Moving Cinema:
Experimental Distribution and the Development of Anthology Film Archives

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Abstract

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Kristen Alfaro

This thesis examines the emergence of Anthology Film Archives (hereinafter Anthology), an independent and experimental film institution in New York City. Within experimental film history, Anthology is predominantly recognized for the creation of Essential Cinema, a canon of film art. The canon has become the institution's most famous endeavor and it has contributed to Anthology's predominant scholarly identity as alternatively a heroic or authoritarian institution. In this thesis, I explore the institution's conceptualization in the 1960s, its emergence in 1970, and the first five years of its development, in order to demonstrate how Anthology's history is more complicated than the dominant narrative implies. I argue that Anthology grew out of a particular set of social and artistic dynamics that shaped experimental film distribution and therefore, its exhibition.

In the first half of this thesis, I examine the shared spaces and distribution networks of art and film during the 1960s and 1970s in New York City. I argue that the shifts in experimental film circulation – in part prompted by changes in experimental art distribution - play an important role in the development of Anthology Film Archives. Secondly, I examine the broader corpus of Anthology's early endeavors, including Anthology's first theater, Invisible Cinema, the Film Study Center, and its collaborations with other institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the American Film Institute, and New York University, among others. This thesis offers a glimpse into aspects of Anthology's history that extend beyond the lasting legacy of Essential Cinema.

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Introduction
Beyond the Canon: Anthology Film Archives and the Experimental Film Narrative

In 2002, *October* published a round table titled "Obsolescence and American Avant-Garde Film."[1] *October* editor and scholar Malcolm Turvey, experimental film scholars Paul Arthur and Annette Michelson, filmmakers Brian Frye and Ken Jacobs, and Whitney Film and Video curator, Chrissie Iles, were brought together to discuss technological changes in artistic media. Sentiments of loss and nostalgia pervaded their discussion, which often returned to the experimental cinema and culture of 1960s and 1970s New York, a significant period for the journal and many of the participants (*October* launched its first issue in 1976). During this time, regular experimental film programming had been integrated into museums across New York. Furthermore, Michelson was a prominent presence in the film community and acted as a liaison between academy, art, and film worlds, while Jacobs, as a filmmaker and occasional exhibitor, was heavily involved in the experimental film scene. The *October* roundtable circled around the feelings of nostalgia attached to this period, and at times - due to the participants varied backgrounds - the discussion veered to the seemingly divided history between art and film worlds. In scholarship, the communities of art and film are primarily examined as two separate worlds, a perception that limits our analysis of two communities that functioned together in the same neighborhood, and often in the same building. Despite these shared physical spaces, many of the participants continued to discuss art and film communities as though they were completely divided. For example,

[1] Turvey, Malcom, Ken Jacobs, Annette Michelson, Paul Arthur, Brian Frye, Chrissie Iles. "Round Table: Obsolescence and American Avant-Garde Film," *October* Vol. 100 (Spring 2002): 115-132.

Iles stated that "art world people" did not know how to approach experimental film or even how to find it, while Arthur described the film world as a separate entity with wholly different perspectives.[2] According to Iles, experimental film exhibition did not extend beyond immediate film communities, while Michelson claimed that the art world and its artists were not interested in experimental cinema. The rhetoric of such strict segregations is cemented within the disciplines of art history, film, and media. However, the continued repetitions of these separations obfuscate the networks, systems of distribution and exhibition, and spaces that the film and art communities of New York did share. In this thesis, I examine the networked history and parallel development of SoHo and Anthology Film Archives to demonstrate how the entanglement of art and film worlds effected the distribution, circulation, and exhibition of experimental film.

When Anthology Film Archives opened in 1970 (hereinafter called "Anthology"), its founders declared the institution the first museum dedicated to film art, stating that their aim was to define its study and exhibition through the development of a canon (Essential Cinema) and a theater (Invisible Cinema). The Essential Cinema selection committee included Jonas Mekas, Peter Kubelka, P. Adams Sitney, and filmmakers James Broughton and Ken Kelman (Stan Brakhage was also briefly on the committee), and their choices contributed to Anthology's association with formalism and the experimental film canon. Having come to signify the institutionalization of experimental film, Anthology has become a significant point of entry into experimental film history, yet critical literature has primarily centered on the Essential Cinema canon. This thesis extracts Anthology from disciplinary segregation in film studies and canonical discourse

[2] Chrissie Iles and Paul Arthur, "Round Table: Obsolescence and American Avant-Garde Film," 119

to foreground the impact of distribution systems on Anthology's conception and early development. I argue in particular that Anthology Film Archives emerged from experimental systems of art and film distribution in the 1960s and remained intertwined within both experimental and more formal art distribution practices after it opened in 1970. Such interactions informed Anthology's development, and their endeavors would later come to shape and shift the public sphere of experimental cinema.

Before Anthology opened, experimental film exhibition was limited and difficult to find. Films were often produced with small gauge cameras and their content defied aesthetic and narrative norms. Filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Jack Smith, Shirley Clarke, and Michael Snow experimented with film form and content by utilizing the camera to foreground elements such as the zoom of a moving camera lens, the movement of an 8mm camera, light, celluloid, and sexuality.[3] This content was difficult, if not impossible to exhibit in commercial theaters, and experimental film and its exhibitors were forced into itinerancy, improvisation, and the formation of film societies. Mekas, in particular, played a pivotal role in advancing the interests of the experimental film community as it struggled to exhibit films within the political and cultural landscape of New York City. From 1958 to 1971, Mekas wrote a regular film column for the *Village Voice*, where he discussed the state of contemporary film criticism, the politics surrounding underground cinema, and the films and filmmakers of the experimental film community. In addition, Mekas devoted himself to numerous cinema-oriented endeavors, several of which became pillars of experimental film history:

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[3] For example see Jonas Mekas *Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)* (1969), Stan Brakhage's *Riddle of Lumen* (1972), Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), Shirley Clarke's *Bridges-Go-round* (1958), and Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967).

Film Culture (journal), Film-Makers' Coop (artists' run distribution cooperative), Film-Makers' Cinematheque, and Anthology.[4] Mekas' ventures occurred simultaneous to the rise of art movements such as Fluxus, where ideas about art and its practices were changing. In the case of Fluxus and avant-garde artists such as Trisha Brown, art distribution and exhibition expanded to include the postal service and the buildings of New York City, respectively, which influenced new kinds of *film* art and alternative forms of spectatorial engagement.[5]

Mekas' activities were not entirely unique. Concurrently, experimental filmmaker Bruce Baille began Canyon Cinema in 1960, an organization out of Canyon, California dedicated to alternative, independent, and experimental film exhibition.[6] In 1966, Canyon Cinema became a distribution organization: it still operates in this capacity today. Both Canyon Cinema (primarily a rental agency) and the permanent exhibition venue Anthology established themselves in opposition to commercial film theatres, offering films omitted from popular programming. Resistance to commercial film and its institutions is an enduring quality of artist-run film projects seeking to create basic access to environments in which films made beyond the major film studios could be seen. Contemporaneous to Canyon Cinema, alternative film access in the New York area

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[4] In 1974, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and Anthology amalgamated under Anthology Film Archives.

[5] For example, Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, 1970 and *Roof Piece*, 1973 were among the choreographed pieces performed atop and on the side of SoHo Buildings, including 80 Wooster Street.

[6] See Scott MacDonald. *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Canyon Cinema moved from Canyon to Berkeley, and finally to San Francisco, where it holds its offices today.

included Amos Vogel's Cinema 16, and Mekas' Film-Makers' Cinematheque.[7] Between 1947 and 1963, Cinema 16 was the primary experimental and independent film venue of the New York area. In 1960, Vogel's refusal to screen Stan Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* added to the mounting criticism of Vogel's programming. In the same year, Jonas Mekas, his brother Adolfas Mekas, and Brakhage were among the filmmakers that created their own collective, the New American Cinema Group (1960), and later distribution center, the Film-Makers' Coop (1962). Though distinct, Anthology's development and materialization coincided with experimental film groups such as these in San Francisco and New York. Anthology was not created independently of alternative exhibition counterparts or predecessors; however the particularities of its emergence in 1970 - parallel to the rise of SoHo - as well as its sustenance and progression in the twenty-first century merit a close analysis of its institutional history.

During Anthology's conceptualization and emergence, the interactions between art and film were entangled, complicated, and networked, and it is important that Anthology's history be understood through the extra-filmic context in which it developed. In the following sections, I look at the ways in which Anthology has been discussed in experimental film history. Primarily, I focus on the rhetoric of P. Adams Sitney and Annette Michelson, who were key figures of the experimental film scene and hailed Anthology as its savior.[8] In addition, I examine the feminist critiques of Constance

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[7] For a history of Cinema 16, see Scott Macdonald's *Cinema 16: Documents Towards a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

[8] P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film, The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*. Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Originally published in 1974. See also Sitney, ed. *Essential Cinema*, (New York: Anthology Film Archives and New York University Press, 1975). Annette Michelson Peter Gidal, and Jonas Mekas. "Foreword in Three Letters, *"Artforum* (September 1971): 8-10.

Penley, Janet Bergstrom, Patricia Mellencamp, and Lauren Rabinovitz, who categorized Anthology as a dictator of a canon.[9] Afterwards, I look at the ways the histories of Anthology and experimental film have been reassessed in the recent scholarship of Michael Zryd, Tess Takahashi, and James Kreul, who each offer a broader context for experimental film history by examining the networks, distribution, spaces, and institutional relations of experimental film.[10] Following this, I will chart contemporary scholarship of the film archive found in the work of Haidee Wasson, Rick Prelinger, and Caroline Frick, among others, to demonstrate how these discourses are pertinent to understanding Anthology's history as a film archive.[11] Lastly, I will draw from recent scholarship on networked and interdisciplinary approaches to art and media history, exemplified in the work of Wasson, Gwen Allen, and Craig J. Saper, as well as others, in order to foreground the configurations of experimental film distribution and exhibition in

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[9] See Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," *Screen*, 19 no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 113- 127, Patricia Mellencamp, *Indiscretions: Avant-garde Film, Video, and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), and Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71*. Second Edition. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Originally published in 1991.

[10] Zryd, Michael, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America." *Inventing Film Studies*. Eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 182-216 and "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance, *"Cinema Journal* 45 no. 2 (Winter 2006), 17-42 and Tess Takahashi, "Experimental Screens in the 1960s and 70s: The Site of Community," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Winter 2012): 162-167.

[11] Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies The Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Rick Prelinger, "Points of Origin: Discovering Ourselves Through Access," *The Moving Image*, 9 no. 2 (2010): 164-175, and Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema The Politics of Preservation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

the history of Anthology Film Archives.[12] These particular readings will serve as key texts for my argument in the following chapters.

In chapter one, I contend that Anthology's formation is tied to the Fluxus movement's reconfiguration of artists' networks and cooperatives in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The dialogue between experimental film exhibition and radical art movements altered perceptions of the film as a particular kind of art object and included a consideration of the spaces it inhabited. Before Anthology opened in 1970 as an institution of film art, the New York art world had shifted and art objects had begun to circulate outside of the gallery system, building peripheral exhibition networks. In reorganizing the institutional mode of art distribution and exhibition, the networks and spaces of art communities in 1960s and 1970s New York parallel the experimental distribution and exhibition practices of both the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and Anthology.

The second chapter of this thesis examines Anthology's entire corpus of activities and the network it built during the first four years of its tenure. As an outgrowth of experimental distribution of the 1960s, Anthology's changes in experimental film distribution and exhibition were also experiments for its founders who navigated new institutional terrain. When Anthology obtained an address at the Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street in Greenwich Village, the institution became a node in a larger network and the experimental film traversed economies of established art institutions, universities *and* the artists' run neighborhoods of SoHo and Greenwich Village. In 1974, Anthology

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[12] Haidee Wasson, "The Networked Screen," *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 74-95, Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), and Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

merged with the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and returned to 80 Wooster Street in SoHo, continuing to expand on popular models of film exhibition in the 1960s. Anthology pursued film preservation and pedagogy through the creation of a specific type of film theater, canon, and film study center, which shaped a particular discourse around the experimental film, yet despite these changes, Anthology remained deeply connected to the burgeoning radical art movements of SoHo.

