadian-made features, particularly during the production boom that fizzled out after 1923.¹⁸ These reviews showed indications of cultural nationalism, which had blossomed among commentators in the previous decade, fermented by Canada’s involvement in World War I and in response to overweening American patriotism in films and newsreels shown on Canadian screens.¹⁹ *Saturday Night* magazine, the *Montreal Herald*, the *Montreal Star*, and the *Toronto Telegram* raved about the Canada-United States coproduction *The Great Shadow* (1920).²⁰ The Toronto dailies praised Blaine Irish’s popular Camera Classics

¹⁵ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 67.

¹⁶ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 91.

¹⁹ See my discussion of nationalist tendencies in early Canadian cinema culture in Zoë Constantinides, “The Myth of Evangeline and the Origin of Canadian National Cinema,” *Film History: An International Journal* 26, no. 1 (2014): 50–79.

²⁰ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 69.

series of 1921–1922.²¹ Peter Morris reports that Irish in fact convinced the *Daily Star* and *Star Weekly* to back the series and that the *Winnipeg Free Press* was actively involved in expanding exhibition of the series west of Ontario, suggesting that the relationship between journalism and the film industry remained quite close.²² Mattias Frey writes that tensions in film criticism of the period “saw the authors both promoting and evaluating in equal measure and assuming the perspectives of both the producers and consumers.”²³ By 1923, the *Ottawa Journal* featured a column called “Photoplays, Dramas, Vaudeville.”²⁴ Morris presents a sampling of Canadian press coverage for domestic films including *Cameron of the Royal Mounted* (1921), *Satan’s Paradise* (1922), *The Rapids* (1922), *Policing the Plains* (1927), and *The Devil Bear* (1929), among others.²⁵

Throughout the 1920s, Canada struggled to establish a domestic film industry through various short-lived initiatives by independent producers, the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau, and the British quota quickie system. In 1925, the *Toronto Star* reported a statement made by filmmaker D. W. Griffith on a visit to Toronto: “You in Canada should not be dependent on either the United States or Great Britain. You should have your own films and exchange them with those of other countries. You can make them just as well in Toronto as in New York.”²⁶ Pleas from several writers in the late 1920s echoed these sentiments, including a call in the *Montreal Star* to “wake up, and make Canadian film,” and an imaginative argument in *The Canadian Forum* suggesting that exporting films to Europe could be the key to stimulating immigration, making government investment in film production a smart strategy.²⁷

Even as film criticism solidified in trade publications, daily newspapers, and highbrow magazines, the profession held a relatively low status and critics generally had minimal expertise. As Jerry Roberts describes, most critics “weren’t equipped to detect genre gains, artistic leaps, or

²¹ Ibid., 87.

²² Ibid., 145.

²³ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 45.

²⁴ John Hofsess, *Inner Views: Ten Canadian Film-Makers* (Montreal: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 11.

²⁵ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 115, 87–88, 120, 91, 186.

²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 175.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91; Richard De Brisay, “A New Immigration Policy,” *The Canadian Forum* 8 (October 1927): 396.

rudimental technical advances of the medium.”²⁸ Film reviews in American newspapers were frequently placed near the comics.²⁹ Film criticism was for dabblers and writers aspiring to more prestigious work as reporters and drama, art, and book critics.³⁰ Moreover, as Antonia Lant and Anna Everett attest, film criticism was still, to a degree, a space where marginalized voices could find some purchase.³¹ Until the mid-twentieth century, dedicated staff positions were established for film critics, though personnel tended to change frequently.³² This was partly due to the erratic hours and low wages of these positions, factors that made the jobs well suited for women, who were typically not expected to be primary earners for the family and whose domestic duties were less compatible with a regular office schedule.³³

Soon, cultural forces took shape to improve the status of film criticism. Film scholar Greg Taylor credits a small number of avant-garde film critics with the rise of highbrow film criticism in postwar United States.³⁴ He studies Manny Farber and Parker Tyler, critics who took up popular cinema in the 1940s as a reaction to the rise of American modernism in art, which they viewed as commercial, shallow, apolitical, and toothless. After the neutralization of the avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s, these critics applied techniques of surrealism and abstraction to cinema instead, an unabashedly commercial medium that managed to operate outside stifling high culture and maintain intimacy with the general public. Taylor proposes that Farber and Tyler were linked by their “obvious desire to present their criticism of the movies not merely as a consumer guide but as a vehicle for asserting their own creative, artistic response to the challenge of postwar popular art (i.e., middlebrow culture).”³⁵ They thereby established a “critical elite” that led the way for the boom in film criticism in the 1960s and critics such as Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, and Jonas Mekas.³⁶ Taylor sees Farber and Tyler’s approaches as a response not only to the sterilization of modernism, but also to the encroachment of the middlebrow on privileged good taste. Highbrow commentators responded to the shifting cultural

²⁸ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 44.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 47, 44.

³¹ Lant, *Red Velvet Seat*; Everett, *Returning the Gaze*.

³² Roberts, *The Complete History*, 78.

³³ Bell, “Women’s Work.”

³⁴ Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism*.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

³⁶ Ibid., 14.

hierarchy by digging in their heels and appealing to principles of “authenticity” in opposition to middlebrow “kitsch.”³⁷ Interestingly, the rhetoric of “authenticity,” which Bourdieu identifies as a scapegoat for high culture privilege, also surfaces repeatedly in the late-1940s middlebrow reviews of Canadian radio film critics Gerald Pratley and Clyde Gilmour (see Chapter Four).

Though Farber and Tyler may have elevated film criticism as incidental by-products of their avant-garde agendas, various European and American writers explicitly advocated increasing film criticism’s prestige, complaining that dilettantes were corrupting the field. Passionate pleas to this effect appeared in print, penned by Herbert Ihering (1923), Rudolf Arnheim (1929), Harry Alan Potamkin (1930), Pare Lorentz (1931), and Alexander Bakshy (1933).³⁸ Again, Canadian film critic Gerald Pratley would revive similar rhetoric on his radio programs in the late 1940s. This enforcing of professional boundaries also finds a corollary in today’s backlash against online criticism.

Transitional Voices: Film Criticism at Mid-Century

The route to legitimizing film criticism was nevertheless slow and winding. Along the way, women continued to find opportunities in the field’s instability. Melanie Bell follows Antonia Lant’s work on gender in early popular film writing, with a focus on the milieu of 1940s England, where women film critics were prominent both on radio and in print. But while Lant attributed women’s early successes to the industry’s low status and flexible working conditions, Bell’s research suggests film writing was actually a fairly prestigious outlet for women journalists, at least for a brief postwar moment. Bell writes, “From 1946/7 onwards, film criticism began to have increased cultural cachet, its critics were in high demand and many of its most experienced proponents were women. Film criticism at this time was both accessible to women and culturally prestigious.”³⁹

Influential British critics, like E. Arnot Robertson on BBC Radio, C. A. Lejeune at the *Observer*, Penelope Houston at *Sight and Sound*, and Dilys Powell of the BBC and *The Sunday Times* were able to establish productive and renowned careers as critics in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁰ Women’s writing appeared in everything from specialist film journals to general

³⁷ Ibid., 26.

³⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 37; Roberts, *The Complete History*, 44, 57, 48–49.

³⁹ Bell, “Women’s Work,” 196.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 193; Bell, “‘Superior Woman’ Persona,” 704.

circulation magazines, to daily newspapers, to women's magazines.⁴¹ A sardonic (and obviously inaccurate) 1943 article in *The American Mercury* estimates the fraction of female fan magazine writers to be as high as three-quarters.⁴² Numerous women critics of the period ascended to prominent positions, including Powell, Freda Bruce Lockhart, and Elspeth Grant, who each had a turn chairing the Film Section of the Critics' Circle between 1946 and 1954.⁴³

At the same time, Bell found that the increasing status of women in film critic positions resulted in some pushback. She references the case of E. Arnot Robertson, a well-liked BBC critic of the postwar period who was banned from MGM press screenings after delivering on the radio an unfavourable review of the studio's film *The Green Years* (1946). Robertson fought back by bringing a libel suit against MGM and advocating for her right to critical autonomy. Bell explains,

The charge of 'self-exhibitionism' and 'brightness' suggests that Robertson's real crime lay in having a good opinion of herself and her intellect, and in seeking to promote herself as a professional critic. As more attention began to be paid to film criticism, it's evident that some were resentful that women held the role, and those secure in particularly prestigious positions were especially vulnerable to attack. By the early 1960s, Dilys Powell's position was attracting negative publicity with her detractors addressing her Editor directly, demanding, 'Can't a man be found to do the films for The Sunday Times?'⁴⁴

Bell suggests, "the high visibility of women raised anxieties for some who seemed to be uncomfortable with the opportunity criticism afforded women to play a role as cultural commentators."⁴⁵

While some editors—such as Joseph Medill Patterson at the *New York Daily News*, as noted in Chapter Two—felt a woman's voice was a natural fit for the feminized sphere of mass cinema culture, others attributed the perceived inferiority of film journalism to the presence of women in the field. In a 1945 issue of *The Screen Writer*, former film reviewer for *The New*

⁴¹ Bell, "'Superior Woman' Persona," 704–705.

⁴² Anonymous, "Vultures of Hollywood," *The American Mercury*, March 1943, 345.

⁴³ Bell, "Women's Work," 196.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 198–199.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

Yorker John Lardner, who had moved on to sports and war reporting, offered the snide (and gendered) quip “film reviewing is regarded in the trade as a spot for a hack or a venial biddy.”⁴⁶ Theodore Strauss—formerly a reviewer for *The New York Times*—was even blunter when he characterized the enormously popular Kate Cameron thus:

The reviewer commanding by far the largest single audience in America is the *News*’ Kate Cameron, the sweet and suburban lady who might have stepped out of a Helen Hokinson cartoon. Miss Cameron’s reviews are not far above the level of advice-to-the-lovelorn columns and she relieves her approximately two and a half million readers of tedious eye strain by affixing stars—like a report card on behavior—to each film. This system in effect also relieves Miss Cameron of the necessity of making extended evaluations of the films reviewed. Her stars are easy, neat, and highly effective. They are as uncomplex, as uncritical, but not quite as accurate as the carnival contraptions which test how much wind a man can blow out of his lungs.⁴⁷

The negative association between popular criticism and women continued into the next decade. In 1958, *Time* magazine published a hatchet piece with no byline about newspaper film critics, which included the statement, “A few perceptive, readable critics are still at critical work. But many papers leave the job to worn-out desk-men, middle-aged ladies...or unqualified cubs.”⁴⁸ Women’s audibility in film talk circles came at a price: the de-valuing of the film critic profession in general and, especially, the female voices working within it.

As a response to this phenomenon, several eminent female film critics in 1940s and 1950s Britain adopted the “superior woman persona” as a shield. Bell documents the various ways upper-middle class critics with an elite education, such as C. A. Lejeune, Dilys Powell, Freda Bruce Lockhart, and E. Arnot Robertson, distanced themselves from the feminized gossip columns, and worked “to prove themselves in relation to a male standard.”⁴⁹ Bell presents occasions when these women distinguished themselves from the “ordinary” female moviegoer, while still addressing the interests and tastes of female audiences. Sometimes the balancing act

⁴⁶ John Lardner, “Last Word,” *The Screen Writer* 1, no. 7 (1945): 16; cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 96.

⁴⁷ Theodore Strauss, “No Jacks, No Giant Killers,” *The Screen Writer* 1, no. 1 (1945): 6; cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 104.

⁴⁸ Cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 105.

⁴⁹ Bell, “‘Superior Woman’ Persona,” 709.

backfired, as when Lockhart admitted to crying in a film screening on the BBC radio program *The Critics* and was ridiculed by her male counterparts on the panel.⁵⁰

Women critics were especially conspicuous on 1940s British radio, particularly on the BBC, where film criticism was a fixture.⁵¹ Film critics in general went back all the way to BBC radio's early years. George Atkinson was a film critic there in the 1920s. In 1926, he found himself in deep water over some disparaging comments he made about American cinema, demonstrating the sway the film industry still held over journalistic criticism, or at least the extent to which exhibitors wished to hold on to such influence. When a group of exhibitors joined forces and complained to the BBC, the broadcaster invited a representative of the group to debate the issue on the air.⁵² In the 1930s, Harvard and Yale-educated Alistair Cooke, who went on to host CBS-TV's *Omnibus* and PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre*, was also a BBC film critic.⁵³ Melanie Selfe's article about the BBC's policies on broadcast film criticism shows that the vocal qualities and styles of broadcasters were a significant concern of the corporation in the 1940s and in fact impacted the casting of female broadcasters, as both guests and hosts.⁵⁴ The Talks Department had moved in the 1930s towards a more conversational and anecdotal mode of address. It faced challenges during the war in finding film reviewers who were competent and intelligent and also appealing as broadcast personalities. Selfe writes, "many of the best male critics [were] deemed to have particularly dull or pompous voices."⁵⁵ In the end, several factors came together to create opportunities in broadcast film talk for female critics: the growing taste for genial on-air personalities, the wartime gender imbalance, and the job's less-than-ideal combination of long hours, low pay, and unstable contracts.⁵⁶

Renowned print critic C. A. Lejeune, who hosted the film review show *The Fortnight's Films*, was encouraged to tailor her broadcasting style towards "light entertainment" for the military audience.⁵⁷ Dilys Powell, also a highly regarded print critic, faced criticisms that her

⁵⁰ Ibid., 714.

⁵¹ Ibid., 194.

⁵² "Protest Film Critic's Attack Via Radio," *Variety* 81, no. 13 (February 10, 1926): 3.

⁵³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 88.

⁵⁴ Selfe, "Intolerable Flippancy."

⁵⁵ Ibid., 380.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 379.

“microphone performance” was not friendly enough.⁵⁸ E. Arnot Robertson, on the other hand, was not previously established in the middlebrow press, but was hired for her microphone and storytelling experience. Radio listeners responded well to her; in fact, her positive reception by BBC audiences gave her an advantage over the far more experienced film reviewer Richard Winnington.⁵⁹ Robertson was “one of the BBC’s most regularly used film critics” in 1946, when she brought her above-mentioned libel case against MGM.⁶⁰ On the air, Robertson was a practitioner of the new, approachable and less didactic broadcast style. She appeared in regular rotation on the program *The Week’s Films*, but while her casual address was in keeping with the Corporation’s policy, the American studios had become frustrated with the cheekiness and “inappropriate use of wit” among BBC film critics.⁶¹ Selfe explains, “in court, MGM’s attacks on Robertson began to take on a personal quality, revealing the film company’s gendered expectations of the performance of critique.”⁶² The studio suggested that the competence of women critics lay not in cleverness and wit but in expressing their genuine emotional responses.

Selfe’s work also captures the beginning of the end of the heyday of women as purveyors of film talk: “when the Corporation developed television shows about cinema in the 1950s, they only used male presenters, eschewing both female broadcasters and anything approaching film criticism.”⁶³ Ultimately, even the strategic stance of the “superior woman” on the BBC could not protect women critics from the backlash. For Bell, the E. Arnot Robertson case is an example of the ways “women’s high profile as critics attracted negative attention and their declining influence in the profession.”⁶⁴ By Bell’s calculations, based on the membership of the Critics’ Circle, the proportion of British female critics in the postwar period rose above 30 percent. But by the 1970s, women’s membership dropped from about one-third to one-fifth of the total. Bell observes, “as the 1960s progressed, women’s visibility and status as critics declined, relative to their earlier position.”⁶⁵ She cites factors such as the closure of fan magazines, shifts in cinema

⁵⁸ Ibid., 383.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 381.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 373.

⁶¹ Ibid., 379.

⁶² Ibid., 386.

⁶³ Ibid., 389.

⁶⁴ Bell, “Women’s Work,” 196.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 199.

discourses towards “muscular” topics such as auteurism and aesthetics, and the denigration of women critics by their male colleagues (such as derisive comments by director Lindsay Anderson about C. A. Lejeune in *Sequence*).⁶⁶ The growth of a male-dominated culture around art cinema and film societies in the 1960s also helped precipitate the decline of female voices in popular film criticism.

Women were prevalent for a time in American radio film talk too. *Chicago Tribune*’s Mae Tinee took to the air on the newspaper’s radio network WGN in 1935, where she performed a twice-weekly program associated with Mandel’s department store.⁶⁷ Here the critic’s symbiotic relationship with the film and retail industries is readily apparent. Louella Parsons helped establish radio production in California, with her program *Hollywood Hotel* (1934–1938), “the first major network show to broadcast from the West Coast.”⁶⁸ The tremendous national influence of her columns in Hearst publications allowed Parsons to book A-list movie stars on her program without financial compensation. Hedda Hopper followed with *The Hedda Hopper Show* in 1939, after appearing on various types of programs since 1936. Her celebrity gossip program, sponsored by the Sunkist corporation, aired on-and-off until 1951. Unlike Parsons, who had started off in print journalism, Hopper began on the radio, and her success there led to a syndicated newspaper column. Hopper offered film reviews in addition to gossip on her subsequent radio program, *Hollywood Showcase*, starting in 1943.⁶⁹ Generally, while the British public broadcaster featured stringent and irreverent critiques, commercial American radio was oriented more towards publicity and celebrity news.

However, a similar pattern of a narrowing of the range of voices to that in the United Kingdom can be observed in the United States. Participating in a panel called “Why Aren’t There More Women Film Critics?” held at the Boston Public Library, Gerald Peary discovered

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Mae Tinee.”

⁶⁸ John Dunning, “Hollywood Hotel,” in *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 323.

⁶⁹ John Dunning, “The Hedda Hopper Show,” in *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 313–315.

that until the mid-1960s, “all the film critics in Boston were women.”⁷⁰ Jerry Roberts affirms, “quite a few women worked in the midcentury as film critics, especially in New York [...] and Boston.”⁷¹ Long-time, Boston-based arts editor Kay Bourne introduced the panel and proposed a theory: “women were the Boston critics until, in the 1960s, film exploded as an important art. Then men came in wanting the reviewing jobs.”⁷² At the time of publication of his article in 2006, Peary confirmed that no major Boston newspaper had had a woman as staff film critic since the 1980s. In both the United Kingdom and the United States, then, the increased prestige of film and film criticism in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to make it harder for women to capture increasingly lucrative film critic positions, despite the growing number of such jobs at all levels of journalism.

The International Film Generation

The 1960s and 1970s have been referred to as the “great age of film criticism,” when cinema was bold, moviegoers were adventurous, and film critics mattered.⁷³ This movement was especially striking in the United States (i.e. New York), but the reign of art cinema created a strong critical culture and industry in Europe, too. Several international film journals were established, reflecting the rise of scholarly film criticism and analysis: *Filmkritik* (Germany, 1957), *Film Quarterly* (United States, 1958), *Movie* (United Kingdom, 1962), and *Screen* (United Kingdom, 1968). Film criticism in Canada also grew more urgent and invested, especially with the advent of breakout Canadian features such as *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964), *Le chat dans le sac* (1964), *Isabel* (1968), *Goin’ Down the Road* (1970), and *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971), which spurred the excitement for a new and chic sort of cultural nationalism through cinema.

In 1966, Stanley Kauffmann published the essay “The Film Generation” in *The New Republic*, coining a catchy label for the widely observed phenomenon of cinema’s ascendancy, as it became not just a recognized high art form, but also a new academic discipline (film studies), and a general symbol of urbane sophistication among youth. Kauffmann observed that

⁷⁰ Gerald Peary, “Women Film Critics,” *Gerald Peary: Film Reviews, Interviews, Essays & Sundry Miscellany*, February 2006,

http://www.geraldpeary.com/essays/wxyz/women_film_critics.html.

⁷¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 333.

⁷² Peary, “Women Film Critics.”

⁷³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 15.

the generation born after 1935 had been raised on classical Hollywood cinema instead of traditional fine arts, engendering a fundamental shift in cultural tastes and hierarchies. He went so far as to say that the very future of culture lay in the hands of the film generation.⁷⁴ Moreover, the phenomenon of repeat viewing emerged in the 1950s, allowing members of the general audience to become more intimately acquainted with specific cinematic texts, and, by extension, to have more to say about films.⁷⁵ Young audiences also had plenty of reading material to fuel the fire. The publication of *Agee on Film* in 1958 sealed James Agee's literary reputation and put 1950s film criticism on the map (see also Gilbert Seldes, Otis Ferguson, Manny Farber, and Parker Tyler).⁷⁶ New stars of film criticism hit the scene, including Judith Crist, Roger Ebert, Stanley Kauffmann, and Richard Schickel.

Talking about cinema became a powerful cultural force for the film generation. This kind of talk went hand-in-hand with the intellectualization of film culture. Historian Ethan Mordden describes the way film talk in this period expanded to include knowledge of the critical discourses accompanying films: "The intelligent moviegoer didn't just talk about the latest film; he talked about the latest film's reviews."⁷⁷ *Life* magazine reported that the cinephiles of the new generation preferred "intellectual, sophisticated and aggressive films, and when they find one they talk their heads off about it, thereby propelling it before larger audiences."⁷⁸ Now, art cinema talk joined the cacophony of conversation that already surrounded popular cinema: "The best of the movies—that small but important number which charts the way to better things—are discussed as avidly at sophisticated parties as are the more popular works at snack bars."⁷⁹ *Time* magazine also noticed the rise of film talk: "Film has all but replaced the novel as the chief topic

⁷⁴ Reprinted in Stanley Kauffmann, "The Film Generation: Celebration and Concern," in *A World on Film: Criticism and Comment* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), 415–28.

⁷⁵ Barbara Klinger discusses the origins of repeat viewing in *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 135–190.

⁷⁶ Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 123.

⁷⁷ Ethan Mordden, *Medium Cool: The Movies of the 1960s*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, 1990), 177.

⁷⁸ "Everybody Wants to Say It in Films," *Life*, December 20, 1963, 40; also cited in Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 167.

⁷⁹ "Everybody," 39.

of cultural talk on the campus and at many cocktail parties.”⁸⁰ The article claimed that the figure of the film director was increasingly at the centre of film talk; talking about movies was virtually equated with name-dropping auteurs, especially European ones.

Meanwhile, film talk continued to grow as a form of popular entertainment and information in broadcast media. Kauffmann himself was a TV film reviewer and interviewer on WNDT-TV in New Jersey, from 1963 to 1967, “one of the first notable film critics on TV,” according to Jerry Roberts.⁸¹ But Kauffmann was far from the first television film critic; such figures have been an important part of film culture going back to television’s youth. Drama critic John Mason Brown hosted ABC’s *Critic at Large* in 1948 to 1949, with guest Bosley Crowther from *The New York Times* presenting film reviews.⁸² Long-time BBC film critic Alistair Cooke crossed over into American television with the cultural arts program *Omnibus*. The program debuted on CBS in 1952, moved to ABC from 1956 to 1957, and completed its run on NBC, 1957-1959. CBS replaced *Omnibus* with *The Seven Lively Arts*, named after Gilbert Seldes’s book. The film coordinator for both programs was film critic Arthur Knight.⁸³ Newspaper-based critics also launched roles on local television, including the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*’s W. Ward Marsh, who produced the film quiz show *Lights, Camera, Question*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*’s Harold V. Cohen, who hosted Sunday afternoon film screenings on the CBS affiliate KDKA-TV.⁸⁴ Roberts observes, “Critics were appreciated on TV as intellectuals and tastemakers, and were hired for emphasis.”⁸⁵ Throughout the 1950s, these ambassadors of film were almost exclusively white men. The same applies in the Canadian context, where film commentary became a regular part of television programming in the 1960s. Chapter Five will illuminate early film talk on Canadian television and will challenge the popular misconception that film critics appeared abruptly on television in the 1970s and 1980s and somehow signalled the end of erudite and meaningful cinema commentary. The dominant historical narrative about film criticism’s

⁸⁰ “Cinema: The Film Maker as Ascendant Star,” *Time*, July 4, 1969, 56; also cited in Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 167.

⁸¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 186.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 250.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 251–252.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.

highbrow golden age in print has sidelined an alternative story about film talk as an accessible, democratic part of popular broadcast media.

The same year as “The Film Generation” essay, a group of New York critics founded the National Society of Film Critics.⁸⁶ The group was formed in response to the perceived middlebrow bias of the New York Film Critics Circle, founded three decades earlier, in 1935.⁸⁷ No comparable institutions appeared in Canada until 1997. The Circle in the late 1930s and early 1940s was comprised of the city’s daily newspaper critics from *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Archer Winsten of *New York Post*, Eileen Creelman of the *New York Sun*, Alton Cook of *World-Telegram*, Rose Pelswick of *Journal-American*, Cecelia Ager and John McManus of *PM*, Leo Mishkin of *Morning Telegraph*, and Dorothy Masters, Kate Cameron, and Wanda Hale of the *Daily News*. The Circle expanded in 1962 to include magazine critics, after an industry altering newspaper strike in New York City.⁸⁸ The high proportion of women critics among the membership suggests women felt they benefitted from the protection and promotion the professional association offered. The National Society of Film Critics sought to distinguish itself from the general circulation orientation and Oscar voter sensibilities of the Circle.⁸⁹ At this time, Bosley Crowther remained head of the Circle and was still film critic for *The New York Times*, though he had become a favourite target of up-and-coming critics, who viewed him as a stodgy moralist.⁹⁰ The Society was established by vanguard critics whose tastes were more international, more self-consciously intellectual, and more daring than those of the Circle. The Society strove to elevate film culture, for one thing through their selective membership voting system. The founders included Stanley Kauffmann, Andrew Sarris, and Pauline Kael. The Screen Directors Guild also recognized contributions in film criticism with its Critics Award, granted from 1953 to 1965. Winners included Bosley Crowther (1953), John Rosenfield (1955), Hollis Alpert and Arthur Knight (1957), and Paul Beckley (1960). None of the thirteen recipients were people of colour and none were women.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 188.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 188–190.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 90–91.

⁸⁹ Barbara Klinger discusses the bourgeois taste of the New York Film Critics Circle in *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*, 71–72.

⁹⁰ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 188–190.

⁹¹ Ibid., 114.

Increasingly valued as professionals and allies of cinema, film critics were essential for the legitimization of film as art in 1960s United States and Canada. Sociologist Shyon Baumann refers to film critics as “intellectuals” and studies their impact in “justifying aesthetic claims and conventions to the wider public. By providing the vocabulary and analytic techniques, film critics made an artistic approach to Hollywood films possible for the reading public.”⁹² Baumann considers a selection of 684 film reviews printed between 1925 and 1985 in three mass-circulation publications: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Time*.⁹³ He also analyzes newspaper movie ads and finds that the number of ads that included “critical commentary” increased sharply between 1965 and 1970, as did the number of quotations per advertisement, and the word length of the quotations.⁹⁴ The use of film reviews in movie advertising, he concludes, shows that “As film discourse changed to legitimate film as art in the 1960s, it was reaching the reading U.S. public and it meant something to them.”⁹⁵ Baumann wishes to “provide empirical support for the assertion that the critics’ legitimating ideology for film was received and taken up by a wider audience,” reminding us that popular commentary produces the intellectual attention that justifies art.⁹⁶

Mattias Frey unpacks the mythic quality the 1960s and 1970s era has taken on in film criticism history. He contends that this moment has been framed in recent discourses about the decline of film criticism as the “halcyon era of influential, public critics that once existed.”⁹⁷ This “pure” golden age is frequently contrasted to shifts in the mid-1970s towards the “sell[ing]-out or dumbing-down of the profession,” particularly as manifested in the “broadcast punditry” of popular critics like Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert.⁹⁸ Frey posits this commonplace narrative as a collective construction (“a huge proliferation of memory”), if not a historiographic failure.⁹⁹ Frey presents a case study of critic Pauline Kael’s time in the spotlight and unpacks some historical inaccuracies on which the mythology of Kael has been built. He aims to show that

⁹² Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, 19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138–142.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹⁷ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 101.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101; for a typical example of this narrative, see Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*.

critical influence in the 1960s and 1970s was not as strong as often assumed and, in reality, critical culture was on shaky ground then as it is now.

I wish to challenge from a different angle this myth of a “golden age” uncorrupted by lowbrow broadcast talk. Comparing the career of Pauline Kael at *The New Yorker* to that of Judith Crist on *The Today Show* reveals that film criticism history has overemphasized the cult of Kael at the expense of acknowledging the popular influence of mainstream figures like Crist on ordinary film talk. Moreover, an analysis of the sexism both women faced highlights a different kind of crisis of critical authority, one which even Frey overlooks, and which is central to my thesis about the barriers to diversity in the field of film criticism. But first let me establish the context of film criticism in the 1960s and the backdrop against which Crist and Kael both emerged as household names.

Pauline Kael’s star rose in the 1960s and she has been a symbol of criticism’s heyday ever since. She gained notoriety through her feud with Andrew Sarris, who had imported the French model of the *politique des auteurs* to the American context.¹⁰⁰ Sarris proudly salvaged the artistic reputation of a number of filmmakers he felt had been unfairly dismissed (as did the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics before him), in part as a response to the bourgeois moralism he saw in the critical climate of the time. Sarris saw as his mission the rescue of overlooked but valuable parts of popular and genre cinema. Jonathan Lupo points out that auteurism’s focus on authorship helped legitimize cinema as an art more broadly.¹⁰¹ Yet when Kael responded to Sarris in the Spring 1963 issue of *Film Quarterly*, she critiqued his approach as clique-y and even sexist, finding among Sarris’s evaluations a self-perpetuating boys’ club mentality that revered certain powerful commercial directors and cast shadows over the rest of film culture.¹⁰² Besides the flaw of championing undeserving works merely because they were part of a revered director’s oeuvre, the exclusive focus on directors meant that the work of women in the film industry was effaced. Indeed, all the “auteurs” Sarris took into consideration were men—and so were the auteurist critics—and Kael held the opinion that this brand of criticism simply

¹⁰⁰ See Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” *Film Culture*, no. 27 (1963 1962): 1–8.

¹⁰¹ Lupo, “Loaded,” 221.

¹⁰² Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 129.

celebrated a masculine ideal of creative work.¹⁰³ Kael's swipes at Sarris were at times harsh, and he bore the brunt of her diagnosis of the sexism underlying film criticism more generally. In response, Sarris disavowed her feminist critique, calling it "misapplied feminist zeal," and claiming "Miss K has always made too much of an issue of her womanhood."¹⁰⁴

Provocative and contrarian, Kael is remembered for the staggering influence she had on her successors, on her intensely loyal readership, and on the overall style of popular film criticism, even to this day. Frey admits, "in the minds of many commentators Kael was the most influential film critic ever," though he argues that her power as a cultural authority—and indeed the cultural authority of any film critic—has been overstated.¹⁰⁵ Kael is known for experimenting with a brazen and highly personal writing style, in which she sought a cozy intimacy with her readers while asserting her role as a fearless spokesperson and defender of the cinema. She established her distinctive voice at *The New Yorker* in 1968, challenging not only the magazine's own sense of propriety, but also overturning the critical tradition upheld by practitioners such as Bosley Crowther, whose tenure at *The New York Times* had just ended. Crowther's scandalized review of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) is frequently contrasted with Kael's rapturous celebration of the film, becoming a symbol of this changing of the guard. Kael's writing helped establish a new brand of genial, informal, and at times risqué film criticism. She favoured the second person "you" pronoun as a way to align herself with a hypothetical average reader and self-consciously strove for a democratic mode of address. Even as she declared the glory of cinema, she also defended its intrinsic and vital populism against what she saw as elitist and destructive attempts to elevate film to high art status. Still, she relied on existing hierarchical structures to reinforce her own authority. Raymond Haberski explains, Kael "sought to uphold the core critical traditions if only to build her own legacy on its foundations," and she "depended on modernist traditions to support her authority as a critic," though she rejected many modernist tenets.¹⁰⁶ Kael was exceptionally erudite and attended University of California at Berkeley, but

¹⁰³ Pauline Kael, "Circles and Squares," *Film Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1963): 12–26.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1970," *Film Comment* 6, no. 3 (1970): 7.

¹⁰⁵ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 136, 137.

she criticised formal education when she gave university guest lectures.¹⁰⁷ She claimed she wished to prevent the academy from stealing cinema from the people.¹⁰⁸

The legend of Pauline Kael looms large and is a key part of the narrative of film criticism's golden age. In the literature, Kael and Andrew Sarris have come to represent the purity of 1960s and 1970s film criticism, before popular media corrupted it. However, this characterization is inaccurate. For one thing, Kael herself got her start as a film reviewer on the radio, at the public station KPFA in Berkeley.¹⁰⁹ She left the job in frustration in 1963, after giving the station what she believed to be “a million words’ worth” of unpaid labour.¹¹⁰ Kael’s precarious start on radio makes the tenuous professional status of the women BBC critics of the 1940s seem downright enviable. She went on to numerous appearances on radio and television throughout her career. Jerry Roberts describes Kael’s command of the multimedia universe: “No film critic before her captured the media’s fascination the way Pauline Kael did in the late 1960s.”¹¹¹ Clearly, associating Kael solely with her middlebrow writing and placing this writing in opposition to later televisual forms mischaracterizes the era’s film criticism field. An example of this distortion appears in a 1988 essay in the *Los Angeles Times* that questions whether Kael’s “richly descriptive criticism” would “play” on television, and contrasts her work to that of television film critic Gary Franklin (who started out in radio).¹¹² The assertion that “writing and TV are completely different mediums” forgets that Kael herself started out in radio and was a frequent guest on talk television.¹¹³ Talk shows in the 1960s often featured appearances by film critics, including Kael, Dwight Macdonald, and John Simon. All three appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show*, where film critic Rex Reed was a fixture, guesting several times in 1968 alone.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 166.

¹⁰⁸ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 140.

¹⁰⁹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 158.

¹¹⁰ Frank Rich, “Roaring at the Screen with Pauline Kael,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 2011, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/books/review/roaring-at-the-screen-with-pauline-kael.html?referrer=&_r=0.

¹¹¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 166.

¹¹² Patrick Goldstein, “Commentary: TV Film Critics Go for the Glitz. Roll Clip, Please,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1988, http://articles.latimes.com/print/1988-01-03/entertainment/ca-32442_1_tv-critics.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ “The Dick Cavett Show,” *TV.com*, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.tv.com/shows/the-dick-cavett-show/episodes/>.

Kael's high profile made her "practically peerless among women as the roundly regarded No. 1 in her particular specialty."¹¹⁵ It also made her an easy target for sexist attacks. In a popular anecdote, Andrew Sarris is alleged to have commented disparagingly on Kael's appearance after their first face-to-face meeting, telling another critic, "She's no Hepburn," referring to the Katharine Hepburn–Spencer Tracy quality of their quick-witted duels in print.¹¹⁶ Kael was also likened to the ignominious Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons for her takedown piece on Orson Welles.¹¹⁷ Peter Biskind described her "unremarkable" appearance as akin to "the registrar at a small New England college for women."¹¹⁸ John Simon ungraciously suggested that Kael had a preference for movies featuring a "homely or butch heroine who nevertheless achieves romantic fulfillment."¹¹⁹

Also a target for gendered barbs, Judith Crist offers an enlightening counterpoint to the larger-than-life myth of Pauline Kael. Crist was a more accessible television personality and represented the mainstream tastes of the time. As a result, her impact on film criticism history is generally treated with less reverence. But remembering Monica Dall'Asta's advice to look for feminist film history among the "ordinary professionals," the example of Crist illuminates everyday film criticism culture.¹²⁰ Focussing on the mundane also permits research to move beyond the powerful nostalgia of "the mediated memory of the era."¹²¹ Crist started on local television in 1962, reviewing films on ABC-TV's New York affiliate, WABC-TV (Channel 7). During the city's epic newspaper strike that year, she appeared on the air twice a day. She went national in 1963 on NBC's *The Today Show*, and "Crist's opinions on the latest films became a regular portion of the morning ritual with coffee and anchorman Hugh Downs."¹²²

¹¹⁵ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 169.

¹¹⁶ "In Praise of Andrew Sarris: Remembering the Late Film Critic Who Championed the Auteur Theory," *Film Journal International*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.filmjournal.com/content/praise-andrew-sarris-remembering-late-film-critic-who-championed-auteur-theory>.

¹¹⁷ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 207.

¹¹⁸ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 40; cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 202.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 217.

¹²⁰ Dall'Asta, "Challenges."

¹²¹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 101.

¹²² Roberts, *The Complete History*, 174.

Though film critics on television went back as far as the late 1940s, Crist was one of the first to become a household name: “[she] was one of the most notable film critics to transfer her vocation to different venues and across media barriers.”¹²³ The public knew Crist several years before it had heard of Pauline Kael. In addition to her work on *The Today Show*, Crist was a reporter, drama critic, and arts editor at the *New-York Herald Tribune* for many years. She also reviewed movies on television for *TV Guide*. But Crist’s primary currency was talk, and she positioned herself on television as a voice of the people, stating, “I speak for the movie-lover rather than the cineaste, for the audience rather than the industry.”¹²⁴ She viewed film criticism as “a conversation between moviegoers.”¹²⁵

Crist was opinionated, articulate, unpretentious, and a tough critic, not unlike Kael. The exceptional popularity of both women was marred by sexism, however. Where Andrew Sarris had blithely quashed Kael’s feminist grievance, Crist was the victim of outright name-calling. One of Twentieth Century Fox’s publicists called her “a snide, supercilious, sour bitch” after she gave the studio’s big-budget spectacular *Cleopatra* (1963) a negative review and was banned from their press screenings.¹²⁶ The incident recalls BBC film critic E. Arnot Robertson’s run-in with MGM in the late 1940s, and just as Robertson’s witty and bold radio reviews had inspired sexist epithets, detractors used similar tactics to cut Crist down to size. For her part, Crist used her wit to rebuff the publicist’s remarks and reclaim her reputation: “Nicknamed the ‘Triple S’ rating, it became a badge of honor she offered to journalists covering her exploits.”¹²⁷ Crist was a force to reckon with, yet documentation of her legacy pales next to Kael’s. Film criticism history has favoured a version of accounts where real critics were print critics and criticism on television did little more than threaten the hallowed tradition of print criticism.

Attempts to diminish Crist’s influence continued. A piece by Stephen Koch for the *Saturday Review* belittled film critics on television, reducing them to “simply performers themselves, putting on their own sometimes entertaining but usually self-serving little show.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Ibid., 173.

¹²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 170.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 171.

¹²⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 174–175.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 175.

¹²⁸ Stephen Koch, “The Cruel, Cruel Critics,” *Saturday Review*, December 26, 1970, 12.

Koch expresses some admiration for Crist's work, but concludes that it cannot stand up to the "serious" writing of Kauffmann, Kael, and Sarris. He explains,

Mrs. Crist's cute, even flashy journalism is something I've followed with mixed feelings for years, though certainly never with any problem about attention. It is perhaps a commentary on the nature of journalism itself that when I went through her collected reviews (*The Private Eye, the Cowboy, and the Very Naked Girl*) for the purposes of this article, I literally could not keep my eyes on the page—the fly on the ceiling seemed more interesting. There is no news in old news, and in Mrs. Crist's case (she is certainly a *very* competent journalist) that means that after six months nothing remains at all.¹²⁹

In Koch's assessment, Crist fares better than John Simon and Rex Reed, whom he dismisses as shallow egomaniacs, but she nevertheless is relegated to second rate, despite her "very competent" journalism and her prized familiarity with popular audiences. Television-based criticism may have been effaced from film history, but stars such as Crist, Simon, Reed, and Gene Shalit (who started out with Crist on *The Today Show*) were surely central to many Americans' experiences of film talk and popular film culture in this era. All things considered, women critics achieved some visibility among the film generation, but their status was uncertain and their power came at a cost.

Canada's Film Generation

Film criticism and journalism in Canada continued to develop slowly through the 1920s and towards World War II. Though several fan magazines appeared in Quebec during the silent period, "only one, *Le Film* (1921-62), survived the transition to the talking film."¹³⁰ The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* remained the only major English-language film trade publication until the *Canadian Motion Picture Exhibitor* was established in 1936. In 1941, Hyman (Hye) Bossin and N. A. (Nat) Taylor took over the *Exhibitor* and renamed it *Canadian Film Weekly*.¹³¹ Louis Pelletier and Paul S. Moore discuss the differences between the more conservative *Canadian Film Weekly* and the types of rumours and subjective editorials published

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁰ "Film Magazines," *Cinema in Quebec: The Talkies and Beyond, 1930-1952*, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.cinemaparlantquebec.ca/Cinema1930-52/pages/textbio/Textbio.jsp?textBioId=67&lang=en>.

¹³¹ Lerner, *Canadian Film and Video*, 1428.

in the *Digest*, suggesting Ray Lewis was able to use the somewhat derogatory association between women film writers and industry gossip to her advantage by publishing attention-grabbing rumours that had not yet been verified, giving her a jump start on her male counterparts.¹³² Other publications at the time included the French-language *Le courrier du cinéma*, which launched in 1935 and billed itself as the “official monthly magazine of movie theatres and the principal producers and distributors of films in Canada and the United States.”¹³³ However, the Cinema in Quebec website notes that the popular magazine was primarily a tool for promoting France-Film’s commercial distribution and exhibition interests in Quebec.¹³⁴ *Film Society News* began publishing in 1936, representing the Montreal branch of the National Film Society. In Ontario, the Independent Theatres Association published *Canadian Independent*, also in 1936. Prominent Canadian critic Gerald Noxon got his start around this time while attending Cambridge and writing about film and culture in the university weekly *Granta* and in the avant-garde magazine *Experiment*, which he founded in 1929.¹³⁵ Noxon went on to work with Sweden’s *Close Up* and the print review of Rome’s International Institute of Educational Cinematography, as well as in film and radio production in England.¹³⁶ He wrote in 1930, “Canada is a new country and the means of her development must necessarily be new. It would be criminal were she to ignore the gigantic and significant cinema, the cinema which is the greatest propagandist power in the world.”¹³⁷ Although developments in Canadian film criticism were relatively minor, cinema culture as a whole experienced some major milestones, such as the founding of the National Film Society of Canada in 1935 and the dissolution of the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau to make way for the 1939 founding of the National Film Board (where Noxon worked briefly as a producer).¹³⁸

According to George Melnyk, “engaged film criticism” only began in English Canada with Nathan Cohen, whose primary journalistic commitments lay elsewhere, but who

¹³² Pelletier and Moore, “Une Excentrique,” 81.

¹³³ Quoted in “Cinema in Quebec.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Paul Tiessen, “A Canadian Film Critic in Malcolm Lowry’s Cambridge,” in *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History*, ed. Gene Walz (Montreal: Film Studies Association of Canada/Mediatexte Publications, 1986), 67.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹³⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

nonetheless wrote about film occasionally for a few Jewish publications in the immediate postwar years, and, later, for the *Toronto Star*.¹³⁹ However, Melnyk's claim about Cohen's engaged criticism has the effect of erasing earlier contributions, including Alice Fairweather's ground-breaking work in the trades in the late 1910s and Ray Lewis's spirited editorials at *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Surely Lewis's championing of various causes in film culture should also qualify her criticism as "engaged." Melnyk also suggests critics of the late 1940s—such as Gerald Pratley at CBC Radio—were unable to engage significantly with Canadian film culture due to the absence of a sizable feature film industry producing Canadian films for critics to review.¹⁴⁰ Chapter Four shows a different picture: even without domestic films to endorse, Pratley fostered participation with international cinema at local city theatres. He raised awareness about key issues in moviegoing (e.g. censorship and Hollywood domination), advocating for quality audience experiences and helping cultivate Toronto as an international movie centre.

Pratley was instrumental in bringing film criticism to CBC radio in 1947, over twenty years after George Atkinson's film critic post at the BBC. It is instructive to consider the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's adoption of film criticism against the backdrop of developments in the United Kingdom, where stakeholders in the British film industry were increasingly concerned by the strength of American cinema. The postwar BBC film talks and its radio personalities participated in a kind of nation-building effort that prioritized the homegrown tradition of "quality" cinema and protected the freedom to unapologetically critique Hollywood films. Film criticism thus took on an ambassadorial and educational role, which implied a certain cultural nationalism, as bolstered by the 1948 Radcliffe Report's recommendation encouraging the public appreciation of film as art.¹⁴¹ This kind of nationalism through film and criticism also featured in the ethos of the British Film Institute and its central publication since 1933, *Sight and Sound*.¹⁴² Mattias Frey describes the project of *Sight and Sound* in the 1950s and 1960s as:

¹³⁹ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 226; Wayne E. Edmonstone, *Nathan Cohen: The Making of a Critic* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1977), 28–29.

¹⁴⁰ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 226.

¹⁴¹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 62.

¹⁴² Groening, "Timeline," 405.

the construction of a particular kind of liberal taste that would come to define *Sight and Sound*'s role in the establishment of a broad-church national film culture. Aiming to accommodate the new diverse (or 'fragmented') postwar niche audiences, *Sight and Sound* sought a dialogue that would nevertheless define its role as the ultimate arbiter of the conversation and, via canon-building and other means, assert long-term authority.¹⁴³ In this view, the magazine invited and published reader feedback in order to consolidate different voices as all part of a national discourse that was inherently edifying as part of a film appreciation mandate. The growing audience taste for cinephilia and foreign films could then be framed within—instead of in opposition to—the national film culture, in an “attempt to centralize a polyvocal national taste culture.”¹⁴⁴ CBC's challenges vis-à-vis film audiences in the postwar period were different; nevertheless, Chapter Four will explore the broadcaster's similarly ambivalent perspective towards national film criticism at a time when commentary on international films was more or less everything Canada had to offer in terms of homegrown cinema culture.

Nathan Cohen himself identified a boom in Canadian culture criticism in the postwar period, particularly on the radio: “Beginning in the late 1940s, radio was in fact to usher in a unique period in Canadian cultural history,” featuring extensive arts coverage and criticism, and thereby establishing national cultural standards.¹⁴⁵ Cohen cites Clyde Gilmour's 1947 film review show, produced in Vancouver and airing on CBC's Trans-Canada Network. This program was followed closely by the launch of Pratley's similar program from Toronto, aired on the CBC's local Dominion network. Cohen explains that the success of these programs led to his own show, reviewing theatre and ballet. He claims, “The general response made it plain that these programs were serving a useful purpose, were filling a void in the cultural scene.”¹⁴⁶

Yet the public role of critics was not without controversy. In a CBC Radio broadcast of *Across the Footlights* on December 12, 1948, Cohen references a court case involving a female BBC film critic and an American studio over the content of her reviews (presumably the E.

¹⁴³ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 62. Note Frey's insertion of “fragmented” to indicate that contemporary concerns over the disjointed character of the film criticism audience have a long lineage.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴⁵ Edmonstone, *Nathan Cohen*, 104.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Arnot Robertson case).¹⁴⁷ Cohen sees similar threats to the autonomy of Canadian film critics of the time:

Even in Canada, motion picture exhibitors have been throwing dirty looks at Clyde Gilmour, who reviews movies on the Trans-Canada CBC network. I am told that a Toronto trade paper is going to attack him for his harmful, uncooperative attitude. Maybe that's already happened, I heard about it a week ago. This much is certain: the men who make movies and the men who distribute them don't like honesty in criticism. They stand to lose too much money that way. They fear a forewarned public.¹⁴⁸

Such power struggles with the industry indicate that Canadian culture critics had established sufficient authority as to be dreaded.

The increasing influence of critics made the 1950s a productive time for Canadian popular film criticism. A number of significant film critics emerged in Toronto, including Cohen, Wendy Michener, Joan Fox, and Germaine Warkentin. Cohen pursued various journalistic projects, such as publishing a monthly journal called *The Critic* from 1950 to 1953, which showcased his own theatre criticism, Pratley's editorials on film, and Robert Weaver's writing about books, among other contributions.¹⁴⁹ Cohen joined *Toronto Star* in 1959 as drama critic and entertainment editor. During his years as an editor, he continued to write film reviews for the newspaper's television supplement *Star Week*.¹⁵⁰ His colleague Robert Fulford proclaimed himself a fan but admitted that Cohen was an abrasive critic who did not always get along with the rest of the staff.¹⁵¹ According to Fulford, Cohen would sometimes pull rank as editor and publish a second, contradictory piece about a film already reviewed by the designated film critic. Michener allegedly had her autonomy at the *Star* trampled by Cohen on multiple occasions, and she eventually "resigned in a rage."¹⁵² For his part, Gerald Pratley gave a film course at Queen's University in the summer of 1956, likely the first academic film course taught in Canada.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Cited in *ibid.*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁵¹ Robert Fulford, *Best Seat in the House: Memoirs of a Lucky Man* (Toronto: W. Collins and Sons, 1988), 121–124.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 126–127.

¹⁵³ Groening, "Timeline," 409.

Meanwhile, *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* merged and became *Canadian Film Weekly* in 1957. Quebec film culture continued to flourish in local publications, including *Projections* (1952-54), *Images* (1955-56), and *Séquences*, the latter of which the Catholic Church launched in 1955 as a youth outreach tool, and which continues to publish, now as a well-regarded cinephile magazine.¹⁵⁴

The film journals that sprang forth in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s had some internationalist content but mostly focussed on regional and local film culture at the time. As such, Canada's answer to the American "film generation" was buoyed by its own film societies, urban film festivals, and specialized publications. The majority of the journals grew out of the Toronto and Quebec film scenes. Quebec cinema culture, dominated by francophone films and critics, got the ball rolling for a new brand of cinephilia with *Objectif*, which ran from 1960 to 1967 and catered to a younger generation that was moving away from the still-powerful Catholic church.¹⁵⁵ Starting in 1971, *Cinéma Québec* offered a guide to the provincial film industry. The Cinémathèque québécoise launched *Copie Zéro* in 1979.¹⁵⁶ Quebec criticism was frequently nationalistic and highly politicized; the period saw the birth of the left-wing specialist magazine *Champ Libre* (1971-3), *24 images* (1979-present), and *Format Cinéma* (1981-1986).¹⁵⁷

Peter Morris's "The Uncertain Trumpet" offers a rare study of popular criticism in Canada. Morris argues, "film criticism in English-Canada [...] can play a negative role in a particular creative development."¹⁵⁸ He claims English-Canadian critics of the 1960s were reluctant to view Canadian cinema seriously alongside international art cinema, with implications for national film policy and filmmaking practices (particularly the tax shelter approach of the 1970s). He presents several common themes among reviews from the 1940s to

¹⁵⁴ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 241; "Cinema in Quebec"; Rose-Aimée Todd, "Appendix: Chronology of the Canadian Film Industry, 1893-1989 / Appendice : Chronologie de L'industrie Cinématographique Canadienne de 1893 à 1989," in *Canadian Film and Video: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature*, ed. Loren R. Lerner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 1453.

¹⁵⁵ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 241.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.; "À Propos," *24 Images*, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://revue24images.com/about>; Todd, "Chronology," 1440.

¹⁵⁸ Morris, "The Uncertain Trumpet," 7-8.

1960s, seeking “the dominant mainstream of critical thought in the post-war years.”¹⁵⁹ Although he finds Anglophone critics were unusually harsh in their critiques of Canadian films, he acknowledges that Canadian cinema had some allies, among them a group of young women critics of the 1960s—Wendy Michener, Germaine Warkentin, and Joan Fox—and the cultural nationalist Gerald Pratley.¹⁶⁰

Film criticism in the 1960s took on a progressive nationalistic flavour. Having lain mostly dormant since the early 1920s, commercial film production re-emerged as a cultural force, with innovative feature films like *Le chat dans le sac* (1964) and *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964) gaining domestic and international critical attention. Morris notes that a number of Canadian features from the late 1950s went largely unnoticed, particularly in the retrospective establishment of a national cinema canon. But the shared stylistic and narrative elements of *Le chat* and *Nobody* formed the basis for a thematic approach to canon building. Morris shows that the desire for a national canon led critics to thematize films in reductive ways and to emphasize less-than-flattering characteristics, such as a “victims and losers” motif.¹⁶¹ By 1972, this tendency became the dominant paradigm in writing about Canadian cinema.¹⁶²

Before 1972, however, Canadian critics were still mostly dealing with Canadian films on their own terms, free from the ideological baggage of canon formation. Enter Michener, Fox, and Warkentin, who formed a responsive, vibrant critical community and helped establish an English-Canadian film culture, though without the dogmatic, institutional nation building of the previous two decades.¹⁶³ Morris claims these writers were nationalists, yet they examined cinema from “a variety of perspectives.”¹⁶⁴ Little has been written about these women; there is certainly an opportunity here for important research, not simply because they infiltrated the masculine ranks of Canadian film criticism, but also because they helped establish the shape of Canadian cinema culture as it was emerging in the 1960s. Editor of *Saturday Night* Robert Fulford recognized Wendy Michener as “really our first national critic, because she could speak for both our cultures,” referring to the fact that Michener, who was born and worked in Toronto,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Morris, “Eyes,” 37.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

spoke fluent French and was considered an authority on the Montreal Film Festival. In 1964, Michener reported on the festival, reflecting on what she saw as a new tide in Canadian movie culture, one characterized by youthfulness, bilingualism, and internationalism.¹⁶⁵ Starting in the 1950s, Michener's columns and freelance pieces appeared in several venues, including *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Chatelaine*, *Maclean's*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, and the CBC. Her career was cut short by her untimely death in 1969. Fulford suggested that she was poised at *The Globe and Mail* to become "the undisputed Canadian film spokesman."¹⁶⁶ Her father, Governor-General Roland Michener, established the Michener Awards for Journalism in her honour, and she was also memorialized through a special award at the Canadian Film Awards from 1969 to 1978.¹⁶⁷

Ottawa-born Joan Fox began publishing in Toronto from her temporary home in London, England. She subsequently relocated back to Canada and her film writing appeared widely in *The Toronto Telegram*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Saturday Night*, *Canadian Forum*, *Canadian Film Magazine* and *Chatelaine*. She appeared on a number of CBC Radio programs, in particular *The Arts This Week*, and also Gerald Pratley's *The Movie Scene*.¹⁶⁸ Fox's intellectual interests were wide ranging; among them were feminism, anti-censorship, and the promotion of Canadian and Quebec national cinemas. She wrote passionate reviews of *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964) and *Helicopter Canada* (1967) and championed the work of Quebec filmmaker Claude Jutra.¹⁶⁹ She was also a publicist for the seminal Canadian film *Goin' Down the Road* (1970) and was a prominent socialite, hosting high profile Canadian feminists at her "women's dinner" events in the early 1960s.¹⁷⁰ For her part, Germaine Warkentin also wrote film reviews in 1950s and

¹⁶⁵ Wendy Michener, "Look Who's Looking at the Movies," in *Documents in Canadian Film*, ed. Douglas Fetherling (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1988), 102–11.

¹⁶⁶ "Wendy Michener: Film Critic Daughter of Governor-General," *The Globe and Mail*, January 3, 1969, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Townend, "Wendy Michener Award," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation, 2015), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/wendy-michener-award/>.

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, Fox's review of the year's films on "The Movie Scene," December 30, 1961, MG 31, D 103, Library and Archives Canada.

¹⁶⁹ Noreen Shanahan, "'She'd See a Different Film than Anybody Else'," *The Globe and Mail*, April 2, 2009; Helen Davies, "The Politics of Participation: A Study of Canada's Centennial Celebration" (PhD, University of Manitoba, 1999), 118.

¹⁷⁰ Shanahan, "Different Film."

1960s Toronto and went on to become a book historian and professor at University of Toronto.¹⁷¹

Toronto was thus front-and-centre in the foundation of an English-language national film culture. George Melnyk points out, “every major magazine about English-Canadian film [...] came out of [Toronto].”¹⁷² This is not entirely true since *Take One*, one of the first major Canadian film magazines, was born in Montreal in 1966. The original *Take One* focussed on international cinema.¹⁷³ It was not until a second series of the publication in 1992 that it moved to a Toronto-based editorship and the content shifted to Canadian cinema (with a Toronto emphasis).¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, *Cinema Canada* (renamed from *Canadian Cinematography* in 1967) promised national coverage from the beginning but tended to marginalize film production activity outside of Toronto. *Cinema Canada* was put out monthly by the Canadian Society of Cinematographers and focussed on industry news and interviews, but also published reviews of all Canadian feature films. The Toronto-centrism of English-Canadian film criticism continued through the 1970s, with the work of Marshall Delaney (Robert Fulford), Martin Knelman, John Hofsess, Jay Scott, and Brian D. Johnson, who all wrote for a national audience, but from a Toronto perspective.¹⁷⁵ Throughout the 1970s, several of the leading voices in Toronto film criticism published monographs and collections. Notably, the works of leading female critics were not collected.

Toronto also dominated film talk on television. Journalist George Anthony called the city “the top movie town per capita in North America” in the 1970s.¹⁷⁶ For this reason, Pauline Kael made a point of including Toronto on her book tours, where she would do an on-air interview with television host Brian Linehan. (On one occasion, she allegedly disclosed to Linehan privately that she sometimes offered solicited advice, film critic-to-film critic, to then-*Globe and*

¹⁷¹ “Warkentin, Germaine,” *English - University of Toronto*, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.english.utoronto.ca/facultystaff/emeritiretired/warkentin.htm>.

¹⁷² Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 227.

¹⁷³ Todd, “Chronology,” 1443.

¹⁷⁴ “International Index to Film / TV Periodicals - Journal List” (International Federation of Film Archives, January 2016), <http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/Journal-List.html>; Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 230.

¹⁷⁵ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 227.

¹⁷⁶ George Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 114.

Mail film writer Martin Knelman.¹⁷⁷) Linehan's program, *City Lights*, debuted in 1973 on the local station CityTV.¹⁷⁸ He starred as host and interviewer of the big names in arts, culture, and show business. With its parade of celebrities, the show was soon syndicated across Canada and parts of the United States, and, eventually, internationally.¹⁷⁹ CityTV founder Moses Znaimer expressed frustration that his vision of "build[ing] a Canadian star system" was partially thwarted by the station's reliance on Hollywood for content and cachet.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Linehan put his Canadian guests on equal footing with their American counterparts and provided a solid platform for the promotion of the English-Canadian arts scene. *City Lights* ran with Linehan as host until 1989.¹⁸¹ The program was popular and distinctive enough to inspire a recurring caricature on the sketch comedy program *SCTV*, discussed in Chapter Six.

A few months after *City Lights* was launched, another man with a coffee table took to the Toronto area airwaves. The public television station TVOntario introduced the movie screening programs *Magic Shadows* and *Saturday Night at the Movies*, with host Elwy Yost. These programs became local sensations by the late 1970s (see Chapter Five). The timing was right: Linehan and Yost's programs capitalized on the appetite in Canada for international cinema and celebrities. But the 1970s saw very few female broadcasters delivering film talk. Exceptions included Janine Manatis, a freelance film critic on Canadian television, and Claire Olsen, a former radio broadcaster who hosted the television series *At the Movies* from Barrie. The latter was widely watched by Torontonians but has been mostly forgotten.¹⁸² Meanwhile on the radio, Gerald Pratley's film programs were beginning to appear less frequently, though film talk remained a significant part of the national broadcaster's schedule, including film reviews by Clive Denton on various programs.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 83, 104, 130.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸² Ibid., 49, 60.

¹⁸³ Clive Denton, "Canadian Feature Films 1964-1969 by Piers Handling [review]," *Cinema Canada*, July 1976.

A New Golden Age of Canadian National Cinema

The notion of a “golden age” implies a subsequent decline, and the narrative of American film criticism typically marks this decline as starting in the mid-to-late-1970s. Even as Roger Ebert in 1975 became the first film critic to win a Pulitzer Prize for his work at the *Chicago Sun–Times*, the cultural urgency of the profession seemed to be dissipating.¹⁸⁴ Film criticism in Canada, however, continued to flourish, and partly for the same reasons it lost steam in the United States. According to accounts, the rise of the blockbuster model of American cinema with such films as *The Godfather* (1972), *Jaws* (1975), and *Star Wars* (1977) shifted the balance of power away from film critics and towards the tastes of mass audiences, and, importantly, towards hefty marketing departments. Raymond Haberski claims that critical influence waned once the studios started “flooding the market” with highly anticipated films.¹⁸⁵ He describes the way “consistently poor movies that found big audiences through saturation marketing—despite critical drubbings—proved time and again that critics had little influence.”¹⁸⁶ Roberts also blames the emergence of “blurb mills,” in which film critics in cahoots with film marketing departments provided quote-worthy praise for new releases of dubious quality.¹⁸⁷ Haberski and Roberts both trace a downwards trajectory towards a “critical malaise” in the 1980s and 1990s, suggesting Hollywood distribution strategies together with a drop in the quality of films led to the disillusionment of post-film generation moviegoers and critics.¹⁸⁸ Frey shows that some historians have blamed “the rise of television criticism.”¹⁸⁹ In these accounts, the popular broadcast critic meant “the last stand of the public critic and the beginning of an anarchic, populist, and ultimately useless explosion of opinion.”¹⁹⁰ Among the critics associated with the boom in film criticism on radio and television in the 1970s are Judith Crist, Rex Reed, John Simon, Pauline Kael, Gene Shalit, Roger Ebert, and Gene Siskel.¹⁹¹

During the supposed decline of American film criticism, Canada’s critical culture was flourishing. The drive to differentiate domestic cinema from American commercial film made

¹⁸⁴ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 199.

¹⁸⁵ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 180.

¹⁸⁶ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 15.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 101.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101–102.

¹⁹¹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 198.

this a fruitful time to build an independent film scene with a devoted critical network. A number of film critics established full-time, long-term positions at Canada's major journalistic institutions, becoming recognized names and admired intellectual voices in the cultural conversation. An early linchpin of the Toronto film criticism scene, Martin Knelman first joined the film beat in 1967 at the *Toronto Star*, followed by a solid stint as film critic at *The Globe and Mail*, from 1969 to 1976. He has been reporting actively on cinema and entertainment for several Toronto-based publications (especially the *Toronto Star*), ever since.¹⁹² Knelman followed up his 1977 book on Canadian cinema, *This Is Where We Came In*, with the equally personal and mythologizing *Home Movies* in 1987. Fresh voices emerged in the late-1970s and 1980s, such as that of the openly gay film critic Jay Scott, whose passion and clear-eyed view of cinema culture earned him a large following during his sixteen years at *The Globe and Mail* (1977-1993). Scott also hosted a program about film on TVOntario. He died prematurely in 1993; his contributions were collected in two books: *Midnight Matinées* (1985) and *Great Scott!* (1994).¹⁹³ Over at the alternative weekly magazine *Now*, one of the founding writers John Harkness would turn out to be the publication's film critic for twenty-six years, until his (also-untimely) death in 2007. Harkness's work was partly an outgrowth of the American golden age; he studied under Andrew Sarris at Columbia University.¹⁹⁴ It is a testament to the stature of both Scott and Harkness as critics that each was credited with sometimes writing reviews of higher quality than their target films.¹⁹⁵ It is also a testament to the importance of film criticism to Canadian audiences in the 1980s and 1990s. The torch was taken up towards the turn of the millennium by, among others, admired African-Canadian critic and film programmer Cameron Bailey and the ubiquitous Katherine Monk, who helped increase the diversity of voices in print criticism and also in film talk across various media. Bailey, who has also been a film critic for *Now* magazine, co-hosted the *Showcase Revue* on the Showcase cable channel in the 1990s, where he provided insight and commentary on the featured films. Monk's career has reflected the more amorphous—and

¹⁹² "Knelman, Martin 1943-," *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3416600082/knelman-martin-1943.html>.

¹⁹³ Gloria Galloway, "Film Critic Jay Scott," *The Gazette (Montreal)*, July 31, 1993, 2.

¹⁹⁴ "John Gordon Harkness - Obituary," *National Post*, December 24, 2007, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/nationalpost/obituary.aspx?n=john-gordon-harkness&pid=100107109>.

¹⁹⁵ Galloway, "Jay Scott"; "Harkness."

unstable—shape of the profession in the past twenty years. Where Scott and Harkness made a living and a name almost entirely as print-based film critics, Monk’s portfolio has included everything from news reporting to reviewing music, new media, and video games, across a wide range of venues. She was the national film writer for Canwest newspapers while also delivering reviews on Global television in British Columbia and on local radio broadcasts.¹⁹⁶ Most of these broadcasts were also available in digital format as online videos and audio podcasts, at least until Monk was laid off from her position at Canwest (now Postmedia) in 2015.¹⁹⁷ (Chapter Seven includes a more detailed discussion of Monk’s career.)

Film talk in Canada has long involved not only chatter about new releases and celebrity news but also reflections on the very state of national identity, the domestic film industry, and the elusive entity referred to as Canadian national cinema. Melnyk explains, “The preoccupation over a viable national cinema in English Canada had begun during the 1970s when academics decided that there was a body of work called Canadian cinema that was worth discussing and interpreting.”¹⁹⁸ By the mid-1980s, the “problem” of national cinema—of why it was not more economically and artistically robust—was a heavily recurring theme in popular Canadian journalism.

Probably the most sustained discussion of this type was the “Cinema We Need” debate that filmmaker and intellectual Bruce Elder started with a provocative article in *Canadian Forum* in February 1985. Peter Morris has testified to the preoccupation Canadian critics had up until this time with realism and documentary aesthetics in domestic cinema, and he has shown that these preferences strongly informed the emerging canon of Canadian national cinema.¹⁹⁹ Elder sought to challenge the taste for realism in both fiction and non-fiction Canadian-made films. His polemic claimed the project of Canadian national cinema ought to affirm the practices and explorations of experimental cinema, which prioritized direct “perception” over the illusions and

¹⁹⁶ “About Katherine,” *Katherine Monk*, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://katherinemonk.com/about-katherine/>.

¹⁹⁷ Charlie Smith, “Postmedia Fires Film Critic Katherine Monk, but She Says It’s Not Personal,” *The Georgia Straight*, February 5, 2015, <http://www.straight.com/blog/821891/postmedia-fires-film-critic-katherine-monk-she-says-its-not-personal>.

¹⁹⁸ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 233.

¹⁹⁹ Morris, “Eyes.”

mediations of narrative.²⁰⁰ In response to the canonization efforts he identifies with film scholars Peter Harcourt and Piers Handling, Elder proposes their taste for Canadian art cinema (or “New Narrative”) simply perpetuated a numbing and complacent mythologization of Canadian identity, based on wishful thinking. Only experimental cinema could deconstruct these illusions and find freedom from the construction and projection of a unified Canadian identity.

Elder’s article was incendiary. The July/August 1985 issue of *Cinema Canada* published six essays by leading scholars responding to the *Canadian Forum* piece. Bart Testa, Piers Handling, and Geoff Pevere all accused Elder of elitism and attempting to turn Canadian cinema into a hermetic clique. Pevere replied with a piece subtitled “The Critics We Need,” in which he critiqued the tendency in Canadian film criticism towards prescriptivism, especially when it pitted itself against popular cinematic forms:

The cinema we need, we are told, is a cinema separate from and unsullied by the grime and corruption of everyday discourse and popular taste. [...] It is a view that seeks to establish a hierarchy of knowledge and privilege that exploits mystification as a necessary means of maintaining an imbalance of power between the exalted few that produce and comprehend art, and the greater masses that do not.²⁰¹

Instead, Pevere argues, popular culture is just as much a product and instrument of Canadian identity as “art” is, even if some of the artifacts of pop culture, he admits, are less than flattering. Pevere would over time become widely known as the host of CBC Radio’s pop culture review *Prime Time*, long-time film critic for *Toronto Star*, and co-host of the Toronto movie review show *Reel to Real* on Rogers cable television.²⁰²

In the years since “The Cinema We Need,” countless Canadian critics have weighed in on the trials and successes of Canadian national cinema. Jay Scott, for one, promoted Canadian films to his readers and also engaged in dialogue with filmmakers. Robert Fulford has described Scott’s role in cultivating local film talk: “Critics shape the context in which artists reach their public, and Scott did as much as anyone to create a sophisticated audience for film. In a sense,

²⁰⁰ Elder, “The Cinema We Need,” 34.

²⁰¹ Pevere, “The Critics We Need,” 37.

²⁰² “*Prime Time* Clicks with a New Age of Radio,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 29, 1990; Etan Viessing, “Rogers Cancels *Reel to Real*,” *Playback*, July 10, 2008, <http://playbackonline.ca/2008/07/10/rogers-20080710/>.

the audience found itself through Scott. By becoming the centre of discourse, he helped moviegoers in Toronto to make connections among themselves and form an articulate community.”²⁰³ Fulford suggests the conversations Scott instigated reached all the way to the production end of cinema culture, influencing the careers of then up-and-coming Canadian auteurs such as Denys Arcand and Atom Egoyan.²⁰⁴ Influential too was Katherine Monk’s book *Weird Sex & Snowshoes* (2001), which lovingly hypothesizes some recurring tropes and themes in Canadian feature cinema, drawing on Margaret Atwood’s literary criticism, but indulging in quite a bit more unabashed boosterism. George Melnyk wrote, “This uplifting and promotion-toned narrative of Canadian film, filled with biographic sketches of contemporary directors, was meant to remedy general ignorance of the Canadian public about its cinematic stars.”²⁰⁵

Canada’s film critics are thus crucial for two reasons: a) they foster a supportive climate for domestic film production and distribution, b) they help audiences engage meaningfully with film as art, both national and international, and c) their work cultivates a public sphere where Canadians of all demographics can talk about and challenge institutional assertions of good taste, tasteful citizenship, and cultural hegemony. Despite the essential role of film critics in cinema culture, English Canada lagged far behind Europe and the United States in establishing professional networks for them; the Toronto Film Critics Association (TFCA) did not open shop until 1997.²⁰⁶ In the absence of a national association, the TFCA (founded in 1997) reinforces Toronto’s dominance in Canadian popular film criticism. The association brings together “Toronto-based journalists and broadcasters who specialize in film criticism and commentary.”²⁰⁷ The group is associated with FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics), and it presents annual international film awards and the Clyde Gilmour Award “to a Canadian who has enriched the understanding and appreciation of film in this country.”²⁰⁸ Recipients have included Clyde Gilmour, Gerald Pratley, and Elwy Yost. Deepa Mehta won the

²⁰³ Robert Fulford, “Introduction,” in *Great Scott! The Best of Jay Scott’s Movie Reviews*, ed. Karen York (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994), 13.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰⁵ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years*, 229.

²⁰⁶ “Technicolor Clyde Gilmour Award,” *Toronto Film Critics Association*, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://torontofilmcritics.com/awards/signature-award-2/>.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

award in 2015, making her the first female winner.²⁰⁹ British Columbia has the smaller Vancouver Film Critics Circle, which boasts, “It is the only critics’ event that presents a full slate of international awards and a full slate of Canadian awards.”²¹⁰ It also honours the “Best B.C. Film” and contributions to the local industry. In a field rife with precarity, such institutions can go a long way in securing the health and longevity of film criticism in this country.

Progress requires more than stability, however. Moreover, stability never lasts. As in the United States, English Canada’s critical industry is changing. The proliferation of film blogs and podcasts opens up spaces and conversations that fall outside of previously recognized institutional boundaries, and, indeed, outside the mandates of professional associations. The do-it-yourself spirit of podcasting can be an enormous boon to the diversity of voices in Canadian criticism, but the neoliberal principles of the podcast market can also engender a retrograde populist conformity. As Chapter Seven explores, the absence of a public imperative in both scenarios means that cultural nationalism and Canadian national cinema have been easily abandoned for more internationalist (and commercial) perspectives. But first, I return in the next chapter to the beginnings of institutional, publicly sponsored broadcast film talk, with the emergence of professional film criticism on CBC radio.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ “Awards,” *Vancouver Film Critics Circle*, accessed June 26, 2016, <https://vancouverfilmcritics.com/awards/>.

Chapter Four: The Decorous Voice of Public Film Talk: Gerald Pratley and the CBC

Institutions dedicated to the public's critical and aesthetic appreciation of cinema flourished internationally in the 1920s and 1930s, with the founding of organizations such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (1927) and the British Film Institute (1933).¹ Fan and specialty magazines continued to multiply, including *Photoplay Magazine* (1911-1940) and *Film Spectator* (1926-1931) in the United States, *Close Up* (1927-1933) in Switzerland, and *Sight and Sound* in London (1932-present).² In Canada, the National Film Society was born in 1935, followed by the National Film Board in 1939.³ Film buffs in Canada mostly relied on imported periodicals, with a few Québécois exceptions, most significantly *Le Film* (1921-1962).⁴ With the lag in film-related publications, making a living as a full-time English-language film critic in Canada in the 1940s was still exceptionally rare. So when Clyde Gilmour and Gerald Pratley joined CBC Radio as film critics in 1947 and 1948, they were pioneers of not only broadcast film criticism but also of the fledgling field of professional film criticism in general. In fact, Gilmour's job at *The Toronto Evening Telegram* made him the first full-time film critic at a Toronto paper.⁵

My first case study traces the arrival of film talk at the public broadcaster and the strategies used to persuade listeners of cinema's cultural and educational importance. During the 1940s to 1960s, arts and culture criticism became a cornerstone of CBC's programming, offering both entertainment value and uplift. According to CBC drama critic Nathan Cohen, a contemporary of Gilmour and Pratley, in the late 1940s "arts criticism became for a time a subject of widespread general interest and influence in developing national cultural standards."⁶ Though Gilmour's humorous and populist address served as the first example of film talk at the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, Pratley's middlebrow approach to accessible film education would ultimately prevail for the subsequent twenty-five years at the public broadcaster.

¹ Groening, "Timeline."

² Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 21; Groening, "Timeline," 402, 403, 405.

³ Groening, "Timeline," 406, 407.

⁴ "Cinema in Quebec."

⁵ "Technicolor Clyde Gilmour Award."

⁶ Edmonstone, *Nathan Cohen*, 28, 104.

Moreover, Pratley's promotion of Canadian cinema helped establish the cultural nationalist rhetoric that permeated film commentary well into the 1990s.

The Real First/First Real CBC Film Critic

In June 1948, the American trade publication *Variety* printed a story praising the Canadian public broadcaster for inaugurating a program dedicated to film reviews. "The CBC is to be lauded," it said, for "realizing that people do go to see motion pictures," and "for having the courage to present a program which plugs a competing field."⁷ For the first time, the CBC had taken a gamble to make space on its airwaves for talk about cinema. The timing was opportune. Hollywood was just emerging from four years of record profits and there was a growing appetite for foreign films in the United States and Canada.⁸ According to Raymond Haberski, "In the post-World War II era, the notion that movies were not only serious business but also serious art started to take hold. [...] Helping to advance the taste of audiences was a new breed of critics—a generation raised in a 'filmic' rather than a solely literate culture."⁹ Moreover, cinema had achieved enough respectability as an art to warrant substantial critical commentary in major journalistic institutions such as the BBC and many American highbrow publications. *The New York Times* reported on a Gallup research poll in 1945, explaining that movies had become "the entertainment of choice for educated and prosperous people rather than, as had always been assumed, for the undereducated and poor."¹⁰

The *Variety* article referred to Clyde Gilmour's Vancouver-based show *CBC Movie Critic*, which had been airing coast-to-coast across CBC's Trans-Canada Network since November 1947.¹¹ By the time the piece was published several months later, Gerald Pratley had his own show on CBC's local Dominion Network in Toronto; but the report makes no mention

⁷ "CBC Movie Critic With Clyde Gilmour," *Variety*, June 23, 1948, 26; for some background on the rivalry between the film and radio industries, see Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2007), 84–85.

⁸ David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 371; Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 104–105.

⁹ Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 102.

¹⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, 105.

¹¹ "CBC Movie Critic," June 23, 1948; "CBC Movie Critic," Digital audio tape, November 11, 1947, 480208-03, CBC Radio Archives. Note that all Gilmour broadcasts are cited by recording date, since the CBC records do not contain precise broadcast dates.

of it. The first episode of Pratley's *This Week at the Movies* aired on April 11, 1948. Both programs aired on Sundays and consisted of reviews of the past weekend's new releases. This scheduling at the end of the weekend suggests the programs were meant to help listeners reflect on the films they had recently viewed, rather than priming them to make decisions at the box office. Gilmour and Pratley both wrote their own material, infusing it with opinionated remarks, but only Gilmour's voice was on the air, since a proxy CBC announcer read Pratley's scripts for the first few months of the program.

The fact that Gilmour performed his own reviews and reached a national rather than local listenership, all five months before Pratley's show debuted, would seem to make Gilmour the frontrunner for the title of first CBC film critic. Yet in the press surrounding Pratley's death at age 87 in 2011, numerous articles—including those from the CBC itself—confidently claimed that he was indeed “the broadcaster's first film reviewer.”¹² In these celebrations of Pratley's contributions, Clyde Gilmour falls off the radar. This chapter explores how and why Pratley displaced Gilmour as the voice of film talk on CBC Radio. In comparing the two critics' modes of address within the historical context, a picture emerges of Pratley as an influential agent of ideas about popular culture, public life, and cultivated citizenship, as these came together at the intersection of film criticism. Pratley spoke eloquently not just on behalf of the CBC and its institutional mandate, but also on behalf of a nascent Canadian film culture just trying to find its bearings within a somewhat overwhelming global industry. His notions of good taste, good cinema, and good audiences had a profound impact on the cultural and political orientation of film talk at the public broadcaster. The values Pratley promoted in his late 1940s radio criticism—film art over commerce, cinema as an international and unifying force, and the importance of authenticity, for example—would even come to characterize criticism of Canadian national cinema more generally, as Peter Morris's study of 1960s Canadian film criticism suggests.¹³

The selective omission of Gilmour from the record is perhaps due to the divergent fates of the two critics. Both men went on to long and distinguished careers with the national broadcaster. Gilmour had started out writing both film and music reviews for the *Vancouver*

¹² “Film Champion Gerald Pratley Dies,” *CBC News*, March 14, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2011/03/14/pratley-film-obit.html>.

¹³ Morris, “The Uncertain Trumpet.”

Daily Province. He would later write reviews for the *Toronto Star* newspaper while also at the CBC. On the radio he went on from film reviewing to hosting *Gilmour's Albums*, a popular and eclectic music program that aired for over forty years. So although Gilmour was a long-time film critic his reputation was primarily as a music connoisseur. Moreover, Gilmour was never branded as a film intellectual. Though he had a strong film criticism portfolio, his radio persona downplayed these qualifications. The *Variety* article focussed on his vocal qualities and his role as an entertainer. Even the introduction to his program describes him not as a critic but as someone who simply “likes to go to the movies.”¹⁴

Pratley, on the other hand, proved to be a cinema guy through and through. Besides his two CBC Radio shows in 1948, he headed several programs about cinema in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, many of which he performed on-air himself. Often he was writing scripts for three different film-related programs on a weekly basis. He reviewed international and domestic new releases and interviewed film celebrities and professionals. He also expanded the scope of film commentary by covering music in the movies, general film industry news, and special issues pertaining to cinema culture. He was the CBC correspondent for the Cannes Film Festival for thirty years.¹⁵ All along he regularly contributed film commentary to four Toronto newspapers, including thirty-five years writing for *The Toronto Star* and forty years for the *Globe and Mail*. He published in *Canadian Film Weekly*, *Variety*, and *Films and Filming*. In contrast to Gilmour's populist, irreverent approach, Pratley's commentary flaunted authority and middlebrow prestige in a way that helped elevate film talk on the CBC to the level of its other arts and culture programming. In other words, Pratley's breed of film criticism resonated better with the institutional vision of the CBC at the time.

Taste Wars at the CBC

Understanding Gerald Pratley and Clyde Gilmour's relative positions within the universe of 1940s CBC Radio requires a historical detour through the institution's mandates and policies. Radio in Canada, as in the rest of the world, had developed as a national medium. The initial commercial system was overhauled when the Aird Commission, appointed in 1928, found that

¹⁴ “CBC Movie Critic,” June 23, 1948.

¹⁵ Norman Wilner, “A Tribute to Gerald Pratley,” *Now Magazine*, March 15, 2011, <http://www.nowtoronto.com/movies/story.cfm?content=179613>.

Canadian radio featured almost exclusively foreign (i.e. primarily American) content.¹⁶ A public system similar to the British Broadcasting Corporation was implemented to focus on Canadian-made programming. In 1936, an act was passed establishing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

While the 1936 Act prioritized Canadian content, it also maintained a place for “the best” foreign programming.¹⁷ In the subsequent years, a political struggle continued between private and public ownership, between light entertainment and educational programming, between liberal and conservative interests, and between American and Canadian product.¹⁸ By the time the CBC presented a general report to the House of Commons ten years later in 1946, the network was booming; but its achievements had been hard won.¹⁹ The report underlined the role of broadcasting as both a “great public utility” and a sophisticated “art.”²⁰ The 1946 report reflected competing interests in the broadcasting field, describing the goals of the CBC as at once educational, entertaining, spiritual, informative, and, most importantly, nationalistic. It made a point to distance the CBC from profit motive: “It has been the responsibility of the Corporation to see that the Canadian air-waves are used to the general benefit of the people of Canada, over and above all other considerations.”²¹

One of the report’s main preoccupations was defining and clarifying programming priorities. It explained that although the CBC ought to concern itself with catering to Canadians as a whole, it should not forget that Canadians were diverse and that no two individuals shared the same “radio tastes.”²² This notion of radio taste permeated the report’s language around programming and designated strictly personal preferences in entertainment content, without any apparent acknowledgement that such preferences reflected education level, job position, and class status. Tastes were divided into categories, such as popular entertainment, news, and so-

¹⁶ Hilmes, *Only Connect*, 65.

¹⁷ House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, “CBC 1946: A Digest of Statements on the Policies, Administration and Programs of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1946), 4.

¹⁸ Knowlton Nash, *The Microphone Wars: A History of Triumph and Betrayal at the CBC* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁰ House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, “CBC 1946,” 3, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

called “serious entertainment,” which included “good music” and religious programs. One programming principle was “variety of tastes,” which was concerned again with catering to personal preferences rather than offering plural perspectives from and for diverse cultural groups.²³

When the report forbade “allowing the desires of a majority to crush the legitimate wants of minority groups,” it actually sought to protect *elite* tastes.²⁴ It stated,

If a large number like popular entertainment, there should be a good deal of popular entertainment. But there are others who want more solid matter. In the process of meeting the different wants the CBC can and does, we believe, contribute greatly to the development of new tastes and new ideas and to general communication among Canadians. Some programs on the air give fleeting pleasure, and are highly appreciated. They may be followed by another that will help to open up new vistas in the minds of the listeners. The CBC is very conscious of this responsibility to provide an active and stimulating force in the mental and artistic mind of the nation.²⁵

Embedded here was English literary critic Matthew Arnold’s nineteenth century notion that culture is “the best that has been thought and said.”²⁶ Arnold viewed culture—the finest theatre, literature, and music—as an instrument of uplift to cultivate the minds of the working classes and rescue the disenfranchised from intellectual, and, by extension, material, squalor. This belief in high culture as a liberating and ultimately democratizing force informed the CBC’s privileging of “minority tastes,” a tricky phrase considering “minority” actually described the preferences of the intellectual classes. The report insisted that though these minority tastes were outside the mainstream, they should nevertheless be granted key, high-traffic time slots.

The stated goal was to avoid the tyranny of commercial interests.²⁷ It is important to remember that CBC Radio at the time relied substantially on the proceeds of commercial advertising, both domestic and American.²⁸ The practice of programming highbrow content into popular time slots demonstrated a dedication to “serious entertainment” as an Arnoldian public

²³ Ibid., 10–11.

²⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁵ Ibid., 11.

²⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1869), 5.

²⁷ House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, “CBC 1946,” 38.

²⁸ Nash, *Microphone Wars*, 144–145.

service and uplift strategy, catering to the privileged classes while tutoring the masses. This commitment to highbrow culture angered at least one CBC employee, announcer Joel Aldred, who, in 1946, published an article in the Montreal *Standard* (formerly under the editorship of the CBC's then-newly-appointed chairman, Arnold Davidson Dunton). Aldred complained, "The CBC is spending an outlandish proportion of its program budget on a fifty-two-week dose of culture."²⁹ He continued, "There is too much catering to the Montreal and Toronto artsy crowds. What the CBC needs in its radio fare is more corn and a lot more reality."³⁰ Aldred had reportedly already been on notice for professional misconduct and this public takedown led to his dismissal from the network. Dunton would later respond "he felt the CBC was already providing 'corn' along with 'artsy' programming. His approach was to serve all of the people some of the time rather than some of the people all of the time."³¹

Talk radio was a major component in the CBC's education and uplift strategy. The 1946 report noted that the ratings for talk radio easily stood up to "commercial programs designed strictly for entertainment."³² Listed among the categories of talk radio were quiz shows, documentary and educational programs, interviews, and, significantly, commentaries.³³ Topics included "national and international affairs," music, literature, and sports.³⁴ Film is notably absent from the report, though one can begin to see how informed and uplifting talk about cinema could fit into this vision of radio programming as both educational and entertaining. Commentary on popular films could provide more of the "corn" Aldred demanded, while building on the esteemed tradition of commentary about books, theatre, and music.

Nationalist interests also acted as a through line in the 1946 report, recalling Michele Hilmes's observation that radio waves literally and symbolically cut across geographical space to unify diverse individuals and populations and solidify national identity.³⁵ Hilmes notes that in its early years, against the backdrop of war and the Depression, radio in North America emerged as

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 217.

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, "CBC 1946," 39.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁵ Michele Hilmes, "Introduction," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11.

the major “circulatory system” for “the signs and symbols of the national imaginary.”³⁶ Every nation in the world developed a version of state-supported radio to circulate “preferred elements of arts and politics into every village.”³⁷ But while radio was fundamentally national in its deployment, the medium also contained great potential for transnational exchange, represented both in its technical flexibility and its commercial imperative to expand consumer audiences. Hilmes also proposes the “inherent transnationalism of broadcasting’s cultural economy,” held in tension between the demands of the nation and a desire to “let other influences stream into the national space.”³⁸ Hilmes suggests that Hollywood, as an agent of “transnational consumer culture” helped shape broadcasting’s national orientation, within and outside the United States.³⁹ She argues, “Often, ‘Hollywood’ [...] came to stand in for a wide array of culturally denationalizing forces [...] in the minds and policies of national gatekeepers. Broadcasting promised a powerful agent to contain such forces and to define national cultures around preferred national values.”⁴⁰ The Arnoldian and somewhat conservative priorities articulated in the CBC report points towards the preferred Canadian values the broadcaster wished to promote in the late 1940s. Interestingly, even though the report did not mention film talk programming, both Clyde Gilmour and Gerald Pratley started reviewing films for CBC Radio within a year of its publication. Both young men fulfilled another of the report’s goals to incorporate fresh, new talent.⁴¹ And both critics represented a white, male, middle class version of cultural authority. But the contrasts between their programs and modes of address offer important clues as to why Pratley’s Toronto-based programs eventually became the standard-bearer for film criticism at the CBC and the voice of public Canadian film talk for a generation.

Clyde Gilmour: Between Philistine and Film Snob

Clyde Gilmour was born in Calgary in 1912. He worked with various western Canada newspapers and served in the navy as a news reporter before becoming a film critic for CBC

³⁶ Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, “CBC 1946,” 38.

Radio in Vancouver.⁴² In November 1947, CBC Vancouver launched a short program that aired nationwide, hosted by Gilmour and called, simply, *CBC Movie Critic*. Gilmour was also the regular film critic starting in 1948 on the cross-country program *Critically Speaking*.⁴³ Gilmour would continue as a film critic for CBC Radio until 1954, when he moved on to *Gilmour's Albums*, a program of eclectic music that he hosted without holidays or re-runs for over forty years.⁴⁴ When Gilmour retired in 1997, his was the longest running music show in CBC Radio history and the network's highest rated music program.⁴⁵

The debut episode of *CBC Movie Critic*, which was billed as “the first of this new series of informal talks,” sought to cultivate a specific critic persona for Gilmour, indicating his qualifications and tastes. It presented a parable in which two hypothetical characters represented opposite sides of the taste war, on opposite ends of the country: one was an elderly woman in Vancouver and the other was a young man in Toronto.⁴⁶ The woman was meant to represent the philistine end of the spectrum. She enjoyed light-hearted fare and went on a weekly outing to the movie theatre with no particular film in mind, less interested in the films themselves than in the opportunity for a fun escape. She was “uncritical” and ignored the “motion picture” as a “social force.” The young man, on the other hand, played the role of the pedant who “doesn't refer to ‘the movies’.” He speaks of ‘the cinema.’ He sneers at Hollywood cinema, reads international film journals, and enjoys foreign films.” This man was overly concerned with the techniques of the cinema art: “When he tells you about any picture he has seen, he rarely tells you about any stars or the plot. Instead, he mentions the direction, and the camera angles, and the compositional arrangements, the use or abuse of distorted perspectives, the cutting and slicing and editing, and the social significance of the philosophy.” Note that this dig at the film snob happened to contain a mini-lesson regarding the language one might use to talk about movies in an educated manner. Mostly, though, it was a warning about the socially preferred way to engage with cinema.

Gilmour sought to illustrate his own position, “somewhere between these two extremes,” a position he put forth as level headed and relatable:

⁴² Alan H. Cowle, “Clyde Gilmour,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation, December 16, 2013), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/clyde-gilmour-emc/>.

⁴³ Edmonstone, *Nathan Cohen*, 104–105.

⁴⁴ Cowle, “Clyde Gilmour.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “CBC Movie Critic,” November 11, 1947.

The idea of going to the same theatre every Thursday, like Mrs. Donahue, on a sort of weekly blind date with Hollywood—well that thought is quite horrifying to me. It's the sort of thing that happens in nightmares, finding yourself trapped in the same building with Abbott and Costello. Just the same, I imagine I still get a lot more fun out of the movies than my good Toronto friend with the shaggy hairdo. And I believe, too, that it is possible to be unduly preoccupied with technique in your contemplation of any work of art, whether it be a portrait by Rembrandt or a symphony by Mozart, or the latest screen installment in the career of the Thin Man, or Dagwood Bumstead, or Donald Duck.⁴⁷

As a middle ground between the oblivious old lady and the proto-beatnik film geek, Gilmour planted himself as a mediator between high culture and the lowbrow, capable of understanding everything from Renaissance painting and Classical music to popular serial cinema, and even comics and cartoons. Most importantly, he professed to appreciate cinema the way it ought to be appreciated. He appealed to the audience to treat movies with “responsibility” by making an effort to sort through the large volume of messages put forth by the industry. In particular, he questioned the morality of common Hollywood themes, such as boy-gets-girl and lives happily ever after, foreigners are dangerous, and violence is a viable solution to conflict. Throughout his commentary he remained jovial and conversational, reinforcing his average moviegoer persona.

In the interests of branding Gilmour as an everyman, the program's rhetoric downplayed his credentials as a critic, a sign of the “professional self-loathing” prevalent in an anti-intellectual climate, according to Andrew Ross.⁴⁸ In the program's introduction, announcer Ray MacNess described Clyde Gilmour as “a Vancouver newspaper man and magazine writer who likes to go to the movies,” a relaxed and relatable description compatible with the program's label as a “series of informal talks.”⁴⁹ The statement recalls mid-twentieth century film critic Robert Warshaw's famous appeal to critical humility, “A man goes to the movies. The critic must be honest enough to admit that he is that man.”⁵⁰ Gilmour also invited listener feedback and participation, a reminder that interactivity has long been a hallmark of radio formats. He asked listeners to inform him of what they would like to see included in the show, though he set

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ross, *No Respect*, 6.

⁴⁹ “CBC Movie Critic,” November 11, 1947.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 371.

a moratorium on celebrity gossip. He pointed out that gossip was already covered on another program by “his friend” Susan Fletcher; his disdainful tone emphasized the distinction he wished to enforce between celebrity news and the more learned—albeit still accessible—content of his own program. It also distanced Gilmour from the lowly tradition of female gossip columnists, typified by Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper (see Chapter Two).

Part of what made Gilmour accessible was his no-holds-barred reviewing style. He positioned himself as a man of taste who was not obligated to be tasteful. MacNess’s opening alluded to Gilmour’s refusal to pull punches. He chuckled, “Some movies he enjoys very much. But others,... well, he’ll tell you about those himself. Mr. Gilmour has some rather pungent opinions about the movies, and the CBC has invited him to express these opinions [...]”⁵¹ Gilmour thus had free rein to exploit the particular pleasures—for both reviewer and spectator—of the negative review. He frequently employed pithy witticisms, recalling MGM’s charges that 1940s BBC film critics were reckless in their use of humour. In his review of *They Won’t Believe Me* (1947), for example, Gilmour wondered who found it harder to sit through the film, the fictional jury of the story, or the real-life audience. The style of the review was breezy and brief, consisting of an extremely short plot summary, followed by the punch line. Gilmour’s radio persona leveraged the power of the cynical review, making an appeal to the listeners’ “self-respect,” and empowering them to reject and even ridicule the commercial offerings of popular cinema.⁵² It is difficult to say how Gilmour’s listeners interpreted his hatchet jobs and to what degree his snarky reviews influenced listeners’ movie choices. Regardless, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, Gilmour’s “refusal of the *facile*” allowed him a certain power and social distinction.⁵³ After all, the subtext of a negative review is always “I know better.” In this way, Gilmour strove to be both a man of the people and a projection of “the people’s” most flattering, clever, and discerning aspects.

Gilmour’s everyman persona was built on his image as a straight-talking, clear-eyed arbiter of taste, unafraid to speak his mind, and, by extension, able to liberate what may have been on the minds of CBC listeners. His antics consisted not only of occasionally harsh reviews, but also casual sexism and comedic imitations of movie stars. Throughout his early radio reviews,

⁵¹ “CBC Movie Critic,” November 11, 1947.

⁵² Ross, *No Respect*, 4.

⁵³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 488.