As experimental film culture developed both institutionally and underground, the terms "avant-garde" and "experimental" were often used interchangeably. In his essay, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," Michael Zryd chronicles the linguistic history of "experimental" and "avant-garde" in film criticism, culture, and history. He states that "experimental" was favored in the 1950s and 1960s, while Jonas Mekas, Annette Michelson, and P. Adams Sitney employed the term "avant-garde" in the late 1960s and 1970s. In film, "avant-garde" is predominantly associated with two distinct connotations. Zryd identifies the first association to a particular disruptive aesthetic configuration found in surrealist and 1920s Soviet montage cinema, 1960s Brechtian and Godardian film, and 1980s punk cinema, while the second association refers to political or progressive theories or attitudes.[13] In recent scholarship by Zryd and Tess Takahashi, the more general term, "experimental" has been employed to describe American experimental cinema from the 1940s onward, films that utilize highly abstract, often non-narrative techniques. Zryd's and Takahashi's work (among others) has also pushed scholars working on the history of experimental cinema to more

[13] Michael Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," *Inventing Film Studies*. Eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 183. Tess Takahashi, "Experimental Screens in the 1960s and 70s: The Site of Community," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Winter 2012): 162-167.

fully consider the institutions, networks of relationships, and other modes and media of experimental art in these histories. Use of the term experimental allows for a more inclusive approach to the history of this particular body of films and related cultural activities. Following suit, I will utilize the term "experimental film" in this thesis; however, I will employ the term "avant-garde" when referring to Anthology's original institutional rhetoric in which they claim to be an avant-garde film academy. The term "avant-garde" will also be used to describe the collective art world (including film) of 1970s SoHo.

Anthology Film Archives as a Hero of Experimental Cinema

In the history of experimental film, Anthology Film Archives is largely situated in two opposing discourses: Anthology as a heroic emblem for experimental film or Anthology as dictator of a canon. In both discourses, Anthology is measured upon the power it developed and sustained as an institution devoted to experimental cinema and film art.[14] Film scholars and critics P. Adams Sitney and Annette Michelson are predominantly associated with Anthology's heroic discourse. Primarily, their phenomenological and formalist approach to film criticism and history informed the creation of the Essential Cinema canon, as well as the direction of experimental film curricula in the university. Secondly, Sitney and Michelson's pedagogical influence increased during their involvement in the development of the New American Cinema Group and the influential journal *Film Culture* in the 1950s. In addition, both taught in

[14] In this thesis, I use the term "film art" to describe the wide spectrum of films included in the Essential Cinema canon and categorized by Anthology's Film Selection Committee as film art.

the early years of New York University's Cinema Studies program. As well-known critics of the experimental film, they were deeply linked to the film community, the NYU Cinema Studies program, and Anthology Film Archives. Michelson regularly published film criticism in *Film Culture* and *Artforum* and in 1976, after leaving *Artforum* she started the scholarly journal *October* with Rosalind Krauss, while Sitney had a more direct and influential relationship to Anthology. Although Michelson became a board member for Anthology in 1972, Sitney was involved from conception onward. He helped conceive the parameters of the institution, wrote the institutional rhetoric, participated in board meetings, and belonged to the Film Selection Committee for Essential Cinema. Both Sitney's involvement with Anthology and his position as a film critic and scholar helped promote Anthology as a hero and savior of experimental film. Experimental film history often overlooks the details surrounding Sitney and Anthology's lasting rhetoric as an arbiter of experimental film value, and as a result, Anthology's history has largely been simplified as an analysis of the institution's polemical discourse. The context of Anthology's opening was far more complex than an analysis based solely on its own institutional rhetoric. Though it is telling of a particular lasting perception of experimental film, Anthology's development must be understood in relation to the networks its founders traversed in the decade prior to its opening.

Michelson's influence, on the other hand, expanded beyond the film community and into art world publications. During Anthology's second year, *Artforum* produced a special film issue where Michelson served as guest editor.[15] Three months earlier, Michelson published an analysis of Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) in which she

[15] *Artforum* September 1971.

compares Snow's camera to consciousness.[16] According to Michelson, Snow's work exemplified film's ability to materialize phenomenological ideas. After her analysis was published, Michelson received criticism from filmmaker Peter Gidal, which she included in the editorial foreword to *Artforum*'s September film issue. Composed of Gidal's critique, Michelson's response, and a letter by Jonas Mekas, Michelson's "Foreword in three letters" was a diverse commentary on the state of film criticism and its shifting future.[17] Michelson's own letter is a broader commentary on the nascent stage of film criticism and the significance critics will have on the young art medium. At the time of publication, Michelson stated that Anthology Film Archives would change the course of film criticism by offering the equipment for repeated film viewings, a film library, and regular screenings of Essential Cinema. The experimental film was now framed in an unprecedented disciplinary context and Michelson believed that this would redefine film criticism and give experimental film discourse the rigor it lacked in the former decade.[18] Michelson's editorial alerts us to the basic conditions in which film writing was taking place: often without systematicity, viewer control, or even availability.

Anthology's radical approach to experimental film exhibition garnered the attention of popular press and newspapers across the country, including *The Cincinnati Examiner*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The San Francisco Examiner*. Several local publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Village Voice*, and *Vogue* covered the opening of the new exhibition space. In *Vogue*, Barbara Rose praised

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[16] Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," *Artforum* (June 1971): 30.
[17] Gidal, Peter, Annette Michelson, and Jonas Mekas. "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum*. (September 1971): 8-10.
[18] Michelson, "Foreword in Three Letters," 9.

Anthology for bringing, "a new maturity of the American film consciousness."[19] Writing in *Film Comment*, Melinda Ward praised Anthology for challenging film criticism to move away from social considerations and into a purely aesthetic approach to criticism. She writes,

> …(T)he theater, the collection, the publications, the library, and the people involved together make the Anthology Film Archives a very important and signal event in the history and aesthetics of cinema…Glory to the Cinema. And glory to the Anthology Film Archives![20]

According to each reviewer, the institution created a theatrical and canonical standard, solved viewing problems (such as scarcity and variability), and articulated a new perception and understanding of film. This perception - steered by Anthology's rhetoric - would remain fundamental to scholarly analysis of the institution.

Anthology Film Archives as Dictator of a Canon

While hailed as heroic institution by certain critics, others disavowed the Essential Cinema selection process and the committee's exclusion of prominent filmmakers. Paired with Ward's praise in *Film Comment*, Richard Corliss offered an alternative review of Anthology, citing that Peter Kubelka, James Broughton, and Stan Brakhage, each members of the Film Selection Committee, have a total of thirty-seven films in Essential Cinema. The art and purity of film, Corliss maintained, is contained in the work and opinion of the selection committee, who did not include Alfred Hitchcock and Jean-Luc

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[19] Barbara Rose, "Where to Learn How to Look at Movies: New York's New Anthology Film Archives," *Vogue*, (November 1, 1971:70).
[20] Melinda Ward, "Anthology Film Archives," *Film Comment* (Spring 1971): 90.

Godard (among many other notable filmmakers) on their list.[21] In response to Ward's gushing admiration, Corliss ends with his own tribute: "Glory to the Independent Cinema! And gloriosky to the Anthology Film Archives!"[22] Andrew Sarris upholds a similar tone in his review of Anthology in *The Village Voice*, where he attributes the final list to the personal tastes and opinions of the Film Selection Committee.[23] Taking Corliss' count further, Sarris cites the number of films included on the list by the Selection Committees favored contemporaries, while also listing filmmakers Sarris believes should have been included on the list. Neither Sarris nor Corliss deny the relevance and potential of an institution like Anthology Film Archives, however, both strongly disagree with the institution's critical rhetoric and its film selection.

Led by a geographically and gender specific group of filmmakers and critics, the Film Selection Committee and Essential Cinema canon drew criticism from feminist writers. In 1978, Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, who were among the founders of Camera Obscura Collective criticized the dominance of New York experimental film critics. Influenced by Christian Metz, Penley states that the valorization employed by Sitney and his contemporaries disassociates criticism from the actual properties of film language and instead creates a critical language derived from value judgments.[24] Penley cites Anthology's publication (edited by Sitney), *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the*

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[21] Richard Corliss, "Anthology Film Archives," *Film Comment* (Spring 1971): 90.
[22] Corliss, "Anthology Film Archives," 91.
[23] Andrew Sarris, "Films in Focus," *The Village Voice*, November 26, 1970.
[24] Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," *Screen*, 19 no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 114. Sandy Flitterman and Elizabeth Lyon co-founded the Camera Obscura Collective with Penley and Bergstrom. The collective also produced the journal *Camera Obscura.* See Amelie Hastie, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, and Sharon Willis "(Re)Inventing *Camera Obscura*," *Inventing Film Studies*, Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 298-318.

Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives, as the most prominent example. The essays in the collection prioritize passion, which according to Mekas, was the primary basis of judgment for the Essential Cinema canon. Bergstrom identifies the established institutional bias of the avant-garde film canon, citing Anthology Film Archives and the Essential Cinema canon as the institution and critical framework that has dominated experimental film history, programming, and criticism.[25] The Whitney and the MoMA collected and programmed experimental films belonging to the Essential Cinema canon and Sitney was an instrumental member of the NYU Cinema Studies department, which held classes at Anthology's Film Study Center. The Essential Cinema program pamphlet was distributed to universities and guided avant-garde film education.[26] In 1976, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris presented *Une Histoire du Cinema*, an avant-garde film program that was advised by Peter Kubelka and accompanied by an exhibition catalog containing essays written by Kubelka, Mekas, Sitney, and Michelson.[27] Penley and Bergstrom's piece was among the first of academic criticisms against Sitney and Mekas' institutional approach. As one of the most enduring critiques of Anthology Film Archives and the New York experimental film scene, it has also contributed to the frequent simplification of Anthology's history.[28]

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[25] Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," 123.
[26] No record was kept of this distribution. Jonas Mekas, e-mail correspondence, March 9, 2011.
[27] John G. Hanhardt, "Chronology," *A History of the Avant-Garde Cinema* (New York: The American Federation of the Arts, 1976), 49-65. *Une Histoire du Cinema*, Paris: Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou, 1976.
[28] In 1979, Sitney refuted Penley and Bergstrom's claims citing a mere coincidence in the similarities between the Essential Cinema canon, John G. Hanhardt's contribution to *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, and the Centre Georges Pompidou's program *Une Histoire du Cinema*. Further, Sitney lists the discrepancies between the three lists, citing the number of films in Hanhardt's chronology and the Pompidou

Twelve years after Penley and Bergstrom, Patricia Mellencamp revisited Sitney's *Visionary Film* in her book *Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video, and Feminism*.[29] Mellencamp's critique focuses on Sitney's literary approach to film, as well as his rhetorical use of binary oppositions. Mellencamp contends that a critical framework based on literary theory posits a narrow understanding of cinema and instead she proposes a more critical approach to experimental film historiography which might provide insight into new models of analysis: "Examining the canonized concept of U.S. avant-garde cinema, its imaginary, which resonates with the biases of the historical avant-garde, is a preliminary step toward the emergence of another cultural model, which might enable us to see the films differently."[30] Mellencamp denotes the heroic tendencies of Sitney's historical narrative, citing that his dependency on literary theory over film theory limits experimental film criticism. Borrowing from Harold Bloom's *Visionary Company*, Sitney is inspired by romanticism, which positioned the artist at the center of all criticism. Mellencamp contextualizes Sitney's critique and acknowledges the radical history of romanticism, however, she states that the progressive history of romanticism is now viewed as conservative, particularly in the context of feminism. Mellencamp argues that Sitney's formalist and romantic criticism spearheaded exclusionary tactics that disregarded the plural, non-formalist history of experimental cinema. What is considered

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collection that do not belong to Essential Cinema or Anthology's collection. According to Sitney, these differentiations are markedly significant and attest to some reasonable coincidence rather than canonical dictatorship. Penley and Bergstrom reply separately to Sitney in the same year, both defending their position and disregarding Sitney's attempt at defense. P. Adams Sitney, "Letters from the Film Work Group, P. Adams Sitney, Constance Penley, and Janet Bergstrom" *Screen* 20 3-4 (1979): 151 – 159.

[29] Patricia Mellencamp, *Indiscretions: Avant-garde Film, Video, and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[30] Mellencamp, *Indiscretions*, 23.

a new style, she contends, stems from a forgotten history that occurred alongside the history remembered through Sitney's *Visionary Film* and amplified by the Anthology Film Archives collection.

Mellencamp's contemporary, Lauren Rabinovitz also calls for a new reading of experimental film history in *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71*.[31] She examines women filmmakers in the male dominated milieu of the New York avant-garde community. Focusing on Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke, and Joyce Wieland, Rabinovitz expands experimental film history into the realm of the social. Her history addresses social and institutional contexts that influenced the trajectory of experimental film. In a socio-historical context, Anthology's institutional power takes precedence and she writes, "Now within a united circle of political allies, the choices made by Mekas and others were inscribed in Anthology Film exhibitions, catalogues, and auxiliary publications that included two books as *the* New York avant-garde cinema."[32] Once again, Anthology's history is written as one of power and exclusion and Anthology is credited with altering extant power dynamics within the experimental film community through its canon.

The feminist critiques that arose from Essential Cinema locate Anthology within the discourse of canon formation and as a result, Anthology is identified solely as dictator of an experimental film canon, a position that has been adapted even more recently by Peter Decherney, who defines Anthology as an "authoritarian structure" that promoted

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[31] Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71* Second Edition (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Originally published in 1991.
[32] Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 141.

and embodied exclusionary tactics based on particular value judgments.[33] Though each analysis offers necessary alternatives to the heroism cemented into the experimental film narrative, Anthology's institutional history is more complex than these critiques have suggested, and it is important to revisit Anthology beyond the lens of Essential Cinema, which was but one of its lasting legacies.