Gilmour evaluated women's acting performances by their physical appearance. This association between beauty and virtue is reminiscent of Bourdieu's claim that, for members of the "popular aesthetic," the subject of a pretty woman automatically entails a pretty photograph.⁵⁴ In Gilmour's commentary on *Golden Earrings* (1947), he complains that Marlene Dietrich "does not show us her eminent legs, which I for one find difficult to forgive."⁵⁵ In his review of *A Place in the Sun* (1951), Gilmour appraises Shelley Winters's looks and condescendingly credits Elizabeth Taylor's strong performance to the director.⁵⁶ Women were also targets of the host's recurring celebrity impersonations, wherein he mimicked line readings from the movies under review. Jane Greer once came under fire, and, in another instance, Gilmour mocked an unspecified Cary Grant co-star, to whom he referred as a "buxom wench."⁵⁷ One might say Gilmour had some "rather pungent" views on gender. By way of these interjections of coarse humour, Gilmour's commentary sought a balance between quality-minded aesthetic judgment and rowdy populist diversion.

On the other hand, Gilmour's tastes often leaned towards the highbrow. Even as early as 1948, *Variety* noted Gilmour's approval of historical films and docu-dramas over comedies. The same article commended Gilmour on his "intelligent inflection" but warned against his use of "\$64 words."⁵⁸ *Variety* suggested that a brainy vocabulary was not appropriate for radio's mass audience, at least not in the American context, where listeners were entrenched as customers in the commercial system.

Gilmour thus flattered the literary sensibilities of his listeners, interpellating them as discerning consumers of culture, while forgiving them their high culture blind spots. In a discussion about musical film scores, he opined, "Now every discriminating filmgoer knows, of course, that sometimes movie music rises above the level of a mechanized industry. Sometimes,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁵ "Movie Critic, with Clyde Gilmour," Digital audio tape, December 10, 1947, 990424-18(17), CBC Radio Archives.

⁵⁶ "Critically Speaking," Digital audio tape, August 28, 1951, 520326-03, CBC Radio Archives.

⁵⁷ "CBC Movie Critic," Digital audio tape, December 3, 1947, 480208-03, CBC Radio Archives; "CBC Movie Critic," November 11, 1947.

⁵⁸ "CBC Movie Critic," June 23, 1948; this was a reference to the American radio quiz show *Take It or Leave It*, in which the questions would escalate in difficulty and reward towards the top \$64 level. "Take It or Leave It," April 4, 1948, <http://www.myoldradio.com/old-radio-episodes/take-it-or-leave-it-appearance-by-red-skelton/1>.

movie music becomes art. Not “Art” with a stuffy capital “A,” but *real* art, honest and unaffected.”⁵⁹ As an example, Gilmour cites William Walton’s score for Laurence Olivier’s 1944 adaptation of *Henry V*, which had been nominated for an Academy Award for Score of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture. Gilmour invokes himself and his listeners as “discriminating” but still distances his taste from drab and exclusionary high culture. His notion of art as “real”, “honest”, and “unaffected” is consistent with his preoccupation with authenticity, expressed in multiple reviews through evaluating a film’s “honesty.”⁶⁰

In another attempt to have it both ways, Gilmour occasionally aligned himself with the “ordinary” listener through allusions to radio’s lowly and unpretentious status. He closes one 1947 episode with an anecdote about the program’s theme song, describing an encounter with a “dignified man” whistling the tune in a line-up at a coffee shop.⁶¹ When Gilmour asks the gentleman if he had heard the music on the radio the previous night (on Gilmour’s broadcast), the man allegedly responded haughtily, “Certainly not. I never listen to the radio. And I don’t believe we’ve met.”⁶² This excerpt is characteristic of the program’s jocular tone and its use of sardonic humour to forge a conspiratorial alliance between Gilmour and his listeners. In this case, no matter the tastes that may divide them at the movie theatre, the audience members have a dirty secret in common: they are radio listeners. So the implied listener of the coffee shop story can appreciate the jab at the stereotype of a high-class snob and enjoy a frisson of underclass communion and distinction, confirming that good taste happens on the radio, too.

In his first months as a CBC Radio film critic, Clyde Gilmour was a complex figure, embodying the contradictions of the competing taste claims circulating in the late 1940s. Though he had little to say about Canadian cinema culture, Gilmour’s criticism happily championed Hollywood cinema, while also propelling listeners towards a more sophisticated understanding of popular culture. The tensions over taste are discernable in the radio scripts, sometimes as a deliberate rhetorical strategy and sometimes as a by-product of Gilmour’s desire to both embody and reject lowbrow culture. He effectively juxtaposed competing ideologies about culture through play and humour, cracking jokes and even at times breaking into song to fulfill his role

⁵⁹ “CBC Movie Critic,” December 3, 1947.

⁶⁰ “Clyde Gilmour,” Digital audio tape, April 18, 1949, 990424-17(11), CBC Radio Archives.

⁶¹ “Movie Critic, with Clyde Gilmour.”

⁶² Ibid.

as an on-air entertainer. Gerald Pratley's early film criticism manifested a similar ambivalence around matters of taste, but his approach to culture was comparably solemn and didactic. Pratley worked harder to establish the appropriate blueprint for film talk on public radio. The stakes were high even in his earliest episodes, where he considered the impact engaged film criticism could have on the cultural climate and on the very future of cinema in Canada.

Gerald Pratley: The Making of a Cultural Nationalist

Pratley was born in 1923 in England, which would put him in his early twenties when he joined the CBC as a scriptwriter in 1946.⁶³ Information about his educational background is limited, but one source states he was educated in London prior to leaving for Canada.⁶⁴ In his time at CBC Radio, he was a regular contributor to numerous series, as writer or announcer, and usually both. He turned his attention to film talk programming in 1948, first with *This Week at the Movies* (March 1948–December 1950) and then with *The Movie Scene* (August 1948–September 1962); the programs are credited as “the first of their kind to deal seriously with film appreciation.”⁶⁵ Pratley wrote in 1950,

A little over two years ago the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation began an experiment by adding to its coverage of talks about the arts and social and economic affairs two programs of film criticism, one originating in Vancouver and the other in Toronto. New films showing in Toronto were reviewed each week, and the same procedure was followed in Vancouver. Thus listeners could always hear two opinions of the same film.⁶⁶

However, only Torontonians could hear both Gilmour and Pratley. Clyde Gilmour's film review program aired nationally on the CBC's Trans-Canada Network, but Pratley's first film talk shows started out on the Dominion Network, the CBC's second English-language network. So Gilmour was heard across Canada on the main public network, but Pratley only reached Toronto area listeners on the CBC-owned local station CJBC. Where Gilmour interpellated a broad Canadian audience—as seen in his parable of the Toronto snob and the Vancouver philistine—Pratley instead frequently talked about developments and programming at Toronto movie

⁶³ Posner, “Pioneer of Movie Critiques Boosted Canadian Cinema”; Gerald Pratley, “Furthering Motion Picture Appreciation by Radio,” *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1950): 127–31.

⁶⁴ “Contributors: Gerald Pratley,” *Kinema*, n.d., <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/contributors.php?id=7>.

⁶⁵ Todd, “Chronology,” 1429.

⁶⁶ Pratley, “Furthering,” 127.

theatres. This discrepancy makes it all the more curious that Pratley and not Gilmour came to be known as the CBC's first film critic. It nevertheless helped perpetuate Toronto as the centre of film criticism. A look at Pratley's contributions and political commitments illuminates the reasons he came to represent the national voice of film talk.

Over the years, Pratley innovated and participated in numerous additional radio programs related to cinema culture, such as *Music from the Films* (April 1949–June 1966), *Facts about Films* (1950), *Shakespeare in the Cinema* (1955), *From Jolson On...* (1955 and 1956), *Pratley at the Movies* (October 1962–September 1971), *Audio* (1957–1964), *Assignment* (1957–1971), *CJBC Views the Shows* (1958–1959),⁶⁷ *Saturday Day* (1960–1963), *The Learning Stage* (1964), and *Arts in Review* (1971–1977).⁶⁸ Some programs were short-run mini-series, but many were on the air for several years, running simultaneously. The earliest episodes ran only fifteen minutes but by 1949 Pratley's programs had earned half-hour time slots. His summer 1950 mini-series *Facts about Films*, prepared with the BBC, aired nationally.⁶⁹ Pratley's diverse programming included verbal commentary, interviews, movie soundtracks, and, occasionally, audio clips from the films under discussion. Not surprisingly, considering Pratley's recent move from the United Kingdom, the content and formats echoed the film talk programming on BBC Radio. For example, *This Week at the Movies* paralleled the BBC's *The Week's Films*, a popular program during the mid-1940s.⁷⁰ Several episodes of *The Movie Scene* were prepared by the BBC.⁷¹ Even Pratley's original content generally mirrored the key concerns of 1940s British criticism, including a dedication to film talk as social uplift and education.⁷² Interestingly, as the BBC moved away from didacticism in favour of a more "approachable," "informal," and "witty" broadcast style in the 1940s, Pratley maintained his decorous and authoritative mode of address.⁷³ In fact, Clyde Gilmour's film talk program was ultimately more in line with the

⁶⁷ CJBC was the Toronto CBC affiliate.

⁶⁸ Titles and dates are based on the script holdings in the Gerald Pratley Fonds at Library and Archives Canada, MG 31, D 103 (hereafter "LAC").

⁶⁹ Pratley, "Furthering"; "Facts about Films," August 5, 1950, LAC.

⁷⁰ Selfe, "Intolerable Flippancy."

⁷¹ Pratley, "Furthering," 128.

⁷² John Ellis, "The Quality Film Adventure: British Critics and the Cinema 1942-1948," in *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson (New York: Cassell, 1996), 74; Selfe, "Intolerable Flippancy," 375.

⁷³ Selfe, "Intolerable Flippancy," 379.

BBC's "greater emphasis placed on 'ordinary man' new release guides over the more 'intellectual' and topical talks about the cinema."⁷⁴ But Pratley's research and in-depth commentary found a long-term place on the CBC.

Pratley made his reputation on the radio, but his legacy has reached much further. Alongside nearly fifty years of popular criticism in print and radio, Pratley established the Toronto Film Society, the Toronto and District Film Council, and the Stratford International Film Festival.⁷⁵ He was the founder of the Ontario Film Institute (OFI) and its director from 1968 to 1990.⁷⁶ The mandate of the OFI was to promote world cinema; it programmed films encompassing forty-seven countries and 1400 directors in its 322 programs, which, according to one website, constituted "the most ambitious and most complete film screenings in the province."⁷⁷ The OFI eventually faced allegations that it had become stale and "claustrophobic" and, in 1990, Cinematheque Ontario took over the organization and the Film Reference Library absorbed Pratley's extensive collection of textual and audio-visual documents.⁷⁸

Working "far beyond the realms of a simple reviewer," Pratley taught a film course at Queen's University in 1956, long before Canada's first undergraduate film department was established in 1969.⁷⁹ He went on to teach film history at Ryerson, Seneca College, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and York University.⁸⁰ He received honorary degrees from York University, University of Waterloo, and Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He was admitted to the Order of Canada in 1984 and became an Officer in 2002, as recognition of his "highest standards for Canadian cinema."⁸¹

It is indeed Pratley's engagement with issues of national cinema that secured his pivotal place in Canadian film criticism history. Documentary filmmaker Ron Mann proposed,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁷⁵ "Film Champion Gerald Pratley Dies," *CBC News*, March 14, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2011/03/14/pratley-film-obit.html>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Staff, "Remembering Gerald Pratley," *Northern Stars*, March 15, 2011, http://www.northernstars.ca/News/01103150931_pratley.html.

⁷⁸ "Clarkson Says Film Institute Should Be Part of His Group," *Toronto Star*, September 29, 1987.

⁷⁹ "Remembering Gerald Pratley"; Groening, "Timeline," 409, 411.

⁸⁰ "Remembering Gerald Pratley."

⁸¹ "Order of Canada - Gerald Pratley, O.C., LL.D.," accessed May 12, 2013, <http://www.gg.ca/honour.aspx?id=1368&t=12&ln=Pratley>.

There would be no film culture in Canada without Gerald Pratley—period. He was our Henri Langlois. Gerald was the first person I knew who promoted film as a serious art form. He brought film nerds together to appreciate world cinema, which Canadians would otherwise have never seen. Don't think for one minute there would be the Toronto International Film Festival without Gerald Pratley.⁸²

At the beginning of his career as a critic, it was not a given that Pratley would become a crusader for Canadian cinema. The brand of cultural nationalism Pratley became known for was mostly absent in his first year on the air. But as his repertoire of radio programs grew, he became more and more vocal about the kind of film industry and culture Canada should pursue. In 1955 he charged that the Canadian Film Awards, inaugurated in 1949, made “a mockery of honour awards by upholding downright mediocrity.”⁸³ (Ironically, the Canadian Film Awards would recognize the CBC and Pratley for their radio work in 1959. In 1973 Pratley was recognized for “outstanding leadership, service, and promotion of the Canadian Film Awards.”⁸⁴) Pratley also lamented the paucity of critical support for Canadian cinema: “The Canadian film is the one art which does not enjoy, in this country, the support of an enthusiastic and vocal group of sophisticated admirers [...]. Film is almost never discussed in serious journals [...]. Our ‘intellectuals’ are never overheard discussing the Board’s latest movies or the achievements of various directors.”⁸⁵ Compared to Clyde Gilmour, who was apt to go with the flow of popular culture, Pratley adopted a missionary zeal for high quality cinema that was not always kind to specific Canadian films or institutions but was always adamant that Canada deserved a strong and lively film scene.

The first episode of *The Movie Scene* set up many of the issues Pratley would come to champion throughout his lengthy career. The fifteen-minute debut episode aired the evening of Sunday, August 29, 1948, at 10:15 p.m. (See Appendix for full script.) Pratley explains that his

⁸² Michael Posner, “Pioneer Created Film Culture over 5 Decades,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 30, 2011. Langlois was the co-founder of Cinémathèque Française.

⁸³ “Legacy Celebrating 65 Years,” *Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television*, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.academy.ca/About-the-Academy/Legacy/Legacy-65-Years>; Gerald Pratley, “Film in Canada,” in *Documents in Canadian Film*, ed. Douglas Fetherling (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1988), 100.

⁸⁴ Todd, “Chronology,” 1431, 1436.

⁸⁵ Pratley, “Film in Canada,” 100.

second program on the Dominion Network was born because the CBC felt there was room for film talk that went beyond Gilmour's and Pratley's weekly reviews of new releases. *The Movie Scene* for its part "dealt with practically every aspect of film making from an international viewpoint."⁸⁶ Pratley launched the program with a panoramic snapshot of the state of film criticism in Canada and a bold statement of position. He urged print media to better keep up with radio, citing the latter as a trailblazer in criticism: "It now remains for the press to give its readers the same wide and interesting reviews of national and inter-national films as the radio is commencing to do."⁸⁷ Recognizing the symbiosis of film and other media, he denounced the rivalry between cinema and radio and the competition for advertisers between radio and newspapers, advocating instead a somewhat utopian mass media convergence.

This debut episode, written by Pratley and read by CBC announcer John Rae, worked hard to establish the stakes of Canadian film criticism. For one thing, Pratley felt strongly that film criticism was not living up to its potential. The script recounted,

The Editor of a Canadian motion picture trade magazine remarked, rather resignedly one day, that 'everybody thinks they are qualified to write about the movies.' This, unfortunately, is true. Films are not restricted to a small, select circle of admirers, but in the process of distribution and exhibition throughout the world, they are reviewed and publicized by thousands of people who earn a profitable living by writing reams of what often proves to be pure nonsense about them. These writers are not answerable to any one authority because once the motion picture has left the producing studio, and starts its career of worldwide exhibition, it becomes more or less a part of the entertainment life of the people and is, as it were, the property of everyone. The film is then, whether it deserves it or not, open to castigation by critics, fulsome write-ups by commercially-minded reviewers, condemnation by religious societies, repression by censorship, and finally, to misunderstanding by the public. Opposed to all these adverse influences are small groups of individuals who review the pictures sensibly and sympathetically, and strive to maintain their artistic quality.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Pratley, "Furthering," 128.

⁸⁷ "The Movie Scene," August 29, 1948, LAC.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The broadcast expressed concern about commentary from amateur tastemakers, sell-outs, and moralists who failed to properly appreciate the cinematic art. Pratley may have had in mind his contemporary, *The New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther, who notoriously prioritized cinema's social messages above artistic merit. In any case, the excerpt demonstrates that rhetoric about an excess of public response to cinema began long before film criticism moved online.

The statement distinguished quality criticism from general clamour, establishing professional boundaries in the process. This assertion of quality responded to ambivalence at the time about the value of critics, their role in the film industry, and their place in popular culture. The unspoken questions were, What is the function of a film critic? What makes a good public film critic? And why does public radio need one? Indeed, the field of popular film criticism has made regular attempts at self-legitimization throughout its history. Career critics today continue to sharpen the boundaries between themselves and amateurs in order to protect their jobs against the social and economic devaluation of criticism as cultural labour. Pratley thereby performed an act of position-taking situating himself—and Rae—among the rare “individuals who review the pictures sensibly and sympathetically, and strive to maintain their artistic quality;” this, despite the fact that Pratley had no extensive qualifications as a critic. His biographies, tributes, and obituaries turn up no mention of any education or training in journalism or film. Like many other film critics of the 1940s to 1960s era—André Bazin, Bosley Crowther, James Agee, Pauline Kael, and Roger Ebert, among others—Pratley turned his enthusiasm and aptitude for film writing into a vocation. Starting with a couple of articles published in a fan magazine, he turned an amateur passion into a professional legacy.⁸⁹

The instability of professional film criticism, as a field of expertise without an established *code* of expertise, recalls sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction. The theory illuminates the way that “cultural capital”—meaning cultural knowledge and clout—is reproduced through both formal and informal education, but always in ways that obscure the mechanisms of class privilege. The idea that the figure of the film critic could represent a certain innate sense of good taste is for Bourdieu an ideological assumption that conceals a complex socialization process by which the subject unconsciously internalizes fine-grained cultural codes

⁸⁹ Gerald A. Pratley, “What You Owe to Fred Astaire...and What You Will Miss,” *Picturegoer*, January 19, 1946; Gerald Pratley, “Not Enough Guts or Go,” *Picturegoer*, October 26, 1946.

and conventions. That the relationship of cultivated individuals to art feels authentic to them and that they experience their good taste as instinctive is explained by the fact that the most effective instruments of cultural reproduction and class dominance are invisible. Bourdieu writes, “[an] intellectualist theory of artistic perception directly contradicts the experience of the art-lovers closest to the legitimate definition [of culture]; acquisition of legitimate culture by insensible familiarization within the family circle tends to favour an enchanted experience of culture which implies forgetting the acquisition.”⁹⁰ For an individual like Pratley establishing himself in a new intellectual community, a “middle-ground art” like cinema could offer unique opportunities. According to Bourdieu, middle-ground arts which are “disdained or neglected by the big holders of educational capital, offer a refuge and a revenge to those who, by appropriating them, secure the best return on their cultural capital (especially if it is not fully recognized scholastically) while at the same time taking credit for contesting the established hierarchy of legitimacies and profits.”⁹¹

In the first episode of *The Movie Scene*, Pratley explicitly asserts his own good taste as distinct from—and more serious than—other popular critics. He feels also compelled to defend his chosen media, cinema and radio, as legitimate culture. He refers to “the slough of mediocrity” containing most radio and cinema content, distinguishing it from the elevated and elevating “serious” commentary he intends to provide.⁹² Pratley suggests that it is the critic’s duty to raise the aesthetic standards of the moviegoing public so that moviegoers may demand higher quality entertainment from the profit-driven culture industry. Among cinema’s tasteful entertainments, Pratley cites literary adaptations, historical dramas, and social issue films, including *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Great Expectations* (1946), *The Yearling* (1946), and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). Pratley’s tastes were not unlike his contemporaries over at *The New York Times* and the New York Film Critics Circle, who bolstered “sophisticated comedies,” foreign films, and “a great number of domestic dramas.”⁹³ For Pratley, the critic’s greatest value was in supporting such rare and uplifting texts, movies which generally fit the mold of

⁹⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹² “The Movie Scene,” August 29, 1948.

⁹³ Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*, 71–72.

Hollywood “prestige pictures” and British “quality” films.⁹⁴ He declared, “It is not a cheerful task to write an unfavourable review of a film, or to sit and watch uninteresting movies, especially as the worthwhile films are so few and far between.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Pratley nobly pursued his vocation, for the next fifty years, watching bad movies to spare his listeners, even as he grew frustrated with what he saw as the populist and unsavoury path of popular cinema.

Pratley’s notion of quality figured prominently in his vision for Canadian national cinema, as is apparent in the debut of *The Movie Scene*. Pratley warns that the implications of a healthy critical practice for national culture should not be underestimated. Healthy criticism in his view was “intelligible as well as insightful,” walking the line between erudition and accessibility so as not to alienate the radio audience.⁹⁶ He takes a protectionist stance, warning of foreign producers and exhibitors coming to Canada to exploit moviegoers’ naiveté and wallets. Again, he asserts the importance of the critic-guardian, this time to keep unscrupulous foreign producers in check and protect the Canadian public from low-quality commercial fare. At this time, Canadian audiences were accustomed to seeing their country on screen mostly through American productions shot in Canada, such as the cycle of “northwoods melodramas” popular from the 1910s to 1950s.⁹⁷ In his classic book, popular historian Pierre Berton analyzes “Hollywood’s Canada” and concludes that such “movies have frequently blurred, distorted, and hidden [national] identity under a celluloid mountain of misconceptions.”⁹⁸ Even the National Film Board, formed in 1939, was struggling with low visibility at the time of this broadcast; in another episode three weeks later, Pratley insisted that “something must be done” to bring NFB films to Canadian and global audiences. Journalists, scholars, and policymakers would echo this argument for better distribution for decades to come.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism*, 49–50; Ellis, “The Quality Film.”

⁹⁵ “The Movie Scene,” August 29, 1948.

⁹⁶ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 112.

⁹⁷ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 39–45.

⁹⁸ Pierre Berton, *Hollywood’s Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), 12.

⁹⁹ “The Movie Scene,” September 19, 1948, LAC. Canadian film distribution policy is explored in depth in Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) and

The first episode of *The Movie Scene* aired just six months before the formation of Canada's Massey Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.¹⁰⁰ The Commission's report, released in 1951, would make an assertive statement about the necessity of developing a solid nationalist culture. Pratley sees a similar impetus for promoting national cinema. He also supports the role of global media in fostering cross-cultural understanding and harmony, explaining that, "one print of a film can be shipped with little trouble and expense to every corner of the world, where it will be understood and enjoyed by everyone, irrespective of the colour of their skin, or the language they speak."¹⁰¹ Pratley's dual commitment to the national and the international reflects Zoë Druick's observation that the Canadian "postwar nationalism" that informed the Massey Commission and many of its resulting cultural institutions, "is indebted to a logic of internationalism, and it inherited many of its contradictions and tensions."¹⁰²

In particular, Druick considers the influence of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the recommendations of the Massey Report. She notes, "Film was by far the most important medium in UNESCO discussions of the late 1940s," since it "promised to function in many desirable ways."¹⁰³ Cinema was seen to offer great social utility and educational potential, including demonstrations of practical economic activities and "documentation of national cultural production and the creation of high art."¹⁰⁴ It was at the time the most popular form of entertainment, yet it was simultaneously viewed as a vessel for learning about various ways of life and fostering cross-cultural exchange. In 1955, UNESCO declared cinema "the only mass communications medium which effectively crosses frontiers and perhaps

Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ Vincent Massey, "Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters & Sciences 1949-1951," 1951, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/2/5/index-e.html>.

¹⁰¹ "The Movie Scene," August 29, 1948.

¹⁰² Zoë Druick, "International Cultural Relations as a Factor in Postwar Canadian Cultural Policy: The Relevance of UNESCO for the Massey Commission," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2006), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1742/1853>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the most potent force by which one modern culture influences another.”¹⁰⁵ Pratley’s progressive vision for national and international cinema resonates with UNESCO’s; this vision would also form the foundation of his programming practices at the Ontario Film Institute, which spotlighted Canadian and, especially, global film.

In this early radio episode, Pratley interpellates a particular kind of listener. He talks to English Canadians—in this case Torontonians—as a unified whole, existing within a changing geopolitical world. The listeners he invokes are expressly national citizens, but he encourages them also to embrace international culture; Pratley thereby defies the historians’ characterization of him as a single-minded nationalist. Despite the nationalistic orientation apparent in CBC policy, Pratley’s early work when he was a fresh British expat focussed on the transnational, writing about and promoting mostly European (including British) and American cinema, not least because Canadian film production activities at the time were fairly limited. Subtitled “a review of the film world here and abroad,” *The Movie Scene* occasionally addressed issues of Canadian cinema but more often covered international film news, such as film festivals.¹⁰⁶ He presents himself as a custodian who can help Canadians achieve a worldly sense of good taste, and he compels his audience to demand higher quality arts and entertainment. His worries about lowbrow mass culture are indeed related to policing national standards, as evidenced by his invocation to reject subpar content from foreign producers and exhibitors. But Pratley’s cultural authority was still in flux. At this transitional moment in the late 1940s, just when Canada’s national broadcaster had begun to formalize and professionalize film talk on its network, Pratley had to negotiate his position with listeners and make a case for his own legitimacy, not to mention the legitimacy of both cinema and radio as serious cultural forms. These struggles for legitimacy, and a growing sense of responsibility to national cinema, would typify Pratley’s radio work through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Pratley’s radio programs were carefully scripted and performed as monologues, with the exception of the occasional recorded interview insert. Their tone was formal and learned. This mode of address was in keeping with early broadcast models from the United Kingdom, wherein “selected speakers spoke at length from the studio to absent listeners on predetermined scripted

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ “The Movie Scene,” August 29, 1948.

topics.”¹⁰⁷ Since Pratley’s words were typically read by a different announcer, at least until 1950, there was a discrepancy in the message between the “animator” (usually John Rae), “author” (Pratley), and “principal” (the CBC), to borrow Erving Goffman’s “production format” schema.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the programs would have found it a challenge to deliver the impression of spontaneous “fresh talk,” particularly considering Rae’s rather formal delivery style.¹⁰⁹ Thanks to the contextual information bookending each broadcast and a good degree of creative control, however, Pratley’s distinct perspective and interests shone through nevertheless.¹¹⁰

There are several recurring tendencies throughout and across Pratley’s various film talk programs, including forays into film history, an abhorrence of film censorship, insistence on cinema’s medium specificity, suspicion of the comedy genre, staunch anti-commercialism, close attention to music in movies, and a penchant for “spoilers” (he frequently revealed key plot points in fiction features). Topics Pratley covered in his first year as a film critic at the CBC included film festivals, documentary film, movie music, television, and film production in Canada. Pratley’s handling of these topics sometimes demonstrated his conservative inclinations, while at other times he showed a progressive instinct to forge new territory and disrupt reactionary forces in mainstream film culture.

Pratley subscribed to a declinist view of popular culture, and in some of his stuffer moments, he lamented the vulgarization of culture. In reviewing the admittedly slight *Tarzan and the Mermaids* (1948), Pratley asserts,

one cannot help arriving at the conclusion that movies, in more ways than one, are definitely not what they used to be. Their technical qualities may have improved considerably, but their standard of artistic presentment in the many spheres of motion picture entertainment, has changed noticeably. The comedy films of today are not nearly as hilarious or cleverly written as those of the pre-war period, and the musical films of the same era were far more light-hearted and entertaining.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Scannell, *Broadcast Talk*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 226; cited in Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*.

¹⁰⁹ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 146.

¹¹⁰ Pratley attests to the creative freedom he enjoyed at the CBC in “Film in Canada.”

¹¹¹ “This Week at the Movies,” July 4, 1948, LAC.

Pratley finds multiple occasions to express dismay over the direction of Hollywood comedies, for instance in his reviews for *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), and *Three Daring Daughters* (1948).

He finds his ideal musical comedy in the Italian film adaptation *Barber of Seville* (1947), which illustrates his concern for cinema's "respectability," a vague quality invoked repeatedly but never quite defined. Pratley wishes that all films, regardless of genre, could be created with "the same intelligence" as *Barber of Seville*: "Only then will every subject used as story material for movies, whether it be fiction or comedy, musical or documentary, obtain respect from present day society."¹¹² Regarding *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, Pratley again notes that, by contrast, previous incarnations of the Frankenstein story "were filmed with sincerity, honesty and respect."¹¹³ The key words "sincerity" and "honesty," along with "real," recur throughout the 1948 scripts, signalling Pratley's passion for authenticity, an equally vague and ideological notion that was prevalent in film criticism of the period. Not only did Pratley's colleague Clyde Gilmour habitually venerate "honesty" in films, but authenticity was also a favourite theme in British film criticism of the late 1940s.¹¹⁴

Pratley, like many critics of his time, promoted fairly conservative taste in movies; but on certain topics, he was more liberal. For one, he was an advocate for the lowly medium of radio. He saw great potential for collaboration between radio, newspapers, and the cinema industry. Pratley even embraced television in its early days. An episode he wrote called "Television Enters the Scene" offers a detailed response to television's detractors and the general anxieties around television's economic and cultural impact.¹¹⁵ For perspective, there were still only 146 000 television sets in Canada as of 1952, the year CBC Television started broadcasting out of Toronto and Montreal.¹¹⁶ The December 1948 broadcast deconstructs the film industry's concerns:

Those who prophecy the coming of television will spell the end of movies overlook the fact that people still enjoy going out for their entertainment, especially the housewife who

¹¹² "This Week at the Movies," April 11, 1948, LAC.

¹¹³ "This Week at the Movies," August 1, 1948, LAC.

¹¹⁴ Ellis, "The Quality Film."

¹¹⁵ "The Movie Scene," December 11, 1948, LAC.

¹¹⁶ Howard Fremeth, "Television," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation, December 16, 2013), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/television/>.

spends most of her days indoors. People welcome the opportunity of dressing in their best clothes and going out to mingle with their fellow citizens, where the lights are bright and the atmosphere is convivial. No matter how lavish one's home is it cannot match the warm glow of a super-cinema, the exciting atmosphere of a theatre before the curtain rises, or the hush that descends over music lovers when the conductor steps before his symphony orchestra. Furthermore, compared with the immense size of stage and screen the television screen looks like a postage stamp. Can such a small screen do justice to the re-production of a film or play? Television will come into its own on such days as Sundays and other times when most entertainments are not available.¹¹⁷

Over time, many of Pratley's points have expired: women have joined the workforce, the pleasures of dressing up for the movie theatre have been lost, "lavish" home theatres now rival the megaplex, televisions have grown exponentially bigger than "postage stamps," and few Sunday prohibitions have survived. Nevertheless, Pratley's screed predicted the cooperative relationship television and cinema have enjoyed for decades now.

Perhaps his most radical side emerged in his impassioned critiques of film censorship. In 1948, Hollywood and much of the moviemaking world was in the grips of the Hays Code (1930–1966), a self-imposed industry corrective intended to "clean up" movies and minimize salacious and controversial content on American screens.¹¹⁸ Notoriously, the Code was the foundation for bizarre prohibitions on depicting pregnancy or childbirth and on portraying criminal activity in ways that might inspire imitation, among many other restrictions.¹¹⁹ On account of the heavy involvement of the Catholic Legion of Decency, religious piety was another major focus of the Code.¹²⁰ The subject of censorship came up in several of Pratley's scripts. For example, in reviewing *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), he proclaimed, "Hollywood is not happy where religion is concerned, and the frequent attempts made by the movie industry to tread the path of

¹¹⁷ "The Movie Scene," December 11, 1948.

¹¹⁸ Richard Maltby, "More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of 'Pre-Code Cinema,'" *Senses of Cinema*, no. 29 (December 2003), http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/pre_code_cinema/.

¹¹⁹ James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 96–101.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

righteousness, have been marred by vulgarity and excess-sentimentality.”¹²¹ In November 1948, Pratley dedicated an entire episode of *The Movie Scene* to the topic of censorship, outlining the structure of Canada’s censorship boards and sermonizing on the issue.¹²²

His views on censorship were somewhat contradictory in that they combined his progressive and reactionary impulses. For starters, he was vehemently opposed to censorship because it “resulted in many films failing to mirror the realities of daily life and revealing the truth about historical events and biographies, and, in general, has prevented the film from being as truthful in the portrayal of world problems as the theatre is.”¹²³ The chilling effect of censorship on “honest” storytelling in the cinema was a recurring concern throughout Pratley’s criticism. He was outraged, for example, when Ontario censors banned *Rope* (1948).¹²⁴ Moreover, he viewed censorship as the by-product of film producers’ lowbrow tastes as much as of puritanical agendas: “It is possible that if film producers in the early days of movie making had not violated good taste with the low moral content of their productions, they would not have been subjected to criticism from the many women’s organizations, religious societies, and other busy bodies who are constantly telling Hollywood what to do.”¹²⁵ Again, Pratley’s Arnoldian solution is to educate the masses to demand better. His advice was to “accept [censorship] as temporarily inevitable, and to endeavour to mitigate as far as possible its retrograde effects on culture until such time as the standards of the under-privileged are raised to higher cultural levels.”¹²⁶

Pratley’s conservatism is evident in his views on Canadian cinema, about which he was generally pessimistic. He sets the tone in an early episode of *The Movie Scene* from October 1948 dedicated to domestic film production. John Rae declares, “[...] apart from the excellent documentary films produced by the National Film Board, Canada has no commercial motion picture industry of its own. No Canadian producer has succeeded in making a film that is either creditable to Canada, or which would entitle Canada to a place among leading film producing

¹²¹ “This Week at the Movies,” April 11, 1948.

¹²² “The Movie Scene,” November 7, 1948, LAC.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “This Week at the Movies,” December 19, 1948, LAC.

¹²⁵ “The Movie Scene,” November 7, 1948.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

countries. The record, such as it is, has been one of almost complete failure.”¹²⁷ Pratley’s views on Canadian cinema over the years frequently exhibited “cultural cringe,” a phenomenon described by Australian literary critic Arthur Phillips. Phillips observed that in colonized nations like Australia, there was often among critics “an assumption that the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported article.”¹²⁸ He notes cringe is a common response to local literature, fine arts, and popular music. This concept captures the ambivalence of Canadian critics towards national cinema and its fraught relationship with Hollywood and world cinema. Pratley manifested cultural cringe as a way to critique what he viewed as complacent filmmakers, apathetic audiences, and ineffectual state intervention.

To Pratley, the launch of the Canadian Cooperation Project in 1948 was an example of the latter. The deal between the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and the Government of Canada was meant to protect the interests of Hollywood in Canada while raising the profile of Canada’s movie industry. Essentially, Canada agreed not to restrict the free flow of American film rentals revenue and to stay away from homegrown film production. In exchange, the MPAA made Canada a threefold promise to produce more films on location in Canada, to mention Canada favourably in American films, and to increase American exhibition of NFB content. Pratley was sceptical:

At the present time the Canadian Government is anxious to save American dollars. In an effort to conserve dollar expenditure on American goods, overtures are being made to American film producers to come to Canada and produce. But how can any producer work here when facilities are so limited. Furthermore, how can American produced films be Canadian in content and spirit if they are financed and supervised by American companies. So far, the only results achieved by the Government’s ‘please be kind and come to Canada to make films’ plea to Hollywood, is that three films have Canadian backgrounds—but little else.¹²⁹

Hindsight would substantiate Pratley’s doubts. Canadian film historian Peter Morris notes that exhibition of NFB films in the United States did not actually increase, that the mentions of Canada in American films were superficial, and that a rise in on-location shooting in Canada

¹²⁷ “The Movie Scene,” October 3, 1948, LAC.

¹²⁸ Phillips, “The Cultural Cringe,” 299.

¹²⁹ “The Movie Scene,” October 3, 1948.

never materialized.¹³⁰ According to Morris, “The project was hypocritically sold to the public as a boost for film production in Canada, when in fact its impact was precisely the opposite. It was a blatant—and thoroughly successful—attempt to prevent the growth of the Canadian film industry and ensure that the Canadian market remained completely subservient to American interests.”¹³¹

Although the Canadian Cooperation Project effectively stopped efforts to increase production, there were a small number of domestic releases during this time, including *Bush Pilot* (1947), *Sins of the Fathers* (1948), and Quebec Productions’ *Whispering City/La Forteresse* (1947) (French and English versions). Pratley mentioned these films reluctantly on his programs, opining that they “did nothing to increase the prestige of Canadian films.”¹³² Of *Sins of the Fathers*—a commercially successful film about venereal disease—Pratley maintained, “It is not worthy of being recorded in Canadian film history.”¹³³ He would later document the film in his book on Canadian film history: “It was yet another example of a Canadian film made solely because its producers felt that only by using sensational subject matter could a Canadian film hope to succeed.”¹³⁴ By contrast, Clyde Gilmour, who was generally less concerned with the “respectability” of Canadian films, described *Whispering City* as “a good, average melodrama with music.”¹³⁵ He appreciated the “superb photography” capturing the Quebec City locations and was pleased that due to a worldwide distribution deal, “people in Texas and Rhode Island and New South Wales are just as likely to see it as filmgoers in Medicine Hat and New Westminster, and in Quebec itself, where the film was made.”¹³⁶ While Gilmour typically did not dote on Canadian productions, he was nevertheless generally more amenable than Pratley to recognize national contributions to popular film genres.

¹³⁰ Peter Morris, “Canadian Cooperation Project (1948–1958),” *Canadian Film Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation), accessed January 17, 2015, <http://legacy.tiff.net/canadianfilmencyclopedia/Browse/bysubject/canadian-cooperation-project-19481958>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² “The Movie Scene,” October 3, 1948.

¹³³ “Canadian-Made Film about VD a Boxoffice Phenomenon in Toronto,” *Variety*, August 11, 1948; “The Movie Scene,” October 3, 1948.

¹³⁴ Gerald Pratley, *Torn Sprockets: The Uncertain Projection of the Canadian Film* (Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 1987), 87.

¹³⁵ “Movie Critic, with Clyde Gilmour.”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Pratley was even more incensed when American films misrepresented Canada. The release of *The Iron Curtain* (1948), an American *film noir* about Russia-Canada relations during World War II, certainly got under his skin. Shot partly on location in Ottawa and based on real-world events, it told the story of a young Soviet spy family stationed at the Soviet Embassy, and it explored their struggle with being trapped between two vastly different socioeconomic systems, with the Soviet regime portrayed as particularly oppressive. On *This Week at the Movies*, Pratley concluded that the film was dangerously propagandistic, and that “‘The Iron Curtain’ is the type of film that should never have been made, and it is certainly not calculated to bring about that peace which the world so desperately needs.”¹³⁷ Pratley resented the way the American producers projected the United States’ own political tensions onto a Canadian canvas, thereby fanning the flames in the early stages of the Cold War. Here, the charge of inauthenticity had serious political implications: “the shortage of food and materials in Russia is used to contrast the benefits of Democracy, and frequent references are made about there being ‘plenty of everything in Canada.’ Judging from the short film that was screened at the Imperial after ‘The Iron Curtain’ this seems to be far from true. The film asked for donations to buy milk ‘for Canada’s under-nourished children.’”¹³⁸ All that aside, Pratley was willing to praise the film’s “pleasing shots of Ottawa.”¹³⁹

Ultimately, to label Pratley as a straightforward booster for all things Canadian is too simple. He supported the development of a strong national cinema but was consistently disappointed with efforts in this direction. In fact, he most often paid attention to Canadian cinema to point out its failures and conspicuous absences. What Pratley did advocate, however, was a rich moviegoing and critical scene in Canada, where moviegoers, empowered with a strong sense of identity and high expectations, could contemplate, enjoy, and appraise international cinema. Pratley’s preference for international cinema is a fitting example of Michele Hilmes’s claim that there have always been transnational forces challenging radio’s state-driven framework. The 1946 CBC report admitted a focus on Canadian programming but also vowed to bring in “good” programs from elsewhere, including “suitable programs from Great Britain” and “some of the most expensive and popular radio shows in the world from the

¹³⁷ “This Week at the Movies,” May 16, 1948, LAC.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

United States.”¹⁴⁰ Pratley’s programs were of course technically Canadian productions, but they dealt with a profoundly transnational cultural product and incorporated substantial foreign content, including movie clips and soundtrack music. As time went on, Pratley’s interest in domestic cinema grew and his commentary and programming activities earned him a reputation as a champion of Canadian cinema. Even then, his primary concern was with tasteful, edifying cinema, and only these qualities could satisfy his vision for Canadian cinema. Pratley’s shoot from the hip rhetoric suggests he viewed himself as a public intellectual in the service of the nation’s cultural health: “Driven by an audacious sense of obligation to himself and to society, [the public intellectual] tells the truth the way he sees it, and in a democracy, dispelling ignorance is perhaps his first duty. Social commitment and civil courage delineates him from other intellectuals.”¹⁴¹ Pratley’s contributions as a discriminating cultural nationalist culminated in his outspoken monograph *Torn Sprockets*.

The 1987 book represents Pratley’s impressionistic, subjective look back on Canadian film history and national cinema. The book throws Pratley’s early criticism into relief. For instance, the section on *The Iron Curtain* reveals what was in the background of Pratley’s angry 1948 review on CBC Radio. The book recounts, how, in 1946, the Russian spy Igor Gouzenko approached the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with intelligence implicating several powerful Canadians in relation to Soviet espionage and communist sympathies, including John Grierson, the founder of the NFB, and one of Pratley’s heroes.¹⁴² As for the film’s Canadian locations, which Pratley had formerly found “pleasing,” he now reveals some cultural cringe: “*The Iron Curtain* was Canadian in only its few murky location shots of dark, snowy streets and a remote Houses of Parliament. Canadians laughed at the film, but it crossed the minds of only a very few that it should have been made by Canadian film-makers, simply because few believed that Canadians could ever make films as well as the Americans.”¹⁴³

When Pratley started out on the radio in 1948, he was a pioneer of national cinema, forging new territory. By the time *Torn Sprockets* came out there was a growing literature on Canadian film. Among other publications, film scholar Peter Harcourt had released *Movies and*

¹⁴⁰ House of Commons Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, “CBC 1946,” 11.

¹⁴¹ Wiseman, “Introduction,” 5.

¹⁴² Pratley, *Torn Sprockets*, 75–76.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.

Mythologies: Towards a National Cinema in 1977, based on his 1975 series of broadcasts for CBC Radio, and Piers Handling edited the 1980 collection *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*.¹⁴⁴ In general, *Torn Sprockets* demonstrates the same kind of oscillation between cultural cringe and national pride found in Pratley's early radio programs. Certainly it demonstrates a strong antipathy towards commercial cinema, as Peter Urquhart has noted. The book often revolves around the impact of two interrelated factors on the Canadian film industry—audience tastes and market expectations—which work together to lower the quality of cinematic art. Pratley also blames the nation's colonial history for poor political and industrial decisions regarding Canadian film production, as well as the lack of public enthusiasm for domestic cinema:

The people of the empire [...] tended to devote their energies to the work of industrial and agricultural development and leave the arts to the mother country. Literature, in particular, whether written in the form of history, biography, education, the novel, play, or screenplay (then considered the lowliest of them all), and later the radio, usually came from Britain, or in Canada's case, with two languages, from France as well. The writers in the new lands, together with other artists, found the climate for their work uncertain and recognition hard to achieve in their lifetimes, largely because the public and the press, brought up to look toward London and Paris, and later New York, as the source of all achievement, failed to support many of their own artists because they believed them to be too local and limited. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the emergence of what is now called Canadian 'nationalism,' did this attitude change.¹⁴⁵

According to Pratley, Canada's geographic and political distance from its powerful affiliations (England, France, and the United States), relegated it to a sort of cultural backwater, where creativity languished due to neglect and prejudice.

Throughout the book, Pratley alternates between blaming cultural policy and imperialism for preventing Canadians from producing anything good and blaming the public for failing to recognize anything good produced in Canada. Pratley emphasizes the influence of cultural cringe

¹⁴⁴ Peter Harcourt, *Movies and Mythologies: Towards a National Cinema* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1977); Piers Handling, ed., *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980).

¹⁴⁵ Pratley, *Torn Sprockets*, 13–14.

on audiences for American movies: “The public on the whole was quite happy to see American films. It was generally assumed that anything glamorous and exciting took place south of the border. The Americans had all the heroes and the history, won all the victories and flew their flag high. They had the stars, the cowboys, the gangsters and comedians, the songs and dances.”¹⁴⁶ By comparison, Canadian life was considered too dull for the silver screen, despite the popularity of American-produced northwoods melodramas featuring Canadian locations.¹⁴⁷ Pratley asserts throughout the book that the Canadian people could lose their identity by watching too much American cinema; and yet policymakers seemed unperturbed: “Perhaps it never occurred to most of them to be concerned about the indoctrination of the Canadian public by American behavior, speech, and attitudes.”¹⁴⁸ Ironically, twentieth century cultural policy in Canada was devoted almost exclusively to stemming cultural imperialism, via efforts to strengthen markets, create local jobs in culture, and negotiate cultural trade with the United States and elsewhere. Pratley was simply never convinced of the efficacy of these efforts.

Taste politics and cultural hierarchy are key components throughout Pratley’s discussion, and moviegoing audiences rarely come out ahead. The book’s treatment of the “mass audience” is essentializing and monolithic, characterizing average moviegoers as intellectually and morally feeble: the classic “dupes” of mass media critiques. Pratley remarks,

Hollywood became the center of world film-making, and while the studios made enormous profits American films paid for their popularity with the mass audience in other ways, notably by a lack of respect on the part of intelligent audiences who were disappointed by compromises made with controversial material, and by massive forms of censorship [...]. Films had to be polite to the establishment, and the audiences they had created became a monster that required constant feeding of the celluloid reality they came to represent. Audiences no longer wanted social reality, they wanted a world of beautiful, wealthy people, and even if they were gangsters and thugs they were expected to move against a glamorous background of nightclubs and mansions.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 14–15.

¹⁴⁷ David Clanfield, *Canadian Film* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.

¹⁴⁸ Pratley, *Torn Sprockets*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

Pratley invokes a somewhat grotesque mass audience that not only lacks good taste, but has actually usurped previous “intelligent audiences” who desired more uplifting entertainment. Between impotent policymakers and the unrefined public, Pratley’s prognosis for Canadian national cinema remained bleak into his late career. For Pratley, enforcing high cultural standards was crucial for democracy. The prescriptivism and paternalism evident in his film commentary are a symptom of his nation building agenda, which prioritized Canada’s cultural autonomy, while simultaneously promoting a notion of good taste that drew on European traditions of quality and was suspicious of American popular culture.

Taste Politics in Postwar Pop Culture

Gerald Pratley and Clyde Gilmour were caught up in taste wars that were not of their own making. In the late 1930s, the American middle class showed a growing interest in culture and modern art, a trend that was met with apprehension among artists and critics, including Virginia Woolf and Clement Greenberg.¹⁵⁰ As an editor at *Harper’s Magazine*, Russell Lynes wrote a series of pieces in the 1940s documenting, parodying, and attempting to explain the nuances of taste politics and what he saw as the growing phenomenon of the “middlebrow.” The series started with “The Taste-Makers” in June 1947, in which Lynes examined the popularity of modern art, crediting museum outreach and the art world’s business savvy (or unscrupulousness) for the rise of high art and the concomitant upending of traditional cultural hierarchies.¹⁵¹

By the time Lynes published his 1949 op-ed, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” he was proclaiming nothing less than a new system of social distinction. He explains:

The old structure of the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class is on the wane. It isn’t wealth or family that makes prestige these days. It’s high thinking.

Our heroes now are not the Carnegies or the Morgans but the intellectuals—the atomic scientists, the cultural historians, the writers, the commentators, the thinkers of global thoughts who, we assume for lack of another faith, know better than anyone else how we should cope with what we call with new resonance our national destiny. [...]

¹⁵⁰ See Woolf’s un-sent letter to the editor of the *New Statesman*, published posthumously in Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1942); and Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34–49.

¹⁵¹ Lynes, “The Taste-Makers.”

What we are headed for is a sort of social structure in which the highbrows are the elite, the middlebrows are the bourgeoisie, and the lowbrows are *hoi polloi*.¹⁵²

Lynes's point was that social status had become independent from economic imperatives; in fact, in this new system, members of the highbrow class were unlikely to be very wealthy, as long as "creature comforts are in greater demand than intellectual uplift."¹⁵³ Instead, intellectuals such as academics, publishers, and, pertinently, critics, were "like poets" who would have "to be content mostly with prestige."¹⁵⁴ Lynes's uncoupling of taste from social class predates Pierre Bourdieu's theorizing about cultural capital and class mobility by thirty years. According to Lynes, "Everybody but the genuine lowbrow," who is unconcerned with conspicuous status markers, "is jockeying for position in the new cultural class order."¹⁵⁵ The new cultural hierarchy Lynes maps would be re-formulated and critiqued twenty-five years later in the work of Herbert Gans.¹⁵⁶

The highbrow individual is painted as both a steward of the arts—a "crusader" and "carrier of the torch"—and a stalwart gatekeeper, whose "function" is to "protect the arts from the culture-mongers."¹⁵⁷ The highbrow "spits venom at those he suspects of selling the Muses short."¹⁵⁸ The highbrow disdains public education and popular media (press, radio, and museums) for the threat they pose to the exclusivity and integrity of high culture.¹⁵⁹ Lynes allows for some exceptions to this rule: "Others without a great deal of hope but in ardent good faith expend themselves in endeavor to widen the circle of those who can enjoy the arts in their purest forms."¹⁶⁰ He makes a strong case for the value of the critic as an explorer at the frontiers of culture, making bold discoveries and bringing them to the masses, a role that recalls Pratley's approach to his reviewing and programming practices:

Others may quarrel with his evaluations, but the fact remains that unless there were a relatively small group of self-appointed intellectuals who took it upon themselves to

¹⁵² Lynes, "Highbrow," 19.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵⁶ Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*.

¹⁵⁷ Lynes, "Highbrow," 20, 21.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

ransack the studios of artists, devour the manuscripts of promising writers, and listen at the keyholes of young composers, many talented men and women might pass unnoticed and our culture be the poorer. Their noncommercial attitude toward discovery of talent is useful, though they have an obsession with the evils of the monetary temptations with which America strews the artist's path.¹⁶¹

In the end, both Gerald Pratley and Clyde Gilmour—even though they could be venomous—were eager to share their love of cinema and their perspectives on what moviegoers should seek in cinema culture, in keeping with the uplift mandate of the CBC.

Lynes describes a special relationship between the highbrow intellectual and the culture critic: “The highbrow is primarily a critic and not an artist—a taster and not a cook. He is often more interested in where the arts have been, and where they are going, than in the objects themselves. He is devoted to the proposition that the arts must be pigeon-holed, and that their trends should be plotted.”¹⁶² Yet Lynes praised the antagonisms that arose from criticism as productive: “The ground in which the arts grow stays fertile only when it is fought over by both artists and consumers, and the phalanx of highbrows in the field, a somewhat impenetrable square of warriors, can be counted on to keep the fray alive.”¹⁶³ Pratley was indeed such a warrior, battling the insidious forces of mass taste in order to defend his vision of a worthy national culture. Lynes explains that, for the highbrow, the middlebrow's concern with popularity could “lead to nothing but compromise and mediocrity.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, perhaps the CBC administration was concerned about mediocrity when it established Pratley instead of Gilmour as their house film critic. Introducing film talk on the radio was already a compromise, but Pratley more readily embodied the upper-brow values Lynes describes: “he keeps up on the foreign films, [...] talks about television as potentially a new art form, and he listens to the Saturday afternoon opera broadcasts.”¹⁶⁵ So concerned with “respectability” himself, Pratley's erudite style was less likely to rock the boat in the stormy seas of taste of the late 1940s.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶² Ibid., 20.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

The tone of Lynes's article was breezy and frequently funny, but it made an impact all the same. Two months later, *Life* magazine followed up with an elaborate spread on the new social system, including an amusing chart of the cultural proclivities of the four types, created with Lynes's help.¹⁶⁶ Even if Pratley and Gilmour were unaware of the buzz, the general climate of the taste wars clearly inflected the critics' rhetoric in the late 1940s, from Pratley's complaints about the diminishing standards of popular culture to Gilmour's parable of Mrs. Donahue versus the film snob. Meanwhile, the teasing address of the *Harper's* and *Life* pieces took the sting out of the harsher political critiques of Greenberg, Woolf, and Macdonald. This brand of populist humour could be used to deflate cultural authority and conceal structures and forces of power at the same time.

Embedded in what *Life* calls Lynes's "new order" is a liberal seed that views the cultural status of social agents as radically self-determined, through their own negotiations of taste conventions instead of by their socioeconomic status.¹⁶⁷ Complex and overdetermined social positions associated with economic privilege are reduced to matters of personal choice vis-à-vis taste. Bourdieu would later observe that individuals considered to have the most refined taste and aesthetic sensibility may often be viewed, by themselves and others, to have natural inclinations or aptitudes. Bourdieu points out that such social positions are the subtle result of being socialized within specific class and familial structures. At the same time, Bourdieu allows that a great deal of class mobility is available through the acquisition of cultural capital; however, this mobility requires far greater effort and the ability to carefully navigate the valences and connotations of different cultural products and experiences. Andrew Ross contends that it is for this very reason that when the taste wars of the 1930s and 1940s waned, a much-transformed concept of cultural authority could recover from anti-intellectual backlash and regain some legitimacy, even as public discourse continued to single out certain contemptuous figures, including culture critics. The next chapter considers the role of popular film critics on television, suggesting that the impetus to democratize (and further commercialize) film talk inspired both highbrow suspicion and anti-intellectual backlash.

¹⁶⁶ "High-Brow, Low-Brow, Middle-Brow," *Life*, April 11, 1949, 99–102.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

As middlebrow intellectuals and popular entertainers, film critics like Gerald Pratley and Clyde Gilmour advanced the notion that cultural authority, while valid and in some ways natural, could be accessible to “ordinary people,” and not just experts. In different ways, Pratley and Gilmour aimed straight for the middlebrow audience, capitalizing on the shift from a wealth-based class hierarchy to a culture-based intellectual hierarchy, asserting their position while undermining traditional notions of class distinction. Gilmour, in particular, made populist appeals to the listener’s “self-respect,” a common strategy to gain trust and influence. Meanwhile, Pratley, with his “minority tastes” and his zeal for education and uplift, interpellated another kind of self-respecting listener. In his case, demanding quality and authenticity from popular entertainment was not only a sign of good taste, but also a civic duty for citizens of the English-Canadian community. Though Pratley’s approach to film talk ultimately prevailed at the CBC, both critics found a place in the annals of the Toronto Film Critics Association, which honoured first Gilmour then Pratley with their Technicolor Clyde Gilmour Award for “enrich[ing] the understanding and appreciation of film in their native country.”¹⁶⁸ The third recipient of the award, television host Elwy Yost, is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁶⁸ “Previous Winners,” *Toronto Film Critics Association*, accessed May 31, 2013, <http://www.torontofilmcritics.com/p/list-of-winners.html>; “Technicolor Clyde Gilmour Award.”

Chapter Five: Love and Learning in *Saturday Night at the Movies*

On the eve of the introduction of television services by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, radio film critic Gerald Pratley hoped, “it is anticipated that programs of film appreciation will be even more fascinating and effective when illustrated by memorable scenes from the films, especially the early, but now classic, productions.”¹ This statement is striking in that it challenges the conventional view that radio professionals and film critics alike felt threatened by the powerful potential of television. Through his broadcasts, Pratley had fought hard—and succeeded—to establish film commentary as a staple of public radio. Along with Clyde Gilmour, Pratley showed Canadians that international cinema and even Hollywood film could be a respectable art, deserving of intellectual reflection and high standards of judgment. Pratley encouraged Canadian filmmakers to strive for the same respectability and high standards as had been achieved by international cinema. In other words, film talk on CBC Radio in the late 1940s disseminated formative language and ideas about the terms of engagement of Canadian cinema culture. But what might the new medium of television have in store for cinema culture? How might it once again shake up cultural hierarchies in Canada? This chapter investigates one of the most durable and influential programs of English-Canadian film talk on television, *Saturday Night at the Movies*. The TVOntario program would become, remarkably, “one of the country’s most successful television programs,” in more ways than one.² A closer look at the programs’ public education mandate and its approachable host reveals institutional assumptions about the function of film talk in community building (as opposed to nation building). Whereas Pratley’s monologues sought to elevate film talk to high culture, against the backdrop of the CBC’s nationalist agenda, *Saturday Night at the Movies* invited its audience to dialogue about popular cinema in their own living rooms. While Pratley wished to make domestic cinema global, TVOntario attempted to make global cinema local. *Saturday Night at the Movies* host, film buff Elwy Yost, cultivated an inviting ordinariness that signalled a turn away from traditional top-down cultural authority.

¹ Pratley, “Furthering,” 131.

² “Order of Canada - Elwy Yost, C.M., B.A.,” April 30, 2009, <http://archive.gg.ca/honours/search-recherche/honours-desc.asp?lang=e&TypeID=orc&id=5037>.

Movies on Public Television: The First Wave

When television started making inroads in American homes in the late 1940s, movies had already found a happy second home on radio, through Lux Radio Theatre adaptations of popular Hollywood films and radio talk about cinema in the form of film reviews, cultural commentary, and celebrity news. By 1953, ownership of television sets in the United States had surpassed 50 percent, reaching 42.9 million sets in 1956.³ A similar symbiotic relationship between film and television would seem destined, but competing industry interests led to considerable friction and, according to Jennifer Porst, “a prolonged period of sluggish progress and complex negotiations” between the two mediums in television’s early days.⁴ Due to the studios’ reticence to make their product available for free to home viewers and experimentation with alternative business models, Hollywood movie libraries did not open up for network broadcast until 1955.⁵

As with radio, developments were slower in Canada. In 1952, the country still had only 146 000 television sets; penetration reached 2.3 million sets in 1956.⁶ At first, Canadian viewers tuned into American signals. The CBC finally started broadcasting from Montreal and Toronto in 1952.⁷ According to Paul Rutherford’s history of television in Canada, movies slowly replaced theatrical productions in programming schedules in the 1950s, beginning with mostly British and European film content. Canadian broadcasters, too, gained access to Hollywood films in 1955.⁸ In 1957, CBC-Toronto launched *Great Movies*, which broadcast feature films in the Saturday night hockey time slot during the summer off-season. The program was popular and earned fourth place in the ratings in July 1961. In the 1959–1960 season, *Movies with Manings* offered Hollywood feature films before the hockey broadcast.⁹ Quebec’s Radio-Canada began

³ Timberg, *Television Talk*, 9; Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 142–143.

⁴ Jennifer Porst, “United States v. Twentieth Century-Fox, et Al. and Hollywood’s Feature Films on Early Television,” *Film History: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (2013): 115.

⁵ Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault*, 149; Porst, “United States,” 116.

⁶ Fremeth, “Television.”

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young: Primetime Canada, 1952-1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 298.

⁹ Blaine Allan, “Directory of CBC Television Series, 1952-1982,” accessed July 22, 2016, <http://www.queensu.ca/filmandmedia/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.fmwww/files/files/CBC%20Television%20Linked%20Listings.pdf>.

broadcasting films in 1959 during a television producers' strike and established its own movie anthology program by fall 1961.¹⁰

Meanwhile, independent Canadian stations relied on movies to fill their schedules and help them compete with CBC Television. Rutherford outlines the many advantages of film programming for television:

Movies promised viewers stars, familiar kinds of stories, superior production values, and a bit of variety from week to week. They were, in short, much better suited to entertaining the masses than plays. Besides, movies were cheap, safe, and profitable fare for the networks. They didn't require the collection of playwrights, producers, actors, designers, and so on, needed by plays. They could easily be edited for television, either to remove scenes that might offend or to insert commercials—or to fit the specified length of the program.¹¹

On top of it all, networks could benefit from the publicity and buzz generated by the films' theatrical runs. The mutually beneficial partnership between television (a crucial ancillary market) and film (ideal content for rounding out network schedules) soon solidified.

Before long, film criticism starting appearing on television as well, such as Clyde Gilmour's monthly film reviews on CBC Television's *Open House* in the late 1950s.¹²

In addition to its success with *Great Movies*, CBC Television engaged with cinema across much of its arts and culture programming in the 1960s. Feature film production was picking up steam in Canada, and English-Canadian film criticism was diversifying and thriving. A 1961 episode of *Canada File* called "What Is Criticism?" featured Carleton University professors demonstrating film criticism using three short films.¹³ The episode repeated a broadcast from the CBLT (CBC Toronto) program *Live and Learn*, produced in collaboration with University of Toronto.¹⁴ Several programs catered to the "film generation": *The Lively Arts* (1962–64), *Cine Club* (1964–67), *The Human Camera* (1965–66), *The Umbrella* (1966), *New*

¹⁰ Rutherford, *When Television Was Young*, 299.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Episode Guide - Open House," *TVarchive.ca*, accessed July 26, 2016, http://www.tvarchive.ca/database/18005/open_house/episode_guide/.

¹³ "Episode Guide - Canada File," *TVarchive.ca*, accessed July 26, 2016, http://www.tvarchive.ca/database/16474/canada_file/episode_guide/; Allan, "Directory."

¹⁴ Rutherford, *When Television Was Young*, 152.

Film Makers (1969), and *Spotlight on Film* (1969).¹⁵ For example, *The Lively Arts* did a feature on emerging auteur filmmaker John Cassavetes and aired the now-classic National Film Board documentary short *Lonely Boy* (1962).¹⁶ The weekly *Cine Club* would broadcast animated, documentary, and narrative short films from around the world, many of them available for the first time to Canadian viewers outside of local film societies.¹⁷ On Sunday afternoons, *Spotlight on Film* presented fifteen-minute episodes discussing international cinema news, including new wave filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais.¹⁸ In 1966, arts magazine *The Umbrella* examined a governmental funding proposal for the Canadian film industry; this initiative would become the Canadian Film Development Corporation (and later Telefilm).¹⁹ That same year, CBC Television aired *Home Movies: The Great Canadian Film Caper*, a four-part mini-series about Canadian cinema, created by Rosalind Farber and co-written with film critic for *The Globe and Mail* Wendy Michener.²⁰ Farber, who worked on *Cine Club*, *New Film Makers*, and *Spotlight on Film*, also produced the series *Canadian Film Makers* (1967), which aired works by Claude Jutra, Arthur Lipsett and Tom Daly.²¹ In spring 1969, *Canadian Feature Films* broadcasted theatrical features produced in Canada, including *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1964), the English-language version of Pierre Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* (1963), and *Drylanders* (1963).²² Quebec cinema was featured on the series *Counterpoint* (1967), a show dedicated to improving relations between Quebec and English Canada.²³

Though most programming about film culture was geared towards adults, there was also children's programming, suggesting that exposure to films and film talk was thought to be entertaining and edifying for young people as well. In the CBC program *Children's Cinema*, the star of the popular children's show *The Friendly Giant*, Bob Homme, presented "award-winning feature films from around the world and from Canada."²⁴ The program started over the holiday

¹⁵ Allan, "Directory."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "The Umbrella," Video cassette, June 26, 1966, 31-13752-1, CBC Television Archives.

²⁰ Allan, "Directory."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

period in 1969 and expanded to Saturday mornings or afternoons during the school season and eventually to summers in 1973 and 1974, before its final 1975 season. *Children's Cinema* followed on the heels of *Passport to Adventure* (1965–67), a CBC program that serialized classical Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s for broadcast in half-hour chunks over four consecutive weekdays.²⁵ The time slot, 5:00 to 5:30 p.m., was part of the after-school schedule, and the programming was geared towards “young audiences.”²⁶ Film talk was a key part of the program, with special guests accompanying each movie, including actors such as Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Arthur Treacher, and various experts, such as the director of the Museum of Modern Art's film department Willard Van Dyke, and CBC broadcaster Elwood Glover.²⁷ The program was the creation of educator and television producer Elwy Yost, who introduced the films and moderated the panels and guests.²⁸ Yost had begun appearing regularly on various CBC programs by this time, but *Passport to Adventure* was the first show he could call his own and his first foray into television film talk, a genre he cultivated and presided over on English-Canadian public television for roughly thirty years.

The path to *Passport to Adventure* was a winding one. Elwy McMurrin Yost was born in Weston, Ontario, a Toronto suburb, on July 10, 1925, two years after Gerald Pratley's birth.²⁹ Yost graduated with honours from high school in 1943 and entered the engineering program at University of Toronto, though he left after one year. He briefly joined the Canadian military, but World War II ended before he was deployed. He returned to University of Toronto and earned a degree in sociology.³⁰ Yost went on to work in a variety of jobs, including construction gigs, and stints at the Canadian National Exhibition and the circulation department of the *Toronto Star* newspaper. He worked for several years in industrial relations at Avro Aircraft Ltd., until the cancellation of the Avro Arrow project in 1959.³¹ He also taught high school English at

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Alison Buchanan et al., *Canadians All 7: Portraits of Our People* (Methuen, 1987).

²⁷ Allan, “Directory.”

²⁸ CBC News, “Elwy Yost, Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86,” *CBC.ca*, July 22, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/elwy-yost-longtime-tv-host-dies-at-86-1.1055047>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.; Adrian Morrow, “Former Saturday Night at the Movies Host Elwy Yost Dies,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 22, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/former-saturday-night-at-the-movies-host-elwy-yost-dies/article587800/>.

Burnhamthorpe Collegiate in Etobicoke, where he incorporated film education into his classes and encouraged students “to watch movies and write about them.”³² Yost had long been interested in acting, and he performed in and wrote *The Army Show* with Frank Shuster after the war, and during his time at university, he participated in the Henry Milsom Radio Workshop and acted in summer stock theatre. He was an extra in the feature film *Moulin Rouge* (1952).³³ He wrote radio plays for CBC Radio and later became a panellist on the CBC Television game shows *Live a Borrowed Life* (1959-62), *The Superior Sex* (1961), and *Flashback* (1963-68).³⁴

Yost studied television production at the BBC during a stint in England and worked as a producer and executive director at Toronto’s Metropolitan Educational Television Authority from 1964 to 1970.³⁵ In 1970, Ontario Minister of Education and future premier Bill Davis founded the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (OECA).³⁶ Yost helped to establish the regional structure of the OECA.³⁷ During this time, he also worked towards replicating the CBC’s *Passport to Adventure* model for OECA’s television station, and the program *Magic Shadows* was born on TVOntario in 1974.

Talking Film in Ontario

Magic Shadows, like its predecessor, *Passport to Adventure*, was a thirty-minute series that presented classic films in a serialized format. It aired a bit later in the evenings and ran five days a week instead of four, from Monday to Friday, with any extra time left on Friday’s episode devoted to airing movie serials from the 1930s and 1940s.³⁸ Yost presented introductory and concluding remarks for each episode, featuring extra-textual information related to the

³² CBC News, “Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86.”

³³ Thom Ernst, “Elwy Yost,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation, March 4, 2015), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/elwy-yost/>.

³⁴ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All 7*; CBC News, “Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86”; Allan, “Directory.”

³⁵ Elwy Yost, “You Are the Broadcast: An Anatomy of Television in Education,” in *A Media Mosaic: Canadian Communications Through a Critical Eye*, ed. Walt McDayter (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1971), 168; Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

³⁶ Ontario Educational Communications Authority, “TVO: Annual Report 2014-2105,” 2015, <http://tvo.org/sites/default/files/media-library/About-TVO/Annual-Reports/TVO-Annual-Report-2014-15-English.pdf>.

³⁷ Yost, “You,” 168.

³⁸ Elwy Yost, “Guidance, Teachers, the Cinema, and TVOntario,” *The School Guidance Worker* 32, no. 6 (July 1977): 29.

production or themes of the films, and sometimes putting Yost on location at diverse Ontario locales. Topics included learning to ride a horse, child actors, and historic landmarks.³⁹ As host, Yost guided “the intended audience of 12-year-olds on a journey into the magic of the screen.”⁴⁰ After the show had run for a couple of years, TVO adjusted the intended audience range to ten to seventeen year olds, and noted that the show seemed most popular with viewers aged thirteen to fourteen.⁴¹

Also in 1974, TVO and Yost launched a second program of film broadcasts, this time for adults: *Saturday Night at the Movies*.⁴² This series would become the host’s signature and an institution for the regional network and Ontario television audiences. Yost’s Saturday night tenure lasted twenty-five years, and *Saturday Night at the Movies* became “one of the most popular shows in the history of Ontario’s educational channel.”⁴³ Over the years, film talk in various guises persisted as an essential part of TVO’s programming. The network produced additional film education and appreciation programs, such as *Ciné TVO: Parlons cinéma* (a French-language film and discussion program), *Talking Film* (which repackaged interviews and commentary from *Saturday Night at the Movies*), and *Rough Cuts/The Movie Show* (which featured critics reviewing new releases, often in the style of television personalities Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert).⁴⁴ TVO and Yost helped cultivate a real appetite for film talk and incorporated this populist pleasure into their public education mandate in a way that expanded existing notions about cinema’s place in education and the cultural status of film commentary.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ontario Educational Communications Authority, “Annual Report 1974-75,” September 15, 1975, 11.

⁴¹ Yost, “Guidance,” 29.

⁴² Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

⁴³ Martin Knelman, “Elwy Yost, Host of Saturday Night at the Movies, Dies at 85,” *Thestar.com*, July 22, 2011,

http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2011/07/22/elwy_yost_host_of_saturday_night_at_the_movies_dies_at_85.html; “Order of Canada - Elwy Yost.”

⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there is a shortage of circulating materials about these programs and the TVOntario archives remain closed (except for limited online digitization efforts). Yost, “Guidance,” 32; “TVO Archive,” accessed April 19, 2015, <http://archive.tvto.org/>; *TVOntario Rough Cuts Intro 1982*, 1982, <http://www.retrontario.com/2012/05/13/tvontario-rough-cuts-intro-1982/>.

Not unlike Gerald Pratley and his work at the CBC, *Saturday Night at the Movies* and its host are remembered as unique influences in Canada's cultural field. However, when the program aired its first episode on March 30, 1974, it was one in a long line of programs presenting films on television.⁴⁵ But the TVOntario program made a lasting impression due to its longevity and its distinctive recipe, combining entertaining Hollywood classics with unpretentious educational content, such as interviews, panel discussions, and behind-the-scenes looks at the film industry. Moreover, the unusual and charismatic host became a local legend. *Saturday Night at the Movies* aired for a total of thirty-nine years, finally leaving TVOntario's program slate in 2013. Reports noted the show had once "broke new ground but now entire TV networks and web services are dedicated to movies."⁴⁶ The reminiscences were enormously affectionate, and now that sustained film talk on television is nearly obsolete (with the exception of celebrity news), a look back at *Saturday Night at the Movies* can tell us a great deal about the early role of film talk on English-Canadian public television, where it was promoted as both entertaining and edifying.

The origin story of *Saturday Night at the Movies* emphasizes that Elwy Yost was at the right place at the right time to take advantage of serendipitous circumstances. According to CBC News,

In 1974 [Yost] was establishing regional councils for OECA (later TVOntario) when general manager Jim Hanley told him OECA somehow had the rights to air three Ingmar Bergman films, and asked Yost if he had any ideas about how to air those films on educational television. What started as a limited series with the Bergman movies—*Three Films in Search of God*—became *Saturday Night at the Movies*.⁴⁷

Yost developed "educational" content and commentary to accompany the screenings of the Bergman films, in a manner that recalled *Passport to Adventure* and paralleled *Magic Shadows*. The rest was history. The absence of any signs that the organization was exploring film

⁴⁵ Ed Conroy, "That Time When Toronto Did the Movies Right," *BlogTO*, August 30, 2013, http://www.blogto.com/film/2013/08/that_time_when_toronto_television_did_the_movies_right/

⁴⁶ TVO, "TVO Announces Plan That Looks to Future," *CNW*, November 13, 2012, <http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/1069963/tvo-announces-plan-that-looks-to-future>.

⁴⁷ CBC News, "Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86."

programming for children or adults in TVO's annual reports from the preceding two years supports this out-of-left field narrative.⁴⁸

One biography of Yost emphasizes his fortuitous possession of all the qualifications to helm a new program about film culture: experience on and off camera as a television personality, scriptwriter, producer, educator, and—somewhat less assuredly—film expert.⁴⁹ Hanley, operating on a limited budget and concerned about the costs involved in broadcasting feature films, was reportedly thrilled at the prospect of covering all these bases with a single paycheck.⁵⁰ Yost, on the other hand, had to recalibrate his understanding of his own position and the meaning of “expertise.” The authors give a fanciful account of Yost's thought process:

He supposed he could be called a movie expert. Certainly movies were an important—and fun—part of his life. [...] At first his enthusiasm was shared only with his family, especially his father. Elwy had fond memories of all the times his father would slip him a nickel for a Saturday afternoon matinee, and then sit as an enraptured audience of one when his son returned and would ‘do’ the movie he had just seen, re-enacting every scene, complete with dialogue. Elwy's love of movies matured beyond simple excitement when he saw what he still considers to be one of the best movies of all time—Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. [...] Following in the tradition of great critics such as Nathan Cohen and Clyde Gilmour, Elwy began to keep a journal in which he listed and made notes about every film he saw. While in university, he and two friends even made a movie of their own. [...] While on his honeymoon, Elwy got the chance to actually be in a movie called *Moulin Rouge*. [...] It wasn't much of a career in the movies, he knew, but with that to his credit, along with all his other experiences, Elwy was happy to be considered a movie expert.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ontario Educational Communications Authority, “Annual Report 1971-1972,” August 15, 1972; Ontario Educational Communications Authority, “Annual Report 1972-1973,” September 15, 1973.

⁴⁹ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All 7*.

⁵⁰ Jim Hanley is erroneously referred to here as “Bill Hanley.”

⁵¹ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All 7*, 125–126.

This narrative calls up many of the tropes that came to represent Yost's singular qualities as a public figure and film authority who became a key component of the TVOntario brand, and, in the words of one fan, "the most perfectly employed man in the history of television."⁵²

Elwy Yost arrived on educational television as an exuberant movie fan cast as a cinema expert. Yost had earlier published an essay about educational television in which he complained that the *status quo* comprised of "dull, non-explorative, non-penetrating repetitive talk and not enough picture;" he encouraged a departure from old educational models in order to maximize the potential of moving image technology.⁵³ Yet it was still far from obvious that mainstream Hollywood cinema, the reigning casual entertainment, was compatible with public education. According to Mattias Frey, "education and morality informed discourses on the cinema from its beginnings."⁵⁴ As early as 1906, a British magazine admired Canada's commitment to didactic uses for film: "In Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal we saw better performances than in America, and there was desire shown to elevate and instruct by using films with an educational side."⁵⁵ Between 1917 and 1934, the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau's production and distribution activities concentrated on educational films serving the province's communities.⁵⁶ In the United States, the new periodicals *Visual Education* (1920–1923), *Educational Screen* (1920–1971), and *Visual Review* (1926–1938) included serious discussions of the educational uses of films inside and outside the classroom.⁵⁷

It would still be some time before the art of cinema in itself was considered an appropriate object of learning. In 1948, the British Radcliffe Report recommended developing public film appreciation. Frey cites the report as a turning point "towards film as art (rather than mere propaganda or pedagogical tool) and towards film appreciation (rather than instrumentalizing the medium as a visual prop to aid education)."⁵⁸ It was not until the 1960s that cinema education (as opposed to educational films) gained purchase in the academy. Following similar developments in the United States, Canadian universities gradually started to

⁵² Conroy, "When Toronto Did the Movies Right."

⁵³ Yost, "You," 179.

⁵⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 51.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 137–151.

⁵⁷ Groening, "Timeline," 401, 402.

⁵⁸ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 62.

offer credit courses and degrees in film studies. The Film Studies Association of Canada (FSAC) formed in 1976.⁵⁹ Going back to Elwy Yost, and considering that he was more of an “organic intellectual” than a certified authority, his taking on the host role constituted a bold act of position taking at a time when the legitimacy of cinema education was growing but still precarious.⁶⁰ Gerald Pratley had been similarly assertive three decades earlier when he sought to carve out a space for film talk as social uplift on English-Canadian public radio. By the time *Saturday Night at the Movies* hit Ontario airwaves, however, film critics like Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael, and in Canada, Pratley and Robert Fulford, were widely accepted as public intellectuals. (Incidentally, Sarris, Pratley, and Fulford all appeared on the show and contributed to the *Saturday Night at the Movies* program magazine.⁶¹) But Yost was more modest than those upper middlebrow critics, and what TVOntario attempted was relatively new in both Canada and the United States: a tightrope walk between popular film entertainment and the educational mandate of public broadcasting.

Elwy Yost: “The Movie Host with the Most”⁶²

Yost’s image as an unpretentious movie lover was integral to maintaining this fine balance. The tale of the young boy taking a nickel (sometimes a dime) from his pickle-merchant father to the picture show, in exchange for re-telling the Hollywood tales to his parents upon his return, has been repeated fondly in biographical accounts.⁶³ While the Yost family’s actual class status is unclear, this version paints a picture of a working-class boy finding delight in the accessible sanctuary of the movie theatre, and then sharing his bounty with his humble father, who was perhaps working too hard or too concerned with saving money to accompany his son. After all, Elwy Yost, Sr., did not have a pickle *empire*. This glimpse into Yost, Jr.’s formation as a film fan evokes an idyllic and democratic vision of cinema’s past, where a weekly jaunt to the movie house was a common childhood ritual available to all. The average movie ticket actually cost twenty-four cents in 1930, but the link to the fabled early days of moviegoing is palpable,

⁵⁹ Groening, “Timeline,” 413.

⁶⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 4–22.

⁶¹ Eric Veillette, “Saturday Night at the Movies,” *Silent Toronto*, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://silenttoronto.com/?p=1867>.

⁶² Conroy, “When Toronto Did the Movies Right.”

⁶³ Ernst, “Elwy Yost”; CBC News, “Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86”; Morrow, “Host Elwy Yost Dies.”

and this continuity with film history was reflected in the programming of *Saturday Night at the Movies*, which favoured readily available and affordable classical Hollywood films over newer releases. Yost treated the age of these movies as an absolute virtue and a nostalgic thrill he could share with middle-aged home viewers.

In his book *Magic Moments from the Movies* (1978), Yost discusses his “lifetime love affair with the movies,” describing his after-school visits to Toronto’s movie palaces with his aunt Georgy.⁶⁴ The narrative details and historical flourishes help establish Yost as a self-made authority on film culture, protecting him from what Bourdieu identified as the stigma of scholarly training. Yost’s “love affair” has the aura of inevitability, and his tastes appear natural and unaffected. Hidden from most origin accounts of Yost and *Saturday Night at the Movies* is the show’s long-time producer, Risa Shuman, an important decision maker and an early student of York’s undergraduate film program (established in 1969).⁶⁵

As TVO host, Yost embodied the contradiction of cinema as both important, intellectually rewarding art and as escapist recreation. This tension is also part of Yost’s story, wherein he describes his first encounter with *Citizen Kane* (1941) as an intellectual awakening (“Up till then, movies had just been fun for Elwy. But now, he saw there was something serious about them as well”).⁶⁶ Yet even though his programs took cinema seriously, the emphasis was always on the viewers’ enjoyment. On Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Yost would enter viewers’ homes, with the words “And now it’s that time, ladies and gentleman. Time to turn the lights down and put your feet up, settle back and enjoy yourselves as you watch *The Seventh Veil*,” to name just one of the hundreds of films broadcast.⁶⁷ Yost’s mode of addressing viewers was intimate, usually looking into the camera in a medium shot and speaking directly to the viewer in a conversational tone. Though technically monologues, Yost’s remarks used the devices of dialogue, such as second-person pronouns and rhetorical questions, invoking an exchange of opinions. At the end of *The Seventh Veil* (1945), for instance, Yost returned to the screen and addressed viewers: “Did you like it? Did you see it before? I’m sure many of you did. If you’re

⁶⁴ Elwy Yost, *Magic Moments from the Movies* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1978), ix, xiii.

⁶⁵ Groening, “Timeline,” 411.

⁶⁶ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All* 7, 126.

⁶⁷ Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

old timers like me, or middle timers like me, you certainly did, back around 1945.”⁶⁸ The dialogue was literalized when Yost engaged invited guests in casual interviews. It is telling that tributes to Yost refer to him as “avuncular”—just a member of the family who happened to know a fair bit about movies. As TVO producer Bruce Pittman said, “He was like the uncle you would want in your living room watching movies with you.”⁶⁹ Where Gerald Pratley’s cultural authority was more obviously paternalistic and didactic, Yost was felt to yield a gentler, more genial command. Producer Shuman, Yost’s long-time friend, once remarked, “He’s just like the viewers at home, and he never talks down to them.”⁷⁰

The homey *Saturday Night at the Movies* set was arranged like a living room, with a sofa and coffee table. This living room layout followed in the tradition of Allan Manings’s movie program from 1959–1960, on which Yost had appeared as a special guest.⁷¹ Nuria Lorenzo-Dus points to the importance of visual cues, such as set design and camera work in the signification of television discourse.⁷² In this case, the set explicitly mirrored the position of the home viewing subject, highlighting the centrality of domestic space in movie culture. Sheldon Hall remarks, “seeing films on television—especially films that are hard to find in cinemas—is a formative experience for many people, myself included.”⁷³ The late Canadian film critic David Churchill acknowledged film broadcasts on TVOntario as the beginning of his cinema education.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, a blog comment from a projectionist and film archivist offers appreciation to Risa Shuman and *Saturday Night at the Movies* for changing his life.⁷⁵ On the occasion of Yost’s death in 2011, film scholar Jennifer VanderBurgh shared a simple, poignant email eulogy with her fellow FSAC members: “Dear Elwy. My first film teacher...the only one

⁶⁸ *Elwy Yost - Four Grand Ladies*, Video cassette, *Saturday Night at the Movies*, 1979.

⁶⁹ Morrow, “Host Elwy Yost Dies.”

⁷⁰ Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85.”

⁷¹ Allan, “Directory.”

⁷² Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 5.

⁷³ “Sheldon Hall - Senior Lecturer in Film Studies,” *Sheffield Hallam University - Cultural, Communication and Computing Research Institute*, accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/c3ri/people/sheldon-hall>.

⁷⁴ David Churchill, “Film’s Greatest Fan: Elwy Yost (July 10, 1925-July 21, 2011),” *Critics at Large*, July 23, 2011, <http://www.criticsatlarge.ca/2011/07/films-greatest-fan-elwy-yost-july-10.html#more>.

⁷⁵ See “Brent” in comments section for Conroy, “When Toronto Did the Movies Right.”

to hold class every Saturday night. He will be missed.”⁷⁶ For his part, Charles R. Acland has discussed watching films on Ontario television—including the programs *Magic Shadows* and *Saturday Night at the Movies*—and their impact on his formation as a young movie fan and eventual cinema scholar. He writes,

As I understand it, the deepening of my film fandom involved an encounter with television. And a sense of scarcity sweetened the familiarity with film culture that I had begun to build. Careful attentiveness to broadcast films was the lone way I could be introduced to these works. In the years before home video, there was no archive or backlog readily available to most. There were the new films in theaters, and the closest theater to my home required a trip downtown, which meant negotiating transportation, financing, and parents.

As I recounted in the Introduction, my own access to the movies I wanted to see as an adolescent was hardly better, even as suburban megaplexes proliferated in the 1990s. Acland’s investment in broadcast films, which involved scrutinizing television listings and enacting cherished viewing rituals, gave him a profound appreciation for cinema as something that flourished beyond the theatre, including in the home.⁷⁷

At the same time, Yost’s role in some ways mimicked that of the theatrical showman of the silent cinema era, who made the performance of exhibiting and being astonished by films an essential aspect of cinema spectatorship. Buchanan et al. draw the link between the spaces of the living room and the movie theatre and suggest that Yost’s achievement was to bring the enchantment of the movie theatre into the homes of a mass audience: “Decades later, the excitement and enthusiasm of a little boy sitting in a darkened hall and watching Boris Karloff plot to rule the world still show through in Elwy. From his program’s unprecedented success, it’s obvious his feelings are shared by hundreds of thousands of others.”⁷⁸ Indeed, the notion of Yost as showman and messenger of movie magic goes all the way back to his childhood film re-enactments for his family. When Yost eventually left the living room and retired from hosting

⁷⁶ Jennifer VanderBurgh, “Elwy,” July 22, 2011.

⁷⁷ Acland, *Screen Traffic*, ix–x.

⁷⁸ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All* 7, 127.

Saturday Night at the Movies in 1999, film critic Martin Knelman lamented the gap left in Ontario homes: “Saturday nights were never quite the same after that.”⁷⁹

Knelman’s sense of loss, shared by numerous other fans, seems to have rested largely on the persuasive appeal of Elwy Yost’s persona.⁸⁰ Yost wrote his own scripts, and since he frequently integrated personal experiences into his broadcast talk, and since accounts attested to his long-term devotion to cinema, his messages could be trusted to represent Yost’s own position and beliefs, though they would necessarily also reflect the values of the program itself, as well as TVOntario’s mandate. The “production format” of *Saturday Night at the Movies* thus unified animator, author, and principal, to use Erving Goffman’s terms for the multiple speaking positions in broadcast media.⁸¹ In the case of Gerald Pratley, who in his first days in radio had other announcers performing his scripts, the author and animator were explicitly presented as different people, which may have caused confusion for listeners as to the real source (principal) of the sometimes-polemical messages. The confluence of speaking positions, wherein speakers express their own experiences, beliefs, and opinions, results in “fresh talk”, or the appearance of authenticity, which Lorenzo-Dus reminds us is always performative in broadcast contexts, dependent on “the adoption of certain markers and production formats that may be validated as authentic by their intended audiences.”⁸² Yost’s colleague Pittman attests, “What you saw on TV is exactly what Elwy was like,” and, indeed, perhaps Yost’s primary currency as a television host was his performance of authenticity.⁸³

Lorenzo-Dus suggests that “doing being ordinary” is one of today’s favoured modes of broadcast talk, and we can see Yost modelling this approach going back to the 1970s.⁸⁴ A 2005 study of breakfast television makes some relevant observations, noting not only the props indicating domestic comfort (fireplace, kitchen table), but also the centrality of the hosts’

⁷⁹ Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85.”

⁸⁰ See, for instance, online comments from fans at Conroy, “When Toronto Did the Movies Right.”

⁸¹ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 226.

⁸² Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 41.

⁸³ Morrow, “Host Elwy Yost Dies.”

⁸⁴ Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 85.

performative identities in generating an impression of familiarity and neighbourliness.⁸⁵ Research found that hosts wishing to achieve an aura of closeness “must disguise or disavow any signs of extraordinary intelligence, insight or high social status. In the case of male presenters, they must also lack exceptional good looks. These presenters need, in short, to convey an appearance of unexceptionality.”⁸⁶ Yost’s signature “moustache, bald head and wire-rim glasses” captured his folksy image, even when he dressed in suits for interviews, but especially when he dressed in jeans and a straw hat for an episode of *Magic Shadows* in which he performs his introduction from a bog as a thematic link to the Jean Renoir crime drama *Swamp Water* (1941).⁸⁷

Though Yost was known for possessing encyclopedic knowledge of film and film history, he had an air of humility and was adept at avoiding appearing pedantic. He played the everyman to the celebrity and expert guests he interviewed. In effect, Yost was exceptional mostly or only insofar as he was unusually affable, and as many have remarked, viewers related to him on a first name basis.⁸⁸ Paddy Scannell observes that the characteristically personal and egalitarian address of television is fundamental to the public/private paradox of broadcast media:

From the start, it was recognized that listening and viewing took place in the sphere of domesticity, within the spaces of the household and normatively in the small, family living-room. [...] It was recognized that broadcast output, though articulated in the public domain as public discourse, was received within the sphere of privacy, as an optional leisure resource. Within this sphere [...] people did not expect to be talked down to, lectured or ‘got at’. They expected to be spoken to in a familiar, friendly and informal matter as if they were equals on the same footing as the speaker.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Jan Wieten and Mervi Pantii, “Obsessed with the Audience: Breakfast Television Revisited,” *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2005): 21–39.

⁸⁶ Lorenzo-Dus, *Television Discourse*, 80.

⁸⁷ Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85”; *Saturday Night at the Movies : [excerpt]*, Video cassette, 1989; Elwy Yost, *Magic Shadows Intro*, Magic Shadows, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFYYj4NQyoM>.

⁸⁸ For instance, Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85”; Mark Kearney and Randy Ray, *Whatever Happened To...?: Catching Up with Canadian Icons* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2006), 54.

⁸⁹ Scannell, *Broadcast Talk*, 3.

Judging by the popularity, longevity, and likeability of the program, Elwy Yost and the producers of *Saturday Night at the Movies* understood how to strike just the right tone with the home viewing public.

It is significant that Yost was not considered a film critic; this allowed for a dynamic in which he could share his feelings with viewers, rather than pronounce his judgments. Although Buchanan et al. position him among high-profile Canadian critics like Nathan Cohen and Clyde Gilmour (above), the standard account of Yost is that his tastes were too broad and undisciplined for him to succeed as a professional film critic. Legend has it that he was briefly employed as a film reviewer at *The Toronto Star* in the early 1950s, “but his love of nearly every movie made him poorly suited to the job.”⁹⁰ Yost’s position was as a hands-on movie buff, not a discerning intellectual. In contrast to Gerald Pratley, who was formidably prolific in his film writing and programming—and who did not shy away from expressing strong opinions—Yost’s fandom manifested in his actually making a short student film, which the University of Toronto claims to be “one of the first independent films in Canada.”⁹¹ He had experience as a stage actor and worked as a film extra and television panellist before appearing in the short films *Ida Makes a Movie* (1979) and *The National Scream* (1980). Writing for the newspaper Yost once left behind, Martin Knelman said, Yost “was a fan rather than a critic.”⁹²

The populist flavour of this ambivalent compliment is echoed in the frequent allusions to Yost’s passion for cinema and repeated invocations of his unconditional “love” of movies. In one tribute, “Elwy truly loved movies with the perennial joy of a proud parent, championing even the most questionable titles and never allowing the kind of cynicism so rampant in modern film discussions to blight his magical picture show.”⁹³ According to Knelman, Yost “fell in love with the movies as a kid, and never lost his child-like devotion to them. He was hard-pressed to name a movie he didn’t like.”⁹⁴ Knelman explains that Yost’s contagious enthusiasm was transmitted

⁹⁰ Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

⁹¹ “Elwy Yost,” *University College*, 2012, <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/alumni/alumniofinfluence/elwy-yost>.

⁹² Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85.”

⁹³ Conroy, “When Toronto Did the Movies Right.”

⁹⁴ Knelman, “Elwy Yost Dies at 85.”

to viewers: “watching movies with Elwy was part of the love affair many people developed with the highs and lows of cinema history and lore.”⁹⁵

Still, for all these references to love, no one claims Yost as a “cinophile,” since his engagement with cinema was through fandom and seemed to lack the intellectual rigour associated with highbrow cinephilia. Where *philia* suggests a virtuous and cerebral love, Yost’s affection could be characterized as *storge*, the unexamined, familial love between parent and child.⁹⁶ As the story goes, movies even played an important role in Yost’s marriage to Lila Melby (referred to in some sources as Lila Ragnhild), claiming that he “became smitten with Melby after he took her to a musical on their first date, and she later told him she preferred movies like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.”⁹⁷ (This anecdote suggests that although Yost had catholic tastes, he too adhered to certain standards and viewed taste as an indicator of character.) According to his son, screenwriter and producer Graham Yost, Elwy Yost’s adoration for cinema was indeed a fundamental part of their family home: “He always loved us talking about books and movies [...]. He always thought that movies should serve a higher purpose.”⁹⁸ During Elwy Yost’s time on TVOntario, movies served the “higher purpose” of democratic, accessible broadcast education. Since Yost’s retirement as host of *Saturday Night at the Movies* in 1999, the same year he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada, the show’s vision was kept alive by subsequent hosts, Shelagh Rogers, Johanna Schneller, and TVOntario producer Thom Ernst.⁹⁹ When the program was cancelled at the end of its thirty-ninth year, the press commentary made it clear that Yost was still considered the face and the heart of the show. Yost died in July 2011 at age 86—a few months after Gerald Pratley’s death.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Andrew M. Colman, “Love,” *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹⁷ CBC News, “Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86.”

⁹⁸ Quoted in Morrow, “Host Elwy Yost Dies.”

⁹⁹ Peter Howell, “Saturday Night at the Movies, When Going to the Movies Meant Staying In,” *Thestar.com*, August 23, 2013, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2013/08/23/saturday_night_at_the_movies_when_going_to_the_movies_meant_staying_in_howell.html.

¹⁰⁰ CBC News, “Longtime TV Host, Dies at 86”; “Order of Canada - Elwy Yost.”

Saturday Night at the Movies and Film Education on Television

As Graham Yost's statement suggests, love and learning were seen to go hand-in-hand in the figure of Elwy Yost. He had no specific training either as a film expert or as an educator, but he had picked up skills in the field as a fan and a teacher. In Bourdieu's assessment of the cultural position of twentieth century autodidacts, he finds that they had a conflicted relationship with the educational system and "legitimate culture."¹⁰¹ They popularized legitimate culture and also led counter-cultures; both roles were "attempt[s] to free themselves from the constraints of the scholastic market."¹⁰² The practices of the traditional arts, including criticism, were often appropriated in the struggle to legitimize marginalized cultural fields, such as "strip cartoons or jazz."¹⁰³ Elwy Yost's endeavour was to bring cinema into the field of public education, and any gaps in his credentials could be filled in by his passion for his "two loves—cinema and instruction."¹⁰⁴ These appeals to "love"—indeed, *taste*—ensure that Yost's claim to his position in the cultural field appears natural, growing organically and authentically from his childhood predilections. Like Pratley, Yost was self-taught and resourceful. But more so than Pratley, Yost was also earthy and highly relatable, a good fit for both children's programming and primetime television. (After hosting *Passport to Adventure* and *Magic Shadows*, Yost went on to publish some children's fiction, including *Secret of the Lost Empire* (1980) and *The Mad Queen of Mordra* (1987).)