Anthology Film Archives: It's Complicated

The ways in which the history of experimental film has been written is changing and in the following pages, I will chart the shift in scholars' reassessment of this history, with a particular emphasis on how Anthology Film Archives is represented and criticized. Distinct from popular feminist critiques of the institution, Anthology is also associated with the death of 1960s experimental film culture, wherein democratic values drove production, exhibition, and distribution. When film study programs and courses proliferated in universities across North America, experimental film culture evolved and as Michael Zryd states, this shift created a binary opposition between artists and the critics and academics who wrote and taught about them and their films. Even still, institutional criticism primarily locates Anthology within the canon building project of Essential Cinema, ignoring how Mekas, Hill, Sitney, and Kubelka worked within the framework of an institution *and* a range of self-sustaining alternative downtown spaces. When Anthology opened, the very same experimental filmmakers who belonged to the networks of Greenwich Village and SoHo directed the institution. J. Hoberman attributes *Artforum*'s September 1971 film issue, Anthology, and the rise of cinema study at the

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[33] See Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Cultural Elite: How Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 202.

university to the institutional changes in experimental film culture. However, Hoberman fails to acknowledge the broader role of *Artforum* – a magazine devoted to contemporary art, its criticism and theory - in the early 1970s as an equally important player in shaping the status of the experimental film within the art world. Although the magazine published a special issue on film, the editorial staff (which included Annette Michelson) believed that editor-in-chief John Coplans was not adequately committed to film, video, or performance art, the dominant media of the downtown New York art scene.[34] In other words, there was a nascent critique within conventional art institutions concerning the neglect of film.

The institutional changes Hoberman cites are an alteration in the perception and consumption of the term experimental, yet as Zryd demonstrates, it is important to note that there was an institutional presence prior to 1970. Fred Camper, Paul Arthur, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Lauren Rabinovitz each discern earlier periods of institutionalization: Camper from 1966 – 1986, Arthur on the 1960s, Horak on the pre-world war II period, and Rabinovitz of the 1940s and 50s activities of Maya Deren and Shirley Clarke.[35] Sociologist Todd Bayma argues that the values of 1960s experimental film culture, such as innovation and interaction with local communities, materialize in the following decades, despite increased institutionalization; experimental filmmakers

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[34] Gwen Allen, *Artist's Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 26.

[35] Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde : A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* 45 no. 2 (Winter 2006), 26. Fred Camper, "The End of Avant-Garde Film," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (1986-87), 99-124. Jan-Christopher Horak, *Lovers of Cinema The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1915-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*.

utilized the academy strategically, to their advantage.[36] The academy, Bayma contends, was an institutional site "driven both by the cultural values associated with experimental film and by such material considerations as the art world's small size, unprofitability, and lack of prestige in larger cultural markets."[37] While early experimental film scholarship and criticism state that the sixties and the seventies mark a historical binary of experimental film culture - the former decade represents a freedom that the latter decade took away - work by Camper, Arthur, Horak, Rabinovitz, and Zryd elucidate an experimental film history in which the institutional avant-garde was present earlier than 1970 and in certain instances institutions helped to foster experimental practices rather than mitigate against them into the 70s and beyond.

In 1992, David E. James edited a collection of essays on Jonas Mekas and the New York underground community.[38] Containing essays by Arthur and Rabinovitz, James provided larger cultural and institutional examinations of Mekas' activities in New York. Arthur's essay chronicles Mekas' various exhibition and publication endeavors of the sixties.[39] Mekas was a filmmaker but also an organizer, exhibitor, critic, distributor, and leader of the New York experimental film community. Seeking to locate experimental film within the realm of the social and the economical, Arthur states that there are few official histories of this time period, however several unofficial histories exist, such as Mekas' private diary. Rabinovitz, on the other hand centers on Mekas and

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[36] Todd Bayma, "Art World Culture and Institutional Choices: The Case of Experimental Film," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 1995): 79-95.
[37] Bayma, "Art World Culture and Institutional Choices," 80.
[38] David E. James, ed. *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[39] Paul Arthur, "Routines of Emancipation Alternative Cinema in the Ideology and Politic of the Sixties," 17 - 48.

film criticism, elaborating on her description of Penley and Bergstrom's "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," she recounts the trajectory of experimental film criticism and canon, citing a distinct shift in the 1970s. Using critical discourse as a point of entry, Rabinovitz illustrates how criticism has effectively altered experimental cinema in accordance to Howard Becker's art world model. James, Arthur, and Rabinovitz's work laid the groundwork for the contemporary approaches that seek to understand this history through a rigorous mapping of experimental film networks of exhibition, institutions, and in the case of this thesis, distribution.

In "The Academy and the Avant-Garde" and "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," Zryd addresses the cultural shifts recorded in James' collection but focuses on the historical oversimplification of the institutional avant-garde.[40] The relationship between experimental film and the university, Zryd contends, is one of sustenance and reciprocity; one aided in the development of the other. The university supplied filmmakers with employment, the payment of a stipend or lecture, and ensured that distribution cooperative Film-Makers' Co-op and the organization Canyon Cinema would have consistent rentals.[41] The majority of rentals from the Film-Makers' Co-op were generated from universities across America and the continued growth of Anthology depended on its co-existence with other institutions, such as NYU.

Drawing from archival research, Zryd identifies circulation patterns that indicate a far more complex and reciprocal relationship between the experimental film and the

[40] Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde"17-42 and "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," 182-216.
[41] Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde."

university than has been previously recorded. In a comprehensive literature review, Zryd identifies the overly generalized criticism of the shifts in the experimental film community in the 1970's and utilizes his archival findings to provide a more accurate analysis of experimental film distribution of this period.

Zryd's work also addresses the experimental film's influence on the development of film studies in America. The university aided experimental filmmakers by hiring them to lecture across institutions in America, renting films from their distribution co-ops and teaching students production techniques and criticism. The popularity of experimental film on campuses helped to spawn the culture of film societies in the university. According to Zryd, nearly 5000 film societies exist in universities today.[42] In the 1960s, film education and the growth in portable technology encouraged young students to explore the medium and students increasingly identified with film as a medium of personal and cultural expression in a time that placed a high value on participatory culture and politics.

Moreover, the university played a significant role in addressing the scholarly potential of avant-garde film study. Zryd and Rabinovitz contend that the growth of film study in America continued to decentralize experimental film traffic.[43] New York and San Francisco remained the centralized areas for experimental film culture and production, however, universities across the United States taught and programmed independent films, bringing them to smaller regions of the country. Simultaneously, Zryd points out that the production of academic film journals increased and value was further

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[42] Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America,"192.
[43] Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," 31. Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71*. Second edition (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003),196.

endowed to experimental film through its recurring appearance in reputable publications and university, gallery, museum, and independent presses.[44] For example, *Artforum* commissioned Michelson to edit the September 1971 special film issue, and as Rabinovitz notes, the University of Texas Press and MIT Press published new journals such as The Velvet Light Trap and October, which increased the journals' international circulation.[45] Zryd and Rabinovitz demonstrate that the proliferation of film journals and criticism, as well as the growth of postsecondary film education indicated that this time period was ripe for an institution like Anthology.

James Kreul further challenges the oversimplification of experimental film history in his dissertation *New York, New Cinema: The Independent Film Community and the Underground Crossover, 1950-1970*.[46] Over a twenty-year period, Kreul examines the commercial crossover of experimental films and filmmakers, focusing specifically on the activities of Andy Warhol, Shirley Clarke, and Jonas Mekas. Kreul employs Howard Becker's art world model to analyze distribution within the film and art community of New York in the 1950s and 60s. Focusing on filmmakers and their relationship to institutions, Kreul examines film production as a collective, rather than an individual effort. The Film-Makers' Cinematheque plays a central role in Kreul's narrative, as he encourages the examination of Mekas' non-filmmaking practices including Anthology Film Archives in order to reassess experimental film history. Kreul's study ends just as Anthology enters the New York scene, however he acknowledges Essential Cinema's

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[44] Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," 31-32.
[45] Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 197.
[46] James Kreul, *New York, New Cinema: The Independent Film Community and the Underground Crossover, 1950 – 1970*. Ph.D. diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004. Becker, Howard. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982.

role in shaping experimental film history. In addition, he argues that Penley, Bergstrom, and Rabinovitz place too much emphasis on publications, which do not account for the three other areas required for art world change in Becker's model. Production, distribution, communication, and interchangeable personnel are all required to stimulate change in a specific art world.[47] According to Kreul, the development of the experimental film community occurred because of multiple changes and as Zryd's work also contends, experimental film history is more complex than previous literature has accounted for. Kreul's study concludes with a call for new interdisciplinary approaches to experimental film history, citing Sally Banes' *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde, Performance and the Effervescent Body*, as a model study for increased dialogue between and among disciplines. Kreul contends that these extra-filmic histories are fundamental to a new understanding of independent filmmaking in America.

In other contemporary scholarship, Tess Takahashi focuses on the microcinemas of experimental cinema. Utilizing the screen as a site of analysis, Takahashi demonstrates that American avant-garde film exhibition was community based, centered primarily on informal home screenings of filmmakers and collectors, and thriving most prominently in New York and San Francisco.[48] Takahashi argues that the screen is a critical point of entry into the experimental film, opening its history beyond the artist, art object, and discipline. Despite the existence of medium-specific histories of experimental film and video art, many filmmakers worked with both media and furthermore, disciplinary

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[47] Kreul, *New York, New Cinema*, 532.

[48] Tess Takahashi, "Experimental Screens in the 1960s and 70s: The Site of Community," 162-167. On the history of exhibition of film and video in the Bay Area, see *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000.* Eds. Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

isolation does not account for the actual sites and screens where experimental film, video, and performance art were exhibited and performed. Takahashi suggests that we shift our gaze from medium-specificity to screens, a term that also refers to context and space, therefore considering film and video in relation to portable film technology, transport, travel, site specificity, and its audience members. This perception includes experimental screen audiences who fraternized with multiple media. In many cases, experimental film, video and performance art were not segregated from each other; art and film worlds were networked and shared audiences, neighborhoods, spaces, and systems of distribution and exhibition.

Zryd, Kreul, and Takahashi demonstrate how experimental film networks, communities, and institutional relations offer insight into a more complex history of experimental film. The dominant historical narrative is sustained within an oppositional framework that lends itself to generalization rather than specificity. Though it is important to be critical of the power dynamics created by particular institutions, it is also important to understand the extra-filmic context of Anthology's development. By drawing from multiple disciplines such as art history, film, media, architecture, and urban studies I will set aside oppositional discourse in order to explicate the nuances of Anthology's development and the relationships it forged within its early years with the New York downtown art scene, its artists, and methods of distribution and exhibition.

The Film Archive

My research also draws from recent scholarship on the film archive. In her study of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Haidee Wasson examines the history of our

perception of cinema as art.[49] Central to Wasson's study are the ways in which viewing formations (specifically institutions) shape our ideas about cinema. Prior to the development of the MoMA Film Library, cinema was generally conceived of as entertainment, and part of MoMA's challenge was to convince a public that film was also an art form. In order to do this, the Film Library associated the act of viewing cinema with lectures, publications, and pamphlets - pedagogical tools to reconfigure how, where, and why we watch cinema.

More recently, moving image archives have been discussed through the lens of access. Among its most vocal proponents is Rick Prelinger, who has steadily called on archives to place access as the preeminent discourse, revising the current preservation hierarchy in which the maintenance of the original artifact remains the focus of preservation. In the Fall 2010 issue of *The Moving Image*, Prelinger focuses on the concept of accessibility, arguing that it can redefine the twenty-first century moving image archive.[50] Prelinger describes this archival disposition as one of citizenship, wherein accessibility enables the archive to become an even more active member of the community working in conjunction with both conservative and progressive institutions and collectors. Prelinger argues that free access is a form of preservation that can expand scholarship and enrich communities.

The archivist-scholar relationship is further articulated in Cinema Journal's "In Focus: the twenty-first Century Archive," where Prelinger, Eric Schaefer, Dan Streible, Karan Sheldon, Lynne Kirste, Mike Mashon, and Margaret Compton describe archival

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[49] Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[50] Rick Prelinger, "Points of Origin: Discovering Ourselves Through Access." The Moving Image, 9 no. 2 (2010): 164-175.

challenges, particularly those of the marginal moving image archive (regional, orphan films, LGBT).[51] Experimental Film was not featured in this discussion however, Kirste acknowledges Anthology's preservation of the Kuchar brothers' 8mm films and Prelinger alludes to the online experimental film community when discussing file-sharing sites and members-only downloadable archives. Each piece is an appeal to the moving image community to discuss and build the accessible twenty-first century archive together.