By the time TVO launched its first film talk programs, it was already established as a groundbreaking public education agency. The Ontario Educational Communications Authority, with TVOntario as its trade name, was founded in 1970, making it an early innovator of educational television services. Proto-"ETV" existed in the form of closed-circuit systems in Calgary (CARET), Edmonton (MEETA), and Toronto (META), but TVO launched the first educational, non-commercial broadcast station in Canada with CICA-TV.¹⁰⁵ In Quebec, the

¹⁰¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 77.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰⁴ Morrow, "Host Elwy Yost Dies."

¹⁰⁵ Yost, "You," 181; Television Bureau of Canada, "Television Basics 1972-1973," n.d., insert, 4-5, http://www.tvb.ca/page_files/pdf/infocentre/tvbasics_1972-73_eng.pdf; "A Brief History of Educational Broadcasting in Canada," *Canadian Communications Foundation*, accessed July 23, 2016, http://www.broadcasting-history.ca/index3.html?url=http%3A//www.broadcasting-history.ca/programming/History_of_Educational_Broadcasting.html.

educational television agency Radio-Québec struck a deal to supply programming for the French-language CBC.¹⁰⁶ Together, Radio-Québec and TVOntario established models for educational television that influenced provincial initiatives across Canada in the 1970s.

In 1970–1971, TVOntario was already conducting studies of the province’s educational needs, focusing on “ethnic groups, housewives, industrial workers, non-urban residents and youth in the Toronto area.”¹⁰⁷ At this time, TVO only broadcast on one local frequency, Channel 19, so its reach was limited. Its studies soon established that there was need beyond Toronto, and the geographical scope of its broadcasting activities expanded quickly, with Elwy Yost involved in developing regional branches by 1971. The mandate was to serve the education needs of the entire Ontario population, with particular attention to children and adults who could most benefit from distance education, including the groups listed above. Devoted to “media supported education,” the agency explored the pedagogical potential of television broadcasting, but its research and development also reached beyond broadcasting to include the production of recorded audio-visual learning materials and the development of part-time courses for adult learners in collaboration with Ontario universities. TVO embraced video recording technologies, so much so that in 1972 and 1973, it published teacher handbooks for public and secondary schools to instruct students on how to make short narrative films using the relatively new, battery-powered Portapak video camera.¹⁰⁸ This enthusiasm for teaching about film production is also reflected in the content produced for *Saturday Night at the Movies*.

The program competed in its schedule slot with the ratings behemoth *Hockey Night in Canada*, yet still managed in its prime to regularly attract 250 000 viewers to a public channel broadcast only in Ontario.¹⁰⁹ At first presenting one feature film on Channel 19 on Saturday nights, the format soon grew to a double bill, showing two consecutive films, starting at 8:00 p.m., on twenty-six Saturdays each year.¹¹⁰ The program distinguished itself from other

¹⁰⁶ “Brief History.”

¹⁰⁷ Ignacy Waniewicz, “Toward an Interuniversity Service to Provide Media Supported Distance Education in Ontario,” Progress report (Toronto: TVOntario, June 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁸ James Moriarty, *The Third Eye* (Toronto: Ontario Educational Communications Authority, 1972); J. B. Moriarty and Jack Livesley, *Behind the Third Eye* (Toronto: Ontario Educational Communications Authority, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

¹¹⁰ Yost, “Guidance,” 28.

broadcast film programs by presenting the films unedited, uncensored, and uninterrupted. *Saturday Night at the Movies* was also innovative in its production and broadcast of accompanying educational content in between the two features, primarily in the form of “high-quality interviews” that Yost conducted with actors, filmmakers, crew staff (from wardrobe personnel to stunt people), and film critics and scholars.¹¹¹ The program had an open-ended time slot, so the presentation of the two films, the interviews, and Yost’s commentary combined could last from four to six hours.

Episodes were organized around a theme or topic. In a 1977 article in which Yost asserts that the original content TVO created for *Magic Shadows* and *Saturday Night at the Movies* could be useful to high school guidance counsellors, he outlines the vision of TVO’s broadcast film programming. He notes that the range of themes was quite broad, in this “basically new approach to learning.”¹¹² At times the narrative content of films was used as an entry point for considering social themes, as in the programs “Whatever Happened to the Old Fashioned Hero?,” “The American Dream,” and “A History of the Mystery Story.”¹¹³ In these cases, the motivating principle was that cinema held keys for better understanding culture, and that film, “because of its versimilitude [*sic.*], is a powerful aqueduct to almost any topic, theme, or subject matter you can name.”¹¹⁴ In the aforementioned broadcast of the British film *The Seventh Veil*, Yost interviewed a psychologist and posed questions to his viewers exploring the issue of gender representation in the film about a concert pianist who realizes through therapy that she is in love with her abusive guardian:

Well, the question I put to you—Do you think it would be made the same way? [...] I’m wondering how you felt. Is this the sort of picture that if they shot today, they would’ve ended the same way. Would they have treated the relationship between Ann Todd and James Mason the same way? My suspicion at this stage of our evening is that they wouldn’t have done that like that. Not today. [...] But you know, I’m just an old-fashioned nut, I suppose. I love the movie. And there may be an imbalance in there, I

¹¹¹ Yost, “Guidance”; Morrow, “Host Elwy Yost Dies.”

¹¹² Yost, “Guidance,” 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

guess, as far as the status of sexes goes—certainly in terms of the enlightenments of today, but I still think it was a great deal of fun and of interest.¹¹⁵

Later in the episode, when Yost interviews the film's star Ann Todd, nearly thirty-five years after the film's release, he poses a similar question: would the women's liberation movement affect the ending of the film? Todd appears taken aback and replies, "Well, I don't think about it. I just think it's frightfully stupid. I couldn't possibly go all over the world like I do, making my own films if I had anything to do with women's lib."¹¹⁶ Arguably, Yost and Todd's glib treatment of the film's gender politics is not the keenest example of the use of cinema for rigorous educational purposes, but Yost does bring the film into the contemporary moment and offers his audience a compelling invitation to dialogue about a lively and relevant social issue. Nevertheless, this is a clear case where gender diversity in film talk expertise would be welcome.

Yost's article about educational television also made a powerful plea in support of the pleasure of popular cinema as an end in itself. He sees as one of the "uses" of cinema, "its entertainment aspects, its joys, delights, and emotions—in short its profound leisure role and, hence, its richness in the days to come to those who have been properly introduced to it and stimulated by it now."¹¹⁷ Despite the tenuous legitimacy of film education at the time, TVO adopted the stance that films and film appreciation constituted educational content in their own right. From the outset, TVO had followed a model of educational television that treated all content as fair game, provided it was given a proper context:

its genius was to place the definition, and what makes the programming distinctly different from that broadcast on the conventional television services, in the context within which the programming was presented, rather than the nature or format of the programs themselves. And it was the programming taken as a whole, within the whole context of the service, that made it educational. This allowed the educational television services to use any format, any type of program, since the authorities decided what the context should be. This, in turn, allowed provincial educational television to break out of a boring, lecture-format ghetto and develop entertaining and competitive broadcast schedules.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Elwy Yost - Four Grand Ladies.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Yost, "Guidance," 32.

¹¹⁸ "Brief History."

TVO's embrace of film appreciation was not without its detractors. For example, when the station announced in its first year of operation that it would show *King Kong* (1933), uncensored and with missing footage restored, the *Toronto Star* printed "Educational TV, Who Needs It?" The editorial fretted, "*King Kong*, a mildly diverting monster movie that some camp-addicts insist on calling a classic, pops up fairly regularly on commercial TV [...]. Why the production number over having it on the educational channel? Is this, to quote the slogan OECA uses in expensive *TV Guide* ads, 'TV of value'?"¹¹⁹ It questioned this use of taxpayer money. Yost, who counted the film among his favourites, naturally defended the agency's programming decision.¹²⁰ While he admits the educational value of the film may not be immediately apparent, he argues that the original supplementary programming was beyond reproach. The film had been presented as part of a series called "Great Beasts of the Imagination," which purported to explore the research of "Dr. McLean of Maryland" (Paul McLean) and his hypothesis of the triune brain to explain human psychological evolution. The series featured discussions with a psychiatrist, a sociologist, a nun, and an educator. Yost suggests that the use of *King Kong* to begin the series "was little different than Carl Jung's use of Greek mythology in his explorations into the human psyche."¹²¹ Yost offers that the enthusiastic participation in the on-air discussion and the positive public reaction, by survey and mail response, was proof enough of the strategy's efficacy. Ultimately, TVO's treatment of the series, which also included broadcasts of *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), was similar to the framing devices it used for the Bergman films that inaugurated the program, in which experts were interviewed on the theme "Three Films in Search of God." These examples capture well the program's general approach to humanistic topics.

Another angle of TVO's approach to film education dealt directly with filmmaking as an art and craft. Yost argued that students were increasingly interested in occupations in the film industry and they should be supported in these aspirations. For example, episodes of *Saturday Night at the Movies* examined techniques in screenwriting and cinematography.¹²² Film professionals frequently appeared on set to provide analyses of the processes, products, and

¹¹⁹ Dennis Braithwaite, "Educational TV - Who Needs It?," *Toronto Star*, February 24, 1975.

¹²⁰ Yost, "Guidance," 28.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 31.

history of production. In the program's first three years, Yost interviewed industry insiders like Robert Altman, Robert Wise, Henry Fonda, Gene Kelly, and Canadians Colin Low, Allan King, Tom Daly, and Robin Spry.¹²³ In a 1979 episode dedicated to The Craftsmen of Twentieth Century-Fox, he asks director Henry King questions such as "what does a director do?," "what does the writer do?," and "what about associate producers?"¹²⁴ Bruce Pittman observed, "Elwy was saying, this is an art form and it can be educational. Elwy had such a great knowledge, he knew [the guests'] movies inside-out and backwards, and he knew the parts of their movies they'd want to talk about."¹²⁵ It did not hurt that industry personalities could always sprinkle a little stardust on the proceedings. In time *Saturday Night at the Movies* expanded its interview slate to include trips to Hollywood to talk with filmmakers, producers, and movie stars, such as Sydney Pollack, John Carradine, Fay Wray, Jane Wyatt, Peter Bogdanovich, James Cameron, Donald Sutherland, Robert Mitchum, Susan Sarandon, and John Candy.¹²⁶ "Yost didn't interview everyone who had a role in Hollywood over the past sixty years or so; it just seems that way," joke Mark Kearney and Randy Ray.¹²⁷ The program's focus was on artists and technicians, but occasionally critics got the spotlight; John Simon, Charles Champlin, Leonard Maltin, Andrew Sarris, and Molly Haskell all appeared on the show, as well as Canadian critics Gerald Pratley and Bruce Kirkland (*Toronto Sun*).¹²⁸ When film scholar Maurice Yacowar was a guest, he praised Yost's promotion of film talk for the general public: "the idea that films can be talked about seriously [...] in between the level of mere reviewing and the academic stuff we do; I think that's very valuable."¹²⁹

¹²³ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁴ *TVO Saturday Night at the Movies 1979*, streaming video, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pexp1k--c90&NR=1>.

¹²⁵ Morrow, "Host Elwy Yost Dies."

¹²⁶ Ernst, "Elwy Yost"; Murray Battle, *Elwy: The Man Who Loves Movies*, DVD (Ontario Educational Communications Authority, 1996); "TVO Archive."

¹²⁷ Kearney and Ray, *Whatever Happened To...?*, 54.

¹²⁸ *Talking Film: The Critic*, Web, Talking Film, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://archive.tv.org/video/165274>; *Saturday Night at the Movies : [excerpt]*; *Talking Film: More Film Criticism*, Web, Talking Film, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://archive.tv.org/video/165486/more-film-criticism>; Elwy Yost, *Elwy Yost & Bruce Kirkland*, *Saturday Night at the Movies*, 1983, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UImTy0CRtdw>.

¹²⁹ Elwy Yost, *SNAM - Don Daynard Interview*, DVD, *Saturday Night at the Movies*, n.d.

Over the years, TVO repackaged much of this material for educational use in various formats. Yost encouraged educators to videotape interviews, panels, and commentary directly from television for future use in the classroom. Of course, he cautioned against recording the films themselves, for which the network did not own the rights, “hence the reason we super ‘Do Not Copy’ over the opening footage of the films.”¹³⁰ Similarly, he offered readers mail-order videotape copies, but warned that TVO must first extract their original content from the film broadcasts; here we see the roots of TVO’s current archival challenges. The *Magic Shadows* and *Saturday Night at the Movies* supplementary content was also re-edited as TVO programs *Movie Makers* and *Talking Film*, which achieved some international distribution.¹³¹ According to the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, over one thousand of Yost’s interviews were collected in the TVO archives (though the material is currently inaccessible to researchers).¹³² Fortunately, numerous episodes of *Talking Film* are available through the online TVO Archive, though the videos lack basic contextual information, such as broadcast dates.¹³³

Yost’s defense of popular entertainment and its delights as valid and valuable learning material was remarkably forward-looking in the Canadian context, despite the fact that the use of popular cinema in education can be traced back at least to the 1930s. Film historian Eric Smoodin explores the 1930s as a “golden era in film education,” when Hollywood films and “motion picture appreciation” were studied in American classrooms from public school to university.¹³⁴ He identifies film education as part of the era’s progressive education movement and finds that although there was plenty of enthusiasm for motion picture pedagogy among educators, there were also concerns regarding the effects of moviewatching on children, as evidenced in the Payne Fund Studies, which proposed a plethora of disturbing consequences for children’s physical and intellectual wellbeing. Children’s programming like *Magic Shadows* confronted any lingering concerns about cinema’s nefarious effects. If anything, Yost presented

¹³⁰ Yost, “Guidance,” 30.

¹³¹ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All* 7, 127.

¹³² Ernst, “Elwy Yost.”

¹³³ “TVO Archive.”

¹³⁴ Eric Smoodin, “‘What a Power for Education!’: The Cinema and Sites of Learning in the 1930s,” in *Useful Cinema*, eds. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 18.

such programming as a healthy foundation for young people adapting to a highly mediated environment. He wrote in 1977,

In this multimedia age [...] students have to be constantly alerted to the media available to them and to what these media contain if they are going to be able to cope with what is expected of them. Literacy is no longer the province of print. Its syntax now includes picture and sound and, more accurately, a complicated interbreeding of all three. [...] The message is not always easy to determine because of the work and skills necessary to truly read film, but make no mistake about it, the message is there.¹³⁵

Film education was important not just for teaching children about the wider world but also for illuminating the specificities of moving picture communication.

Yost was also inventive in using television as a nexus of film pleasure and education. The marriage of the two earned scrutiny by commentators and commercial broadcasters, who “wanted educational television to be boring and not competitive, especially around the use of movies.”¹³⁶ Viewers were accustomed to seeing films on television, but the new “educational” context demanded that they actively tend to the cultural meanings and value of these popular artifacts. Yost cultivated accessible and inviting film talk as an entry point into the expansive world of cinema—all from the comfort of the living room. Even while elevating the intellectual profile of cinema, Yost’s earthy, unpretentious brand of authority kept his film discussions planted firmly on the ground. Himself a conscientious movie buff from childhood, Yost trusted his audiences, even the young ones, to learn from cinema without heavy-handed inducements. After Yost retired from *Saturday Night at the Movies*, the last of the replacement hosts was film critic Thom Ernst. Producer Shereen Ali said of Ernst in an ad, “Thom has such an affection and love of film. And he’s had it since he was a kid; that’s something that you can’t fake,” reviving the rhetoric that had always surrounded Yost as a cinema fan.¹³⁷ For his part, Ernst said, “I grew up with Elwy Yost, watching these movies, and I grew up with his knowledge of film, and I got a

¹³⁵ Yost, “Guidance,” 31, 32.

¹³⁶ “Brief History.”

¹³⁷ *Behind the Scenes of Saturday Night at the Movies*, streaming video (TVOntario), accessed July 26, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SwIqJWGT3I&feature=relmfu>.

love of film in part because of Elwy Yost.”¹³⁸ Through to its final iteration, *Saturday Night at the Movies* perpetuated its distinctly personal approach to film culture and education.

Yost as National Symbol?

Elwy Yost’s adoration of Hollywood cinema is well documented, but his connection to Canadian cinema is less obvious; this ambiguity is captured in the one-liner, “Elwy has become so well-known from his television appearances that sometimes children who meet him are surprised to find out he is ‘only a Canadian.’”¹³⁹ Unlike Gerald Pratley, Yost was never held up as a paragon of cultural nationalism. For one thing, TVOntario was clearly a provincial initiative, as with other educational television broadcasters across Canada (e.g. British Columbia’s Knowledge Network and Radio-Québec/Télé-Québec). More saliently, the programming of *Magic Shadows* and *Saturday Night at the Movies* revolved around American and, to a lesser extent, European films. As a result, the majority of interviews were with American and international guests, particularly once the producers started travelling to Hollywood. Former producer Risa Shuman attributes some of the program’s archiving woes to the practice at the National Archives (now Library and Archives Canada) of prioritizing Canadian content. Allegedly, most of TVO’s interviews with movie personalities did not qualify.¹⁴⁰ It is telling that in Yost’s 1978 book *Magic Moments from the Movies*, in which he describes in narrative detail scenes from well over one hundred feature films that made a deep impression on him, he includes only one Canadian film, the canonical *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971). An avid and eclectic cinema fan, Yost nevertheless did not find much inspiration in Canadian cinema. Even that decade’s major critical successes did not register. Yost’s choices, here and in his television programming, reflected the widespread assumption that cinema “magic” belonged to Hollywood.

Regardless, Yost and *Saturday Night at the Movies* were not oblivious to the political and cultural pressures imposed by the efforts to construct a Canadian national cinema. As noted above, Canadian filmmakers and critics did appear on the program with some regularity. On the occasion of the National Film Board’s fortieth anniversary, for example, the producers threw down the gauntlet, hosting a six-hour-plus marathon, with thirty-two short films and clips and

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Buchanan et al., *Canadians All* 7, 127.

¹⁴⁰ Gleaned from a telephone conversation with Risa Shuman on January 23, 2015.

numerous interviews, including those with nine NFB representatives.¹⁴¹ For the NFB's fiftieth anniversary, the episode featured interviews with Gerald Pratley and Canadian film producer Colin Low, and the NFB feature comedy *Why Rock the Boat?* (1974).¹⁴² Ultimately, such special events drew attention to Canadian cinema but also reinforced the view of national cinema as marginal; Canadian feature films were not a significant part of TVO's regular programming, nor were they an explicit part of the broadcaster's film appreciation mandate.

Yost once appeared in an NFB short comedy film that trafficked in Canadian cultural cringe, revealing that he was, after all, "only a Canadian." *The National Scream* (1980) satirizes the obsessive search for Canadian cultural identity, capturing in mock-documentary style the police investigation and public reaction—francophone, anglophone, and allophone—to the disappearance of the "national symbol," an actual beaver that lives in a posh chamber on Parliament Hill.¹⁴³ The title recalls, *The National Dream*, Pierre Berton's book and television mini-series from the early 1970s. Among many other now-familiar tropes of Canadian national soul-searching, the film points out that Canadians tend to underestimate their own accomplishments, relying on experts from outside to acknowledge the country's contributions. In the film, academics including a German theorist and an African "standardologist" attempt to explain Canadians to themselves. Yost, introduced as a "noted Canadian," and the author of a report on the incident of the missing rodent re-appears throughout the film as a sort of master of ceremonies. The conclusion of the film reveals that the beaver's attendant set the beaver free in an act of mercy. Citizens agree that the symbol was not as important as the beaver's freedom; the consensus is that, in the end, the nationalism the symbol represented is at best redundant and at worst destructive. Yost remarks, "simple humanitarianism is more meaningful than any symbol or ideology."¹⁴⁴ It is a fitting analogy for the figure of Yost himself, whose highly personal approach to film talk and rapport with Ontario television audiences seemed to nullify the prevailing nationalist discourses of Canadian film culture.

¹⁴¹ *Saturday Night at the Movies : [excerpt] [Walking]*, Video cassette, Saturday Night at the Movies, 1979; Yost, "Guidance."

¹⁴² *Saturday Night at the Movies : [excerpt]*.

¹⁴³ Robert Awad and David Verrall, *The National Scream*, Web, 1980, https://www.nfb.ca/film/national_scream.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Film Talk with Siskel and Ebert

If Canada's educational broadcast television movement of the 1970s opened up new spaces and functions for film talk—particularly on TVOntario—it was thanks to an international ground swell of interest in film commentary. Not only did the CBC include film talk in several of its arts and culture programs throughout the 1960s, but Canadian viewers would have also seen an increasing number of high profile American film critics appearing on network television to talk about movies. Through these programs, Canadians were called upon to participate in a global film conversation. Even the relatively parochial *Saturday Night at the Movies* promoted a cosmopolitan outlook on Hollywood film. Populist film champion Elwy Yost solidified the place of international cinema within the Canadian home and helped educate viewers on how to think and speak about film history and aesthetics. As the film generation peaked in Canada and the United States, average moviegoers knew more about cinema and its critics than ever. But in the end, the same ascent of film criticism that led to television saturation also foretold the decline of the field's legitimacy. Film talk on television has been widely faulted for popularizing, and thereby undermining, the expertise and authority of film critics.¹⁴⁵ In the starring roles of this narrative of failure are Yost's contemporaries and fellow innovators of educational film talk, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. The rest of this chapter traces the rise and fall of populist film talk and considers how public film education presaged a crisis of legitimacy.

In September 1975, Siskel and Ebert's *Opening Soon at a Theater near You* debuted on Chicago public television (WTTW), a regional network, like TVOntario, dedicated to public education through its association with the Chicago Educational Television Association.¹⁴⁶ Coincidentally, like Elwy Yost, Roger Ebert started out on TV talking about the films of Ingmar Bergman, or at least this is the story according to the show's producer, Thea Flaum.¹⁴⁷ This same year Ebert won a Pulitzer Prize for his writing, the first person to win this accolade for film criticism; his award was regularly mentioned in the show's introduction. Ebert had no formal film education when the *Chicago Sun-Times* unexpectedly appointed him film critic in 1967, and he learned the ropes on the job by talking to filmmakers, by reading established film critics like

¹⁴⁵ See Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 102–110.

¹⁴⁶ Joel Sternberg, "Siskel and Ebert: U.S. Movie Review Program," *Museum of Broadcasting Communications*, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/siskelandeb.htm>.

¹⁴⁷ Steve James, *Life Itself*, M4V, documentary (Video Services Corp., 2014).

Dwight Macdonald, Pauline Kael, and Robert Warshaw, and by struggling to figure out how to write about films he “didn’t understand,” such as Bergman’s *Persona* (1966).¹⁴⁸ The WTTW website claims *Opening Soon* was the “first movie review series on television,” but it should be noted that film reviewers had considerable television visibility at the time, regularly appearing as guests on talk shows. Judith Crist, film critic for *The New York Herald Tribune* and *TV Guide*, had been *The Today Show*’s resident film critic from 1963 to 1973.¹⁴⁹ Viewers could find John Simon on *The Dick Cavett Show* and other discussion programs and see Rex Reed regularly on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.¹⁵⁰

Shows like *Saturday Night at the Movies* and *Opening Soon* posited talk about film as not only entertaining but also educational, indicating a cultural shift from the days when Gerald Pratley strained to present film as a serious art on public radio. The film generation had secured cinema’s “consecrated” status, and there was more leeway for cultural authorities like Elwy Yost and Siskel and Ebert to be passionate and have fun.¹⁵¹ The earliest episodes of *Opening Soon* are actually quite sombre and wooden, but over the years Siskel and Ebert developed a spirited, upbeat, and entertainingly confrontational rapport. By maximizing the potential of compelling film talk, the program ultimately offered a new way for viewers to engage with cinema culture: “[...] this wasn’t just a show about movies. It was also a show about movie reviewing, movie embracing, moviegoing. A shared awe and love of pictures projected in the dark.”¹⁵²

The program’s premise revolved around the central two figures: Gene Siskel—the Yale-educated critic of the upscale *Chicago Tribune*—and Roger Ebert—the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic for the working-class *Chicago Sun-Times*. The two traded opinions on a handful of new film releases, with an emphasis on popular theatrical releases, but with some attention also to film festival fare. Over the years and through various iterations of the show (Siskel died in 1999 and Ebert left the show in 2008 and died in 2013), “Siskel & Ebert” were household names

¹⁴⁸ Ebert, *Life Itself: A Memoir*, 153–154.

¹⁴⁹ Douglas Martin, “Judith Crist, a Blunt and Influential Film Critic, Dies at 90,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/movies/judith-crist-film-critic-dies-at-90.html?_r=0.

¹⁵⁰ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 257–260.

¹⁵¹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 123, 258.

¹⁵² Todd Leopold, “Roger Ebert, Looking at the Light,” *CNN*, January 2, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/15/opinion/roger-ebert-life-itself-essay/>.

known for their provocative and diverting film debate and for initiating the “thumbs-up-thumbs-down” style of film reviewing.

The programs followed the same format for three decades, two men exchanging opinions on four or five films, most of them new releases.¹⁵³ The characters were positioned as professional rivals, writing at competing newspapers that represented different demographics. Numerous accounts attest that the two men did not want to work together, but that being forced to do so in pursuit of career opportunities eventually led to an amicable partnership.¹⁵⁴ Their contrasting looks and personalities were emphasized for dramatic (and sometimes comic) effect, with Siskel taking on the role of the erudite, discerning—and balding—sophisticate, and Ebert inhabiting the role of the passionate, effusive—and fat—everyman. As their popularity grew and the show moved to PBS, the caricatures became more and more reductive, until the pair was performing their own self-mocking clashes of taste.¹⁵⁵ The new national show *Sneak Previews* earned the highest ratings in PBS history.¹⁵⁶ According to Jerry Roberts, the show was even an occasion for weekly get-togethers among friends. The show went far beyond film criticism: “Aside from the general consumer and film buffs, some Americans who cared nothing about film criticism tuned in weekly to see if Gene and Roger were going to argue.”¹⁵⁷ When Tribune Entertainment purchased the show for commercial syndication in 1982 and the critics left PBS, they brought with them their arbitrating thumbs and bickering, but the explicit didactic elements of the early episodes disappeared for good.¹⁵⁸

Ebert’s reputation as a populist grew stronger over the years. He was quick to use the television program to spread the word about foreign art films and micro-budget indie films. Television producer and writer Glen Mazzara said that Ebert “secularized film criticism” and

¹⁵³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 271.

¹⁵⁴ Pierre Perrone, “Obituary: Gene Siskel,” *The Independent*, February 23, 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-gene-siskel-1072625.html>; James, *Life Itself*.

¹⁵⁵ See videos at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-05-22/features/9705220300_1_phooeey-chickens-movies and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMIioyKsaQg>; Roger Ebert, “In Memoriam: Gene Siskel,” in *Roger Ebert’s Movie Yearbook 2010* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel, 2009), 560–63.

¹⁵⁶ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 271.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 274; Perrone, “Obituary: Gene Siskel.”

opened up film talk for ordinary people, beyond intellectuals trained in film theory.¹⁵⁹ *Sneak Previews* producer Thea Flaum said “the reason Roger loved being on television is that at his heart, he really is a populist. Roger believes that everybody oughtta be able to ‘get’ a movie.”¹⁶⁰ Ebert also spoke out in support of increased diversity in American film culture, using his platform at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, his film festival, Ebertfest, and his prolific blog activity in recent years to champion black film, to increase the visibility of indie films made by women and other marginalized groups, and to help diversify American film criticism with his team of international “Far-Flung Correspondents.”¹⁶¹

Like Elwy Yost, Ebert’s position in the field of film criticism was to combine a determined autodidact intellectualism with (somewhat sentimental) populism, and his primary tool for doing so effectively was his perceived “love” of cinema and “natural” taste dispositions, which buffered temptations to see him as pedantic, even when he dug in his heels on a point. Like Yost, some viewers saw Ebert as “avuncular,” though the sometimes-prickly and highly opinionated Ebert wore the label less comfortably.¹⁶² Ebert’s reputation is complex and multi-faceted, and, importantly, it changed substantially over time. Considering Ebert’s rehabilitation from the jocular “fat one” of the 1970s and 1980s to the more recent, adoring portrait of a populist hero and defender of film culture, which emerged when he fell ill with thyroid cancer and lost his ability to speak in 2006, offers important clues about developments in popular film discourse, the role of film talk on television, and shifting but persistent attitudes regarding cultural authority and taste hierarchies.

Over the years there has been pushback against Siskel and Ebert’s prominence in critical culture. As seen in Chapter One, film criticism history has generally overlooked the pair’s

¹⁵⁹ “Remembering Acclaimed Film Critic Roger Ebert,” *Q* (CBC Radio, April 5, 2013), <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/Q/ID/2371439367/>.

¹⁶⁰ James, *Life Itself*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Aisha Harris, “Roger Ebert Was a Great Champion of Black Film,” *Slate*, April 4, 2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/04/04/roger_ebert_and_black_film_how_the_critic_championed_minority_film_makers.html; “‘One Person Can Make a Difference’: Ava DuVernay Remembers Film Critic Roger Ebert’s Early Support,” *Democracy Now!*, January 27, 2015, http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/27/one_person_can_make_a_difference; “Roger Ebert’s Far Flung Correspondents,” *RogerEbert.com*, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.rogerebert.com/far-flung-correspondents>.

¹⁶² Perrone, “Obituary: Gene Siskel.”

television work or else brought it up just to dismiss it as unsophisticated and overly commercial.¹⁶³ Detractors have disparaged the “thumbs-up or thumbs-down” approach the television stars initiated.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, film scholar David Bordwell developed a professional friendship with Ebert, regularly attending his film festival and contributing a foreword to the critic’s *The Great Movies III* (2010). Bordwell has in recent years challenged the “adversarial” relations between academics and critics.¹⁶⁵ For his part, Ebert was not impressed with the state of academic films studies, according to an interview in which he called film theory “a cruel hoax for students, essentially the academic equivalent of a New Age cult, in which a new language has been invented that only the adept can communicate in.”¹⁶⁶ He makes an exception for Bordwell, whom he deems “our best writer on the cinema.”¹⁶⁷

While now celebrated among fans for helping democratize film culture and criticism, the Siskel and Ebert television series was in its time frequently derided and mocked, as explored in Chapter Six. Film critic for *The Globe and Mail* Liam Lacey recalls the highbrow backlash against the program and its “thumbs” method of film reviewing, which was accused of being “reductive” and of “dumbing down” the practice of film criticism, as compared to the more reputable work of critics like Pauline Kael.¹⁶⁸ Lacey proposes, however, that the actual legacy of the program was to bring a wide variety of documentaries, art films, and international cinema to a mass audience. Similarly, Brian D. Johnson of *Maclean’s* notes that naysayers originally put down Ebert for “vulgarizing” film criticism, but that these critics were likely not reading his “brilliant” writing in the *Sun-Times*.¹⁶⁹ Both of these interpretations praise the program’s contributions, but only insofar as Siskel and Ebert exceeded the limitations of popular television.

¹⁶³ See for instance Bywater and Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism*.

¹⁶⁴ See Carroll, *On Criticism*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ David Bordwell, “Academics vs. Critics: Never the Twain Shall Meet,” *Film Comment* 47, no. 3 (June 2011): 38.

¹⁶⁶ David Weddle, “Lights, Camera, Action. Marxism, Semiotics, Narratology.,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2003/jul/13/magazine/tm-filmschool28>.

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in David Bordwell, *How Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), back cover.

¹⁶⁸ Hannah Sung and Liam Lacey, *Roger Ebert, Populist Pioneer in Film Criticism*, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/arts-video/video-roger-ebert-populist-pioneer-in-film-criticism/article10804677/#video0id10804677>.

¹⁶⁹ “Remembering Roger Ebert.”

The tension in the reception of Siskel and Ebert is nowhere more evident than in a 1990 debate between Ebert and fellow film critic Richard Corliss, published in *Film Comment* magazine. In his opening jab, “All Thumbs or, Is There a Future for Film Criticism?,” Corliss adopts a blustery tone in his attack on all forms of film criticism on television, making a distinction between “real critics” (print critics) and television critics, and between “writers” and “performers.”¹⁷⁰ He points to a general decline in the quality of film commentary in the wake of the 1970s film generation, after the influence of James Agee, Manny Farber, and Cecilia Ager in the 1940s and Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael in the 1960s had faded. Corliss blames both academic film scholarship for discrediting upper middlebrow film criticism and television film talk for debasing what that criticism had achieved. Video clips were being used as a glib replacement for intelligent discourse. Where Siskel and Ebert could hypothetically use clips to get a closer look, the program “does not dwell on shot analysis, or any other kind of analysis. It is a sitcom (with its own noodling, toodling theme song) starring two guys who live in a movie theater and argue all the time. [...] ‘The fat guy and the bald guy.’”¹⁷¹

Corliss pulled no punches, making his general disdain for lowbrow television clear. He suggested television reviews reduced criticism to a thoughtless consumer service ruled by thumbs and quantitative star ratings, a trend that threatened to degrade the standards of print criticism as well. For Corliss, “elevated” film criticism was going extinct, and he did not “want junk food to be the only cuisine at the banquet.”¹⁷² Corliss’s colourful invective is hard to take at face value, but when he declares, “To understand pictures, we still need words,” it is clear that words in *print* were what mattered to him and that he viewed film talk on television as antithetical to intelligent exchange.¹⁷³ Instead of welcoming talk television as a broadening of the public sphere, Corliss saw it as a mouthpiece for the barbarians at the gates.

Ebert responded to Corliss’s article in the next issue of *Film Comment*, arguing that the quality and quantity of film discourse had in fact increased since the mid-1960s, when there was not only an absence of film criticism on television, but also no popular film magazines and far fewer newspapers publishing film reviews. Ebert declares, “No art form is covered more

¹⁷⁰ Corliss, “All Thumbs,” 14, 15.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 15, 18.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18.

completely and at greater length in today's newspapers than the movies."¹⁷⁴ Ebert argues that one of the main achievements of his television show was to bring knowledgeable film discourse to places and people that lacked a thriving, diverse film culture: "When we review a film that is not being released simultaneously on 1,600 screens, our review is the only local exposure that film receives in many cities."¹⁷⁵ He points out that this kind of access was unheard of in the "golden age" of the late 1960s, when many households had no exposure to film commentary. Ebert's defense of accessibility is combined with rhetoric about uplift and even education: "When we have an opinion about a movie, that opinion may light a bulb above the head of an ambitious youth who then understands that people can make up their own minds about the movies. And when we try to explain why *Do the Right Thing* is a better film than *Driving Miss Daisy*, although admittedly less enjoyable, it is a message not previously heard in many quarters."¹⁷⁶ Ebert also highlights the fact that one of Siskel and Ebert's hallmarks—beyond thumbs and bickering—was in-depth "special editions" exploring timely topics in film culture, such as censorship, letterboxing versus pan-and-scan, and developments in black cinema. Fifteen years after their debut, having left Chicago public television and much of the initial format behind, Ebert clearly still considered public education an important facet of his television work.

Ebert also challenged Richard Corliss's preoccupation with print media, pointing out that although television reviews had time constraints, his show frequently produced discussions of individual films that were longer than Corliss's own reviews in *Time* magazine. Plus, the program's rules against frivolous scripted jokes helped it maintain journalistic integrity. Ebert contended that there was probably more of an audience for "serious" film discourse than ever, even if film criticism on television served "a different function, for a different audience."¹⁷⁷ In the last word in the debate, published alongside Ebert's piece, Corliss ceded one or two points, but reiterated that he would rather not have to pander to mainstream audiences because "Popular taste, even sophisticated popular taste, is cramped and conservative—especially as it relates to film."¹⁷⁸ Corliss states, "The only solution, if a critic is both to speak his own mind and act as a

¹⁷⁴ Ebert, "All Stars," 46.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Richard Corliss, "Then Again," *Film Comment* 26, no. 3 (1990): 51.

bellwether of audience whim, is to write about a film: ‘It stinks. You’ll love it,’” making his contempt for the average moviegoer abundantly clear and calling into question his relationship with his own readers in the general-circulation *Time* magazine.¹⁷⁹

This kind of jostling for position has always been characteristic of the field of film criticism (according to Mattias Frey), and, indeed, any field of cultural production (according to Bourdieu).¹⁸⁰ When Corliss was asked about the infamous exchange two decades later for the documentary *Life Itself*—which came out less than a year before Corliss’s death—he looks a bit sheepish but explains that the film and critical industries at the time were left to contend with the massive impact of Siskel and Ebert: “two thumbs up became everything for a movie [...]”¹⁸¹ Film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum also laments that film distributors came to focus disproportionately on Siskel and Ebert at the expense of other critics, and that the program’s consumerist approach was corrosive for film culture.¹⁸²

Perhaps Roger Ebert was vindicated when, by the time he fell ill, he had become one of the world’s best-known popular film critics, and also one of the most widely respected film experts—not to mention the head of a very lucrative brand. He held fast to his mission to educate and guide:

I believe a good critic is a teacher. He doesn’t have the answers, but he can be an example of the process of finding your own answers. He can notice things, explain them, place them in any number of contexts, ponder why some ‘work’ and others never could. He can urge you toward older movies to expand your context for newer ones. [...] He can argue that you will have a better time at a better movie. We are all allotted an unknown but finite number of hours of consciousness. Maybe a critic can help you spend them more meaningfully.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸⁰ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*; Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

¹⁸¹ James, *Life Itself*.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Roger Ebert, “‘Critic’ Is a Four-Letter Word,” *Roger Ebert’s Journal*, September 18, 2008, <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/critic-is-a-four-letter-word>.

When Ebert died, President Barack Obama made a public statement.¹⁸⁴ NPR lauded Ebert, who “wrote simply, abundantly, gorgeously, and on deadline for 46 years at the *Chicago Sun-Times*.”¹⁸⁵ A. O. Scott noted that twenty years after Corliss’s critique, amid an explosion of online film writing and film talk, the show Siskel and Ebert had pioneered, “now, in its twilight, looks exalted and heroic.”¹⁸⁶ The two critics had become the old guard, and their onscreen reviews came to grace the DVD extras of contemporary classics such as *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Hoop Dreams* (1994), and *Jackie Brown* (1997).

Before Ebert could be fêted as a hero, however, he would pass through two decades of media overexposure and public teasing. It turns out that on the other side of the film generation and the “golden age” of criticism there developed a widespread cynicism towards outspoken critics such as John Simon, Pauline Kael, and Andrew Sarris, as evidenced by the remarkable popularity of mocking media representations in the late 1970s and 1980s. Even the more populist critics, like Judith Crist, Gene Shalit, and Siskel and Ebert, became favourite subjects of farce. It is true that many of the parodies were affectionate; but what should we make of the implication that the public had grown less willing to take film critics seriously? Moreover, Canadian television—especially SCTV—was a leading satirizer of film critics and criticism; what did this reveal about the role of international broadcast film talk in Canadian film culture at the time? What relationship did TVOntario’s film education programs have with the turning tide of public film criticism? These questions are the topic of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁴ “Statement by the President on the Passing of Roger Ebert,” *The White House*, April 4, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/04/statement-president-passing-roger-ebert>.

¹⁸⁵ Scott Simon, “Roger Ebert: Elegance and Empathy,” *Simon Says*, April 6, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/04/06/176387186/roger-ebert-elegance-and-empathy>.

¹⁸⁶ Scott, “A Critic’s Place.”

Chapter Six: The Decline of Cultural Authority: Undermining the Professional Critic

Culture critics have long been subject to suspicion, derision, and scorn in popular culture. Samuel Johnson, himself a literary critic, wrote in 1759, “every man can exert such judgment as he has upon the works of others; and he whom nature has made weak, and idleness keeps ignorant, may yet support his vanity by the name of a Critick [*sic*].”¹ In his 1779 play *The Critic*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan also satirizes the “vanity” of theatre critics and their grandiose prose.² Two hundred years later, theatre critics were still used as a cherished comedic device, as evidenced by the many spoofs of *Masterpiece Theatre* host Alistair Cooke (e.g. on *Saturday Night Live*, *The Carol Burnett Show*, and *Sesame Street*) and the churlish Statler and Waldorf characters on *The Muppet Show*.³ In 1977, Global television in Canada aired an episode of *The Great Debate* called “Resolved: That Critics Should Be Horsewhipped,” featuring actor John Gielgud and dance and theatre critic for *The New York Times* Clive Barnes. In *Fringe and Fortune*, Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. describes the 1989 play *A Grand Scam*, a scathing satire of theatre criticism and the avant-garde.⁴ Cinema has also been unkind to critics, as, for example, with Woody Allen’s hell-bound book critics in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), the symbolically named restaurant critic Anton Ego in *Ratatouille* (2007), and the hopelessly bitter and corrupt theatre critic of *Birdman: Or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014).

Film critics have perhaps garnered the strongest hostility of all. This chapter will document the trend in mocking representations of film critics that started in the late 1970s and continued into the 1990s. I will present three interrelated factors in the popular backlash against cultural authority that continues to inform the position of film critics today. First, the majority of the parodies that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s were a reaction to cinema overstepping its proper boundaries as a popular art within the cultural hierarchy. This theme was remarkably persistent in popular comedy and clearly legible to viewers. After describing some of the parodies that operated on this first principle, I will suggest some additional developments that

¹ Samuel Johnson, “The Idler,” in *The Essays of Samuel Johnson* (Toronto: W. J. Gage and Co., 1888), 309.

² Richard Brinsley Sheridan, “The Critic,” in *The School for Scandal and Other Plays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 289–337.

³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 251.

⁴ Shrum, Jr., *Fringe and Fortune*, 3–5.

furthered the de-legitimization of film criticism, namely allegations of unprofessionalism in the critical industry and frustrations with the lack of cultural and gender diversity in film criticism. In particular, I will consider spoofs on television comedy programs such as *SCTV* and *Saturday Night Live* that rehearsed prevailing ideas that film critics were at best arrogant and irrelevant, and at worst deceitful and delusional. While these parodies should not be treated as straightforward expressions of public contempt, they offer insight into film critics as one of the period's most recognizable signifiers of pretentiousness and hubris. Examples from Canadian television are particularly revealing about a tendency to disavow the American brand of critical authority and can also be read as a rejection of the greater hegemony of commercial popular culture coming from the United States. The *SCTV* parodies of critics such as Pauline Kael and Gene Shalit suggest a Canadian scepticism about the ascendancy of American cinema and the bold voices of its "film generation." The sketches explicitly question the consecration of popular cinema as high art and illuminate the persistently uncertain status of public film critics. Characters such as Brock Linahan and Jiminy Glick exploit suspicions about both critical authority and Canada's participation in the theatre of Hollywood.

Poking Holes in Film Critic Pedantry

One key argument of this thesis is that cinema has always danced somewhere between low and high culture and film critics have been both agents and products of this tension. In the 1940s, Canadians Clyde Gilmour and Gerald Pratley took contrasting approaches to incorporating film talk into national public radio, the former posing as an everyman and the latter performing social uplift. In the mid-1970s, in the wake of film criticism's golden age, Elwy Yost offered film commentary as a form of televised public education in the living rooms of Ontario. As a result of cinema's commonness, the value of film criticism as intellectual labour has generally been uncertain. Manny Farber and Gerald Pratley helped to elevate the cultural status of popular film commentary in the late 1940s, but the form would continue to rank below theatre and book criticism until the "golden age" of the 1960s and 1970s, when a cadre of high profile American film critics crystallized in first-class periodicals and on television talk shows. But even—or especially—at the peak of film criticism's prestige, the more didactic, obscure, and literary cogitations on Hollywood entertainment must have seemed a little unreasonable to some observers, especially if the satirical backlash of the late 1970s is any indication. Cinema's

consecration, even now, is provisional and fragile. This instability contributes to the stereotype of film experts as ill-advised misfits, who have foregone the social benefits of more respectable cultural obsessions. Many of the parodies of film critics I will present in this chapter are informed by this ideological conflict regarding the place of cinema and of critics in the cultural hierarchy.

Refutations of critical authority often use anti-intellectual and anti-authoritarian appeals to “self-respect.”⁵ According to the logic of capitalist culture, the last thing audiences need is a mediator to interpret popular culture and tell them what to like. In this scenario, the film critic becomes an unwanted intruder, friend of neither filmmaker (who may be scrutinized and attacked) nor moviegoer. In a parallel realm, Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam point out that Canadian and American political discourse often positions intellectual figures, such as politicians Michael Ignatieff and Barack Obama, as “the exotic and threatening other.”⁶ While cultural capital offers significant symbolic and material advantages, the benefits are mitigated by the fact that the critic-intellectual who appears “inorganic” is often met with distrust. All the more reason that Gilmour and Yost downplayed their intellectual resources and positioned themselves as unpretentious, easy-going movie fans—just “one of us” among ordinary moviegoers (see Chapters Four and Five). Throughout film criticism history, many critics have adopted an egalitarian mode of address to distance themselves from the spectres of pedantry and film snobbery. For every highbrow James Agee (*Time*, 1938–1948, *The Nation*, 1941–1948) and John Simon (*The New Leader*, 1963–1973, *New York*, 1975–2005, *Esquire*, 1973–1975), there has been a populist Gilbert Seldes (*The Dial*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Republic*, 1920s–30s) and Pauline Kael (*The New Yorker*, 1968–1991).⁷ The clash between the two camps has been the site of much heated debate, and it has also informed perceptions of the public role of film critics.

When *Return of the Jedi* came out in 1983, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert argued with John Simon on ABC News about the merits of the *Star Wars* trilogy. Simon had become a recognizable face on television talk shows in the 1970s and was known for ruffling the feathers

⁵ Ross, *No Respect*, 4.

⁶ Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam, “Introduction: Public Hopes,” in *The Public Intellectual and the Culture of Hope*, ed. Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4.

⁷ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 121, 214; Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 54; Roberts, *The Complete History*, 165, 342.

of fellow guests.⁸ Here, he argued that *Star Wars* was infantilizing and lowered the standards of children's entertainment. Twenty years later, vindicated by time and public opinion, Ebert posted a video of the exchange on his blog as an artifact of Simon's old-fashioned ideals.⁹ Evidently, Simon's fusty standards were out of step with the powerful forces of popular culture. Ebert commented, "I understand where he's coming from. I'm not in sympathy with where he's going."¹⁰ A similar ideological rift arose more than a decade later, when Kenneth Turan at the *Los Angeles Times* stridently panned *Titanic* (1997). Director James Cameron retorted that skilled, relevant critics would not find themselves alone "in complete opposition to the tide of popular taste," and he pointed to the film's enormous appeal to moviegoers of all ages across the world. He accused Turan of a cynicism about cinema and paternalism towards film audiences so profound that they amounted to a miscarriage of his duties as a critic.¹¹ However, one would be hard pressed to find a theory of criticism that suggests a critic's function is to predict popular taste, as Cameron implied. The pitting of audience tastes against the "expert" tastes of critics serves only to alienate and diminish critics and undermine the authority of cultural capital by painting it as downright authoritarian. The strategy is populist, anti-intellectual, and demagogic all at once.

Challenges to critical authority tend to present critics as members of an educational and professional elite, rarely acknowledging that popular film critics have historically had little or no specialized training in film analysis. They are usually akin more to "organic intellectuals"—self-taught amateurs, immersed in film history, and emerging from the ranks of devoted film fans and audiences. Still, professional reviewers are portrayed as wielding their refined, detached taste as a weapon against the earnest and immediate tastes of average moviegoers, who are also reduced to caricatures. The distinction recalls Bourdieu's dichotomy between the distance and reflection of the "aesthetic disposition" and the sensuality and moralism of the "popular aesthetic."¹² As a

⁸ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 257.

⁹ Roger Ebert, "Siskel & Ebert & John Simon Go to War over 'Star Wars,'" *Balder & Dash*, January 28, 2013, <http://www.rogerebert.com/balder-and-dash/siskel-and-ebert-and-john-simon-go-to-war-over-star-wars>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ James Cameron, "He's Mad as Hell at Turan," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/mar/28/entertainment/ca-33428>.

¹² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 20–26.

result, expertise simply isolates critics from their readers, movie audiences, and the general public, as many of the parodies discussed below highlight.

Writing in the conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, John Podhoretz captures this paradox, championing the democratic (or better, libertarian) potential of amateur film writing:

The more self-consciously educated one is in the field—by which I mean the more obscure the storehouse of cinematic knowledge a critic has—the less likely it is that one will have anything interesting to say to an ordinary person who isn't all that interested in the condition of Finnish cinema. Amateurism in the best sense will lead to some very interesting work by people whose primary motivation is simply to express themselves in relation to the work they're seeing—a purer critical impulse than the one that comes with collecting a paycheck along the way.¹³

Podhoretz would naturally have to count himself among those who collect pay for their critical labour, since he remains employed as a film critic, which makes his call for amateur critics unschooled in Finnish cinema particularly disingenuous. His absurd suggestion that critics should not bother to inform audiences about unfamiliar forms of cinema demonstrates a fundamental incompatibility between the tenets of anti-intellectualism and the ethos of artistic discovery at the root of film criticism history. When it comes to a marginal national cinema like Canada's that relies on committed critical voices to get the word out and engage the public in conversation, such anti-intellectual and populist influences threaten to shut down engagement and significantly narrow the cultural field.

Poking Fun at Film Critic Professionals

Public apprehension about film critics has been more subtly but no less potently expressed in comedy. Critics are targets of countless jokes, of varying degrees of venom. At the heart of most comedic representations is scepticism about the authority and relevance of film critics, not unlike the anti-intellectual sentiments described above. Satirical representations of film critics have a rich history, and parodies permitted the questioning of critical authority and cultural hierarchy long before the talkback mechanisms of the internet. Bourdieu describes parody as a method of emancipating new cultural forms from the orthodoxy of the past: “the

¹³ John Podhoretz, “Thinking on Film: The Way the Wind Is Blowing for Newspaper Movie Critics,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 18, 2009, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/493gurnm.asp>.

newcomers ‘get beyond’ (*dépassent*) the dominant mode of thought and expression not by explicitly denouncing it but by repeating and reproducing it in a sociologically non-congruent context, which has the effect of rendering it incongruous or even absurd, simply by making it perceptible as the arbitrary convention it is.”¹⁴ He explains that parody establishes complicity with audiences by persuading them to laugh at (and to some degree reject) the terms of the target discourse.¹⁵

In 1963, a Mel Brooks film called *The Critic* won the Academy Award for Short Subject (Cartoon).¹⁶ Spoofing trendy abstract art, the film features shapes and lines intermingling across colourful backgrounds, paired with a soundtrack of baroque classical music. The humour comes from the incongruous voiceover narration, performed by Brooks, who portrays a heavily accented Russian-Jewish man responding to the film in real time. Brooks has said the film was based on a real-life incident in which he witnessed an older immigrant crankily dissect a surrealist Norman McLaren film at a Manhattan cinema.¹⁷ Brooks’s voiceover mimics the man’s confusion and disappointment. The “critic” complains that the filmmaker should use his time more wisely: “Fellow like that, he probably could drive a truck; do something constructive; make a shoe. [sigh] Two dollars out the window.” He hilariously concludes, “I don’t know much about psychoanalysis, but I’d say this is a dirty picture.”¹⁸ With its ironic title, the film’s comic performance of casual film talk encapsulates in just three-and-a-half minutes the dynamics of class and ethnicity in New York’s highbrow art and film worlds of the 1960s.

At that time, the New York literati was at the forefront of popular film criticism, with unique voices like Manny Farber, Parker Tyler, and Andrew Sarris blazing new trails in film writing and upending old cultural hierarchies. The film generation lasted about ten years, and by the time *Saturday Night at the Movies* had hit its stride on TVOntario and Siskel and Ebert were syndicated across North America, the tide was starting to turn. There were signs of unrest as

¹⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁶ “The Critic,” *Academy Awards Database*, accessed May 25, 2015, http://awardsdatabase.oscars.org/ampas_awards/DisplayMain.jsp?curTime=1432520838404.

¹⁷ James Robert Parish, *It’s Good to Be the King: The Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 156–157.

¹⁸ Mel Brooks, *Mel Brooks The Critic*, streaming, 1963, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiYjwRZK_NM.

early as January 1970, when Stephen Koch and Richard Schickel published twin critiques of the spike in celebrity film critics.¹⁹ While Koch took Judith Crist, John Simon, and the notoriously snarky Rex Reed to task for lack of rigour, Schickel complained,

Too many critics are becoming demi-celebrities. They are turning up not merely on the panel discussions staged by the educational TV stations, but on the network talk shows as well. [...] Nearly every television and radio station in New York now has a movie reviewer and if they are not any better than the people who worked for the folded dailies, they aren't any worse. A movie publicity man can usually find someone to quote in his ads.²⁰

Suspicion of film criticism on television prevailed for the next two decades. Mattias Frey connects the phenomenon back to Kael: "Her and others' cine-populism and self-promotion paved the way for the cults of personality that formed under television cameras (Ebert and Siskel) and the much derided 'entertainers' such as Jeffrey Lyons, Rex Reed, and Gary Franklin."²¹

The Critic spoof was ahead of its time, but by the 1970s, film critics were a mainstay across all media, where they also emerged as objects of ridicule, especially in television comedy. Many of the parodies were affectionate, but they nevertheless trivialized film criticism and suggested that the public had grown weary of imperious celebrity critics, such as Pauline Kael and Rex Reed. So when Richard Corliss attacked Siskel and Ebert and television film criticism in 1990 (see Chapter Five), he simply articulated a general disrespect already expressed in popular culture in the previous decade and a half. Interestingly, Canadian television viewers, who were by this time intimately familiar with the big-name American critics who appeared regularly on their screens in syndication, were some of the first to laugh at the perceived self-importance of American film criticism culture.

Canada's *SCTV* (Second City Television) comedy program was born out of the Toronto installment of the Chicago-based live comedy cabaret. From 1976 to 1984 a troupe of mostly Canadian-born comedians wrote and performed episodes in Edmonton and Toronto. Global

¹⁹ Koch, "Cruel Critics"; Richard Schickel, "A Movie Critic on Movie Critics," *Harper's Magazine*, January 1970.

²⁰ Schickel, "Movie Critic," 97.

²¹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 121–122.

Television produced and aired the show until its high ratings led to cross-Canada and American syndication on CBC and then NBC. The premise was a satire of cable television, with SCTV as the local station of the fictional Melonville. Each of the sketches spoofed a different type of television programming, from low-budget amateur talk shows to community commercials to fundraising telethons to movies-of-the-week. The main subject was American televisual styles and formats. Since film critics were by this time ubiquitous on both Canadian and American television, they were natural targets. Aniko Bodroghkozy highlights *SCTV* as a cross-border success that allowed Canadian viewers to enjoy a very specific knowing subject position: since *SCTV* satirized American televisual forms, Canadian viewers could mock American culture while knowing that American viewers were simultaneously gleaning different meanings from it and missing some of the Canada-specific jokes. Bodroghkozy explains, “Having turned *their* television into *our* satire, we exported it back to them, but the beaver’s bite would most likely go unnoticed.”²²

During its first season (1976–1977), *SCTV* aired a satirical sketch aptly titled “Good-Bye America,” which took on talk show host Geraldo Rivera (“Heraldo Rivera”, played by Joe Flaherty) and a who’s who of American film critics at the time: Andrew Sarris (“Andrew Sarriss,” played by John Candy), Judith Crist (“Judith Krist,” played by Catherine O’Hara), Pauline Kael (“Pauline Kale,” played by Andrea Martin), Rex Reed (“Rex Reid,” played by Eugene Levy), and John Simon (“John Symon,” played by Dave Thomas).²³ Over dinner at an upscale New York restaurant, Heraldo asked his guests for their opinions on the (hilarious and made-up) Roman Polanski remake of the Marx Brothers classic *Duck Soup* (1933). The critics proceeded to mercilessly trash the film and each other, using ornate language. The sketch astutely picked up on some of the most identifiable traits of each critic: Sarris’s commitment to auteurism, Crist’s dislike of sex and violence in cinema, Kael’s penchant for personal attacks, Reed’s cocky drawl and ambiguous sexuality, and Simon’s alienating pedantry. The snobbishness of all five was foregrounded, as they mocked Heraldo’s naïve appreciation of the restaurant’s food (“You would [enjoy it], you greaseball”) and proceeded to belittle, one by one, the host’s list of classic films: *The Graduate* (1967), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and *Chinatown*

²² Bodroghkozy, “As Canadian as Possible...,” 574.

²³ Jeff Robbins, *Second City Television: A History and Episode Guide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 11, 23.

(1974).²⁴ What is remarkable about this scenario today is the degree to which audiences must have recognized the key personalities and mannerisms of American film criticism to be able to follow even the surface humour of the sketch. Second, it is notable that these critics, all television celebrities at this point, were portrayed as harbouring a deep contempt for popular audiences and popular tastes.

The film critic scene on “Good-Bye America” was a one-time gag, but “Farm Film Report” in *SCTV*’s second season became a popular semi-regular segment. The sketch presented Big Jim McBob (Joe Flaherty) and Billy Sol Hurok (John Candy) as two country bumpkins reviewing films, both fictional and real, from Hollywood to the art house.²⁵ Like many spoofs of popular film criticism that emerged over the next decade, the setup also satirized well-known films and genres in the form of comedic re-enactments or “clips” from the films under review. (*SCTV* also frequently parodied cinematic tropes in its movie-of-the-week segments.) But the film reviews were more than merely a frame for film spoofs, and “Farm Film Report” also parodied a type of embodied and performative film talk that was becoming increasingly common on television. As we saw with Elwy Yost in Chapter Five, these television personas relied partly on physical appearance and mannerisms, making their social status and modes of address more distinctive—and suitable for spoofing. “Farm Film Report” asked the question, what if a couple of farmers took film art as seriously as urban intellectuals did? By foregrounding Canada’s substantial rural population, the satire pointed to the class privilege inherent in the middlebrow film criticism of urban Canada and the United States.

Shows like *Saturday Night at the Movies* and *Sneak Previews* had fully popularized film talk in the mid-1970s, and the resulting high-low tensions and upheavals in the cultural hierarchy are evident in the *SCTV* sketches. The “Farm Film Report” segment first appeared on the seventh episode of the show’s second season. The segment was split into two parts that aired over the course of the episode and tied into some of the other sketches. Big Jim and Billy Sol appropriated the techniques of film reviewers and applied them to invented films like *The Red Hat* and *How the Middle East Was Won*. As the sketch unfolded, it became apparent that the blue collar hosts were superficially preoccupied with on-screen explosions and that their positive

²⁴ “SCTV, 3/24/77 - ‘Good Bye America With ‘Heraldo’ Rivera,’” streaming, *Second City Television*, March 24, 1977, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0g6CpqXfRQ>.

²⁵ Robbins, *Second City Television*, 52.

reviews were reserved for films that “blowed up good!” *The Red Hat* got a positive review since the character of the king was blown up. At the end of the review of *How the Middle East Was Won*, the hosts themselves exploded on screen, perhaps to offer the home viewing audience the pyrotechnic thrill fundamental to all good popular entertainment. The sketch subverted the language of the golden age to illustrate film criticism’s elitism, while simultaneously sending up the philistinism of popular taste.

This balancing act between highbrow and popular tastes continued in the next appearance of “Farm Film Report,” which did not air until *SCTV* had changed over from a thirty-minute to a ninety-minute format on NBC in 1981. This time, Big Jim and Billy Sol discussed some of their favourite movies and directly tackled art house tastes:

Billy Sol: But I’ll tell you a film I did like: Werner Rainer Fassbinder’s *The Third Generation*. I like that one a whole lot. A whole bunch of people got blowed up good in that one; blowed up real good!

[Both laugh.]

Big Jim: Well, I personally don’t like too many of those films coming out of Europe, but I’ll tell ya, I do have a favourite director over there, and that’s Michelangelo Antonioni.

Billy Sol: Yeah.

Big Jim: You see that movie *Zabriskie Point*?

Billy Sol: Yeah.

Big Jim: Remember how it ended?

Billy Sol: Everything at the end blowed up!

Big Jim: Blowed up good!

Billy Sol: Blowed up *real* good!

Big Jim: Real good.

[Both laugh.]²⁶

The hosts admitted that they were disappointed by Antonioni’s previous film *Blow-Up* (1966), which, despite its title, contained no explosions. When they moved on to domestic releases, they

²⁶ “Farm Film Report 2,” streaming, *SCTV Network/90*, July 17, 1981, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHkvD7-u7y8>.

also panned Oscar-winning *Ordinary People* (1980), which they found “too talky.”²⁷ They rhapsodized instead about David Cronenberg’s *Scanners* (1981), particularly an infamous scene about twelve minutes into the film in which the head of a character played by B-list Canadian actor Louis Del Grande explodes.

Though Billy Sol explicitly addressed an audience of “farmers” at the conclusion of the sketch, the parody relied on a knowing *SCTV* audience to pick up on certain incongruities. Billy Sol began by subtly fumbling director Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s name. Viewers should have also known that most film critics panned *Zabriskie Point* (1970) and fêted *Blow-Up*, adding to the irony that the farm critics preferred the former simply because it had a more “explosive” pay off. Billy Sol and Big Jim also rejected *Ordinary People*, another critics’ favourite, which they described as “the people’s choice.”²⁸ Instead, they giddily lingered on the visceral horrors of a genre film by a Canadian director plagued by critical controversy. Though the humour of the sketch rested on the announcers’ dubious critical authority, the gushing excitement reserved for *Scanners* would have likely piqued viewers’ interest and actually promoted the film. The sketch is thus a finely observed commentary on the uncertain and shifting taste hierarchies at work in televisual film talk of that period. After this episode, the recurring sketch was renamed “Farm Film Celebrity Blow-Up,” which featured no further film reviews and focussed instead on interviews with and performances by “celebrity” guests from film, television, and music, played by various members of the cast. This new direction was possibly thought to have wider appeal, since the humour relied less on obscure cinema knowledge. Invariably, the guests “blowed up good,” and this became a popular catchphrase.²⁹

This was not, however, the end of *SCTV*’s play with the conventions of popular film reviewing. The character of Pauline Kael appeared in a sketch again in 1983, in the final episode for NBC, this time played by Mary Charlotte Wilcox.³⁰ The real Kael was still a lead film critic for *The New Yorker*, and she was well known by the general public for her frequent talk show appearances. Stretching Kael’s pervasiveness to its farcical conclusion, Wilcox’s “Kael” participated in a panel for the kitschy B-movie cable program *3D Firing Line*, which screened

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robbins, *Second City Television*, 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 223.

3D adaptations of popular films, in this case the gritty critical success *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). Refashioning an Academy Award-winning film as a vulgar paracinema text, the sketch again animated a clash between high and low culture, particularly as embodied by the panellists: a host dressed as a vampire, two bungling actors from the adaptation, and Kael. The humour arose partly from the lengthy clip sequences spoofing the film itself, but also from the antics of the film panel—modelled after the erudite American public affairs program *Firing Line*—which discussed the goofy remake with great seriousness, at least until the proceedings devolved into quibbling and Kael fled the set suffering from an apparent psychotic episode.³¹ The sketch left one of history’s most imposing film critics with hardly a shred of dignity. It is now a useful reminder that while Kael may exemplify film criticism’s golden age, she too was part of the cross-media popularization of film criticism that many now attribute to the field’s decline.

According to Jerry Roberts, film critics “became ripe in the 1980s for lampooning, as the hoi polloi surmised that the know-it-alls knew nothing after all.”³² Popular favourites Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, by this time national celebrities, were no exception.³³ They were subjected to *SCTV*’s satirical treatment on two occasions. The first sketch, which aired during the third season, spoofed the television show *Sneak Previews*, which had been on air for about five years at this point.³⁴ The sketch exaggerated the pair’s trademark taste conflicts, which came to represent a key trope of television film criticism in general:

Ebert (Dave Thomas): Tonight we’ll be reviewing some new films that Gene and I feel very strongly about.

Siskel (Joe Flaherty): That’s right, Roger. And our feelings on some of these films aren’t necessarily mutual.

Ebert: Right. On some of them, we vehemently disagree.

Siskel: But on others, we hardly concur.

Ebert: Some of them, we see eye-to-eye on.

³¹ “SCTV 135 3D Firing Line Midnight Cowboy,” streaming, *SCTV Network*, March 18, 1983, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I9GDZvW5C0&app=desktop>.

³² Roberts, *The Complete History*, 315.

³³ *Ibid.*, 275.

³⁴ Robbins, *Second City Television*, 87.

Siskel: And on others, we don't even *begin* to agree. Now, tonight our first film is from a—

Ebert: On some of them, we can't even come close to agreement.

Siskel: —is from Twentieth Century Fox, it's a new—

Ebert: And even if we did agree on some of them, the rest of them we would argue about, because we don't see eye-to-eye. Right, Gene?

Siskel: That's right. When that happens, the fur is really going to fly.

Ebert: That's when the popcorn will hit the fan.

[Both laugh heartily.]³⁵

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Siskel and Ebert's quarrels were indeed emphasized on *Sneak Previews* itself, which alluded to the duo's conflicts in the program's introductory segments, though with a dash more subtlety than in the sketch. Siskel and Ebert's theatrical standoffs were themselves an opportunity to enact the nuances of cultural hierarchy, though the popular program was less overtly elitist than some of the film talk of the golden age. Ironically, the sketch showed the pair agreeing on both of the movies they reviewed, the *Star Wars* parody *Empires Are a Girl's Best Friend* and a fictional Robert Altman film called *Henry*, from which they showed a "clip" that can only be described as Brechtian. The Altman film won the "Dog of the Week" distinction, a segment spoofed from the original *Sneak Previews*, where the "Stinker of the Week" featured live dogs and, later, a skunk. According to Ebert, "Gene and I used to ask each other, 'do you think Pauline Kael would appear on television with a trained animal?'"³⁶ As if the real segment were not humiliating enough, in the sketch a tiny but vicious dog attacked the hosts on set. As with *SCTV*'s other film critic parodies, this one satirized a range of taste cultures, from *Star Wars* fans to Ingmar Bergman devotees (the hosts promise to review Bergman's new film about a "Swedish fraternity house" on the next episode). The sketch made fun of high and low culture, and, ultimately, called into question the very idea of cultural hierarchy.

The Siskel and Ebert characters reappeared in the early 1980s on "Gene Shalit's Critics' Special," a farcical promo for an invented television special wherein film critics performed

³⁵ "SCTV S03E14 Hollywood Salutes Its Extras," streaming, *SCTV*, December 19, 1980, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuSYawZ3cK0>.

³⁶ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 281–282.

musical numbers.³⁷ The ad began with Shalit, played by Eugene Levy, singing a gruff, off-key rendition of the opening theme of the children's television program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, complete with jazz hands and high kicks against the backdrop of a giant typewriter.³⁸ Shalit was a well-known critic and a regular on several American television shows, starting out on NBC in 1967 and becoming a film, theatre, and book reviewer on *Today* (alongside Judith Crist) by 1974.³⁹ He was best known for his big hair, long moustache, and loud bow ties, all traits reproduced here, and central to later parodies in *The Muppet Show: Sex and Violence* (1975), *Family Guy* (2006), and *SpongeBob SquarePants* (2007).⁴⁰ For their parts, Siskel (Flaherty) and Ebert (Thomas) performed "Jeepers Creepers" and then debated the special's merits *in media res*, agreeing that the host, Shalit, was a failure. The final critic to appear is "the first lady of critiques, Miss Rona Barrett," who mangles "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" before offering her own response to the special: "Gene, there's a definite dichotomy of emotions coming into play here. On the one hand, I'm thrilled, as a journalist, to be able to perform, but, at the same time, embarrassed to be performing with a critic who should have never gotten out from behind his Smith Corona."⁴¹ Barrett, played by Catherine O'Hara, was known as a gossip journalist, celebrity interviewer, and occasional film reviewer on various network television outlets.⁴²

Gene Shalit's special presents "America's best-loved critics at their acerbic best [...], a mediocre [...] team of second-rate armchair critics, whose musical and comedic talents run the gamut from 'A' to sweet sourdough bread."⁴³ Shalit concludes, "if you can't pan 'em, join 'em!" This sketch, in particular, emphasizes the performance elements of popular film talk. The celebrity critics are repositioned as cabaret performers, literally on the other side of the typewriter, a move that invites viewers to critique the critics. Nevertheless, all these celebrity

³⁷ Robbins, *Second City Television*, 121.

³⁸ "SCTV, 7/24/81 - Gene Shalit Critic Special," streaming, *SCTV Network/90*, July 24, 1981, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxDDgGHURxo>.

³⁹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 255.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ "Gene Shalit Critic Special."

⁴² John J. O'Connor, "TV View; Rona Barrett's Downhill Ride," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/20/arts/tv-view-rona-barrett-s-downhill-ride.html>; Roberts, *The Complete History*, 266.

⁴³ "Gene Shalit Critic Special."

critics are best known for their work on television with no typewriter in sight, and the cabaret context emphasizes the performative and entertainment value of their work. The satire suggests a critique of the show-business-ification of film criticism, wherein intellectuals were forced to adopt the vanity of television stars and submit themselves to the harsh critical gaze of the popular audience.

SCTV picked on the most recognizable personas of film talk, and this generally meant picking on American critics. Bodroghkozy observes, “Cross-border successes like *SCTV* [...] allow Canadian audiences to ridicule both the imagined national self and the imagined mythic American Other, all the while preserving a certain amount of ironic protective covering.”⁴⁴ In these sketches, the American other got the brunt of the satire, which indicates that English-Canadian audiences were watching American film talk at home and were well aware of its key players and features. Perhaps Canadian audiences enjoyed a comfortable distance from the alleged intellectual pretensions of American film talk that made the satire even sweeter. There was one exception to this pattern that brought film talk home to English Canada. Torontonians, especially, would have recognized their own backyard in the recurring character of Brock Linahan.

Martin Short’s Brock Linahan was based on Brian Linehan, the popular television host and celebrity interviewer for *City Lights* on the small commercial Toronto station CityTV. Linehan hosted the program, which was syndicated across Canada and in the United States, from 1973 to 1989. Linehan was a movie buff since childhood and had worked in film distribution. His biographer points out that when Linehan was hired to launch *City Lights*, films and film talk were hot, and it was a strategic move to make a film aficionado the face of a new arts and culture program.⁴⁵ He became known for his elegant, in-depth, and intimate one-on-one interviews with Hollywood stars. He was younger than his TVOntario counterpart Elwy Yost, and, since he covered new releases, he ran in flashier circles. He toured the press junkets in Los Angeles and counted Joan Rivers, Karen Kain, and Peter O’Toole among his international friends.⁴⁶ Linehan’s distinctly un-Canadian embrace of show business glitz and glamour and his noticeable idiosyncrasies made him an appealing choice for an *SCTV* ribbing.

⁴⁴ Bodroghkozy, “As Canadian as Possible...,” 574.

⁴⁵ Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*, 31–32.

⁴⁶ Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*.

Brock Linahan appeared in eight different episodes of *SCTV* in the show's final three seasons. The fictional program he hosted was called *Stars in One*.⁴⁷ Typically, the sketches featured Brock conducting an interview with or narrating a biographical exposé about a fictional Hollywood celebrity, such as movie star Steve Roman, TV star Rusty Van Reddick, art filmmaker Libby Wolfson, and Señor Wences's Hand Puppet. The sketches were largely opportunities to lampoon the American star system and the celebrity interview format. Short's impression of Linehan also regularly highlighted identifiable aspects of the interviewer's screen persona, including his reputation for extensive preparatory research, his incisive and at-times long-winded questions, and his distinctive poise, which could be construed as smugness.

One episode called "Brock Goes Home" took Linahan himself as its subject, suggesting that perhaps the famous talk show host had lost touch with his humble beginnings. The sketch was the fourth instalment of *Stars in One*, and it appeared in the same episode as "Pauline Kael" on *3D Firing Line*. In it, Brock talked to his former paediatrician, who marvelled at Brock's in-depth research; his high school coach, who mocked Brock's athletic ineptitude; and his first lover, who did not remember him but noted that his questions go on forever and then asked for his autograph.⁴⁸ The details strayed from Linehan's true working-class origins in Hamilton, Ontario, which may not have been publicly known until the 2007 release of his biography. George Anthony called the spoof "an affectionate tease acknowledging the success of a hometown boy who made good," but it also cut the Hollywood big shot down to size, suggesting that no matter how much influence he garnered with the stars, he could not impress the average Joe.⁴⁹

In a subsequent episode, Linahan interviewed "Bob Hope" (Dave Thomas), a sketch that showed off Thomas's impression of the legendary comedian and also reiterated many of the standard jokes about Linahan. As with the other sketches, Hope was amazed by Linahan's preparation ("Who does your research here anyway, Methuselah?") and his verbosity ("You know, you have a way of asking a question that makes you forget what it's all about by the time

⁴⁷ Robbins, *Second City Television*.

⁴⁸ "SCTV, 3/18/83 - 'Stars in One': 'Brock Linahan Goes Home,'" streaming, *SCTV Network*, March 1, 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gHuhQtui0A.

⁴⁹ Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*, 114.

you get to the end.”)⁵⁰ At the conclusion of the interview, Hope and Linahan had the following exchange:

Hope: Will this ever be seen in the States?

Linahan: Of course it will be, Mr. Hope.

Hope: [angrily] This is not to be shown in the States! You understand? Under no circumstances!

Linahan: Mr. Hope, this has to be shown in the States.

Hope: This *doesn't* have to be shown in the States. You understand me? You're making my blood boil now. Don't get me mad.

Linahan: We are seen in the States—

[Scene fades out.]⁵¹

This exchange was based on an unpleasant incident wherein director Woody Allen sued Linehan over his *City Lights* interview. Allen had wanted the interview aired only in Canada to protect his privacy, but the episode was included in a package sold to the USA Network.⁵² Not only were Linehan's interviews on *City Lights* syndicated in the United States, but so was *SCTV*, and skits such as these, which caricatured American celebrity culture—and also questioned the American (and specifically Hope's) involvement in the Vietnam War—would have held an especially subversive, political edge down south.

Short's depiction of the television host was not particularly unkind, and the actor insisted that he would retire the character if it bothered his friend Linehan.⁵³ But in 1983, film critic and entertainment reporter Martin Knelman published an inflammatory story in *Toronto Life*, calling Short's caricature “character assassination.”⁵⁴ Knelman asked “After seeing the devastating satirical *SCTV* version, can anyone look at Brian Linehan without chortling?”⁵⁵ The piece also suggested that Linehan, himself a relative unknown, must have been envious of the American success of *SCTV*. Short was disappointed by the outcome of his parody. He attributed the

⁵⁰ “SCTV, 3/18/83 - ‘Stars in One’: ‘Brock Linahan Goes Home.’”

⁵¹ “SCTV, 1/31/84 - ‘Stars in One’: Brock Linahan and Bob Hope,” streaming, *SCTV Channel*, January 31, 1984, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4ZLQoeiXps>.

⁵² Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*, 109.

⁵³ Martin Knelman, “The Inner Networkings of SCTV,” *Toronto Life*, October 1983, 99.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*, 112.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 113.

incident to a distinctly Canadian resentment towards celebrity and success: “When they parody you in the U.S., people say, *hey, good for you!* When they parody you in Canada, people say, *good!...They got him.*”⁵⁶ However it was intended, the spoof would follow Linehan for life; it was even mentioned in his obituaries in *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*.⁵⁷ Short continued to mine the follies of celebrity culture in his post-*SCTV* endeavours, including his 1989 HBO special *I, Martin Short, Goes Hollywood*, which included a segment in which Siskel (Flaherty) and Ebert (Thomas) argue over their past film reviews in the bathroom of a ritzy bistro; Siskel accidentally kills Ebert when things escalate.⁵⁸ Short also hosted his own celebrity interview program for several years, during which time he developed the comedic character Jiminy Glick, a supremely awkward, oblivious, and brazen celebrity interviewer, who, importantly, in no way resembled Linehan. The show aired on Comedy Central in the United States from 2001 to 2003. The Glick character culminated in a feature length film, *Jiminy Glick in Lalawood* (2004) and the 2006 Broadway show, *Martin Short: Fame Becomes Me*.

A United States-Canada co-production, *Jiminy Glick in Lalawood* takes place at the 2002 Toronto International Film Festival (as indicated by the onscreen festival posters) and premiered at the 2004 Toronto fest; this is just one of the film’s many metafictional conceits. In this iteration of the character, Jiminy Glick is a television entertainment reporter from Butte, Montana, who travels with his wife and two sons to Toronto, hoping to hobnob with celebrities and score some big-time interviews for his home network. Glick elbows his way past velvet ropes and into VIP parties, and much of the film’s humour derives from his cringe-inducing interactions with movie stars, both real and fictional. Early on, Glick corners Kiefer Sutherland on an actual TIFF red carpet:

Glick: And you’re Canadian, I hear. What’s that about?

Sutherland: Well, this is a fantastic country...uh... ‘What is that—what is that about?’

Glick: That was my question, dear.

Sutherland: I know! I’m trying to—I’m trying to—I’ve never actually had to—

Glick: Eventually the show will start; don’t you want to just find the answer?

⁵⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁸ Eugene Levy, *I, Martin Short, Goes Hollywood (3 of 4)*, streaming, 1989, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IixwE3ZTa00>.

Sutherland: Yeah, I'm... 'What is it about?'—

Glick: That's what I asked!

Sutherland: [laughing] For me, it's been a fantastic—It's where I come from and, it's, uh—

Glick: What?

Sutherland: Canada.

Glick: You're Canadian?! I didn't know that.

Sutherland: Yes, it's true.⁵⁹

The agonizing exchange pokes fun at the circularity and banality of a certain line of questioning familiar to Canadian-born entertainers who find success and celebrity in Hollywood. The “so, you're Canadian” trope is also immediately familiar to consumers of Canadian entertainment news, where it has been ubiquitous for decades. The American interviewer's aggressive questioning ruffles the suave but somewhat shy Canadian star, recalling SCTV's critique of American media.

The interview is followed directly by a scene in which Glick is on duty at a major gala premiere for the made-up film *Growin' Up Gandhi*. After boasting to his seatmate that he has the distinction of reviewing the “fil-um,” Glick snores through much of the movie, and his panicked wife wakes him as the angry crowd of disappointed viewers exits the theatre. Unaware that the film was universally despised, Glick fumbles his way through a “live on location” television review for the Butte evening news, gushing, “I loved it! It had such an emotional punch to the stomach!”⁶⁰ Glick's professional impropriety sets in motion the story's central plot, whereby Glick lands an exclusive interview with the reclusive superstar of *Growin' Up Gandhi*, which in turn leads to Glick's own rise to stardom and involvement in a murder mystery. These jabs at the alleged lack of professionalism and social ineptitude of film critics followed in the tradition of the *SCTV* sketches, which cultivated a funny but unflattering portrait of professional film talk. The objects of derision were typically American film critics, with the exception of Brian Linehan, who, according to his biographer, was prone to American-style displays of vanity.⁶¹ The deferential Elwy Yost, for instance, whose *Saturday Night at the Movies* was a fixture on

⁵⁹ Vadim Jean, *Jiminy Glick in Lalawood*, DVD (Equinox Films, 2004).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Anthony, *Starring Brian Linehan*.

TVOntario at the time, managed to escape *SCTV*'s ridicule and was generally protected from satire, in spite of his distinctive appearance.

One obscure parody of Yost does exist in the form of a silent experimental short film called *Introducing Elwy* (1979) by Torontonion Martha Davis. According to Davis, the film was intended as a punk challenge to Yost's reign as the (stale) voice of English-Canadian cinema culture.⁶² Indeed, the emphasis on Yost "as a purely physical presence," complete with intrusive close ups of his baldhead and moving lips (with no soundtrack) make it easy to view him as a ridiculous figure. It is also a fair reminder that as the era's king of film talk, Yost did not speak for experimental filmmakers or women filmmakers like Davis, even though each of these groups has a rich history in Canadian cinema.

It is noteworthy that satires of film criticism grew more frequent as Siskel and Ebert gained popularity. The kind of entertaining, highly visible film talk found on television—film talk with a recognizable and relatable voice, appearance, and embodied personality—lent itself well to the satire and physical comedy of programs like *SCTV* and *Saturday Night Live*. The stereotype of film critics, so confident in their knowledge and opinions, resonated nicely with other easy targets of anti-intellectual satire such as nerds and intellectuals. *SCTV* was ahead of the curve here, whereas *Saturday Night Live*, which debuted in the United States in 1975, missed the boat on the golden age of film criticism and let celebrity critics like Pauline Kael and John Simon off the hook. However, it made good use of the Siskel and Ebert phenomenon, and in the 1980s, the pair appeared in person on the show three times, performing film reviews that highlighted their witty repartee. In one 1985 episode, they were integrated into a "Fernando's Hideaway" sketch and also presented a two-part film review segment, as part of the "SNL Film Festival."⁶³ It was not until 1987 that the pair got the full parodic treatment in a spoof of *At the Movies*, with Phil Hartman playing Ebert and Kevin Nealon as Siskel.⁶⁴ The program's chummy

⁶² "Introducing Elwy," *Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre*, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://www.cfmdc.org/node/736>; Martha Davis, in-person conversation, June 25, 2013.

⁶³ "Siskel & Ebert on SNL (1985)," streaming, *Saturday Night Live*, March 2, 1985, <http://siskelandebert.org/video/47KG2R9SGD6A/Siskel-amp-Ebert-on-SNL-1985>; Stephen Tropiano, *Saturday Night Live FAQ: Everything Left to Know About Television's Longest-Running Comedy* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2013), 217–218.

⁶⁴ "Roger Ebert," *The SNL Archives*, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://snl.jt.org/imp.php-i=660.html>; Stephen Tropiano, "Appendix A: Episode Guide," in *Saturday Night Live FAQ*:

relationship with the critics robbed it of the sting of the *SCTV* sketches, but nevertheless contributed to disarming Siskel and Ebert as credible cinema intellectuals, reducing them to an entertaining schtick.

For his part, Gene Shalit also provided plenty of fodder for *Saturday Night Live*, which featured the critic as a recurring character in 1989 and 1990 (played by Jon Lovitz) and from 2002 to 2005 (played by Horatio Sanz).⁶⁵ Jon Lovitz would later become the voice of Jay Sherman, the protagonist of *The Critic* (1994-1995), an animated comedy series about an anxious but likable film reviewer who has his own television show. While Siskel and Ebert guest starred on an episode of *The Critic*, the Jay Sherman character made his own guest appearance on an episode of *The Simpsons* as a juror for the Springfield film festival; conflict arises when his imperious presence in the Simpson home makes Homer feel insecure about his intellect.⁶⁶

This kind of intertextuality and self-referentiality has been an important characteristic of popular culture representations of film critics. Reviewers as figures can be a convenient technique for commenting on and connecting to other texts. A scene in the pastiche *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (1990) shows movie guide master Leonard Maltin, playing himself, panning the first *Gremlins* movie (1984) while a handful of the creatures creep up behind him and take apart the television studio.⁶⁷ Maltin was a good sport in this game, and he also voiced his own character in an appearance on the animated series *Freakazoid!* (1997).⁶⁸ The following year his likeness helped take down the destructive “Mecha-Streisand” in an episode of *South Park*.⁶⁹ In a subsequent episode of *South Park* (1999), Gene Siskel is shown burning in the fires of perdition

Everything Left to Know about Television's Longest-Running Comedy (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2013), 350.

⁶⁵ “Gene Shalit,” *The SNL Archives*, accessed May 31, 2015, <http://snl.jt.org/imp.php-i=2002.html>.

⁶⁶ L. H. MacMullan, “Siskel & Ebert & Jay & Alice,” DVD, *The Critic* (Fox, March 12, 1995); Susie Dieter, “A Star Is Burns,” DVD, *The Simpsons* (Fox, March 5, 1995).

⁶⁷ Joe Dante, *Gremlins 2: The New Batch*, DVD (Warner Bros., 1990).

⁶⁸ Rich Arons and Dave Marshall, “The Island of Dr. Mystico,” DVD, *Freakazoid!* (Kids’ WB, February 7, 1997).

⁶⁹ Trey Parker, “Mecha-Streisand,” DVD, *South Park* (Comedy Central, February 18, 1998).

alongside other well-loved icons Jimmy Stewart, John F. Kennedy, Princess Diana, and Michael Landon.⁷⁰

In the early 1990s on *Saturday Night Live*, the crowd-pleasing “Wayne’s World” sketches included “Movie World” segments that turned Wayne (Mike Myers) and Garth (Dana Carvey) into purveyors of film talk, a role they would reprise at the 2008 MTV Movie Awards, where they presented a list of their favourite pornography movie titles based on 2008 hit movies.⁷¹ The “Wayne’s World” sketches “appropriated and satirized talk shows” in their portrayal of a no-budget community access program featuring a duo of suburban youth hanging out in a basement and chatting about their pastimes.⁷² The “Movie World” feature debuted on *Saturday Night Live* on December 2, 1989.⁷³ Characteristically, the pair’s film reviews focussed on their trivial preoccupations and appreciation for attractive actresses, and they dismissed films that demonstrated intellectual ambition, like *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). When the sketch resurfaced in 2011 as a *Saturday Night Live* episode opener, Wayne and Garth discussed their Oscar picks, reducing all the film titles to sexual *double entendres*.⁷⁴ In his 1990 takedown of television film criticism, Richard Corliss quoted a snippet of “Wayne’s Worlds” dialogue, presumably drawing a parallel between the reckless and hormone fuelled film talk of Wayne and Garth and the quick-fire judgments made by real-life film critics on television.⁷⁵ Corliss’s analogy is clearly a gross exaggeration of television film talk; however, Wayne and Garth’s “Movie World” does offer a fascinating speculation on the promise and danger of truly democratic film talk, where expertise is rendered completely irrelevant and the only thing that matters is the voice of the people. Twenty-five years later, the parody’s prescience is confirmed in the cacophony of amateur film podcasts, as the next chapter will demonstrate. The anti-intellectual deconstruction—or democratization—of traditional film criticism is thus complete.

⁷⁰ Trey Parker, “Mr. Hankey’s Christmas Classics,” DVD, *South Park* (Comedy Central, December 1, 1999).

⁷¹ *Wayne’s World at the 2008 MTV Movie Awards*, streaming, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRm0LnZjP60>.

⁷² Timberg, *Television Talk*, 11.

⁷³ “Mark Wilson,” *The SNL Archives*, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://snl.jt.org/char.php?i=283.html>; Tropiano, “Episode Guide,” 355.

⁷⁴ “Season 36: Episode 14,” *Saturday Night Live Transcripts*, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/10/10nwayne.phtml>.

⁷⁵ Corliss, “All Thumbs,” 18.

Presaging the Digital Turn

If the parodies of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s put film critics on notice, they also attested to critics' continued visibility and prominence in the public sphere. The parodies of *SCTV* and *Saturday Night Live* traded on a prevalent discomfort with film critics as public intellectuals. Even when the mockery was affectionate, as it often was, the anti-intellectual manoeuvre of trivializing and doubting the value of film talk effectively undermined the cultural status of critics. Populist challenges to critical authority also came from movie fans themselves, especially since the relocation of film commentary to the internet put critics in closer reach of the public. After he lost his voice, Roger Ebert was pleased to be able to carry on conversations with movie fans through social media. But such access also meant critics now had to weather the wrath of dissenting fans.

Acrimonious fan-critic battles have played out in recent years on Rotten Tomatoes, a website that aggregates reviews from film critics at print, broadcast, and online outlets and assigns individual films a rating based on their percentages of positive versus negative reviews.⁷⁶ The "Tomatometer" measures the reviews of "professional critics," according to published criteria, and grants a "rotten" rating to any film with 59 percent or fewer positive reviews, a "fresh" rating for at least 60 percent positive reviews, and "certified fresh" for 75 percent positive reviews or better, provided at least five of the reviews are from "Top Critics."⁷⁷ The "Top Critic" designation confers distinction to "the most significant contributors of cinematic and critical discourse," namely critics published in print at a publication in the top 10 percent of circulation, working as a film critic at a national broadcast outlet for at least five years, or reviewing films for at least three years at a journalistic website with over 1.5 million monthly unique visitors.⁷⁸ The vast majority of "approved" professional critics are based in the United States, but there are also several working in Canada. The site recognizes the Toronto Film Critics Association and Vancouver Film Critics Circle among over two dozen mostly-American organizations that help confer legitimacy on potential Tomatometer critics. In addition to the

⁷⁶ See Tamara Shepherd's analysis of the political and cultural economy of Rotten Tomatoes in "Rotten Tomatoes in the Field of Popular Cultural Production," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 26–44.

⁷⁷ "About Rotten Tomatoes," *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed July 31, 2016, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/help_desk/critics.

⁷⁸ "Tomatometer Criteria."

Tomatometer, the site aggregates user reviews to publish an “Audience Score,” based on a five-star rating system. All users of Flixster.com and RottenTomatoes.com can participate in the Audience Score, which is displayed on a film’s page at the same height and size but off to the right of the critics’ Tomatometer score.⁷⁹

With the Tomatometer and Audience Score side by side, the immediate impression is to pit “users” or fans against professional critics in a democratic showdown. To give an example, the 2016 Canadian release *Into the Forest* received a Tomatometer score of 74 percent, a Top Critics score of 69 percent (both “fresh”), and an Audience Score of 52 percent (meaning it received an average user rating of 3.1 out of five stars).⁸⁰ Without getting into the actual statistical comparability of the two divergent algorithms, the film’s page shows that critics collectively deemed the film “fresh,” with a shiny red tomato, while audiences collectively assigned it a low rating, depicted visually by a toppled popcorn box. The visuals are similar but even sparser on Rotten Tomatoes’ Flixster application for personal devices. While the actual numbers reflect significant ambivalence on both sides, the quick visual message is that critical and public tastes regarding the film were contradictory.

In a more innocent time, Rotten Tomatoes also permitted users to comment on individual reviews posted by professional critics. But early negative reviews of fan favourites were consistently met with user uproar, culminating in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) incident, in which users showered vitriol on critics, especially Marshall Fine, for their less-than-ecstatic reviews of the film. The website decided to temporarily deactivate the public comments function and the site’s editor in chief Matt Atchity vowed to re-evaluate the commenting structure.⁸¹ The site has now eliminated public commenting on specific reviews; instead, users may now log in to a general discussion forum for each film. Such dust ups invoke the cliché of the ornery critic removed from public taste. Except that in this case, the critic is not isolated and must face the antipathy of readers. On the other hand, the intense reaction from fans suggests film critics have

⁷⁹ “About Rotten Tomatoes.”

⁸⁰ “Into the Forest (2016),” *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed July 31, 2016, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/into_the_forest/?search=into%20the%20forest.

⁸¹ Matt Atchity, “The Dark Knight Rises--This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things,” *Rotten Tomatoes*, July 16, 2012, <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/the-dark-knight-rises-this-is-why-we-cant-have-nice-things/>.

a greater impact than the cliché of the out-of-touch critic—and much of contemporary discourse—assumes.

In January 2003, *Variety*'s then-editor-in-chief Peter Bart published a baiting opinion piece in *Daily Variety*. Responding to critics' top ten lists for 2002, Bart concluded, "Elitist by nature, critics find it positively unbearable to endorse any movie that has found acceptance from the mass audience. If the great unwashed liked it, could it be any goddam good? This would explain the zero overlap between the box office top 10 and any of the critics' top 10."⁸² Bart claimed that "various filmmaker friends" he spoke to confirmed his views. If critics do not reflect popular taste, Bart continued, then they are only useful for providing blurbs for film advertisements, and even then, their influence is minimal, according to "three top studio ad execs."⁸³ Considering *Variety*'s primary readership is industry insiders and film critics, it is not surprising that Bart's broadside raised some hackles, including those of Charles Taylor, pop culture writer for *Salon*. Taylor responded, in more than double the length of the original article, to several of Bart's claims. He asserted, "By taking the line that critics serve no purpose Bart is—intentionally or not—doing the bidding of the studios, which, while maintaining a blasé public attitude toward critics, would love to be rid of them. What industry chief doesn't dream about being able to market his product in an atmosphere where the public has no information save that provided by the manufacturer?"⁸⁴ Here, Taylor articulated the notion that Hollywood studios have long been working towards critic-proofing themselves, a point also argued by Roger Ebert more than a decade earlier and by numerous critics today, including those at *Slate*.⁸⁵ Taylor also defended the two "obscure" films that Bart derided, the Japanese feature *Warm Water Under a Red Bridge* (2001) and Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002); it is telling that both are foreign productions that challenged Hollywood hegemony.

⁸² Peter Bart, "Critics' Year-End Lists: Triumph of Obscurantism," *Daily Variety*, January 6, 2003, 4.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Charles Taylor, "The War Against Movie Critics," *Salon*, January 13, 2003, <http://www.salon.com/2003/01/13/bart/>.

⁸⁵ Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and June Thomas, "*This Is Event Programming, Dammit*" *Edition*, The Slate Culture Gabfest, 2010, http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/culturegabfest/2010/03/the_culture_gabfest_this_is_event_programming_dammit_edition.html.