As archivists continue to discover nontheatrical films (industrial, educational, training, travel, etc.), value is selectively ascribed to specific films for photochemical preservation, leaving the majority of nontheatrical films unpreserved. And as Caroline Frick observes, the twenty-first century archive ideally shifts away from the object-centered disposition of preservation into content access as a priority. This shift further links archival discourse to media history and portable technology, which provided decentralized and increased content access to moving images. [52] The correlation between contemporary archival discourse and media history are exemplified in the evolution of Anthology Film Archives, whose development begins in the 1960s, where portable technology offered the promise and potential of increased access to experimental film. This will be a key part of what follows.

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[51] "In Focus: The twenty-first Century Archive" featured the following pieces: Eric Schaefer, Rick Prelinger, Karan Sheldon, Dan Streible, Margaret A. Compton, Lynne Kirste, Mike Mashon, *Cinema Journal* 46 no. 3 (Spring 2007): 109-142.
[52] Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Anthology Film Archives and the Experimental Film: A Networked History

In order to understand how Anthology Film Archives shaped the public sphere of experimental film, I frame Anthology's development and nascent years through the lens of a networked history, in which the experimental film object is perceived as a living entity with complex and interwoven histories. The object's movement is best understood as what Arjun Appadurai defines as "commodity flows," wherein value is attributed to the act of exchange and the object's networks are constructed through the interaction between people and things.[53] Appadurai contends that it is through a commodity's movement that we gain an understanding of a thing's "social life" created by the relationship forged between humans and objects.[54] While not a proper commodity, the experimental film flows through varied spatial platforms of exhibition where it must negotiate the political, economical, and social interplay of a definite time and context. By identifying a specific path or method of exchange for the experimental film, we see that a particular pattern of supply and demand, and an increase in value (cultural capital), results in a regulated, centralized exhibition and archival space.

In experimental film history, Anthology Film Archives is conceived of as an arbiter of film value. The institution formed a power structure that imbued value upon the experimental film. This structure included value-building activities: the formation of a canon, the publication of books, and the preservation of films. According to Pierre Bourdieu, this structure is a system regulated by critics and institutions that determine

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[53] Arjun Appadurai, Ed. *The Social Life of Things Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[54] Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 6.

and attribute value to cultural objects.[55] This system is what Bourdieu terms the "field of cultural production," in which symbolic capital is attributed to art objects. Art does not exist in and of itself; it is intimately connected to critical discourse and institutional capital. Its value is measured against such associations, and for the experimental film, the university, the museum, and Anthology Film Archives increased its value within film and art worlds.

In the field of film studies, Haidee Wasson's essay, "The Networked Screen: Moving Image, Materiality, and the Aesthetics of Size," offers a useful model for examining the development of Anthology Film Archives and the experimental film object. Moving beyond the film text and object, Wasson contends that the screen is a vital analytical tool for understanding shifts in cinematic objects, infrastructure, and exhibition. The proliferating screen constantly evolves and requires varied technological components and configurations. Such specifications are temporal; equipment can be outdated or exceptionally new, with each variation modifying moving image exhibition. The screen, therefore, is a site of contention in a network composed of material objects, malleable screen aesthetics, and systems of distribution and exhibition.[56] Moving images are inextricably linked to their material components and travel in accordance to physical specificities; its projection is bound to an exhibitor's budget and the technology available – particular configurations of exhibition inherently connected to a distinct time and place. Screens are nodes in complex networks and function as significant sites of information.

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[55] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[56] Wasson, "The Networked Screen: Moving Image, Materiality, and the Aesthetics of Size," *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 74-95.

As a node in a larger network, Anthology Film Archives and its field of exhibition is intimately connected to the smaller artistic community in SoHo and the larger institutions of uptown New York. Anthology moved locations four times and often shared exhibition and building space with other organizations or art movements, such as Fluxus and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. When Anthology opened, the main exhibition space was called Invisible Cinema, a theater with seating and screen specifications linked to a theory of proper film art viewing (I will further discuss Invisible Cinema in Chapter Two). After Invisible Cinema closed, the institution returned to SoHo and expanded its film programming to include video art, again expanding networks and sharing screens and physical spaces. The particularities of the institution's development, theater, and programming modified the public sphere of experimental cinema and demonstrate how Anthology's history is more complicated than the dichotomous historical narrative has implied.

Furthermore, my argument is influenced by expanding scholarship on the culture, networks, and interrelations of art and media found in the work of Sally Banes, David Joselit, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Gwen Allen, and Craig J. Saper.[57] In her study of Greenwich Village in 1963, Banes demonstrates how various art media interacted and influenced each other to reinvent community. In the age of participatory culture, artists of Greenwich Village created a networked community in which interdisciplinary artworks and collaborations were formed. Work was produced, circulated, and performed by

[57] Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007). Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008). Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art*) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

artists, which contributed to the formation of an autonomous and participatory democracy in Greenwich Village. The networks formed within 1960s Greenwich Village included experimental filmmakers and the exhibition of their films. Banes illustrates how experimental film related to other media and how it influenced the production and exhibition of experimental film.

While television's popularity increased in the 1960s, artistic communities saw a growth in video art. In his examination of the two media, Joselit exemplifies a networked and interdisciplinary approach to art history, which he argues offers further insight into the political possibilities within the discipline. [58] Lambert-Beatty, on the other hand, examines Yvonne Rainer's explorations of the physical body through other media. Focusing on the historically peripheral elements of Rainer's work, such as film, dialogue, and photography, Lambert-Beatty removes Rainer from a medium-specific taxonomy. In order to reconstruct this history, Lambert-Beatty relied on the textual ephemera of performance. Today, Rainer's performances exist in the residual form of programs, posters, photographs, and oral histories, all of which provide further insight into the cultural environment of the experimental film.[59]

Working within the same time period, Allen examines artists' magazines of the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that these objects provided alternative social and exhibition spaces for art. Allen demonstrates that magazines were radical spaces of art as they were inexpensive, miniature, and accessible; the magazine provided artists with a way to circumvent the market-driven galleries of uptown New York. Saper also examines artists' magazines and the miniature in his study of mail art, arguing that art's decentralization is

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[58] Joselit, *Feedback*, xii
[59] Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched*, 23.

grounded in the participatory medium of mail art. Traveling via post, mail art reformulated art access, moving it beyond gallery spaces.

Despite this decentralization, artists and filmmakers still desired a centralized exhibition space. While attempting to find exhibition space artists and filmmakers encountered numerous obstacles such as obscenity law and municipal zoning laws and in the 1970s artists began populating the district south of Houston, known today as SoHo. Economically friendly, SoHo's industrial lofts offered artists the space to work, live, and exhibit. In their study of 80 Wooster Street in SoHo, Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, examine the development of the artists' loft in SoHo.[60] In the 1960s and 1970s, 80 Wooster became a Fluxhouse (Fluxus artist's residential and work cooperative designed by George Maciunas) and a center for avant-garde performances, screenings, and events. As a node in a larger network, 80 Wooster Street is a vital element of experimental film history. As artists colonized SoHo, they faced increased scrutiny from the City Planning Commission due to the districts non-residential zoning classification. When Jonas Mekas purchased space in the Fluxhouse 80 Wooster Street, experimental film screenings became a part of the new SoHo community. The examination of SoHo's architectural and urban history and 80 Wooster Street's legal documents and textural ephemera contribute to understanding how Mekas struggled to obtain legal film exhibition spaces.

In addition, my research has benefitted from Anthology Film Archives and Jonas Mekas' personal archives, through which I obtained Anthology's early board meeting minutes, correspondence between Mekas and Anthology's original legal counsel, Alan A. Masur, as well as early programs for Anthology and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque.

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[60] Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo*, (Vilnius, Lithuania: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010).

These documents have lent further insight into Anthology's early activities, its movement, and the relationships it forged with other institutions and the networks that emerged from them.

Anthology's early networks were formed in part due to its various locations. The institution changed addresses four times, eventually settling in New York City's Lower East Side at 32 2nd Avenue.[61] Its two earliest locations, 425 Lafayette Street in Greenwich Village and 80 Wooster Street in SoHo situate Anthology and the experimental film within progressive art movements and communities, indicating Anthology's participation in the growth of radical art exhibition spaces in downtown New York and its intimate link to other historical narratives. As such, the experimental film object must be examined in accordance to its social relations, wherein oppositions are less pervasive and the configurations of circulation, distribution, and exhibition exemplify the complexities that permeate its history. Within its short life, Anthology has largely been associated with the power dynamics imbued in canon formation. Signifying exclusion and hierarchy, canonical discourse has hidden the many facets of Anthology's history. When the institution opened in 1970, the experimental film began a new sojourn within the networked economy of major art institutions and universities, however, it remained connected to avant-garde art and the artists' ecosystem of SoHo. This autonomous artistic sphere did not disappear when Mekas acquired real estate, instead, the artists' ecosystem of SoHo persisted alongside the institution, and the experimental film community and its

[61] After Anthology purchased the courthouse on 2nd Avenue, Anthology launched a fundraising campaign to renovate the building. From 1983 – 1988, Anthology screened films in basement auditorium of former Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art on 59th Street. At the time, it also housed the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. Bernstein and Shapiro, *Illegal Living*, 105.

practices evolved as it attained increased recognition from art institutions, universities, and government-funded grants, a network we will now examine in the following chapters.

Chapter 1
Becoming Legal: Downtown New York, Experimental Distribution, and the Development of Anthology Film Archives

> Film-Makers' Cinematheque
> 80 Wooster Street
>
> All our screenings of the Avantgarde Film till now have been illegal.
>
> We have been told to close and legalize ourselves.
>
> We'll keep you informed about our Progress in Becoming Legal –
>
> Jonas Mekas for the Cinematheque
>
> July 29, 1968[62]

When the Film-Makers' Cinematheque closed their 80 Wooster Street space in July 1968, filmmaker and exhibitor Jonas Mekas orchestrated a series of itinerant screenings and 80 Wooster Street became a space for performance art, plays, operas, music, and private screenings. In the next two years, Jonas Mekas, filmmaker and financial patron Jerome Hill, historian and critic P. Adams Sitney, and filmmakers Peter Kubelka, Stan Brakhage, James Broughton, and Ken Kelman focused on building a another type of legal exhibition space: Anthology Film Archives. Originally conceived as an avant-garde film academy, the institution altered New York experimental film distribution and exhibition by developing a canon of film art (Essential cinema), a theater (Invisible Cinema), and a film library.[63] As I have discussed in the introduction,

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[62] Film-Makers' Cinematheque notice, *Film-Makers' Cinematheque*, Anthology Film Archives.

[63] See Peter Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) Twelfth printing. In *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 12. Malte Hagener positions avant-garde film culture within Burger's theory of the avant-garde. Avant-garde work, he states, is characterized by its self-

Anthology is predominantly identified as the institution that created the polemical Essential Cinema canon, but beyond this, it is important to understand Anthology within the broader context of which it emerged: the shifting cultural landscape of 1960s and 1970s downtown New York City. Largely due to modifications in art distribution and exhibition, experimental films were exhibited in both private and public spheres. In addition, the configurations of experimental film access, distribution, and exhibition were shaped according to the increased use of portable film technology, which allowed filmmakers such as Mekas to imagine alternative non-theatrical modes of distribution and exhibition. These configurations were also informed by the authorities' enforcement of the obscenity and municipal zoning laws that hindered public screenings.

In this chapter, I identify the circulation rhythms of the experimental film object in the 1960s and 1970s. I argue that its movement - distribution and exhibition - complicates experimental film history and offers further insight into the development of a particular type of experimental film exhibition space: Anthology Film Archives. This critical framework extracts the study of a moving image archival institution and its objects from a lamentation for celluloid - where death and loss permeate our examination of cinematic specificity - to argue that the experimental film object is a *living* thing with a social existence and a history of exchange predicated on new technologies, censorship, and the networks, shifts, and flows of art exhibition and the American avant-garde. In the first half of this chapter, I look at the geographical and film exhibition context in which Anthology was conceived. Specifically, I examine Greenwich Village, Pop Art, Fluxus, and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. In the sections that follow, I illustrate the socio-

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positioning as a social, economic, and cultural alternative to bourgeois and institutional norms.

political framework out of which Anthology emerged by focusing on the obscenity and municipal zoning laws that effected experimental film exhibition. Additionally, I examine the development of the artists' neighborhood SoHo, and the artists' magazines and cooperatives (Fluxhouses) that contributed to the shifts in experimental film distribution and exhibition.

The experimental film is complicated through the lens of its peripheral networks, which expand the history of the experimental film and offer further insight into the creation of an institutional, archival space for a historically anti-institutional object of cinema. I argue in particular that the formation of Anthology Film Archives rests in an important relationship to Fluxus and its contribution to decentralized networks of art, experimental art distribution, and centralized artists' cooperatives. Through Fluxus, I examine the movement and circulation of the experimental film and the various types of real estate it occupied within and beyond the New York City art world. Before Anthology opened in 1970, the 1960s New York art world shifted and art objects began to circulate outside of the gallery system, building peripheral exhibition networks and establishing a self-sustaining artists' ecosystem within the neighborhood of SoHo. In reorganizing the institutional mode of art distribution and exhibition, networks of art provided a blueprint for the development of the institutionalized experimental film; its exhibitors needed more than a system of distribution and exhibition, they also needed their ideas to be grounded and accessed in a centralized space and a permanent screen, propelling the creation of Anthology Film Archives.