Variety followed up on Bart's provocation in its "Pushy Question" column, asking readers, "Are film critics really needed anymore...or is it a washed-up profession?"⁸⁶ The responses represented a range of opinions, but the article certainly reproduced many of the populist prejudices against critics, as evidenced in the quotations below from four anonymous "*Variety* subscribers":

- I think if critics were needed or talented for that matter they would be doing what they're criticizing rather than [*sic*] criticizing it. The worst of it is, the majority of them are more pretentious than [*sic*] the producers who produced what they're criticizing [...].
- With the technology advances [...] the value of the film critic has greatly diminished, if not evaporated completely. [...] I put far more weight in the average opinion of many audience members than I do in the opinion of a single film critic. [...] critics tend to write for other critics, rather than the potential ticket buyer.
- If the trailer looks like the movie is going to be a dud and a large portion of film reviewers say it is, I would probably listen. Power of making or breaking a film is long gone thou [*sic*]. The general public is much smarter these days and will make up their [*sic*] own minds.
- I rarely read film reviews. Critics have their own agenda and usually love movies I'd never consider watching. I make my own decisions.⁸⁷

Though some other respondents were more appreciative of critics' contributions, this selection bluntly captures the sentiment of "self-respect" that underlies rhetoric about the "end of criticism." When a filmmaker confronted *Variety* in 2010 for selling him a costly advertising campaign and subsequently giving his film a negative review, a representative of the magazine allegedly told him, "No one takes these reviews seriously."⁸⁸ It is an insincere statement seeing that *Variety* has steadfastly reviewed virtually every feature film released in the United States since 1907.⁸⁹ Even after laying off its veteran chief film critic, Todd McCarthy, also in 2010, the

⁸⁶ Variety Staff, "Are Film Critics Really Needed Anymore...Or Is It a Washed-Up Profession?," *Variety*, April 25, 2007, <http://variety.com/2007/scene/people-news/are-film-critics-really-needed-anymore-or-is-it-a-washed-up-profession-1117963778/>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ John Cook, "Variety Thinks 'No One Takes [Its] Reviews Seriously,' Which Is Probably Why It Fired Its Critics," *Gawker*, March 11, 2010.

⁸⁹ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 83.

publication continues to publish extensive reviews by a roster of critics under a new chief.⁹⁰ Still, the statement claims, at best, that average moviegoers ignore reviews, or, worse, that the industry is also apathetic about reviews, trusting instead the job of taste making to studio marketers. In this scenario, *Variety*'s stance is as cynical as the client who thought he could buy his film a positive review.

The Rotten Tomatoes and *Variety* examples reveal just how deeply popular film commentary is implicated in the economics and consumption patterns of film, publishing, broadcasting, the internet, and popular culture.⁹¹ Simon During points out that criticism is not just supplementary but essential for creating and sustaining global markets for popular cinema:

Leisure markets require incessant discursive supplementation (commentary, criticism, celebration) because consumer preferences are unpredictable and supply constantly exceeds demand. Reviewing, in particular, must be semi-independent from producers in order to protect its impartiality and its capacity to guide consumption choices. In this sense it is both inside and outside the system. Further, reviewing (like the academic knowledges that border it on one side and the hype that borders it on the other) helps produce ever more specialized cultural markets and increasingly knowing and picky cultural consumers.⁹²

As During notes, this mutual dependency of professional critics and the film industry raises questions about critics' intellectual autonomy and impartiality. In fact, Mattias Frey traces these concerns about critics' proximity to the industry all the way back to the 1920s.⁹³ According to some observers, the distance between critics and the industry shrunk away with television film reviews, where promotional clips from distributors were essential to the formula. In an elaborate take down of the television review format, Patrick Goldstein cautioned in 1988 that clips "have far more impact than any critical opinion-making. That's why marketing execs love them—they've provided them with priceless free advertising."⁹⁴ He worried that print critics were

⁹⁰ Michael Cieply, "Variety Lays Off Two Critics in an Overhaul," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/09/business/media/09variety.html?_r=0.

⁹¹ Shepherd, "Rotten Tomatoes," 33.

⁹² Simon During, "Popular Culture on a Global Scale: A Challenge for Cultural Studies?," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (1997): 821; cited in Shepherd, "Rotten Tomatoes," 33.

⁹³ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 41–51.

⁹⁴ Goldstein, "TV Film Critics."

losing clout and column space in this “cozy new marketing equation.”⁹⁵ Since the film companies were free to choose flattering clips designed to attract customers, they could presumably override any reservations about the film’s quality the critic might present, resulting in an “automatic victory.”⁹⁶ On top of that, reporters found that marketing departments were increasingly using blurbs from radio and television critics instead of print critics, a trend that might inspire broadcast critics to make themselves especially quotable.⁹⁷

Scepticism about the professional ethics of film critics often accompanies anti-intellectual, anti-critic sentiment. But the threat of unprofessionalism can also be viewed as a second, separate factor that has helped undermine the authority of critics since the golden age. The sight of Jiminy Glick sleeping through a festival film he is supposed to critique, and then, to make matters worse, faking a live-to-air review for his home television audience, calls to mind the familiar trope of the lazy, irresponsible film critic. In an earlier iteration, Bill Murray spoofed a film critic on television for *Saturday Night Live*. Asked to review the thriller *The Deep* (1977) during the “Weekend Update” segment, Murray glad hands the audience, refers to himself as “the Party Animal,” and then admits that he missed the preview screening because his date was drunk.⁹⁸ He does not let that stop him, however. Instead, he watches a brief clip and gives his commentary on the spot, based solely on surface qualities of the film’s three lead actors. Satisfied, Murray concludes, “Okay, that’s my first review of the season. You don’t like it? Well, I’m sorry, but that’s the way I feel. Now, get out of here! I mean it! This is Bill Murray for ‘Weekend Update,’ throwing it over to my buddy at the sports desk.”⁹⁹ Murray’s film critic is simply having too good a time to take his job seriously. And actual film critics reinforce this notion that reviewing films is too enjoyable and easy to be a real job, frequently joking about getting paid to watch movies. Both Elwy Yost and Robert Fulford have alluded to having so

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 272.

⁹⁷ James Bates and Jen Pollack Bianco, “The Movies’ ‘Riveting!’ Blurb Mill,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1997, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-03-24/news/mn-41536_1_movie-ads.

⁹⁸ “Season 3: Episode 1,” *Saturday Night Live Transcripts*, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/77/77aupdate.phtml>.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

much fun as critics that it is hardly recognizable as legitimate work.¹⁰⁰ Of course, attending numerous screenings of mediocre films each week and preparing multiple reviews on deadline is demanding work. However, this reality is hardly as seductive—and contemptible—as the popular stereotype.

Even when film critics are seen to be hardworking, they can be perceived as in thrall to the film industry they rely on for access to the preview screenings, glamorous junkets, and press kits that make their jobs viable. Pauline Kael's friendships with filmmakers like Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese were well documented, though these affiliations were generally tolerated without much pushback.¹⁰¹ More egregious transgressions are recounted in Brian Kellow's biography of Kael, where he asserts that she plagiarized and distorted much of the information in her famous 1971 essay "Raising Kane," a text that challenges the conventional view that Orson Welles was the sole *auteur* behind *Citizen Kane* (1941).¹⁰² Frank Rich's review of Kellow's book uses this allegation to perpetuate negative stereotypes of film critics: "If her rise inspired many young writers to enter film criticism, her fall is a cautionary tale illustrating why critics in positions of power should get out while the getting is good, before they invariably flame out in corruption, self-parody, first-person megalomania or, in Kael's case, all three."¹⁰³ Roger Ebert was also known for cavorting with celebrities in Cannes and Los Angeles, but he maintains that he never felt his reviews were compromised.¹⁰⁴ According to his autobiography, only once did a studio executive pressure him for a positive review (at least explicitly).¹⁰⁵

In more recent years, concerns have surfaced about "blurb mills," networks of popular critics sympathetic to the Hollywood studios and poised to offer encouraging reviews to even the least imaginative releases. Ignominy struck the critical industry hardest in 2001 when it was revealed that Connecticut critic David Manning was an outright fabrication. Short on genuine praise, Sony Columbia advertising executives had invented Manning's glowing assessments of critical duds such as *Hollow Man* (2000) and *The Animal* (2001). Seizing the opportunity to

¹⁰⁰ Yost discusses his "charmed life" in *TV Ontario 25th Anniversary Celebration: Incomplete*, Video cassette, Saturday Night at the Movies, 1990; Fulford, *Best Seat*.

¹⁰¹ Ebert, *Life Itself: A Memoir*, 276.

¹⁰² Kellow, *A Life in the Dark*, 156–167.

¹⁰³ Rich, "Roaring at the Screen."

¹⁰⁴ Ebert, *Life Itself: A Memoir*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

skewer the industry, actor Harry Shearer interviewed “David Manning” on his radio program *Le Show*, where Manning, voiced by a computer, was eager to dispel rumours that he did not “exist.” During the nine-minute bit, the robotic voice declared, “When I came out of the box, I did not even know what a movie was, and by now I can spout more enthusiastic adjectives about them than Jeffrey Lyons ever knew,” sneaking in a jab at the veteran radio and television film reviewer known for his generous, quotable reviews on *Sneak Previews* and *At the Movies*. When Shearer questioned Manning’s own charitable reviews, the computer suggested perhaps only a computerized critic could escape the rampant cynicism of the critical industry. Though light hearted and funny, the piece foregrounded the public’s distrust of film critics and the perceived corruption and indifference of the critics themselves. Since the Manning incident, several additional professional ethics scandals have arisen, including studios wooing critics with payouts and critics disregarding review embargoes to get scoops.¹⁰⁶ The film critic profession thus finds itself facing challenges from multiple directions at once, not least Hollywood studios, movie fans, and populists.

The parodies described above are based on three orientations in popular culture: a) subverting the film critic as public intellectual, b) calling out the hubris of Hollywood and its American mouthpieces (especially from a Canadian vantage point), and c) exposing corruption in the film critic profession. A fourth point of resistance has challenged the white male hegemony in film criticism. If one can argue, against anti-intellectual dogma, that popular film criticism is indeed organic and democratic, and if one can convince movie fans that film critics have not been corrupted by proximity to the film industry, it may be more of a challenge to overcome this last factor undermining the legitimacy of critical authority: the uniformity of voices. For much of its history, middle-class white men have dominated the field of film talk. While film commentary has functioned as a valuable arena for exploring disparate ideas and opinions about art, culture, and society, it is important to recognize that the discursive conditions of this public sphere, as informed by gender, ethnicity, and class, were actually quite

¹⁰⁶ Sam Adams, “Get Paid to Review Movies - By the People Who Make Movies,” *Criticwire*, August 5, 2014, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/criticwire/get-paid-to-review-movies-by-the-people-who-make-movies-20140805>; Patrick Goldstein, “A Film Studio Embargo on Reviews in This Day and Age?,” *The Gazette (Montreal)*, December 9, 2011; Cook, “Variety.”

circumscribed and homogeneous. Enormous segments of ordinary moviegoers have simply not been part of the conversation.

Chapter Three traced a history in the United States and United Kingdom in which women and people of colour created spaces for diverse perspectives in film talk in alternative and mainstream venues alike—at least until film criticism’s consecration as a highbrow form in the mid-1960s. The film generation’s appropriation of film talk as a sophisticated, classy activity and the concomitant elevation of the film critic profession narrowed the field of voices, leading to today’s pantheon of middle-class, white, male critics. The diversity of voices in English Canadian criticism has been even more limited, with virtually no people of colour and only a handful of recognizable female names (Ray Lewis, Joan Fox, Wendy Michener, Katherine Monk, etc.). Film talk on English Canadian radio and television has been overwhelmingly white and male, and as a result, the content of broadcast film talk—even in its most liberal manifestations—has been too often hegemonic, exclusionary, and even misogynist, as seen in the talk of Clyde Gilmour, Gerald Pratley, and Elwy Yost. As the SCTV parodies started hinting in the late 1970s, this kind of cultural authority has expired.

Over the decades, Siskel and Ebert inspired countless parodies and homages, including references in *Mad* and *Muppet* magazines, on television shows *In Living Color* and *South Park*, and in B comedies *Back to the Beach* (1987) and *Summer School* (1987).¹⁰⁷ One parody, in Robert Townsend’s 1987 film *Hollywood Shuffle*, stands out for its critique of the cultural homogeneity of film talk. The film tells the story of Bobby Taylor (Townsend), an aspiring African-American actor in Los Angeles who has landed a role in a promising film but is dismayed to find himself playing a black stereotype. Hoping to make the best of it, he tells a group of friends, “Man, I just hope the critics like it, ‘cause they can shoot a movie down.”¹⁰⁸ The reference to film critics prompts the following exchange:

Friend 1: Aw, man, the critics don’t know nothing.

Friend 2: Right, they don’t know nothin’. It’s just like that TV show. You know, the one with the two critics. With the fat dude. The fat dude and the glasses.

[Bobby laughs and nods.]

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 283.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Townsend, *Hollywood Shuffle*, Video cassette (Cineplex-Odeon Home Video, 1987).

Friend 2: Like he knows everything.

Friend 3: Yeah, they need some real brothas critiquing the movies.¹⁰⁹

The film cuts to a new scene depicting a Siskel-and-Ebert-style movie review show. Two working class black men sneak into movie theatre seats and literally bump into each other. They turn to the camera:

Critic 1 (Townsend): Welcome to *Sneaking in the Movies*. My name is Speed, and this is my homeboy Tyrone. We are like, uh, movie critics and shit.

Critic 2 (Jimmy Woodard): Well, not really. Peep this: Each week, me and my boy, you know, we go to different theatres and stuff, and sneak in and check out the movie.

Critic 1: Then, we come back and tell y'all wassup, like if y'all should pay money and shit.¹¹⁰

Speed and Tyrone proceed to review four films, three of them spoofs of mainstream films from the era: *Amadeus and Salarius* (*Amadeus*, 1984), *Chicago Jones*, *Temple of Doom* (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, 1984), and the new “Dirty Larry” (*Dirty Harry*) movie. The fourth film, by far both critics’ favourite, is a loose take-off on the *Living Dead* movies. *Attack of the Street Pimps* features a black cast playing zombie pimps and sex workers, a clear departure from the heroic white narratives of the first three films.

The satire incisively prods some unspoken fundamentals about American popular cinema: it is geared towards majority white audiences, the good guys are white guys, and film critics on television are also typically white, middle-class men who espouse middlebrow tastes. Operating in a time when Siskel and Ebert had become archetypes of white male film taste, the segment (and the film more generally) contemplates what black men might want to say about Hollywood hegemony. “*Sneaking in the Movies*”—a play on Siskel and Ebert’s *Sneak Previews*—follows in the tradition of Eddie Murphy’s film and television critic Raheem Abdul Muhammed on *Saturday Night Live*’s “Weekend Update.” Muhammed appeared on several episodes between 1980 and 1982, reviewing films and holding forth as a spokesperson for the black community on issues including the lack of diversity on television and what horror movies

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

mean to black audiences.¹¹¹ As with *Hollywood Shuffle*, the novelty of a black voice talking back is as salient as the content of the speech. Muhammed's criticism and *Sneaking in the Movies* are both parables of marginalized movie fans inscribing themselves as authorities in spaces that have traditionally excluded them; hence, "sneaking in."

Sneaking in the Movies asks, what if two black guys from the 'hood reviewed movies in the manner of Siskel and Ebert. Fast forwarding twenty-five years, the inaugural episode of the *Black on Black Cinema* podcast in November 2012 joked that if the program was called "White on White Cinema," it would simply consist of Siskel and Ebert.¹¹² Instead, the podcast series features a panel of four informed and enthusiastic African-American movie fans discussing the politics of representation in black films, past and present. The podcast is one of several diverse programs that have emerged during the recent boom in online audio talk content, indicating the potential for a revolution in inclusive amateur and professional programming. Chapter Seven will explore the extent to which such technological and cultural developments are helping the critical community in English Canada diversify. Is the field of online criticism inherently accessible and pluralist, or does it merely reproduce broader existing social inequalities? Does online film talk support and sustain domestic film culture or is it increasingly complicit in the neoliberal capitalism of global cinema? The truth is that online film talk is and does all of these things, representing an open-ended future for popular criticism in Canada and internationally. One of the few certainties is that cultural nationalism, as practiced by Pratley and other Canadian cinema advocates, and now associated with paternalism and colonialism, is virtually dead in contemporary film talk. The next chapter considers the continued place of film talk in cultivating domestic film production, circulating film texts, and fuelling engagement with all kinds of cinema.

¹¹¹ "Raheem Abdul Muhammed Sketches," *NBC - SNL*, accessed August 2, 2016, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/cast/eddie-murphy-15071/character/raheem-abdul-muhammed-65906>.

¹¹² *Superfly*, *Black on Black Cinema*, accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.blackonblackcinema.com/black-on-black-cinema-ep1-superfly/>.

Chapter Seven: Film Talk on the Web: Amateurs in a Dangerous Time

Despite the many “end of criticism” alarm calls that have sounded over the last few years, film commentary is now more pervasive than ever. Traditional news media—newspapers, radio, and television—continue to regularly feature film reviews and commentary in their arts and entertainment reporting, not to mention the explosion of film writing online, ranging from academic blogs to user comments. Meanwhile, spoken film talk is experiencing a renaissance in the form of digital, on-demand podcasts. The 2001 feature comedy *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* wryly observes, “The internet has given everyone in America a voice, and evidently everyone in America has chosen to use that voice to bitch about movies.”¹ And even if the line refers to America’s dominant position in both the global film industry and the World Wide Web, online film talk has become an important part of every country’s cinema culture, not least Canada’s.² The effusion of online criticism shows that Richard Corliss’s plea—“we still need words” to understand movies³—remains accurate more than twenty-five years later. Professional and amateur film commentary in social media, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, and web magazines and newspapers permeates internet culture.

As with the emergence of film talk on television decades ago, the ubiquity of online film talk has prompted consternation about the quality of the discourse. Corliss’s overture was part of a broader warning about the nefarious effects caused by film critics on television. Roger Ebert responded to Corliss’s challenge with his own polemic both defending the intellectual value of television talk and praising its popularizing capacity.⁴ Ebert later took a similar position in the debate about web-based criticism. In 2010 he claimed, “This is a golden age for film criticism. Never before have more critics written more or better words for more readers about more films.”⁵ Also optimistic, Harry Knowles, founder of the ground-breaking genre cinema website *Ain’t It Cool News*, declared, “critical thinking has spread.”⁶ Borrowing from Yockai Benkler’s *The Wealth of Networks*, Chuck Tryon assures non-believers that the free-market attention

¹ Kevin Smith, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, DVD (Alliance Atlantis, 2001).

² Ibid.

³ Corliss, “All Thumbs,” 18.

⁴ Ebert, “All Stars.”

⁵ Roger Ebert, “The Golden Age of Movie Critics,” *RogerEbert.com*, May 1, 2010, <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/the-golden-age-of-movie-critics>.

⁶ Gerald Peary, *For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism*, DVD, 2009.

economy of the internet filters out the less interesting critical voices, creating order from chaos, and allowing the cream to rise to the top.⁷ In the democratic online utopia, all who care about cinema can express their ideas and opinions about it, and the best of them will even find an audience. However, unless you are Roger Ebert or Harry Knowles, “You can’t make any money at it.”⁸

On the other side of the fence, observers worry about declining critical standards, unskilled writing, and dissolving professional boundaries and job opportunities. Mattias Frey documents a popular tendency to view the current critical climate as an “anarchic, populist, and ultimately useless explosion of opinion.”⁹ The notion that online discourse is chaotic and indiscriminate, like a modern-day Babel, has gained purchase with pundits and journalists. In his 2016 book *Better Living through Criticism*, film critic for *The New York Times* A. O. Scott is more concerned that online discourse is the reverse of Babel, following popular culture’s consumerist paradigm towards a stifling conformity of opinion. If some people maintain that the internet has democratized critical speech, Scott finds that old elitisms have simply been replaced by new corporate imperatives:

The leveling of old taste hierarchies does not resolve the problem of cultural authority and does not necessarily make us any freer. The consumer economy is profoundly unequal, raising barriers to entry on the basis of income and access rather than pedigree. And the story of human progress, of opening minds and increasingly cosmopolitan pleasures, is also a tale of loss, of standardization and homogenization.¹⁰

In this view, the same attention economy Tryon celebrates filters out marginal voices that would help diversify film talk. This chapter takes a close look at film podcasts produced in Canada and the United States since 2005 to determine whether this do-it-yourself techno-cultural form actually does challenge old systems of cultural authority and open up spaces where diverse voices and new approaches to cinema culture can be heard. Further, in what ways does this new form of talk support Canadian national cinema; or does it, as Scott’s stance suggests, simply get

⁷ Chuck Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 130.

⁸ Ebert, “The Golden Age of Movie Critics.”

⁹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 101–102.

¹⁰ Scott, *Better Living Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth*, 113–114.

absorbed by the Hollywood industrial complex. In the end, I show that film podcasts in Canada can do more to engage with pluralistic moviemaking and moviegoing communities and to foster a thriving national cinema scene.

The Changing Film Talk Landscape

Despite *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*'s prescient declaration of the ubiquity of online film talk, it took a while longer for the media to panic about it. A symposium titled "Film Criticism in America Today" published in *Cineaste* in December 2000 made surprisingly scant mention of the internet. Only five of the twenty-four contributors brought up the impact of the web. David Edelstein, then of the online magazine *Slate*, wrote about editorial freedoms, flexible word counts, and being taken seriously by the film industry.¹¹ Peter Travers (*Rolling Stone*), Jay Carr (then *Boston Globe*), and Armond White (then *New York Press*) each made passing remarks on the democratizing versus consumerist characteristics of online commentary.¹² Real concerns began to surface a few years later. In January 2005, *Variety* reported large and devoted readerships for web publications like *Film Threat*, *Ain't It Cool News*, and *Salon*. It alleged, "Now anyone with an opinion and a keyboard can post their views for the whole world to see," a sentiment that was quickly becoming a cliché.¹³ There was no reason to worry, however, because niche online outlets were not competing for readers of traditional entertainment journalism.¹⁴ Online and print formats could happily coexist. Two years later, *Chicago Reader* film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum was equally optimistic: "claims that film criticism is becoming extinct, and counter-claims that it's entering a new golden age, are equally misguided if they assume that film criticism as an institution functions the same way on paper and in cyberspace, as two versions of the same thing rather than as separate enterprises."¹⁵ He encouraged a healthy agnosticism about the potential negative effects of the web on the critical industry.

¹¹ Various, "Film Criticism in America Today: A Critical Symposium," *Cineaste* 26, no. 1 (2000): 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 28, 43–44, 44–45.

¹³ Jeff Goldsmith, "Filling the Niche," *Variety*, January 9, 2005, <http://variety.com/2005/film/awards/filling-the-niche-2-1117916027/>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Film Writing on the Web: Some Personal Reflections," *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2007): 77.

The press' response expanded and intensified in 2008, after numerous layoffs of arts and culture critics were announced. The *Salt Lake Tribune's* film critic Sean P. Means kept track of the job losses on his blog, and in spring 2008 he reported that twenty-eight film critics had been cut from or left their jobs since 2006.¹⁶ A year later the number had risen to fifty-five film critics lost to "buyouts, layoffs, reassignment, retirement," and publications shutting down.¹⁷ In 2008, *The New York Times*, *Variety*, *Sight & Sound*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and David Bordwell's blog all contemplated the displacement of traditional critics due to large-scale shifts in print media and the proliferation of informative film discourse on the web.¹⁸

At this time *Cineaste* published a 25 000-word symposium about the issues film critics faced related to the internet.¹⁹ This new and precarious phase in the history of popular film criticism also animated film critic Gerald Peary's documentary, *For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism* (2009), which summarized the trends and shifts documented in the above articles.²⁰ Thomas Doherty documented the decline—even "death"—of professional film criticism, as propagated by the anarchic blogosphere. He noted that the demise was being commemorated in scholarship, such as Peary's film and the books *American Movie Critics* (Phillip Lopate, ed., 2006), *Scenes of Instruction* (Dana Polan, 2007), *Inventing Film Studies* (Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., 2008), and *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Jerry Roberts, 2010).²¹ The "end of criticism" rhetoric was generally regretful about the implied loss of film culture's public sphere.

¹⁶ Vincent Rossmeier, "Where Have All the Film Critics Gone?," *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2008, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/06/express/where-have-all-the-film-critics-gone>.

¹⁷ Sean P. Means, "Critics: Who Needs 'Em?," *The Movie Cricket: All About Flicks*, May 11, 2009, <http://extras.sltrib.com/blogs/movies/>.

¹⁸ David Carr, "Now on the Endangered Species List: Movie Critics in Print," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2008; Anne Thompson, "Times Changing for Film Critics," *Variety*, April 3, 2008, <http://variety.com/2008/film/columns/times-changing-for-film-critics-1117983482/>; Nick James, "Who Needs Critics?," *Sight & Sound*, October 2008; Rossmeier, "Where Have All the Film Critics Gone?"; David Bordwell, "In Critical Condition," *Observations on Film Art*, May 14, 2008, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/05/14/in-critical-condition/>.

¹⁹ Various, "Film Criticism in the Age of the Internet: A Critical Symposium," *Cineaste* 33, no. 4 (2008): 30–45.

²⁰ Peary, *For the Love of Movies*.

²¹ Thomas Doherty, "The Death of Film Criticism," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 28, 2010, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Death-of-Film-Criticism/64352/>; Lopate, *American Movie Critics*; Dana B. Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study*

Ironically, many of the blogs identified as runaway successes in the above articles are now defunct. The author of *Talking Moviezzz*, a blog Bordwell referenced in 2008, lamented, when his blog went under, that 2007 to 2009 had been the heyday of internet community building; after that, movie blogs turned corporate.²² Several major contributors to the cinema blogosphere have vanished, including *GreenCine Daily*, *Film Threat*, *Framework Online*, and the Canadian blog *Criticize This!* The large volume of content produced by and for these blogs has in many cases disappeared without a trace, except for snapshots in the Wayback Machine archive. It has been a presumption on both sides of the “end of criticism” debate that democratic and diverse online film writing will continue to flourish, eventually displacing print criticism. Instead, perhaps only content from the most profitable and securely employed sources lasts, such as that from established celebrity brands (i.e. RogerEbert.com), large media conglomerates (i.e. *The Loop* and Bell Media), and educational institution affiliations (i.e. David Bordwell and University of Wisconsin-Madison). Whatever the case, *Criticwire* recently pointed out that online film journalism is thriving through numerous websites dedicated to highbrow (*Film Comment*) and populist (*ScreenCrush*) film culture and everything in between.²³ In addition, web media companies *BuzzFeed* and *UPROXX* have recently added regular film critics to their staff.

All the same, the layoffs have continued and grown more severe since 2008. In March 2010, *Variety* dismissed their chief film critic, Todd McCarthy, after thirty-one years. McCarthy was known worldwide for giving the first word on the quality and audience appeal of a vast range of international and American films entering the global market. This layoff was treated in the press as the harbinger of a true crisis for popular film criticism, even though McCarthy went on to become chief film critic for *Variety*'s competitor *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* subsequently hired their own new chief film critic. Roger Ebert's tribute to McCarthy's work

of Film (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Roberts, *The Complete History*.

²² “What Ever Happened To: This Blog,” *Talking Moviezzz*, November 22, 2011, <http://talkingmoviezzz.blogspot.ca/>.

²³ Max O'Connell, “David Cronenberg Says Social Media Is Killing the Role of the Critic,” *Criticwire*, January 5, 2015, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/criticwire/david-cronenberg-says-social-media-is-killing-the-role-of-the-critic-20150105>.

read like a eulogy for a dying tradition.²⁴ Some of *Slate*'s critics discussed the firing in a podcast, proposing that the real threat to the critical profession—long before blogs emerged—was the commercialization of film culture and the lessening autonomy of film critics.²⁵ This claim that the bullying Hollywood marketing machine—not new criticism formats—has done the most damage to critical discourse goes back at least as far as Roger Ebert's 1990 defense of critics on television.²⁶ When the cancellation of *At the Movies* was announced a few weeks after McCarthy's layoff, numerous media outlets published additional fretful stories about the uncertain future of film criticism. Yet, even after losing his seat as the program's co-host, A. O. Scott was optimistic that the rigour and spirit of film criticism would continue to flourish, regardless of its technological and material conditions.²⁷

Scott pointed out that authors such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and T. S. Eliot lamented in past centuries the inconstant and unstable state of arts criticism. Scott figured not much has changed in this regard, and that the end of *At the Movies* represented yet another vicissitude in the highly mutable field of criticism. He noted, "from a certain angle, the future of criticism is always bleak and the present always a riot of ill-informed opinion and boisterous disputation," but "the state of the art is remarkably constant."²⁸ In other words, professional critics may lose their jobs, and the landscape may look different now than it did in the golden age of Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris, or even Siskel and Ebert, but critical debate in the arts will continue to thrive.

At *Salon*, Andrew O'Hehir responded to the article with a takedown, accusing Scott and others of inflating the cultural and journalistic importance of popular film criticism. He claimed, "Writing about movies requires no particular expertise or training, and as we've learned over the past decade, any idiot with an Internet connection can and will do it. Will there continue to be a market for those who can do it better than others? Probably, ultimately, over the long haul. I don't know. It depends what you mean by 'better.'"²⁹ Though seemingly confident that film

²⁴ Roger Ebert, "Variety: This Thumb's For You," *Roger Ebert's Journal*, March 9, 2010, <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/variety-this-thumbs-for-you>.

²⁵ Metcalf, Stevens, and Thomas, *Event Programming*.

²⁶ Ebert, "All Stars."

²⁷ Scott, "A Critic's Place."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Andrew O'Hehir, "Movie Critics: Shut Up Already!," *Salon*, April 15, 2010, http://www.salon.com/2010/04/15/film_critics_2/.

criticism is not going extinct, O’Hehir’s impatient tone perhaps reveals an underlying anxiety. Even more optimistically, Ebert celebrated the blogosphere as a renaissance in critical discourse, though he stated matter-of-factly that film criticism was “no longer an occupation,” since it no longer receives compensation.³⁰ In actuality, McCarthy promptly landed a new film critic post, Scott and O’Hehir remain stably employed at the time of writing, and Ebert kept his post at the *Chicago Sun-Times*—alongside his countless other projects—until his death in 2013. The most vocal believers in the continuity of cultural authority are, not coincidentally, some of the world’s most powerful and secure professional critics.

Since McCarthy, additional top-tier film critics have lost their permanent positions: J. Hoberman was cut after forty years of writing for the *Village Voice*, Owen Gleiberman was ousted from *Entertainment Weekly* after twenty-four years (and moved on to *Variety*), David Denby stepped down as a movie reviewer for the *New Yorker* after sixteen years, Rick Groen accepted a voluntary buyout at *The Globe and Mail* after nearly thirty years, and national film writer Katherine Monk was let go after thirteen years with Canwest Global/Postmedia.³¹ These major shifts in the professional field continue to spur media speculation as to the future of film criticism. Meanwhile the dismissal of Canadian critics Rick Groen and Katherine Monk from top positions at the most powerful national newspapers—part of widespread buyouts and layoffs in Canadian journalism—barely made a splash in the press.

Indeed, concern over the future of popular film commentary in English Canada has been comparatively muted. The *Ryerson Review of Journalism* published two pieces about domestic

³⁰ Ebert, “The Golden Age of Movie Critics.”

³¹ Mark Peranson, “Film Criticism After Film Criticism: The J. Hoberman Affair,” *Cinema Scope*, Spring 2012, <http://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/film-criticism-after-film-criticism-the-j-hoberman-affair/>; Cieply, “Variety Lays Off Two Critics in an Overhaul”; Oliver Gettell, “Longtime EW Film Critic Owen Gleiberman Laid Off,” *LA Times*, April 2, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-ew-film-critic-owen-gleiberman-laid-off-20140402-story.html>; Sharan Shetty, “David Denby Retires as Film Critic of The New Yorker,” *Slate*, December 13, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/12/13/david_denby_retires_as_new_yorker_film_critic_after_16_years_denby_leaves.html; Jan Wong, “Thousands of Cuts in the Media Industry,” *Canadian Media Guild*, November 19, 2013, <http://www.cmg.ca/en/2013/11/19/thousands-of-cuts-in-the-media-industry/>; James Bradshaw, “Postmedia Cuts National Writer Jobs, Offers Newsroom Buyouts,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 5, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/postmedia-cuts-national-writer-jobs-offers-newsroom-buyouts/article22819241/>; “About Katherine.”

trends in film criticism. The first, by Lyndsay Gibb in 2002, did not mention the web, but nonetheless proposed that “thoughtful film reviewing” was disappearing from Canadian daily newspapers due to editorial pressures to give readers quick, pithy consumer reports in the place of sustained intellectual analysis.³² The article explored the legacy of Jay Scott, film critic for *The Globe and Mail* from 1977 until his death in 1993. Scott was an award-winning journalist, widely considered an original and influential voice in Canadian film culture. According to Geoff Pevere (media critic with the *Toronto Star* for over a decade before recently moving to *The Globe and Mail*), Scott’s outsized persona, film festival antics, and passionate written engagement with popular culture “made the whole country pay attention.”³³ Gibb suggested that film critics like Pevere, Groen, and Monk were valuable to Canadian critical culture, but that none of them were as provocative and exciting as Scott.

Eleven years later in the *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Miro Rodriguez took up the theme of de-professionalization in Canadian film criticism, contrasting the rich careers of renowned print critics like Peter Howell, Brian D. Johnson, and Liam Lacey with amateur bloggers Alexandra Kittle (alexkittle.com) and Sarah Kelley (quietmoviereview.tumblr.com). Rodriguez distinguished the personal, conversational tone of the young women’s blogs from the heady, universal themes of the professional reviews. Perhaps more interestingly, the article inadvertently illustrated the dominance of white men in English Canada’s critical industry in recent decades. It is encouraging that the female bloggers in the piece found a readership and that both blogs are still active at the time of writing, but both writers were clear that they did not expect to make a living that way. As Kelley put it, “We can’t all afford to pursue what we’re passionate about.”³⁴ As popular film criticism becomes more accessible and inclusive, it offers diminishing economic and cultural rewards.

In December 2014, director David Cronenberg told Canadian Press that he believed the growth of online criticism, social media, and Rotten Tomatoes had “diminished” the authority of

³² Lyndsay Gibb, “O Critic, Where Art Thou?,” *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, June 16, 2002, <http://rrj.ca/o-critic-where-art-thou/>.

³³ Cited in *ibid.*

³⁴ Miro Rodriguez, “Fade to Black: Is It Over for the Newspaper Film Critic?,” *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, December 10, 2013, <http://rrj.ca/fade-to-black-is-it-over-for-the-newspaper-film-critic/>.

“legitimate” film critics.³⁵ As an icon of Canadian cinema, Cronenberg is now in a position to defend popular critics. In the past, however, he had his share of clashes with critics over his divisive, controversial films. He has claimed that negative critiques of his early horror films, specifically *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977), by the likes of Robert Fulford, Robin Wood, Clyde Gilmour, and Martin Knelman, threatened his career and livelihood.³⁶ Fulford’s notorious review of *Shivers* (originally *The Parasite Murders* in English Canada) accused the Canadian Film Development Corporation of funding “an atrocity, a disgrace to everyone connected with it—including the taxpayers.”³⁷ The issue was even raised in the House of Commons.³⁸ Cronenberg maintains that the press’ reactions caused him to lose his family home in Toronto when the proprietor came to believe the filmmaker made pornography after reading a second article by Fulford.³⁹ These stories have become part of the lore of *enfant terrible* Cronenberg’s rise to Canadian auteurist supremacy, offered as evidence of misguided critical authority and the filmmaker’s ability to transcend the old guard. They are part of the myth of Cronenberg as provocateur and visionary. They also imbue the film critics of the time with cultural power as public gatekeepers and spokespeople for the country’s cultural health.

Cronenberg’s emphasis on the real-life consequences of criticism proposes that critics could quite effectively stir public reaction and influence the production of cinematic art, particularly in the relatively small Canadian market. Less often reported is the way that critics rose to Cronenberg’s defense after *Shivers* was vilified by Fulford and others. In Ernest Mathijs’s account of the reception of Cronenberg’s early films, he explains that although *Rabid* shared *Shivers*’ themes and propensity to scandalize audiences, its critical reception triggered less controversy. Shortly before the release of *Rabid*, Maurice Yacowar attempted to salvage *Shivers* in the magazine *Cinema Canada*, pointing out that horror classics like *Psycho* (1960) and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) initially offended critics too and suggesting that “serious art in the

³⁵ Victoria Ahearn, “Is Social Media Killing the Professional Critic?,” *CBC News*, December 30, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/is-social-media-killing-the-professional-critic-1.2886615>.

³⁶ Maurice Yacowar, “You Shiver Because It’s Good,” *Cinema Canada*, February 1977, 54.

³⁷ Robert Fulford writing as Marshall Delaney, “You Should Know How Bad This Film Is. After All, You Paid for It,” *Saturday Night*, September 1975, 83.

³⁸ Ernest Mathijs, *The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48–49; David Cronenberg, “The Night Attila Met the Anti-Christ, She Was Shocked and He Was Outraged,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 14, 1977, 6.

horror genre must expect to be reviled before it is understood.”⁴⁰ The film gained support from other *Cinema Canada* contributors and from John Hofsess in *Maclean's*, and Mathijs notes that the fan press at the time also showed considerable enthusiasm for *Rabid*.⁴¹ By now, journalists and scholars have written as much about Cronenberg and his oeuvre as about any other canonical Canadian filmmaker, and it is fair to say that film critics have been a major part of his international success. The episode demonstrates that film critics are influential less as dogmatic tastemakers than as mediators of public ideas about taste and art. Put this way, one can appreciate Cronenberg’s recent concern with what he views as a decline in critical “authority.”

Besides soliciting the views of Cronenberg, the Canadian Press also spoke to film critics Richard Crouse and Jesse Wente. Both noted that popular film criticism has been de-professionalized and that the cultural authority of film critics is on the wane. Crouse saw fewer individuals earning a living as professional critics and those who did lacked the authority of Pauline Kael, Roger Ebert, and Jay Scott. He remarked, “Do critics still have the same kind of clout that they once did? I don’t think so, and it’s strictly because I think it’s been democratized.”⁴² Wente, who is also director of film programs at TIFF Lightbox, wonders if film reviewing is even a career anymore, but also insists that “Real critical authority is actually more needed and more valuable now, because you do need something to cut through what is this large amount of reaction to films.”⁴³ As an Ojibwe critic, Wente has highlighted Indigenous issues and cinema for the CBC and the ImagineNATIVE film festival, among others.

Whether the predominance of online film discourse is ultimately a bane for traditional print criticism, or the key to democratizing critical authority, or both, it is undeniable that the critics of the 1960s film generation are vanishing. Many of the notable figures of the film generation and the golden age of movie criticism have died: Gene Siskel, Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, Roger Ebert, Stanley Kauffmann, Vincent Canby, Jay Carr, Gilberto Perez, and Richard Corliss, and, in Canada, Clyde Gilmour, Sid Adilman, Joan Fox, Jay Scott, Gerald Pratley, and Elwy Yost. Regardless, professional film talk is still prevalent on traditional Canadian radio and television, though the commentary has generally grown briefer, more pragmatic, and more

⁴⁰ Yacowar, “You Shiver Because It’s Good,” 55.

⁴¹ Mathijs, *The Cinema of David Cronenberg*, 49.

⁴² Quoted in Ahearn, “Is Social Media Killing the Critic?”

⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*

promotional. Gone are the days when Gerald Pratley could sustain several simultaneous half-hour CBC Radio programs devoted to various aspects of cinema. A pair of contemporary examples offers snapshots of the current landscape.

Nearly seven decades after bringing Pratley and Clyde Gilmour on board, CBC Radio still employs a resident critic. Eli Glasner reviews films on Fridays for the CBC News Network, and he also delivers the national Friday drive-time movie reviews, typically covering two or three new releases in ten to fifteen minutes. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation also distributes *Eli Glasner on Film* as an on-demand podcast. Glasner's thoughtful and playful commentary highlights progressive and conscientious views on pop culture, continuing the socially conscious tradition of Pratley, while channelling the relatability of Gilmour. The program frequently juxtaposes a mainstream studio release with an indie film; Glasner usually turns out to be more sympathetic to the smaller, more cerebral, riskier film. Recent episodes matched *The BFG* (2016) with *Swiss Army Man* (2016), *Me before You* (2016) with *Into the Forest* (2016), and *Money Monster* (2016) with *A Bigger Splash* (2016).⁴⁴ In all cases, Glasner's taste favoured the latter film. Expanding on the usual format, Glasner co-hosted the June 8, 2016 episode with a special guest, Toronto-based film writer Radheyen "Rad" Simonpillai.⁴⁵ The two discussed new releases and "Hollywood trends," including the industry's objectification of female performers, during which topic Simonpillai denounced the "patriarchy in Hollywood."⁴⁶ Earlier that year, CBC News published a report by Simonpillai, himself a person of colour, praising Disney for distributing *The Jungle Book* (2016) in the Greater Toronto Area dubbed in Tamil and Hindi: "It's a great move for them for recognizing the diversity of their audience and the diversity of this city."⁴⁷ At the moment, Simonpillai appears to represent a commitment on the part of the CBC to diversify public radio film talk.

⁴⁴ "Eli Glasner on Film from CBC Radio," *CBC Radio*, accessed August 6, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/podcasting/includes/glasneronfilm.xml>.

⁴⁵ Eli Glasner and Radheyen Simonpillai, *Special Eli and Rad Edition*, *Eli Glasner on Film*, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/podcasting/includes/glasneronfilm.xml>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "Tamil, Hindi Versions of Hollywood Blockbusters Now Playing in GTA," *CBC News*, April 20, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/hindi-hollywood-films-1.3543842>.

The second example is indicative of the approach to film talk in Canadian commercial television news. Since 2005, the national network CTV has featured film reviews by Torontonians Richard Crouse on their *Canada AM* breakfast news show.⁴⁸ Crouse was previously a long-time host on Rogers Television's community-based *Reel to Real*, which was cancelled in 2008, after sixteen years.⁴⁹ Next, Crouse hosted Richard Crouse's Movie Show, which aired nationally on the Independent Film Channel.⁵⁰ Rogers TV replaced *Reel to Real* with *Canadian Film Review* (2012–2013), a short-lived series covering Canadian cinema events; it now resides online.⁵¹ On CTV, Crouse delivers his five-minute reviews seated at the news desk with the anchor, while trailers fill the television screen. The emphasis is on mainstream Hollywood fare, with shorter segments dedicated to indie films. Crouse also exchanges some pleasantries with the anchor to book end his brief segment. Little attention is paid to Canadian films.

Reviews on CBC Radio and CTV always include action-packed clips provided by the distributors, demonstrating the profound symbiosis between contemporary broadcast film talk and film promotion. The examples also suggest that media film talk in Canada is still male dominated and Toronto-centric. But there are signs of change. This year the *Globe and Mail* appointed Kate Taylor as lead film critic, after years of having criminally few women on its film beat.⁵² Last year, the flailing Postmedia eliminated their national film writer position (among others), leaving Vancouver-based film critic Katherine Monk jobless. She had previously been a prominent voice in print, radio, and television, going back several years to the company's days as Canwest Global. The job cuts unfortunately meant the downfall of "the only full-time female national movie critic in Canada" at the time (since Taylor had not yet been appointed).⁵³ Monk's layoff also means that national film talk is once again produced almost exclusively in Toronto.

⁴⁸ "Richard Crouse, Film Critic," *CTV - Canada AM*, accessed August 6, 2016, <http://canadaam.ctvnews.ca/about/richard-crouse-1.813205>.

⁴⁹ Etan Vlessing, "Rogers Cancels Reel to Real," *Playback*, July 10, 2008, <http://playbackonline.ca/2008/07/10/rogers-20080710/>.

⁵⁰ "Richard Crouse."

⁵¹ "Canadian Film Review," *Rogers TV*, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.rogerstv.com/page.aspx?lid=12&rid=16&sid=5267&ref=pressplus1>.

⁵² "Kate Taylor," *The Globe and Mail*, accessed August 6, 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/authors/kate-taylor>.

⁵³ Bradshaw, "Postmedia"; Smith, "Postmedia Fires Film Critic Katherine Monk, but She Says It's Not Personal."

As in the past, radio and television still play an important role in producing and circulating talk about Canadian national cinema. Gerald Pratley's first years on public radio may have been dedicated mostly to discussing American and British cinema, but he also led some passionate entreaties for high quality domestic film production. His exhortations on late 1940s radio established a foundation for the discourses of cultural nationalism that characterized Canadian cinema culture for the next three decades. TVOntario's film programming also focussed on bringing international, and, especially, Hollywood movies into the Canadian home, but Elwy Yost nevertheless hosted enthusiastic *Saturday Night at the Movies* marathons to celebrate the achievements of Canada's National Film Board. Broadcasting initiatives of this type have long been crucial for advancing awareness of and engagement with Canadian cinema.

However, white, male, middle-class perspectives on film culture have grown more and more distant from the reality of Canada's moviegoing public and the audiences of criticism. If the internet has become the main repository for film talk and online commentary is in the process of supplanting traditional broadcasting models, what are the implications for the well-being of Canadian national cinema discourses and for a renewed diversity of voices? The rest of this chapter explores the potential of online film culture to diversify and reinvigorate film talk in a way that makes it more inviting and pertinent to the Canadian film community. The hegemonic pressures of global film culture have long exerted influence on media film talk, and Pratley and Yost fought to cultivate talk as a productive and compelling avenue of local participation in global film. But even these types of spotlights on Canadian cinema have virtually disappeared from current film talk. Eli Glasner includes Canadian films among the selections for his CBC program, but he mostly abstains from boosterism. Richard Crouse's reviews for CTV are even more Hollywood-centric. Overall, media film talk gives the impression that cultural nationalism has become passé, replaced by an enthusiastic embrace of the global industrial popular. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the world of film podcasting.

Anarchy/Hierarchy of Voices: Film Podcasts in Canada and the United States

Raymond Haberski claims, "The democratization of criticism has, ironically, undermined the national conversation over the meaning of culture in a democracy."⁵⁴ My findings that Canadian film podcasts rarely include women and people of colour, and neither do they include

⁵⁴ Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!*, 7.

constructive discussions of Canadian cinema, seem to support this statement. But whereas Haberski's book suggests accessible film talk is inherently regressive and depletes critical standards, I wish to argue that podcasting offers great potential for the expansion of the field of voices in film talk, provided existing smaller, niche programs can find their audiences. Since global cinema already provides many opportunities for communal and simultaneous conversation, the staggering variety of film podcasts can act as a network of overlapping content and divergent perspectives, allowing more people into film talk's public sphere, both in terms of "voice" and "access," to return to a distinction I made in the Introduction.