In America, experimental film has long depended on fleeting spaces of exhibition, in part because the well-developed institutions of commercial cinema were largely

unfriendly to experimental and small-scale films. This is also true for the more formal networks of art institutions such as museums, which on the whole only slowly and reluctantly came to include experimental film works. Obscenity and municipal zoning laws complicated experimental film access; these films were simply hard to see, particularly within a theatrical context. In the 1960s, Greenwich Village hosted small-scale screening practices, which sustained early American experimental film exhibition networks of the 40s and 50s, allowing them to grow. Film societies, experimental filmmakers and their friends additionally hosted impromptu and informal screenings in residential spaces. In her diary, Anais Nin recounts the first time she saw Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947) "at someone's house…" in San Francisco during the spring of 1948.[64] Anger admired Nin's writing and quickly after their first meeting invited her to an informal screening of *Fireworks*, where a private space turned fleetingly public.[65] This mode of exhibition carried on in the 1960s, when projections of experimental film occurred wherever its exhibitors could find space, as sites depended on availability, finances, and the evasion of law enforcers. Mobile projections momentarily inhabited small spaces and established what Mekas called "one-shot screenings" as the normative experimental film exhibition system of the time. This type of exhibition space generated a kind of intimacy achieved through shared non-professional environments.[66] The

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[64] Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin Volume Five: 1947-1955,* ed. Gunther Stuhlmann, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 25.
[65] As Takahashi notes, San Francisco's Canyon Cinema organized theatrical, institutional, and informal screenings. Takahashi, "Experimental Screens," *Cinema Journal*. San Francisco's exhibition spaces have been recently documented by Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid, eds., *Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California & Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, 2010).
[66] Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 135.

conventional theatrical mode of viewing only helps us understand so much about an itinerant, informally-documented pocket of film exhibition history; contemporary methods of analysis offer another option, where technological networks provide an alternative aid to comprehending spaces of experimental film exhibition.

Greenwich Village and Pop Art

This multi-functional environment is characteristic of the fluid networks of 1960s Greenwich Village and SoHo, where artists expressed their ideas through performance and media plurality. As Sally Banes has convincingly pointed out, the underground film movement co-existed with theatre, performance, dance, poetry, and music.[67] Artists expressed their ideas through collaborative performances and media plurality, as in the case of Trisha Brown's *Homemade*, 1966, where Brown performed with a working 8mm film projector strapped onto her back.[68] Ideas of community, equality, freedom, and democracy perhaps predictably propelled the formation of underground networks. With the exception of alternative theaters and film festivals, experimental film exhibition was predominantly found in the non-theatrical sector where viewing formations were confined to small spaces and enabled by portable film technology. The gallery, office, classroom, and living room became common venues for moving image projection, modifying exhibition through projector and screen mobility. Film was transported in cars, subways, buses, and by foot. It could be stored in a closet, next to a bookshelf or wheeled

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[67] Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

[68] *Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, and* Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark, Kate Bush, Jane Crawford, Rose Lee Goldberg, Alanna Heiss, Philip Ursprung, Lydia Yee. *Gordon Matta-Clark Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s* (Munich, London, and New York: Prestel, 2011), 69.

from one side of the room to another: new technology made cinema *portable*, complicating ideas about cinema, as the moving image entered spaces designated for other types of performances and activities.[69]

Experimental film in the 1960s progressed in tandem with major art movements of the decade. Pop Art and Fluxus particularly influenced the content, context, and exhibition of experimental films. In 1963, *Art in America* published its fiftieth anniversary issue, in which critics suggested that Pop Art was the new American folk art, because it questioned and performed nationalism by creating work that recalled the American everyday.[70] Andy Warhol, Roy Litchenstein, and Robert Indiana elevated the common and the mundane by enlarging images from the American cupboard, highway, and newspaper, transforming them into paintings, sculpture, and screen prints. Artists equated the vernacular with the vanguard and worked nonprofessionally, existing on the fringes until the explosion of Pop Art.[71] The vernacular soon made its way into the experimental film, as exemplified by Kenneth Anger in *Scorpio Rising* (1964), where sounds and icons of American popular culture were juxtaposed with biker and Nazi imagery. In place of dialogue, Anger overlays recognizable pop songs, using camera movement to eroticize the male body.

In addition, Jonas Mekas believed that home movie filmmaking was a modern day folk art practice:

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[69] Haidee Wasson is currently completing a history of small cinema. See Haidee Wasson, "Electric Homes! Automatic Movies! Efficient Entertainment! 16mm and Cinema's Domestication in the 1920s," Cinema Journal 48, no. 4 (2009): 1-21.
[70] Banes refers to Dorothy Gees Seckler "Folklore of the Banal," *Art in America* no. 4 (1963), 44-52 and Alice Winchester's "Antiques For the Avant-Garde," *Art in America* no. 4 (1963), 44-52.
[71] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 83.

> The day is close when the 8mm home-movie footage will be collected and appreciated as beautiful folk art, like songs and the lyric poetry that was created by the people. Blind as we are, it will take us a few more years to see it, but some people see it already. They see the beauty of sunsets taken by a Bronx woman when she passed through the Arizona desert; travelogue footage, awkward footage that will suddenly sing with an unexpected rapture.[72]

For the experimental filmmaker and the amateur home movie hobbyist, the 8mm format offered an economical product to create home movies which could be collected, distributed, and exhibited in a similar fashion to folk art modes of production and distribution: self-operated and community based.

Fluxus

Though Pop and folk art greatly impacted the infrastructure and aesthetic of experimental film production, distribution, and exhibition, Fluxus' critique of art institutions was fundamental to the changes in art and experimental film circulation and the development of an artist' neighborhood and ecosystem. By the end of the 1960s, Fluxus artists and experimental film venues converged in SoHo partly because of its economical and ideal working environments, a move which helped bring Fluxus ideas closer to the experimental film. During the Fluxus movement's early years, George Maciunas planned to publish a journal entitled *Fluxus* and the movement's performances began with a series of concerts at A/G Gallery in New York. In the early sixties, Maciunas had difficulty expanding Fluxus ideas in New York and eventually travelled to Germany where Fluxus performances expanded. Maciunas returned to New York in September 1963, radically influencing shifts in the spaces and circulation of art. In order

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[72] Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971*, (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 83.

to define the increasing interdisciplinary structures of art, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins utilized the term ‘intermedia’ to describe art’s new formations. As the art of the unnamable, intermedia was a fusion of communication; it was composed of multiple entities and relied on the connection forged among media. This synthesis expands singular notions of traditional art by threading media together to form new networks of art distribution and exhibition. According to Higgins, intermedia transcends modernist dissections of a single medium and instead experiments with the connections formed through media mergers.

In moving image discourse, Fluxus artists employed the term ‘expanded cinema’ to include celluloid and new technologies such as video and holograms. Multiplicity and mergers distinguished Fluxus work as intermedia and artists developed ties between different sectors of Greenwich Village and SoHo, creating what Craig J. Saper terms “networked communities.” Such networks were, as Saper argues, significant to Fluxus creations: artists generated, cultivated, and shared ideas while opening up the frame of art to include the audience. Utilizing systems and structures already in place, such as the postal service, residential and work cooperatives, clinics, feasts, fests, and encyclopedias, Fluxus artists created their own environment utilizing the infrastructure of the environment they were criticizing.

Fluxus members combined media and produced artwork out of systems, communities, publications, events, and performances. Maciunas established Fluxhouses (which I will return to in detail later in this chapter), cooperatives where artists could live, work, and exhibit. These Fluxhouses contained a temporary FluxClinic that mocked and criticized the institutionalization of humans. Artists would measure the dimensions of a

visitor's body and measurements would be recorded in a Fluxpassport.[73] Maciunas also hosted Flux feasts, which included a New Year's Eve Flux Fest in the Fluxhouse cooperative 80 Wooster Street (also a home for the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and Anthology); the menu consisted of Flux Eggs (emptied egg shells filled with items such as plaster, white gelatin, or dead bug), Salad Soup by Yoshi Wada, and Shooting Candies with Gun into People's Mouths by Robert Watts.[74] Additionally, Fluxus artists created Flux Post Kits, which mimicked the structure of the postal system (rubber stamps, mailing stamps, a postal box, postcards, and addresses). The mailman was given the choice between two addresses, and thus the agency to direct the destination of the kit.[75] In 1969, Maciunas' conceptualized the *Learning Machine*, a work that attempted to classify all knowledge in a categorization system personalized to Fluxus values.[76] Maciunas' classification reorients knowledge in accordance with Fluxus ideas; cinema, for example, is placed under the category of 'photography,' while 'expanded cinema' is under its own classification. Maciunas challenged traditional notions of art objects by classifying "wars, orgies, prisons, clouds, fountains, shells, insects, food, cybernetics…" in the art and design section.[77] Each Fluxus project attempts to expand modes of art distribution and exhibition and redefine categorizations of art. Additionally, while many of these projects were exhibited in Fluxhouses, Anthology and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque exhibited experimental film and video in the same space.

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[73] Hannah Higgins, "Fluxus Fortuna," *The Fluxus Reader*, 56.
[74] Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo*, (Vilnius, Lithuania: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010), 101.
[75] Craig J. Saper, "Fluxus: Instructions for an Intimate Bureaucracy" *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 127.
[76] For the purposes of this thesis, I will be discussing Fluxus ideas and works specifically related to moving images, the decentralization of artwork, and the shared spaces of SoHo.
[77] Saper, "Fluxus as a Laboratory," *Fluxus Reader*, 143.

The Film-Makers' Cooperative

As Fluxus ideas were developing, ephemeral experimental film screenings in Greenwich Village expanded. In the 1960s, experimental films frequently traveled between exhibition venues and the storage spaces of filmmakers' own homes and Mekas' loft apartment (which also served as the offices for Film Culture and the Film-Makers' Cooperative), thus institutionalizing a particular kind of screening pattern for the experimental film.[78] At the heart of 1960s microcinema is the Film-Makers' Cooperative, an organization that existed and operated parallel to Anthology. The Co-op guaranteed film circulation and provided a film depository for members; it was also an exhibition space for the otherwise nomadic experimental film.[79] Screenings interweaved through private and public spaces, thriving largely in the domestic spheres of enthusiasts and filmmakers. It was common to watch experimental film inside an apartment, loft or gallery, where screens turned private spaces public and public spaces increasingly intimate. In the 1960s, Mekas became a prominent promoter, protector, and exhibitor of the experimental film, using whatever means possible to provide access, including turning the office of the Film-Makers' Cooperative into a screening venue. Joan Adler

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[78] When the Film-Makers' Cooperative began in 1962, Mekas' loft apartment on 425 Park Avenue South became the Cooperative's office, where it remained until 1967, when they moved to 175 Lexington Avenue. Today, they are located at 475 Park Avenue South.

[79] In the 1950s, Amos Vogel's Cinema 16 (1947-63) was the preeminent film society for the exhibition of contemporary independent cinema in the New York area. Many experimental filmmakers, including Mekas, regularly attended the screenings until 1959, when Vogel's programming interests collided with that of the New American Cinema Group. Brian Frye, "Interview with Jonas Mekas," *Senses of Cinema* (June 2001), http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/mekas_interview.html Accessed October 15, 2010.

and Steven Dwoskin attended the exhibitions and describe the Film-Makers' Cooperative office as crowded, informal, and intimate:

> At the front of the loft, overlooking Park Avenue South and the Belmont, was the office, desk, telephone, typewriter, drawers, paper, pens, inks, filing cabinets. The sides of all sections were filled with film racks which were stacked with films and reels. For screening, the screen would be opened with the office as a dark backdrop and the audience would drag up chairs, sit on the floor or lie on the sofa to one side of the cleared space which was the centre of the loft. Maybe 25 feet deep and 12 feet across. Behind that was the projector and storage space with more film and cameras and negatives and whatever odd items of equipment had turned up. There was also table space for sorting mimeographed sheets and what was once to have been darkroom space but never got used. There they gave private film showings to prospective backers, sponsors, angels, distributors, helpers of power and there they got raided by the police a couple of times and lost a few copies of film (including *Flaming Creatures*) to the authorities.[80]

Adler's description demonstrates the various functions of Mekas' loft space: office, studio, and theater. Film was stored next to the pens, paper, and file cabinets of the Film-Makers' Cooperative office. When turned into an exhibition venue, screens were placed in front of the designated office space, masking its daytime function. Viewers moved chairs to the center of the loft while others planted themselves on the sofa, further signifying the shift in spatial context. The Film-Makers' Cooperative office became a temporary screening venue recalling a home living room.

These juxtapositions mark a common transformation of artistic space in the 1960s, when the studio, residence, and exhibition venue increasingly became one. Many experimental films were originally screened in atypical venues. *Flaming Creatures* debuted in a storage loft where converted boxes, wooden planks, and old toilets were utilized as seats. James Kreul highlights Dwoskin's memory of the Gramercy Arts

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[80] Joan Adler, *Film Is: The International Free Cinema*, ed. Stephen Dwoskin, (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1975), 14.

Theater, where films were projected onto small screens and filmmakers used records or tapes in place of sound transfers, a scenario reminiscent of the home movie experience.[81] These spaces anticipated the contemporary home living room adorned with new technology and a DVD library.[82] As film objects were increasingly stored and displayed in relation to office supplies and living room furniture, domestic and office spaces were altered to accommodate portable technology, shifting dynamics of the home and the office.

Obscenity Law and the Experimental Film

As the lines between private and public exhibition spaces were further obscured, experimental film exhibitors faced the nuanced obscenity clause of the First Amendment. The First Amendment protected motion pictures, but certain experimental films could not bypass obscenity laws and exhibitors of experimental films such as *Flaming Creatures* were accused of violating such laws. [83] Although the history of obscenity and cinema dates back to the 1890s, I will be focusing on the 1950s and 1960s for the purposes of this thesis.[84] Sexual content in experimental film could be deemed immoral and therefore

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[81] Kreul, *New York, New Cinema*, 242.
[82] For more on the home movie experience, see Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, Technologies, and the Home*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[83] In the landmark 1952 case *Burstyn vs. Wilson*, the US Supreme Court ruled that the First and Fourteenth Amendments did indeed motion pictures, however this rule did not apply to every single motion picture produced and exhibited in the United States. Peter Lev, *The Fifties Transforming the Screen 1950-1959*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 99.
[84] Thomas Edison's *The Kiss*, 1896, is the first film to contain a kiss and is referenced as belonging to the histories of pornography. See Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See also Lee Grieveson. *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Richard Hixson *Pornography and the Justices: The Supreme Court and the*

obscene, leading to the arrest of experimental filmmakers and exhibitors. The circulation, distribution, and exhibition of pornography underwent similar scrutiny from the US government; both pornography and particular experimental films were seen to break the moral code dictated by American law. In 1964, in preparation for the upcoming influx of World's Fair tourists, New York City officials outlawed clubs, coffeehouses, and pornography theaters and accusations of sexual deviancy (immoral acts) led to the persecution of film exhibitors and the collection of projectors and box-office receipts.[85] Using his *Village Voice* column, Mekas applied the rhetoric of war and freedom to the increase in censorship around experimental, independent, and art cinema. Mekas tried to mobilize film audiences to protest what he termed the "establishment": censorship laws, he argued, forced cinema underground, an act that required resistance.

The literal embodiment of this metaphorical imprisonment came in 1964 when Mekas (programmer), experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs (theater manager), and artist Florence Karpf (ticket seller) were arrested for screening Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) at the New Bowery Theater, which housed the Film-Makers' Cinematheque two nights a week.[86] Following the arrests, Mekas published "Underground Manifesto on Censorship" in the *Village Voice*, where he accused the legal system of imprisoning the experimental film in the confines of hermeticism while its

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Intractable Obscenity Problem (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996). Lynn Hunt, ed. *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Zone Books, 1993).

[85] Paul Arthur, "Routines of Emancipation: Alternative Cinema in the Ideology and Politics of the Sixties," *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground*, ed. David James, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 28.

[86] Michele Pierson, David E. James, and Paul Arthur, Eds. *Optic Antics The Cinema of Ken Jacobs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

community desired social promiscuity.[87] Local and international press covered the censorship battle over *Flaming Creatures*, as Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf's case went to court.[88] Under the New York County Criminal Court, Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf were found guilty of exhibiting an obscene film. An appeal was filed and the New York Supreme Court exonerated the accused, ruling that Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf were screening *Flaming Creatures* as a work of art and therefore not violating obscenity laws. While awaiting the court's decision**,** Mekas founded the short-lived Anti-Censorship Fund in hopes of changing film licensing laws; in 1964 the Film-Makers' Cooperative became a private screening venue and center for protest mobilization.

For Mekas, this was not enough and he looked to portable film technology for the answer. Writing in the *Village Voice*, Mekas claimed that the 8mm film offered a solution to the censorship problem, as it promised inexpensive copies, cheap distribution, and affordable display devices in the form of portable projectors.[89] The United States Postal Service (USPS) provided a veiled transportation system, which allowed portable film formats to reach the domestic sphere. This was particularly lucrative for the pornographic film industry, which had long been utilizing the postal service for domestic distribution.[90]

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[87] Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-71* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 127-128.

[88] By 1965, media coverage of the censorship battle dissolved. In the January 7, 1965 edition of the *Village Voice*, Mekas writes of censorship as a passing fad, stating that underground film became a fashion of the establishment. Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 174-175.

[89] In 1965, *Business Screen* reported that approximately five million 8mm projectors were circulating in the United States (population 194.3 million). Anthony Slide, *Before Video A History of Non-Theatrical Film* (New York, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 114-115.

[90] Eric Schaeffer, "Plain Brown Wrapper Adult Films for the Home Market, 1930-1969," *Looking Past the Screen Case Studies in American Film History and Method*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). 201-226.

Pornographic films, however, were not able to escape obscenity law via post; as Eric Schaeffer notes in "Plain Brown Wrapper," the Comstock Act of 1873 prevented the mailing of "…every obscene, lewd, lascivious, indecent, filthy or vile article, matter, thing, device or substance; and Every article or thing designed, adapted, or intended for preventing conception or producing abortion, or for any indecent or immoral use."[91] USPS handled the investigation of questionably moral material traveling through the post up until the 1950s.[92] Theatrical exhibition posed numerous threats to the pornographic film industry, complicating its economic growth and distribution, which caused pornography distributors to create an underground circulation system. For example, Schaeffer states that from approximately 1953 to 1965, a common form of distribution would involve a face-to-face meet between a middleman and a buyer at a coffee shop, where they would clandestinely exchange shopping bags. The buyer's bag would hold empty boxes, while the middleman's held the films and atop each would be identical groceries such as cabbage and lettuce. [93] Newsstands and bookstores were among the establishments that clandestinely sold pornographic material (paper ephemera, photographs, and films) and were subject to raids inspired by House Representative Ezekiel Gathings' 1952 crusade against the circulation of obscene material. Gathings' vow to expose such obscenities occurred in the same year the Supreme Court ruled that the First and Fourteenth Amendments protected motion pictures, which did not include films considered morally harmful, complicating both private and public exhibition of pornographic and experimental film. Potentially safer than public screenings, the home

[91] Schaeffer, "Plain Brown Wrapper," 211.
[92] Schaeffer, "Plain Brown Wrapper," 212.
[93] Schaeffer, "Plain Brown Wrapper," 213.

movie market and portable film formats offered the experimental film an ideal system of distribution and exhibition that could, in theory, circumvent theatrical exhibition obstacles.

Censorship inspired further use of portable film formats in experimental film; in particular, Mekas and Stan Brakhage were most excited by 8mm's potential for democratizing exhibition. In 1964, while living in Boulder, Colorado, Brakhage purchased 8mm equipment out of necessity (he couldn't find any 16mm editing equipment in Boulder) and soon realized that the 8mm format would return him to the living rooms of his friends through inexpensive copies.[94] Mekas, meanwhile, was using his Village Voice column to employ the rhetoric of freedom to 8mm: experimental film would be liberated through domestication. The inexpensive format could make the experimental film more accessible, enabling it to elude censorship while transforming film art into viable cultural objects stored and displayed in the home. Likening the 8mm experimental film to poetry and paper, music and vinyl, Mekas claimed that the 8mm film would change the consumption of experimental film through the act of domestic collecting and viewing. Reaching beyond the theater and alternative, perpetually itinerant exhibition spaces, the experimental film could, in 8mm form, enter into the home, in the same way as literature and music. Mekas thus aspired to reduce the Film-Makers' Cooperative film collection to 8mm for the purpose of distributing and selling. However,

[94] For $30 ($214 in 2011 dollars) Brakhage purchased a complete suite of 8mm equipment at an auction. Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 138.

due to a lack of financial support and the preoccupations of other projects, the 8mm domestic dream was never realized.[95]

Alternative Art Spaces: Aspen (1965-1971) and Avalanche (1970-1976)

In the late 1960s and 1970s, artists and exhibitors began to rethink exhibition formats and new spaces emerged in varied forms, shrinking in size and expanding through travel. Ideas about art were transported through the postal service, which aided in the transgression of museum and commercial gallery space. Art could travel by post to a wider audience in miniature form: the artists' magazine.[96] In her book, *Artists' Magazines*, Gwen Allen argues that the format and potential of the magazine propelled artists to reorganize form, content, and conception in accordance with the miniature; the magazine, Allen contends, functions as both a medium *and* a space for art, reshaping its distribution and exhibition, an alternative space to which film and technology belonged.[97] Though condensed in size, the magazine is not a diminished version of traditional arts, museums or galleries, but rather a new structure of art media and space, extending the "how," the "who," and the "where" of art distribution. Predominantly focusing on publications produced in New York City, Allen examines the multimedia magazine

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[95] Mekas wrote about the Film-Makers' Cooperative desire to reduce all 16mm films to 8mm in the Village Voice on April 23, 1964. Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 135. According to Mekas, the Film-Makers' Cooperative reduced Andy Warhol's *13 Most Beautiful Women* to 8mm. Jonas Mekas, e-mail correspondence, March 9, 2011.

[96] Between 1935-40, Marcel Duchamp created a series of twenty miniature museums in a box, entitled *Boite en Valise* (six more were created in the 1950s and 1960s). Playing with the idea of a portable, moving, miniature museum containing replicated works of art, *Boite en Valise* is an early materialization of a conceptualized decentralization of art exhibition.

[97] In Gwen Allen's *Artists' Magazines* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2011). On the miniature, the gigantic, and the size and scale of objects, see Susan Stewart's *On Longing*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

Aspen (1965-71) and the SoHo based *Avalanche* (1970-76) and demonstrates why the artists' magazine must be viewed as an art form and not a companion or conduit. The reformulation of art media and space paralleled the multimedia environment of downtown New York; the artists' magazine was not bound by print but included a variety of media. Allen's history of the artists' magazine is paramount to understanding how moving images in general and experimental film in particular, were incorporated into the New York art world.

In 1965, magazine editor Phyllis Johnson created the artists' magazine *Aspen* (1965-1971), and incorporated film objects and ephemera into the multimedia "magazine in a box."[98] According to Johnson, the typical bound paper format was limiting and *Aspen* sought to change magazine form by creating a multimedia, sensory experience and offering its subscribers LPs, paper, and film. First published in 1965, *Aspen* was devoted to experimental art movements; Johnson commissioned prominent figures to curate each issue, which often featured an art movement (Fluxus, Pop Art, Minimalism, Conceptual Art). Through mail art, *Aspen* sought to change the magazine format by creating a multimedia, sensorial experience available for home delivery. In an early advertisement, *Aspen* declared itself the first three-dimensional magazine, promoting its tangible, atypical qualities:

> *Aspen* is the first truly new idea in publishing since paperbacks. It is pioneering a revolutionary magazine format: a slender, sturdy 3-dimensional box filled to all of its dimensions with a wealth of reading and hearing and touching and moving and thinking matter…You don't simply read *Aspen*…you hear it, hang it, feel it, fly it, sniff it, play with it.[99]

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[98] Phyllis Johnson. "A letter from Phyllis Johnson." http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen1/letter.html.

[99] *Aspen* advertisement, http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2007/07/03/books/pc-aspen.html

The advertisement addresses *Aspen* as an assemblage of all things modern. With an emphasis on surprises, the advertisement invokes the humor of Fluxus: big ideas transmitted in a deceivingly simplified, familiar form. Though *Aspen* circulated complex ideas (including writings by John Cage, Marshall McLuhan, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag), its form and advertising tended to be playful and humorous, referencing the modern and the popular. To achieve a multi-sensorial magazine, *Aspen* ventured beyond print to include sound, photographic and moving images, which relied on the subscriber to complete the experience. In his review of *Aspen* and William Copley's *S.M.S*, (1968) artist Jud Yalkut remarked that the evolution of the magazine surpassed the boundaries of print:

> What possibilities for the further evolution of the magazine format lay ahead in the challenges of new technologies now opening to the artist? More films, slides, film-strips, tape recordings as well as records and tape-loops, inflatable models and sculpture-structures may comprise a complete multi-media package with magazine 'box' covers…Indeed, the container for all recorded media may well become completely unrecognizable…In our foreseeable future, the perfection of three-dimensional color videotape may well, in the words of Nam June Paik, make *Life* magazine as obsolete as *Life* made *Collier's*.[100]

The magazine format was reformatted in accordance with various media formations, demanding participation from its readers, viewers, and listeners. The temporal rhythm of the magazine depended on the technology owned by its subscriber. *Aspen* required its followers to have a record player and film projector on hand to complete the sensorial

[100] Jud Yalkut, "Toward an Intermedia Magazine," *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1968, 14. William Copley's *S.M.S* was a bimonthly magazine that published limited edition art objects.

magazine experience. Allen argues that readers and technology were needed to activate the material. Without either *Aspen* could not be experienced.