At the time of writing, a search for "film reviews" in the iTunes podcast store turns up five hundred distinct audio and video series, all of which have episodes available free of charge. These key words are only the tip of the film talk iceberg, the larger part of which includes interviews, gossip, and industry news. The sheer quantity of film talk podcasts is impressive; however, many of them do not have staying power. Podcasts, like blogs, are appealing to amateur media creators because they are inexpensive to produce and require less technical expertise and equipment than most other formats. But they do require considerable attention, time, labour, and unwavering commitment on the part of producers. With small podcasts, the investment often serves only a tiny, fringe audience. Ultimately, most amateur efforts survive for only a year or two—again, not unlike blogs. By comparison, some have been remarkably enduring, including *Filmspotting*, a film review program currently hosted by Adam Kempanaar and Josh Larsen that debuted in early 2005—one of the better known and most respected film review podcasts available. Eleven years later, the program is still released weekly in podcast form and has now been picked up by Chicago Public Radio.⁵⁵ Crossing over in the other direction, the program *Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo's Film Review* ran on BBC Radio for over twenty years and became available internationally as a free podcast in 2005. It was the second most popular BBC podcast in 2014, attesting to the enduring appetite for film talk and the BBC's continued leadership in the genre.⁵⁶ Moreover, support from large public and private institutions offers instant stability that amateur initiatives struggle to achieve.

⁵⁵ Benji Tunnell, "Podcasting Challenges Mainstream Media," *Box Office*, November 12, 2007, <https://archive.is/tDuaR>.

⁵⁶ John Plunkett, "Simon Mayo and Mark Kermode: 'Everybody Thinks We'd Be Great on TV'," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2014,

Though specific podcasts come and go, the field of online amateur film talk is consistently rich and varied. The do-it-yourself podcast movement has generated an impressive range and quantity of hours of audio and video content about movies. The purveyors of critical wisdom range from film studies undergraduates to homemakers and from toddlers to teachers. One of the most encouraging aspects of this phenomenon is the space claimed by marginalized voices. Diverse cultural actors are staking claims for critical authority and seeking niche audiences in both Canada and the United States. For example, film scholar and former *LA Weekly* film critic Karina Longworth left film reviews behind to explore “the secret and/or forgotten histories” of classical Hollywood cinema on *You Must Remember This*.⁵⁷ Self-identified Latina lesbian Sarita M. Ramirez reviews new releases on *Movies á La Queer*.⁵⁸ Four African-American men (Jay, Micah, Terrence, and Rob) discuss black films from different periods on *Black on Black Cinema*.⁵⁹ Eve Franklin and Tim Martin offer “Entertainment reviews with critical thinking for Christians” on *Are You Just Watching?*⁶⁰

Film podcasting is far from a pluralist and inclusive utopia, however, and before turning to some of the more exciting, diverse offerings, it is worth considering the dominant paradigm in Canadian online film talk. The most high profile film podcasts in Canada currently present a disturbingly narrow public sphere, informed primarily by promotional Hollywood rhetoric and frequently channelling puerile sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. Following in the footsteps of the seminal *Filmspotting*, several of the most popular series are hosted by two to four young white men and aim to reach a similar demographic. Three examples capture this trend:

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/nov/09/simon-mayo-mark-kermode-film-movie-review-bbc-radio-5-live>.

⁵⁷ Karina Longworth, “Podcast,” *You Must Remember This*, accessed May 21, 2015, <http://www.vidiocy.com/podcast/#podcast-1>.

⁵⁸ Sarita M. Ramirez, “Home,” *Movies á La Queer*, accessed May 21, 2015, <http://moviesalaqueer.podbean.com/>; Sarita M. Ramirez, *Coming Out 2 Family*, YouTube, New Femme on the Block W/ Sarita, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktaQE7ZTVNM>.

⁵⁹ “Podcast Episodes,” *Black on Black Cinema*, accessed May 21, 2015, <http://www.blackonblackcinema.com/podcast-episodes/>.

⁶⁰ “Home,” *Are You Just Watching?*, accessed May 21, 2015, <http://areyoujustwatching.com/>.

- *Jobless Film Reviews* (Toronto, 2009–2012): “Each week two unemployed men drink beer, chat and review films. Neither is really qualified for the task, however the podcast is undertaken with gusto.”⁶¹
- *The Good, the Bad, and the JoBlo Movie Podcast* (Montreal, 2009–2013): The audio offshoot of the JoBlo website, dedicated to discussion of movie news, reviews, and “movie hotties.”⁶²
- *Film Junk* (Toronto, 2005–ongoing): “One of the longest running and highest-rated movie podcasts on the web. [...] Hosted by Sean, Jay and Frank (with occasional appearances from Reed Farrington), the show features funny entertainment news, heated movie reviews, and always a little bit of the unexpected.”⁶³

All three blogs and podcasts started out as amateur endeavours and achieved a degree of legitimacy through a combination of web traffic, listener numbers, and corporate sponsorship. All three podcasts adopt a hyper-populist mode of address, featuring meandering dialogue among the hosts, crass jokes, and allusions to substance use during recording. The mode is unstructured, extremely casual, and opinion based.

If Gerald Pratley delivered monologues, and Elwy Yost engaged viewers in dialogue, film podcasts usually present self-contained conversations, with little effort to interpellate listeners, other than as eavesdroppers. The web series *On Cinema at the Cinema* (2012–ongoing) hilariously and astutely spoofs the trope of the two-men-and-a-microphone format of many amateur film review podcasts, including the performers’ self-seriousness, untutored delivery, and awkward attempts at humour.⁶⁴ Whereas Clyde Gilmour and Elwy Yost played the everyman, these programs proudly flaunt their amateurism and delight in transgressing the conventions of polite film talk. The content of the discussions tends to revolve around new and upcoming

⁶¹ “Jobless Film Reviews,” *Facebook*, accessed August 5, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jobless-Film-Reviews/112170981991?sk=info&tab=page_info.

⁶² “Latest Entertainment News Headlines,” *JoBlo*, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://www.joblo.com/movie-news/>.

⁶³ “Film Junk Podcast,” *Film Junk*, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://filmjunk.com/podcast/>.

⁶⁴ “On Cinema at the Cinema,” *Adult Swim*, accessed May 30, 2015, http://www.adultswim.com/videos/on-cinema/?cid=yt_oc510descrip.

Hollywood releases, and any consideration of Canadian cinema, particularly *as* Canadian cinema, is off the table.

However, much of English Canada's online film talk (fortunately) does not fit the dominant trend, and though the landscape is less vast than that of the United States, it is nevertheless quite diverse. Alberta alone has produced several film podcasts serving different audiences and featuring atypical figures of cultural authority. *View From the Couch* (2007–2012) features a stay-at-home mother and a working father reviewing popular children's movies; they even invite children to appear on the program to share their own views. Also geared towards families, *Parent Previews* (2014–2015) offered weekday, one-and-a-half-minute podcast reviews as a supplement to its long-running website to inform parents about the suitability of new releases for young audiences. Accessing a different slice of the Alberta population there is *Robocop vs. the Nazis* (2011–2013), started by four independent filmmakers in Edmonton with the apparent goal of speaking to local aspiring filmmakers. Occupying yet another niche, three Edmonton men of East-Indian descent started the *Bollycast* podcast in fall 2014, where they review Bollywood releases with passion and humour.⁶⁵

Film talk continues to have a strong presence in Toronto, even beyond the official voices of public radio and television. The quirky *Cinephobia Radio* podcast (2009–2012) grew out of a 1990s York University radio show about underground cinema.⁶⁶ The popular news site *BlogTO* started the *MoviesTO* podcast (2005–2008), initially to cover the Toronto International Film Festival. Toronto's alternative weekly *NOW* magazine launched *Someone Else's Movie* in 2015, in which film critic Norm Wilner interviews guests from the local film industry about a film of their choice. Perhaps Toronto's most unusual contribution to English-Canadian film talk is *Review Raja*, a YouTube series featuring the "first Caucasian male in the world to be a movie reviewer of Tamil films."⁶⁷ Though "Raja," a Belleville, Ontario native, does not speak Tamil and can only watch the movies with subtitles, he professes a deep love of Kollywood that started

⁶⁵ "About Us," *Bollycast*, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://bollycast.com/about-us/>; "Bollycast," *Facebook*, accessed May 22, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/bollycast>.

⁶⁶ Stuart F. Andrews, "About Cinephobia Radio," *Cinephobia Radio*, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.cinephobia-radio.com/about-cinephobia-radio>.

⁶⁷ *Who Is Review Raja?*, streaming, Review Raja, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLL-RxbWOXk>; *Review Raja at Galatta*, streaming, Galatta Tamil, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fBoGhaBFE0>.

when his Tamil friends introduced him to it in the summer of 2012. The show is distributed through a *YouTube* channel with over 16 000 subscribers. The host has expressed a hope to one day perform in Tamil films.⁶⁸

Despite the often highly specific identities of the presenters and target audiences, many film talk podcasts express no clear geographic provenance. A product of the transnational reach of online content and the global character of film culture, podcasts often do not announce where they come from. This sense of placeless-ness is especially true of English-Canadian web-based film talk, most of which deals with American and world cinema rather than local and domestic content. As such, Canadian contributions can be hard to spot among the array of American offerings. Delivery systems do not specify or differentiate, and there is as-yet no Canadian content policy for the web. As a result, English-Canadian podcasters have the option of maintaining a degree of transnational anonymity that is not available to them in more geographically circumscribed media. Film podcasts may choose this path as a way to disguise their distance from Hollywood and to thereby legitimate their participation in American cinema culture. For example, *Parent Previews* was deliberately generic for the purposes of North-American radio syndication.⁶⁹ *Robocop vs. the Nazis* calls itself a “Canadian film and arts podcast,” but rarely discusses Canadian films and filmmakers.⁷⁰ The guests of *Someone Else’s Movie* are based in Canada, yet in seventy-two episodes, only one of them chose to discuss a Canadian film, the international co-production *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010). These examples demonstrate that now, more than ever, and even with a number of Canadian films to talk about, Canadian cinema culture largely consists of talk about cinema from elsewhere. One particularly apt example of the placeless-ness of Canadian film podcasts is the popular podcast *Sound on Sight*, which will serve as an instructive case study of the possible future for film talk on the digital frontier.

⁶⁸ “Review Raja,” *YouTube*, accessed May 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/user/ReviewRaja/>.

⁶⁹ “Syndicated Radio Show,” *Parent Previews*, August 5, 2016, <http://parentpreviews.com/company/syndicated-radio-show>.

⁷⁰ Jesse Nash and Ryan Byrne, “Canadian Film and Arts Podcast,” *Robocop vs. the Nazis*, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://robocopvsthenazis.com/>.

Where Did *Sound on Sight* Go and where Might It Take Us?

The Montreal-based *Sound on Sight* podcast ran from 2008 to 2015, making it one of the oldest online film review shows, according to its website.⁷¹ Founder Ricky da Conceição developed the podcast from the *Sound on Sight* blog, which was itself an offshoot of his earlier blog and radio show, *The Naked Lunch*, which started broadcasting from Concordia University's campus radio station CJLO in 2007.⁷² One episode from March 2013 concisely demonstrated the podcast's ambivalence about its Canadian roots. In a segment in which the three co-hosts read and discussed listeners' iTunes reviews, da Conceição reacted negatively to a five-star review that mentioned, "They are based in Canada but have a very international group of guests and writers." Da Conceição asked, defensively, "What does us being based in Canada have to do with anything?"⁷³ The other hosts pointed out that the description was technically true and they took no issue with it. In fact, the listener's comment paralleled information da Conceição himself would make available in a public letter on the occasion of the brand's restructuring in 2015: "[*Sound on Sight*] has become one of the most prominent pop-culture sites of our kind in Canada. Little did I know that our simple blog would grow into what it is now, a world-wide collective with writers contributing from five continents, seven countries and far too many cities to name."⁷⁴ Even here, it is clear da Conceição prioritizes the brand's cosmopolitanism over its Canadian-ness.

Throughout its run, the blog and podcast downplayed its Canadian origin without completely obscuring it. There was no mention of its Montreal location or ties to Canada in the "About" section of the old website. The podcast episodes introduced the hosts without mentioning their location. However, the hosts occasionally mentioned it in passing, such as in their discussion of the Montreal-produced film *Incendies* (2011) and accounts of their adventures at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Fantasia International Film Festival in

⁷¹ "Sound on Sight Podcast," *PopOptiq*, accessed August 6, 2016, <http://www.popoptiq.com/radio/sound-on-sight-sordid-cinema/>.

⁷² Ricky da Conceição and Simon Howell, *Final Episode Featuring "Inherent Vice" and the Top 10 Movies of 2014*, streaming, ep. 400, *Sound on Sight Podcast*.

⁷³ Ricky da Conceição et al., *Bryan Singer Special*, vol. 351, *Sound on Sight Podcast*, 2013, <http://www.popoptiq.com/bryan-singer-special-sound-on-sight-podcast-351/>.

⁷⁴ Ricky D, "Sound On Sight Is Closing Shop August 28, 2015," *PopOptiq*, August 20, 2015, <http://www.popoptiq.com/sound-on-sight-is-closing-shop-august-28-2015/>.

Montreal.⁷⁵ Rarely, however, were Canadian films discussed or described as *being* Canadian. Overall, the show's Canadian identity was treated as incidental rather than defining—hardly an identity at all.

Instead, the hosts of *Sound on Sight* frequently referenced outside critics and reviews, thereby participating in a broader discussion led primarily by United States critics about specific movies, genres, and trends. In episode 279, the hosts analyzed the work of Stanley Kubrick; Justine Smith invoked Pauline Kael's critique of the director and da Conceição referenced two Roger Ebert reviews. In episode 286, a guest host read directly from another critic's review that appeared on the *Battleship Pretension* film blog, based in Los Angeles. In the best of 2011 episode, the contributors referenced multiple other critics, including those at the *Filmspotting* podcast. An episode dedicated to (trashing) director Michael Bay included a lengthy metacritical debate about the cultural role of film critics, which emphasized the panel's views that critics must work independently from the industry, must be unafraid to criticize commercially successful cinema, and that the major contribution of critics was to facilitate and enrich wider conversations about films and film culture.⁷⁶ Indeed, these conversations that sprawled across the critical community helped position *Sound on Sight* as an international player. Another indication of the program's extra-Canadian status was an editor's note that claimed the podcast

⁷⁵ Simon Howell, Ricky da Conceição, and Justine Smith, *The Social Network / Catfish*, streaming, vol. 232, Sound on Sight Radio, 2010, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-radio-231-the-social-network-catfish/>; Simon Howell, Ricky da Conceição, and Justine Smith, *Ten Best Movies of 2011 / Review of "Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol"*, streaming, vol. 300, Sound on Sight Podcast, 2011, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-podcast-300-part-one-ten-best-movies-of-2011-mission-impossible-ghost-protocol/>; Simon Howell, Ricky da Conceição, and Chrystina Benyo, *Fantasia 2009: "The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle" & "Must Love Death"*, streaming, vol. 135, Sound on Sight Podcast, 2009, <http://www.soundonsight.org/episode-135-fantasia-2009-bruno-the-immaculate-conception-of-little-dizzle-must-love-death/>.

⁷⁶ Simon Howell et al., *Stanley Kubrick: "A Clockwork Orange", "Paths of Glory" and "Barry Lyndon"*, streaming, vol. 279, Sound on Sight Podcast, 2011, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-radio-279-classic-directors-stanley-kubrick/>; Simon Howell et al., *Director Miranda July's "Me and You and Everyone We Know" and "The Future"*, streaming, vol. 286, Sound on Sight Podcast, 2011, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-radio-286-director-miranda-july/>; Howell, da Conceição, and Smith, *Ten Best*; Ricky da Conceição, Justine Smith, and "Derek," *Director Michael Bay: "The Rock" and "Transformers: Dark of the Moon"*, vol. 280, Sound on Sight Podcast, 2011, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-radio-280-michael-bay/>.

had been recognized as “one of the best film shows worldwide by several outlets,” including *MovieMaker* magazine.⁷⁷

An area in which the podcast excelled was the inclusion of diverse voices. Though da Conceição and co-founder Simon Howell formed the stable core, they worked with a regular roster of women co-hosts on the majority of episodes throughout the show’s run, including Justine Smith and Kate Rennebohm. Episodes regularly incorporated adept feminist critiques and discussions of women in cinema involving all members of the team.⁷⁸ The guest rotation was diverse and inclusive. However, in the podcast’s final months, da Conceição and Howell shifted their attention to the genre film podcast *Sordid Cinema*, and the franchise lost its way.⁷⁹ Two new hosts took over the flagship podcast, renaming it *Sound on Sight This Week*. Not only did the female co-hosts disappear from both podcasts, but also the new hosts were markedly less attuned to gender issues, as evidenced by a tone-deaf episode called “The State of Women in Film.” The discussion was perfunctory and ill informed, and, despite the episode’s ambitious title, the pair discussed gender for only seventeen minutes of the fifty-minute running time.⁸⁰

The show’s decline eventually ended in its cancellation. In August 2015, the podcast (along with *Sordid Cinema*) ceased publication and the blog re-branded itself as PopOptiq. *Sound on Sight* founders Ricky da Conceição and Simon Howell are still attached to the project, but most of the guest contributors have moved on. In its new incarnation, the blog describes itself as “the creation of a team of like-minded pop-culture devotees from across North America,” having finally exceeded and ultimately erased its humble Montreal beginnings.⁸¹ The new site expands far beyond film culture, including stories about television, video games, and comics. More than that, PopOptiq features a substantial amount of tabloid-style entertainment news and

⁷⁷ “Ten Best Movies of 2011 / Review of ‘Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol,’” *Sound on Sight*, December 22, 2011, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sound-on-sight-podcast-300-part-one-ten-best-movies-of-2011-mission-impossible-ghost-protocol/>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; “Sound on Sight Podcast Episode 394: ‘Gone Girl,’” *PopOptiq*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.popoptiq.com/sound-on-sight-podcast-episode-394-gone-girl/>.

⁷⁹ da Conceição and Howell, *Final Episode*.

⁸⁰ Zach Dennis and Brian Welk, *The State of Women in Film*, vol. 5, SOS This Week, 2015, <http://www.soundonsight.org/sos-this-week-podcast-5-the-state-of-women-in-film/>. Despite the misleading title, the topic of women in the film industry takes only seventeen minutes in a fifty-minute episode.

⁸¹ “About Us,” *PopOptiq*, accessed August 6, 2016, <http://www.popoptiq.com/about-us/>.

benign celebrity gossip, content that dominates the home page. The film talk that remains has also changed. The podcast's thoughtful and feisty exchanges about carefully selected newer and older releases have been replaced by traditional written reviews by a single contributor. These too seem to be petering out, with the last ones published in May 2016. In their place are links to promotional trailers, telltale signs of film talk sell out. The web's free-market attention economy can be unforgiving to independent content, putting pressure on producers to conform to the status quo of the global popular.

Regardless of its recent fate, I would like to look at *Sound on Sight* at its peak as an imperfect but promising manifestation of what English-Canadian film talk can be. Advancing on the detached moralism of Gerald Pratley, the goofy familiarity of Clyde Gilmour, and the kindly tutoring of Elwy Yost, the *Sound on Sight* team offered skillful and passionate informal film talk with a rousing amateur spirit. The program brimmed with youthful energy, quietly applying undergraduate film studies knowledge in the context of engaging and accessible conversations. The announcers' cultural authority was casual and inviting, yet intelligent and meaningful. The podcast was principled in its independence from the film industry and corporations, as well as from public or educational institutions.

It was also committed to inclusiveness, featuring a variety of autonomous opinion and a roster of diverse guests, reflecting Montreal's cosmopolitanism. As such, *Sound on Sight* contradicted the idea that a free market of online film talk necessarily leads to intellectually bankrupt aesthetic relativism. In *The Death of the Critic*, literary scholar Rónán McDonald blames the turn towards cultural studies for an alleged movement away from evaluative and aesthetic criticism. According to McDonald, in its enthusiasm for inclusiveness and cultural democracy, cultural studies flattened hierarchies, made all works equivalent, and made it impossible to talk about "value in the arts."⁸² Film scholar Noël Carroll argued a similar line in *On Criticism*, endorsing the responsibility of film criticism to evaluate artistic merit, a responsibility seemingly abnegated to cultural studies.⁸³ The end point of this process, the reasoning goes, is a stifling of the capacity to appreciate true quality, and a concomitant loss of access to beauty and transformative aesthetic experience.

⁸² Rónán McDonald, *The Death of the Critic*: (New York: Continuum, 2007), 134; quoted in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 143.

⁸³ Carroll, *On Criticism*; cited in Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 143.

But this emphasis on evaluation misses the point. As this thesis has argued, authority in film criticism comes not from declarations of value but instead from fostering awareness, thought, and talk about cinema—all enterprises dedicated to making art and beauty more accessible. Film critics are more facilitators than judges. Citing cultural theorist Michael Denning, Frey explains, “Rather than the unexpected dagger in the critic’s back, cultural studies is, in Denning’s historical analysis, a descendant of the liberal cultural pluralism of the 1940s,”⁸⁴ as promoted by conscientious cultural critics like Gerald Pratley. And if the global conversation about cinema has grown larger and more inclusive thanks to digital formats, giving rise to new kinds of cultural authorities and organic intellectuals, this can be counted as a victory for film culture.

The remaining question is, does film talk need to be post-national to achieve the grace of a podcast like *Sound on Sight*? Mattias Frey would say yes. He considers online criticism’s geographic and cultural mobility liberating: “because the potential film viewer is not being bulldozed by the subjective opinions of arbitrary local critics or hegemonic national authorities, he or she can potentially enjoy a more communal experience of film culture.”⁸⁵ Perhaps this is so; but it is also likely that a diet of *only* global film talk denies potential viewers a full experience of the diverse cinema that surrounds them, just behind the curtain of Hollywood hegemony. This experience involves a more localized communal experience, built on the recognition of one’s own neighbours and social contexts on screen. Besides, *Sound on Sight*’s placeless-ness did not necessarily work in its favour; it is conceivable that if the show had been less afraid to announce its provenance, it might have found a long-term home on national public radio, like its American counterpart, *Filmspotting*. In any case, why disguise the local when part of the fascination and pleasure of global cinema culture is seeing how the local engages and hybridizes with the global? The problem is that Canadian film talk has been deemed hopelessly dull after a generation of fairly homogeneous perspectives. Raymond Haberski writes, “Champions of a new kind of cultural pluralism have, in an attempt to broaden the debate over culture, made participating in a national discussion almost irrelevant.”⁸⁶ But if the diverse voices on *Sound on Sight* made it a more compelling film podcast than its competitors, then it stands to

⁸⁴ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 144.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸⁶ Haberski, Jr., *It’s Only a Movie!*, 189.

reason that cultivating a diverse public sphere can also make conversations about Canadian cinema immeasurably more interesting *and* more relevant to contemporary audiences.

Conclusion: Diversifying Canadian Film Talk

As the paradigm of the didactic, middlebrow film critic that peaked during the golden age gave way to the more avuncular, fun-loving, and populist film critic, the democratization project of film culture and film talk was largely achieved. Into the 2000s, as legions of film fans took to the internet and podcasts, participation in public film talk, as users and producers, became more accessible than ever. Populist modes of address became the default style of online film writing and talk by both professionals and amateurs. Many observers have been optimistic about the effects of online film discourse; film scholar David Bordwell, and film critics Roger Ebert and A.O. Scott all wrote about the great promise and excitement of online film criticism. It is worth noting that these critics have been at the top of their respective games for years, and they have the privilege of extolling these virtues from a position of professional safety. Their online intellectual labour has earned them immense financial and social rewards. The same cannot be said for the growing group of amateurs attempting to stake out positions and establish careers as film authorities. Ebert acknowledges that it is exceptionally rare for present day film critics to find gainful employment in the trade, whether through traditional journalistic institutions or within the attention economy of the blogosphere.¹ While the internet may invite everyone to participate in film culture as consumers and fans, not everyone is empowered to *speak* about cinema and still fewer are *heard*.

The concerns about the new critical economy tend to focus on recent widespread layoffs at print venues and the phenomenon of diminishing critical standards. Mattias Frey argues that a climate of crisis has been a constant in the profession; though discussions of job losses tied to shifting business models in journalism make the current debate appear more urgent than usual.² The alleged lowering of standards, on the other hand, is associated with the democratizing impact of the internet, where new voices reflecting various backgrounds and a wide range of levels of expertise can speak in social media, blogs, digital videos, and podcasts. The numerous press articles on these trends are no doubt partly by-products of position taking by professional critics eager to buttress their job security. The air of urgency also attracts readers and reinforces the concept that critics are culturally important. This thesis has shown that few of the claims in

¹ Ebert, "The Golden Age of Movie Critics."

² Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 145.

the crisis of criticism—about lost job opportunities or shrinking standards—can be taken at face value. Nearly every point in this issue can be and has been refuted. Perhaps least self-evident is the cultural value of critics.

So what, exactly, is the importance of film critics? I will return to David Denby’s statement: “Critics seldom make things happen, but they can spark the dialogue, the good talk that is one of the prime pleasures of moviegoing.”³ I have argued that this “good talk” about movies is in itself enormously valuable. Time and time again during my research, I came across stories of individuals reading film criticism in lieu of watching movies. Most recently, film critic for *The New York Times* A. O. Scott describes reading “a great many reviews of things long before I heard or saw them, and in a lot of cases reading the review of something I would never experience firsthand was a perfectly adequate substitute for the experience.”⁴ My teenaged self, who read reviews as substitutes for watching hard-to-find films, would have agreed (see Introduction). Besides being pleasurable and satisfying, film criticism is one of the few ways the public engages in large-scale discussions about art and society. Even ridiculing “bad” movies—a preoccupation of the podcast crowd⁵—is fundamentally talk about art. And talking about movies is always about much more than the art itself; cinema culture starts conversations about all aspects of personal and social experience: history, politics, economics, physical and mental health, gender, race, sexuality, and so on. Even if critical niches fragment and multiply the genres and languages of cinema talk, the common ground of global cinema ensures that everyone is generally talking about the same movies at the same time. Film talk thus grants broad access to one of the defining cultural forces of contemporary life.

Film talk does not just speak *about* cinema; it also speaks *for* cinema. It can function as an advocate for art against the harsh forces of the profit-driven film industry and the apathetic or uninformed public. Film producer Scott Rudin emphasized the importance of film criticism in drawing attention to works that fall outside the Hollywood marketing mega machine: “we rely on that talk to do the work of getting people interested.”⁶ There are studies to back up Rudin’s

³ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 384.

⁴ Scott, *Better Living Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth*, 156.

⁵ See, for example, *The Flop House* and *How Did This Get Made?*

⁶ Quoted in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 403.

statement. Researchers in 2005 showed that “Positive reviews have a particularly large influence on the demand for dramas and narrowly-released movies.”⁷ Another study in 2010 found that “movie reviews are predictors of the financial success of movies, and that this effect is particularly strong for independent films.”⁸ These tendencies make film criticism especially crucial for a national cinema like Canada’s, where all productions are independent, most are narrow releases, and few follow popular genre conventions. To return to a question I asked in the Introduction, the reasons why Canada needs film critics include raising awareness of domestic films and embracing the vast cultural benefits of a thriving critical community.

The online opportunities for diverse and exciting criticism are undeniable; but my research shows that confidence in the increasingly democratic future of criticism is premature and even misplaced. Frey, for one, predicts the rhetoric of crisis in current film criticism will continue, “despite the reality that, first, it has been a permanent feature of the field; second, critics have never been as influential as they believe; and, third, developments—including new media—are not as ‘democratic’ as many fear.”⁹ Now that the dust has settled from the industry re-shuffling of the late 2000s, film criticism remains on solid, remunerative ground in numerous online publications as well as traditional print and broadcast outlets. Indeed, it seems the real crisis of film criticism is not the loss of jobs or the erosion of cultural authority but has to do with Frey’s third point about democratic new media. The real crisis of criticism is the vexatious and persistent exclusion of diverse voices that could speak meaningfully with movie audiences and talk back to the film industry.

Frey suggests venues like the Rotten Tomatoes website, which aggregates reviews from dozens of professional and amateur film critics, may “provide a training in traditional critical discourses and forms and thus somewhat democratize criticism as an activity that may potentially be practiced by a broader public.”¹⁰ My research on contemporary amateur podcasts indeed shows an interesting diversification of niche programming, but it also supports Frey’s conclusion that, ultimately, “the barriers to entry have shifted from production to filtering:

⁷ Reinstein and Snyder, “Influence of Expert Reviews,” 27.

⁸ Peress and Spirling, “Scaling the Critics,” 81.

⁹ Frey, *Permanent Crisis*, 146.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

speaking has become easier but being heard is more difficult than ever.”¹¹ Chuck Tryon’s astute analysis of the economy of film blogging explains the ways user traffic and industry interests can both benefit and restrict the intellectual exchange of bloggers and their readers. Tryon agrees that the filtering of content on the basis of reputation and popularity can reinforce social exclusions, but he also claims that this filtering ensures a level of quality some fear may be lost in the unregulated internet. An active blogger himself, Tryon concludes “film blogs are perhaps the most significant evidence yet of a vibrant and engaged networked film audience.”¹² Maybe so, but surely the accessibility of the blogosphere and digital podcasts can be better utilized in both the United States and Canada to reflect these countries’ profound plurality of tastes, cultural backgrounds, and identities.

In journalism there are signs of improved diversity, but change is slow and generally haphazard. The African American Film Critics Association formed in New York City in 2003, and the first professional organization for women film critics, the Women Film Critics Circle, launched in 2004.¹³ The latter boasts a membership of eighty American and international members. Jerry Roberts claims women’s voices have grown more prominent in recent decades. He explains, “as the profession experienced an upswing in the 1980s and 1990s, more women filled major film-review posts,” and he presents a healthy list of female critics at various American general circulation publications. He cites the example of Sheila Benson’s decade-long career as *Los Angeles Times* reviewer during the 1980s as evidence that women were gaining ground in the critical industry: “Benson was [...] proof that women were expressing their opinion on films more and more. Along [Pauline] Kael and [Janet] Maslin, Benson was one of America’s three leading female critics, whose numbers were growing.”¹⁴

But the statistics do not support a significant improvement in the number of women employed as critics during this period. In 1989, both the New York Film Critics Circle (NYFCC)

¹¹ Ibid., 138.

¹² Chuck Tryon, “Toppling the Gates: Blogging as Networked Film Criticism,” in *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 148.

¹³ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 412; “About Us,” *African American Film Critics Association*, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://aafca.com/about-us/>; “Unique, Provocative and Stylishly Opinionated...,” *Women Film Critics Circle*, January 20, 2016, <https://wfcc.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁴ Roberts, *The Complete History*, 332–333.

and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association (LAFCA) included seven women members, which, if anything, is no better than the New York organization’s proportion of female members in its early years in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapter Three).¹⁵ Roberts notes NYFCC added two women in 2007 and three in 2008. At present the membership includes thirty-one members, seven of which are women: slightly less than one-quarter.¹⁶ The current count for LAFCA is fifty-five total members, including ten women: less than one-fifth.¹⁷ A 2008 study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University “found that 70 percent of the movie reviews in the top 100 newspapers were written by men. Almost half of those papers (47%) did not run reviews by women.”¹⁸ The study’s author, Martha M. Lauzen, subsequently studied the gender make up of editorial-based internet publications and found an even starker discrepancy, as documented in Table 1:

| | Men | Women |
|--|-----|-------|
| Radio outlets/sites (e.g. NPR) | 70% | 30% |
| Newspaper websites | 72% | 28% |
| General interest magazine sites (e.g. <i>Time</i> , <i>Salon</i>) | 80% | 20% |
| Trade publication sites (e.g. <i>Variety</i> , <i>The Hollywood Reporter</i> , <i>The Wrap</i>) | 90% | 10% |
| Movie/entertainment magazine sites (e.g. <i>Entertainment Weekly</i>) | 91% | 9% |

Table 1. Percentage of women film critics in American online media, spring 2013.

Despite the substantial contributions of women’s voices in popular film criticism, both in print and online, there remains plenty of room for greater representation; and there is little indication that the online public sphere is creating more spaces for alternative voices, at least not among the high traffic publications.

¹⁵ Ibid., 333.

¹⁶ “Membership,” *New York Film Critics Circle*, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.nyfcc.com/membership/>.

¹⁷ “Meet the Critics,” *Los Angeles Film Critics Association*, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.lafca.net/members.html>.

¹⁸ Cited in Roberts, *The Complete History*, 423.

Diversity in film criticism in the English-Canadian sphere has been even more elusive. Although film criticism in past British and American contexts “is an area of work where women have dominated and played a key role in the dissemination and circulation of ideas about individual films and cinema more generally,” the same cannot be said of Canada, where very few critical voices have belonged to women.¹⁹ And despite the multiculturalism of the country and its cinema, the public voices of English-Canadian film culture and its institutions have been remarkably ethnically homogeneous throughout film criticism history. The case studies in this thesis reflect the male, white, middle-class, Toronto-based paradigm that has dominated English-Canadian film talk, past and present. Even as film criticism was popularized in broadcast formats and parodied on television, the faces and voices of cultural authority in English-Canadian film culture remained remarkably consistent. Now film talk podcasts are reproducing the inequalities of film criticism’s past, amounting to the true crisis of contemporary criticism.

This crisis of the lack of diversity in Canadian film criticism suggests some productive possibilities for future research. It would be useful to find out more about the lives and careers of the cutting edge women critics of the 1960s—Germaine Warkentin, Wendy Michener, and Joan Fox—as well as other women on the margins of film criticism history. Even less is currently known about the practices and personas of film talk from Canada’s immigrant communities and people of colour. The topics of gender and ethnicity both require going off the beaten path of standard film criticism history. Indeed, much of even the standard history remains unwritten. There is still plenty of work to be done on both the public and private institutions of print and broadcast criticism. Broadcast film criticism is particularly opaque since so little of its history and so few of its texts have been preserved. Considering the countless sites and styles of film talk, it is difficult to generalize about film criticism in Canada until more of this data has been unearthed. The same goes for Quebec, where research into popular criticism has recently begun receiving more attention.²⁰

Studying and fostering diversity may be the key to reversing the historical prescriptivism, out-dated nationalism, and air of parochialism that has surrounded much of English-language commentary on Canadian national cinema. This project has explored the existing models of

¹⁹ Bell, “Women’s Work,” 192.

²⁰ See Lacasse and Sabino, “Émergence de La Critique.”

critical authority in Canada and pointed to future avenues for cultivating a more vital, diverse, participatory, and tuned-in critical culture. Cultural cringe has been a stifling force to the extent that the newest generation of film talk declines to even designate Canadian films as such—on the occasions that the critics elect to engage with Canadian films at all. Most current film talkers, including *Glasner on Film* on CBC Radio, Richard Crouse on CTV, the *Film Junk* podcast, and the recently defunct *Sound on Sight* podcast and blog, focus overwhelmingly on Hollywood releases, participating in large-scale, timely conversations about global cinema culture, while also functioning as an extension of studio marketing. All these examples enact an informal, intimate mode of address that buys into a paradigm of entertainment as consumption but also invites listeners to be part of a conspiracy against restrictive notions of good taste and cultural authority. In this dynamic, the global free market dominates and narrows Canadian cinema culture while appearing to liberate critics and audiences from old-fashioned attempts to prescribe national cinema standards.

CBC Radio and *Sound on Sight* have shown glimpses of what Canadian film talk could sound like if, in addition to providing populist entertainment and opportunities to dialogue about arts and culture, it also made a point to challenge cultural hegemony and diversify the voices and perspectives of cinema's public sphere. Film podcasts and vlogs, as prototypes of do-it-yourself accessibility, appear to be well positioned to increase the range of autonomous and diverse voices; see the *Bollycast* podcast and YouTube's Review Raja as intriguing examples of cultural hybridization that interpellate niche Canadian audiences as more than extensions of American pop culture. However, larger trends in film podcasting so far show a tendency to reproduce the profound social exclusions of Canada's film criticism history. Even the CBC, with its commitment to diverse voices and identities in broadcasting production and programming, has historically produced surprisingly homogeneous (male and white) film talk, from the 1940s until the present day.²¹ Here there are also signs of change, with Rad Simonpillai joining Eli Glasner on the film review roster in the past year. An optimistic view of the future of film criticism in Canada sees film talk that encompasses both global and local views, addresses international and domestic films, and opens the conversation to diverse genders, cultural backgrounds, and classes.

²¹ "CBC Workshop for Diverse Creators Spawns Two Development Deals," *CBC Media Centre*, April 26, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/mediacentre/cbc-workshop-for-diverse-creators-spawns-two-development-deals.html>.

Both public broadcasting and amateur podcasting can participate in the realization of such an approach to film talk. To a significant degree, Canadian national cinema depends on it.

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**Appendix: Script of The Movie Scene, aired August 29, 1948 on CBC Radio
(Dominion Network)**

THE MOVIE SCENE

Sunday August 29th 1948
10.15. - 10.30. P.M.

Gerald Pratley
John Rae

CJBC ... Dom.Net.

Duration - *14.40.*

THEME REC: THEMES FROM "GONE WITH THE WIND" VIC 28-1419-B
PLAY FOR 15 SECONDS AND FADE OUT:

ANNCR : This is John Rae with "The Movie Scene" ... a
review of the film world here and abroad prepared
by Gerald Pratley. This preliminary programme
outlines the purpose of the series, and pays
tribute to the late Louis Lumiere and David
Wark Griffith.

PAUSE AND CONTINUE WITH PROGRAMME

THE MOVIE SCENE
Sunday August 29th 1948

One

ANNCR : The Editor of a Canadian motion picture trade magazine remarked, rather resignedly one day, that "Everybody thinks they are qualified to write about the movies." This, unfortunately, is true. Films are not restricted to a small, select circle of admirers, but in the process of distribution and exhibition throughout the world, they are reviewed and publicised by thousands of people who earn a profitable living by writing reams of what often proves to be pure nonsense about them. These writers are not answerable to any one authority because once the motion picture has left the producing studio, and starts its career of world wide exhibition, it becomes more or less a part of the entertainment life of the people and is, as it were, the property of everyone. The film is then, whether it deserves it or not, open to castigation by critics, fulsome write-ups by commercially-minded reviewers, condemnation by religious societies, repression by censorship, and finally, to mis-understanding by the public. Opposed to all these adverse influences are small groups of individuals who review

THE MOVIE SCENE
Sunday August 29th 1948

Two

ANNCR : the pictures sensibly and sympathetically, and
strive to maintain their artistic quality.

The film of today is recognised as being one of the
most flexible and graphic forms of art. This by no
means implies that all films are works of art.
They are not, because the film industry, like the
radio, often sinks into the slough of mediocrity.
Occasional brilliant productions prevent one's
faith in them from being completely lost.

One reason for this state of affairs is that radio
and newspapers regard one another as competitors.
This selfish and narrow outlook results in the
radio interests looking upon motion picture audiences
as being lost to them as listeners while the news-
paper interests take the view that the radio (through
its advertising activities) deprives them of
advertising revenue. That this short sighted
attitude is giving way to a more enlightened view
toward the public (whose interests both press and
radio profess to serve) is illustrated by a recent
announcement in one of the entertainment trade

THE MOVIE SCENE
Sunday August 29th 1948

Three

ANNCR : paper in which the CBC was commended for having appointed a movie critic. It now remains for the press to give its readers the same wide and interesting reviews of national and inter-national films as the radio is commencing to do. If the radio, film and press would work together as partners in furthering unity and understanding between nations, they would accomplish more toward establishing lasting peace than all Leagues of Nations could do.

The CBC realizes that films are playing an important role in the life of every nation, and that such an influential force should receive the publicity and encouragement it is rightfully entitled to.

Our aim in this programme is to endeavour to raise the prestige of motion pictures, not only for the sake of those who love the medium of film, but for the industry itself. Among intelligent people the reputation of some present day pictures has reached an extremely low level, and all because, over a period of years, many film reviewers, under pressure from

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ANNCR : commercial interests, have been constantly misleading the public by playing up poor pictures as good pictures, and through failing in their responsibility of giving the public an unbiased lead in the choice of good film entertainment. The result is that a generation has grown up with a low standard of appreciation for the film. This in turn has enabled certain producers to make easy money through mediocre films doped with sex and escapism. These producers then have the nerve to say they are giving the public what it wants. This is blatantly untrue because the public always appreciate good films providing they are made available at a reasonable price.

Today, more so than at any other time, the motion picture is needed to bring understanding to a troubled world. The responsibility which lies with those who produce films, is world-wide. Unlike a stage-play or symphony orchestra, one print of a film can be shipped with little trouble and expense to every corner of the world, where it will be understood and enjoyed by everyone, irrespective of the colour of their skin, or the language they speak.

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ANNCR : Yet sadly enough, producers are constantly turning out reels of celluloid made expressly for profit, without one thought of raising the cultural standards of either the public or the industry. We appreciate that film producing is an industry, but this should not prevent the realization that it is a form of pure art. Granted it is a mechanical art as compared to the theatre, never-the-less, when used for its original function, namely, giving a moving picture of events, places and things, it reigns supreme as a medium of creative art.

In saying this we are not losing sight of the fact that entertainment is the primary purpose of the film. But then so is opera, music, the theatre and the art gallery - and such great films as "Gone With The Wind" - "Great Expectations" - "The Yearling" - "Boomerang" - "Odd Man Out" - "The Best Years of Our Lives" and many more, have not only been entertaining and artistic, but also financially successful.

It is therefore, the desire of this programme to help people think more seriously about the films presented

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ANNCR : to them, and to indicate the fine and delicate points of the cameraman's art, the director's skill, and the actor's ability. At the same time, this programme also aims to point out the stupidity of the worthless films, vulgarly displayed through extravagant advertising. Those who wish to obtain full enjoyment from the motion picture must learn to distinguish between the true and the false. That which is acceptable to the heart is not always acceptable to the reason. Those who have the responsibility of film reviewing should not therefore, allow personal friendship and consideration for commercial interests to affect their obligations to the public. No one could be more interested in the welfare of the motion picture than we who are responsible for this programme. It is not a cheerful task to write an unfavourable review of a film, or to sit and watch uninteresting movies, especially as the worth while films are so few and far between.

Canada is a lucrative country for the production of new films. Producers from other countries are coming here to make pictures which, they say, will

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ANNCR : help to make Canada's name prominent among the film producing nations of the world. Other companies are finding Canada a profitable market for the exhibition of films produced in other countries. As Canadians, we must see that profit minded producers and exhibitors do not come here under the impression that our people are simple minded souls who will accept any inferior productions thrust on them. They must understand and respect the ideals and wishes of our people and not abuse their privilege in being allowed to produce and exhibit films in Canada. Above all, they should realize that the progress of every form of art depends on healthy and unbiased criticism. If films are to play a vital and interpretive part in present-day life, their value must be interpreted to the public. Conscientious producers are not afraid of having their films criticised. It is only those who, motivated by profit, object to having their synthetic productions analysed. After all is said and done, writers who succeed in having books published often find their work severely criticised. Why therefore,

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Eight

ANNCR : should film producers expect to foster worthless
 films upon the public without criticism.

In its lowly beginnings, film was under the control of men whose primary interest was financial gain, and was neglected by the critics of art who could have raised its standards. Despite this unpromising start, the film which reached maturity in 1920, came more under the influence of artists and technicians who were not satisfied with films which merely provided quick emotional satisfaction and an appeal to the lower instincts. Directors such as William Wyler, Orson Welles, Carol Reed, John Ford, David Lean, Charles Chaplin, and, later, film producers of other nations, came upon the scene and made aesthetic pictures in the realm of realism, fantasy, satiric comedy, and sociological drama. Films which furthered the advances made by D.W.Griffith.

Constructive motion picture criticism, made up for its late appearance, and now keeps regular pace with all the latest developments. It has also atoned for part neglect by making an exhaustive study of early cinema history.

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Nine

ANNCR : Louis Lumiere, the man who fathered the film in 1895, is now dead. Hardly had the film industries of all nations ceased to mourn his passing when David Wark Griffith, one of the greatest men who ever struggled to make the cinematic vision come true, also died, in Hollywood. Not until death did the industry, which had ignored him for fifteen years, pay tribute to this great pioneer in the art of picture making.

Although Louis Lumiere and his brother Auguste, never claimed to have done more than adapt the Edison Kinetoscope, they were, nevertheless, the first to give a commercial exhibition of films projected on the screen. This was in Paris on December 28th 1895, and later in London, February 20th 1896, at the Polytechnic in Regent Street. This important step in motion picture progress came about through the father of Auguste and Louis Lumiere purchasing an Edison Kinetoscope with a dozen Edison films, and giving them to his sons in the hope they would develop the idea.

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ANNCE : The story has frequently been told of how Louis, while confined to bed, suddenly conceived the idea of a mechanical claw movement to give motion to Edison's pictures. Auguste always gave credit to his brother Louis for this invention. Auguste used to say: "My brother, in one night, just invented the "kinematographe."

One of Louis Lumiere's first short pictures, about 40ft in length and running less than 30 seconds, was called: "The Arrival of A Train at Ciotat Station." This film was of a train photographed (in a very timid manner compared with today's standards) as it steamed into the station. As the train drew closer to the camera, and seemingly closer to the audience, spectators in the front seats are said to have been terrified at such magic.

During later life, and whenever he passed lines of people waiting for admission to a motion picture theatre, Louis Lumiere would say: "I began it all." Without minimising the work of Thomas Edison of America, and Friese-Green of England, he did exactly that. Many of his earlier films foreshadowed later developments which took place in motion picture technique.

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Xleven

ANNCR : Then in 1907 came David Wark Griffith, whose outstanding films (still remembered today) include: "The Birth of a Nation," "Intolerance," "Broken Blossoms," and "Heart of the World." It was Griffith who first made the camera mobile. He was the director who made the camera enquire into the heart of things, instead of playing a remote and detached role. It was he who invented such familiar innovations as the flash-back, the fade-out, the close-up, tinted and misty photography. To what heights would the American film industry have continued to rise if Griffith had been allowed to produce films during the past fifteen years,

But Griffith, always the independant and free creative artist, was unable to stand alone against the mass attacks of the magnates who ~~was~~ were working to create the vast monopoly which is Hollywood today. So he faltered and fell before the mass-production methods of present day film production. The formula for making standardized films for profit had been discovered by studio

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Twelve

ANNCR : executives, and they had no use for Griffith or his new ideas. The sadness and bitterness which Griffith must have experienced during his life is now obliterated by Death. Only Death could make known to the world the tragedy of Griffith, and only his death could bring to prominence the now historic fact that he was the first great creative genius in the art of the motion picture.

The purpose of this programme therefore, is to give credit where credit is due. We shall be glad to say "this film is good" if it is good ... but on the contrary we shall say "this film is poor" if it is poor. For we believe in the words of D.W.Griffith who said:

"The motion picture is boundless in its scope and endless in its possibilities."

END

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ENDING

MUSIC : THEME FROM "GWTW"
 PLAY FOR REMAINDER OF TIME AND OUT:

ANNCR : "The Movie Scene" is a review of the film world
 here and abroad, prepared by Gerald Pratley.
 Next week, "Movie Scene" is devoted to Sir
 Laurence Olivier's production of "Hamlet,"
 with music from the sound track of the film
 by William Walton. This is John Rae speaking.

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