Aspen was progressive in form and content. In her inaugurating letter, Johnson informed her readers that both content and form would be equally challenging:

> The articles will be as surprising as the format, ranging from beautiful picture stories on nature and sports to the more esoteric subjects of art, humanistic studies, design, underground movies, music (always with a record), poetry, dance, architecture, gourmet dining. In other words, all the civilized pleasures of modern living, based on the Greek idea of the "whole man…"[101]

The goals of *Aspen*'s multi-sensorial experience further reflected Fluxus philosophy and intermedia practices. The modern man was an "everything" man, who, like Maciunas and his *Learning Machine*, perceived diverse media and common objects as art. Maciunas' issue, subtitled "Art information and science information share the same world and language," focused on new forms of systems theory.[102] Assembling a work addressing the amalgamation of art and technology, Maciunas' issue (*Aspen* 8, Fall/Winter 1970-71) argued that the contemporary landscape required a new infrastructure for the transmission of ideas and the conceptualization of a highly technological society. Artists contributed urban fantasy experiments (Robert Morris' burying of air conditioners and heaters), city landscapes (Edward Ruscha's parking lot), Robert Smithson-grazed landscapes, and American crops (Dennis Oppenheim). Utilizing text, a phonograph recording by Jackson LacLow and La Monte Young, a musical score by Philip Glass, diagrams, and

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[101] Johnson, "A Letter from Phyllis Johnson," http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen1/letter.html
[102] Saper, *Networked Art*, 117.

photography, Maciunas' Fluxus issue exhibited the artistic process, as well as the finished product.[103]

Experimental moving images were incorporated into *Aspen*'s oeuvre from the onset. Issue two, "The White Box, 1966" presented excerpts from an industry vs. art film debate at the Aspen Film Conference. Issue three, "The Pop Art Issue, December 1966," included an Underground Movie Flip Book featuring Andy Warhol's *Kiss* (1964) and Jack Smith's *Buzzards Over Baghdad* (1952), along with mock newspaper *The Plastic Exploding Inevitable*, edited by Warhol and Gerard Malanga and containing Mekas' *Village Voice* review of *Chelsea Girls* (1966). In the Fall/Winter 1967 Minimalism issue *Aspen 5* curator Brian O'Doherty included one 8mm film reel composed of Hans Richter's *Rhythm 21* (1921), excerpts of Laszlo Maholo-Nagy's *Lightplay: Black-White-Grey* (1932), Robert Morris and Stan VanDerBeek's *Site* (1964), and Robert Rauschenberg *Linoleum* (1967). Through *Aspen*, the 8mm film was distributed alongside LPs and paper in a fashion evocative of Mekas' 8mm distribution vision of 1964, while the newspaper and the flipbook correlated daily life with the experimental film.[104]

According to Saper, art's decentralization is historically grounded in mail art, a participatory practice that rerouted connections between artists and viewers. The postal service expanded art access, moving it beyond the gallery and into domestic spaces; art travelled from the artist's hand to the viewer's mailbox, creating a new geopolitical

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[103] All issues of *Aspen* can be found on UbuWeb, ubu.com/aspen/

[104] On the networks of 1960s multimedia art texts (assemblings, flyers, newspapers, magazines) see Craig J. Saper, "Fluxus: Instructions for an Intimate Bureaucracy" *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 113- 128. For networks of the European avant-garde see Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back, The European Avant-Garde and The Invention of Film Culture 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

artistic sphere where previously centralized artistic movements were exposed to international and rural areas. Functioning as a brief ideal rather than a sustainable reality, *Aspen* published irregularly and had difficulties overcoming postal service bureaucracy. In 1971, after ten issues, the USPS revoked *Aspen*'s second-class mail license; without proper labels, titles, and printed formats, the magazine was not considered a periodical. Due to its unpredictable publishing pattern and the particularities of its shifting formats, the postal service determined that the magazine was unclassifiable and refused to grant mail privileges, forcing Johnson to end publication.[105] Despite a brief run, *Aspen*'s architectural scope defied periodical classification and remains a fundamental component in the history of art decentralization.

Avalanche (1970-1976), on the other hand, embraced the proliferation of time-based media in a more traditional magazine format. Co-founders Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp chose the familiar oversized square format of *Artforum* and each cover featured artists' headshots akin to the covers of *Rolling Stone*. In a panel discussion at the Museum of Modern Art, Béar described the magazine's design as filmic, if it was read sequentially, the reader would experience continuity from beginning to end: "If you were to turn the pages one at a time, you would get a continuous and ever-changing, never repeated experience."[106] Printed on high-quality paper, the magazine often featured photographs of performance art and video installations that were framed by *Avalanche*'s white borders, which, for Allen, gave the young art media a legitimate air.[107] In the

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[105] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 49, 66, 67.
[106] Liza Béar, "Experimental Magazines and International Avant-Gardes 1945-1975," panel discussion chaired by David Little, Museum of Modern Art, New York, December 11, 2006. As documented by Allen in *Artists' Magazines*, 97.
[107] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 101.

1970s, SoHo was a thriving ecosystem where artists ran their own galleries and curated their own exhibitions. Artists in SoHo wanted to challenge the uptown art economy and created alternative art spaces to exhibit their work, shifting methods of circulation and distribution. Produced and published mainly by artists, the artists' magazine was participatory, allowing readers a degree of ownership in their consumption practices. Inherently social, the artists' magazine worked in conjunction with SoHo's gathering spaces. For example, *Avalanche* also served as SoHo's community board, publishing gallery ads which were often designed by Béar and her co-founder Willoughby Sharp. As Allen notes, Béar and Sharp's ads concentrated on "the spatial and social character of the emerging downtown gallery scene," by showcasing the physical characteristics of the gallery over the exhibition; the gallery itself was featured more often than single exhibitions, along with their entire roster of artists and the buildings' street addresses and floor plans.[108] In addition, *Avalanche* was a fundamental advertising platform for artist Gordon Matta-Clark's restaurant *Food*, located at 127 Prince in SoHo. The magazine published advertisements that included a photograph of Matta-Clark opening the restaurant. Juxtaposed with the photograph is a strip of black with text at the top and bottom of the pages. The top text reads "127 Prince Street at Wooster," while the bottom simply states: "Lunch and Dinner/Open to midnight/Saturday to 3am."[109] Other advertisements include random photographs of cabbage or a dog, with simple text such as "EAT FOOD 127 PRINCE 260-3730" OR "FOOD IS OPEN MONDAY THROUGH

[108] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 114-115.
[109] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 117.

SATURDAY. 127 PRINCE STREET."[110] *Avalanche*'s *Food* ads state the least amount of information possible, which emphasizes the address and location of the restaurant. As in the case of the gallery ads, *Food*'s advertisement emphasizes a particular aesthetic popular amongst artists and readers already functioning within the SoHo ecosystem. *Avalanche*, no 4., Spring 1972, included "Food's Family Fiscal Facts," a single page document disclosing the restaurant's expenses.[111] Further exemplifying the community established within the magazine, *Food*'s decision to disclose financial information to the public demonstrates the intimacy of SoHo's artists' neighborhood. Before *Food* changed owners in 1973, the final *Avalanche* ad contained a simple photograph of the restaurant's banner at the corner of Prince and Wooster. Allen writes, "…(it is) as if the restaurant were somehow synonymous with this intersection itself, defined by this spot on the urban grid."[112]

As a community board, *Avalanche* contributed to the growth of an artists' neighborhood and ecosystem by offering a forum for artists and galleries to communicate with each other. Lasting six years, *Avalanche* could not afford to continue publishing and Béar and Sharp were forced to retire the magazine in 1976. The final cover revealed the magazine's fiscal report in red, clearly indicating its dire financial position. Exposed in a similar manner to *Food*'s financial disclosure, *Avalanche* further contributed to the intimacy of the SoHo community in spite of its retirement.

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[110] *Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2011), 60.
[111] *Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2011), 67.
[112] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 115.

SoHo, Fluxhouses, and the Experimental Film

Fluxus and artists' magazines increased art object malleability, shrinking and expanding the object through technology and the postal service. New networks of distribution extended the boundaries of art exhibition. The art object miniaturized, flattened, and technologically transformed, shifting art circulation to form a decentralized, mobile exhibition space reserved for private spheres and activated by viewers at their own time - a viewing etiquette opposed to the regime of museums and galleries. In their ideal form, new artistic networks were anti-institutional and cost effective. However, artists soon realized that they needed a space where people (artists and viewers) could come together - traveling ideas and miniature galleries must work in tandem with a centralized space. Macuinas recognized this need and created Fluxhouses, which represented an ideal, centralized space for the new art networks. As part of the Fluxus philosophy, Maciunas attempted to assist the artist in finding economical working and living spaces by creating Fluxhouses. Maciunas' goal was to build several artist-designated spaces throughout SoHo, where artists could rent and own loft spaces to produce, exhibit, perform, and reside. Over a period of ten years, Maciunas devoted his time to developing and managing four Fluxhouses. News of the new artists' cooperative spread quickly throughout Greenwich Village's many coffee houses, bars, and performance spaces, generating excitement within the community. When Maciunas began advertising, the SoHo lofts were located in the M1-5 zoning district and designated as warehouse, manufacturing, or commercial spaces, causing several problems for future tenants. In 1961, New York Mayor Robert Wagner permitted artists to live in two lofts per factory, on the condition that sanitation and cooking regulations were met and that a

six-inch "A.I.R. (Artist in Residence)" sign was placed on the face of the building to comply with fire codes. Regardless of mayoral concessions, Maciunas encountered several obstacles concerning the occupation of non-residential spaces. Many artists withdrew from Fluxhouse when they discovered the zoning obstacles. Nonetheless, Maciunas worked around real estate syndication laws and filed Fluxhouses as agricultural cooperatives, a move inevitably resulting in a warrant for his arrest. Maciunas organized Fluxhouses without proper funds, making the tenants the primary source for property payments.[113]

Among the most significant Fluxhouse tenants were Mekas and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. Prior to Mekas' purchase of space at 80 Wooster Street, The Film-Makers' Cinematheque was an itinerant film exhibition group circulating throughout New York City's available theaters and loft spaces. While choosing a stable physical location for the group concurrent to his vision of the 8mm format for the distribution and exhibition of experimental cinema, Mekas decided that public film exhibition was more important and he focused on developing a centralized exhibition space. From 1962-63, Mekas exhibited films under the name "The Film-Makers' Showcase," founded in the same year as the Film-Makers' Cooperative. Many of the Film-Makers' Showcase screenings occurred in the Film-Makers' Cooperative loft. In 1964, Mekas changed the name to the "Film-Makers' Cinematheque." Inherently itinerant, the Film-Makers' Showcase and Cinematheque moved throughout eighteen different venues between 1961 and 1969. Its temporary homes included Maidman, City Hall Cinema, Forty-First Street Theater, 80 Wooster Street, Methodist Church on West Fourth Street, Bleecker Street

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[113] Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo*, (Vilnius, Lithuania: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010).

Cinema, the Elgin, Gotham Art, and the Gallery of Modern Art.[114] The experimental film endured a nomadic life in the 1960s, a characteristic that Mekas chose to emphasize in a 1969 *Village Voice* advertisement, when he referred to the Film-Makers' Cinematheque as the "Flying Cinematheque" and its program, "Flying Program 1." Not yet the brick and mortar of a conventional museum theater or atomized like the small gauge home delivery system, the "Flying Cinematheque" was an ephemeral and fleeting space, squatting throughout New York City theaters.

The Film-Makers' Cinematheque endured brief stays at the Film-Makers' Cooperative office, where filmmakers stored, edited, *and* exhibited films. But in 1967, Mekas purchased space at 80 Wooster Street to tame and provide the Flying Cinematheque a permanent home. Mekas and filmmaker and financial patron of experimental cinema, Jerome Hill discussed the formation of two film centers, one an academy (Cinematheque II, later named Anthology Film Archives) and the other an exhibition space for contemporary avant-garde and independent cinema (Cinematheque I/ Film-Makers' Cinematheque). While Mekas and Hill were planning the construction of the film academy, Mekas was also organizing the renovations for 80 Wooster Street and Cinematheque I. Due to the city's zoning restrictions, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque remained in perpetual movement, despite Mekas' newly purchased real estate. Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro chronicle Mekas' zoning obstacles, while charting the development of the artists' loft in SoHo.[115] At the time of Mekas' purchase, 80 Wooster Street was a Fluxhouse, managed by Maciunas. As a significant Cooperative member, Mekas held the ground floor and basement storage space for the Film-Makers'

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[114] Arthur, "Routines of Emancipation," 24.
[115] Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living*

Cinematheque. Mekas also planned to purchase square footage at 16-18 Greene Street (Fluxhouse 1). However, Mekas moved the future film academy to 425 Lafayette Street as space opened up at the Joseph Papp Theater, retaining 80 Wooster Street for contemporary experimental film screenings.

When the ground floors of 80 Wooster Street became Cinematheque I, Mekas encountered several legal issues preventing a continual operation of the theater. Mekas obtained a temporary license to operate the theater in time for a December 1967 opening, on the condition that more work would be completed to comply with building codes. Mekas was not able to raise the appropriate sum to renovate and remain open, and in July 1968, the Cinematheque was forced to move again. Arriving at the Bleecker Street Cinema, Mekas was dissatisfied with the quality of projection, which further fueled the re-opening of 80 Wooster Street. As it transformed into a "Flying Cinematheque" and migrated to various exhibition venues, 80 Wooster Street became a central avant-garde performance space, used for theater, music, dance, and performance pieces. Among the performances were Richard Foreman's *Angelface*, Herman Nitsch's Orgies-Mysteries Theater, Philip Glass' first performance of his own work (with Steve Reich), and in 1970 Trisha Brown and Joe Schlichter's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. Mekas also housed Fluxus events in the Cinematheque space, including a New Year's Eve Flux-Feast and a Fluxfest featuring the work of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. As the art object took new forms, the artist's studio became a multifunctional space for living, working, and exhibiting. Maciunas' new artists' loft encouraged artistic hybridity and broadened relationships among technologies, media, systems of distribution and spaces of exhibition.

Conclusion

The history of the experimental film and Anthology Film Archives is tied to the cultural landscape of New York City, artistic movements, and the laws that prohibited art and film exhibition. Anthology Film Archives emerged from a zeitgeist of media exploration and the scrutiny of its democratic potentials and the institution's history must also be considered in relation to the development, distribution, and exhibition of performance and video art in downtown New York City.

Less concerned with the singular art object, art movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought to disrupt the everyday by becoming the everyday. Reproducible copies and networked ideas were artworks that existed outside of the gallery sphere, entering into a range of spaces, among them the home. Saper argues that publications and networks were artist tools equivalent to the painter's canvas: media platforms were primary, not secondary formations of art. The new American folk art (Pop Art) referenced the everyday of American popular culture while Fluxus broke the barrier between viewer and artist. By allowing the viewer to participate, Fluxus artists shattered artistic genius into pieces, reconstructing it through systems of distribution and exhibition; genius was not only contained in the single artist or the object an artist produced, but in the art object's transportation and display. Artworks existed beyond the institutional frame, radically repositioning traditional modes of exhibition and traveling by postal service. Fluxus sought the democratization of art through expanded systems of distribution, creating what Saper terms "networked art."[116] Received in the mail, *Aspen*'s 8mm moving image was transferred, reduced, and modified to fit a small domestic screen. *Aspen* participated in

[116] Saper, *Networked Art*.

shifting the pattern of film art travel; the 8mm format definitively linked the experimental film to jazz and avant-garde records, curators and critical thinkers, all of which could be experienced in one's living room.

The networks of 1960s experimental film distribution and exhibition led to the creation of Anthology Film Archives, a central, physical space, which functioned simultaneous to the new decentralization of art and film art distribution. The experience of alternative art and exhibition spaces were recorded by participants and imagined by creators; the domestic sphere required chronicles of the private viewing experience, which often removed viewers from a communal experience of art. This critical mass of ideas and activities, along with the absence they made apparent, necessitated a central space for Fluxus and the experimental film, where people could gather to view, discuss, perform, and create art.

The interweaving complexities of avant-garde art exhibition practices modified experimental film viewing formations, expanding its access by way of portability, as it moved between office spaces, lofts, residences, theaters, and venues inside and outside the New York underground. Where and how the experimental film was stored, exhibited, and transported reflect the way it has been perceived, consumed, and preserved. Its ties to Pop Art, Fluxus, and artists' publications in the 1960s and 1970s exemplify how the experimental film functioned within artistic networks prior to its institutional inauguration. When Anthology was created, the founders' proclamations collided with the environment out of which it emerged, where hybrid spaces and the decentralization of art expanded definitions of cinema. Anthology's founders constructed an institutional framework for the experimental film that brought a seemingly counter-intuitive stability

to its defiant experimentation committed to constant change and movement. Before 1970, the experimental film shared exhibition spaces with all performance arts, forging a link between the film object and radical artistic movements and publications. The art object was malleable, travelling as reproducible copies, instead of original formats; at times it was broken down, exposing the process and the end result.

In cinema, portable technology further miniaturized the film art object, enabling it to travel economically to domestic spaces across the country. In the public realm, the experimental film lived a migrant life filled with screening obstacles, yet nonetheless turning small spaces into venues for diverse performances and activities. As a predecessor to Anthology, the Film-Makers' Cooperative served as storage, screening venue, and office for the experimental film, necessarily amalgamating various functions and providing a template for Mekas' formal institutional ambitions in the 1970s, when Anthology developed into a museum, archive, theater, and study center, offering a space for pedagogical activities, archiving and preservation, screenings, and performances. Unlike the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, Anthology obtained space where public screenings were legal. Experimental film had an address and Anthology became a node in a larger network inclusive of uptown and downtown New York art spaces, merging the above ground cultural economies of local and national museums and universities with the artist-run ecosystem of downtown New York. Anthology gave the experimental film value *and* real estate. When Hill died in 1972, Anthology faced serious budget cuts; in 1974 it merged with the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and moved to 80 Wooster Street where it remained until 1978. Once in SoHo, Anthology began programming video art

screenings and performances by video artists, such as Nam June Paik. Medium-specificity was quickly overturned to include art world trends.

For the experimental film and the artists' community of SoHo, acquiring real estate - exhibition and residential space - was a political act. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s artists were claiming SoHo buildings through their work and in their daily lives, making significant changes to the way art was exhibited and how artists lived. Trisha Brown and her dancers performed across rooftops and walked down ladders and buildings in SoHo (*Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, 1970, *Woman Walking Down a* Ladder, 1973, *Roof Piece*, 1973) while Gordon Matta- Clark scrawled an invitation to his open house between 98-112 Greene across the side of a SoHo building.[117] Galleries, residences, and artists' run spaces were often identified by street address: 80 Wooster Street, 127 Prince. Numbers and street names functioned as geographic emblems of an artists' neighborhood and a specific culture. SoHo had its own artists' association, its own community magazines, and its own system of exhibition, which largely involved performances outside of galleries and lofts, as well as inside and in miniature, mobile form. Anthology Film Archives and experimental film belonged to this culture and shared its networks, spaces, and screens with video and performance art, despite its history's predominant disciplinary segregation. In addition to shifting the circulation rhythms of experimental film and avant-garde art, Mekas and Anthology and Maciunas and Fluxus contributed to the formation of SoHo's self-sustaining artist community by providing space for performances, exhibitions, and events. From obscenity

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[117] *Invitation for Gordon Matta-Clark: Open House*, 19-21 May 1972. Original photograph: Carol Gooden in *Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2011), 196.

to municipal zoning laws, artist exhibition and living were fraught with legal obstacles, and spaces were fought for, lost, and hard won.

Chapter 2
New York Networks: Reframing the history of Anthology Film Archives, 1970-1975

In 1967, Jonas Mekas focused on obtaining real estate for experimental film exhibition in New York. His contemporaries, Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, and film historian P. Adams Sitney were dissatisfied with the open policy of experimental film programming, a democratic ideal that was most present in the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. They desired an exhibition venue with higher standards of programming and better procedures for film selection. Simultaneously, Mekas and Jerome Hill, experimental filmmaker and major financial supporter of the experimental film, Film Culture, and Anthology (from 1960 until his death in 1972), conceptualized an experimental film academy, and Mekas, aware of their criticism, approached Brakhage, Kubelka, Sitney, filmmaker Ken Kelman (James Broughton later joined the Essential Cinema film selection committee) to form an alternative and complementary exhibition space to the Film-Makers' Cinematheque.[118] The founders wanted to create a central place where film could be valued as art and audiences could learn about and view its history, and as a result, Anthology Film Archives opened on December 1, 1970 with a specialized theater (Invisible Cinema), a canon of film art (Essential Cinema), a Film Study Center, and a manifesto stating their institutional and pedagogical goals to define film art through their programming. Anthology's founders sought to create the proper conditions for experimental film to grow and thrive, and in their eyes, this required a single enduring site where such films from the past and present could be reliably shown,

[118] Brian Frye. "Interview with Jonas Mekas," *Senses of Cinema*, (June 2001), http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/mekas_interview.html. Accessed October 15, 2010.

seen, saved, discussed, and studied. This space was understood as a compliment to extant circuits and not a replacement.

As I have discussed in detail in the introduction to this thesis, Anthology Film Archives has two primary identities in experimental film history: hero or dictator. It is either recognized as a savior of experimental film and its pedagogy, or it is identified as an institutional dictator of a canon. In their own writing and while teaching at NYU, scholars Annette Michelson and P. Adams Sitney consistently promoted Anthology's resources. Michelson claims that Anthology's film library, theater, and programming will change film scholarship and Sitney states that his book, *Visionary Film* would not have been possible without Anthology's resources.[119] Scholars Janet Bergstrom, Constance Penley, Patricia Mellencamp, and Lauren Rabinovitz focus instead on criticizing Anthology and its founders' role in shaping film criticism and forming the power dynamics of New York's experimental film community.[120] In particular, the Essential Cinema canon became a symbol of power and exclusion in their writings. Anthology, however, also functioned as a node in a larger, complex network of New York art institutions and communities. In this chapter, I argue that Anthology's other endeavors (such as the Film Study Center and library) and the institution's relationship to various museums and universities are also significant to experimental film history. Furthermore,

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[119] See Annette Michelson, "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum*, (September 1971): 8-10 and P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Both readings are discussed in detail the introduction.

[120] See Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," *Screen*, 19 no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 113-127, Patricia Mellencamp, *Indiscretions: Avant-garde Film, Video, and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), and Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71* Second Edition (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Originally published in 1991. Each text is discussed in detail in the introduction.

these factors are key to understanding how Anthology shifted the public sphere of experimental film.

The first section of this chapter will address the museological and academic environments that surrounded the first five years of Anthology's tenure, a time that saw the development of experimental film programming in major art museums such as the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), as well as the cultivation of New York University's (NYU) cinema studies program. In the second half of this chapter, I expand the history of Anthology's early endeavors by examining Invisible Cinema, Essential Cinema, *and* the activities of the Film Study Center, a fundamental aspect to the growth of the institution as an archive and research center. By studying Anthology's entire corpus of activities, I investigate how a previously mobile and self-sufficient distribution and exhibition system integrates into the larger institutional systems of the museum, archive, and university.

The Museum, the Academy, and Experimental Film

When Anthology was created, the MoMA and the Whitney began regular programming of experimental cinema. On December 15, 1970 (15 days after Anthology's first screening), the Whitney Museum of American Art inaugurated the New American Filmmakers Series**.** Each program lasted one week and contained twenty-three individual screenings. The NEA and the New York State Council for the Arts primarily supported the series until 1976, when the Jerome Hill Foundation began supplying major grants. The Film and Video Department was spearheaded by Whitney board member Barklie Henry and began with the New American Film Series. Barklie urged his cousin, Flora

Miller Biddle (Whitney president from 1977-95) to support the growth of the department and wrote her endless letters describing the increasing significance of film and video within the art world. He argued that the incorporation of film and video would signify that the Whitney was conscious of the media-infiltrated artworks most prominent in downtown New York.[121] With a new independent and experimental film series, the Whitney would enable experimental film enthusiasts to see the films they read about.[122] In 1971, A. A Heckman, president of Jerome Hill's Avon Foundation, urged Hill to facilitate collaboration between the Whitney and Anthology.[123] At the time, the Whitney used Anthology's archival resources, but remained independent in their programming.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), on the other hand, began the experimental film series Cineprobe and experimental filmmakers were invited to speak before the screening of their films. In experimental film history there is a longstanding perception that MoMA was completely unfriendly to experimental film, which has been fueled by Iris Barry's alleged distaste of Maya Deren's work. In 1945, Barry rejected Deren's application for a Rockefeller Foundation grant and further distanced the experimental film community from larger art institutions.[124] Eventually, MoMA purchased *Meshes of the Afternoon* in 1955 but withheld regular experimental film programming for eleven more years.[125] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, MoMA marginalized the New York experimental film community and led Mekas and other filmmakers and exhibitors to form

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[121] Letter to Flora Miller Biddle, quoted in Flora Miller Biddle's *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Made A Family Memoir*, (New York: Arcade, 1999): 148-149.
[122] Robert J. Landry "Mekas' Insiders, Whitney Weeks" *Variety*. November 18, 1970: 7.
[123] "Memorandum to Jerome Hill from A.A. Heckman, August 9, 1971." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.
[124] Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 173.
[125] Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite*, 170.

DIY ephemeral screenings. When Cineprobe was inaugurated, P. Adams Sitney presented his work in a lecture series (this work would become the seminal *Visionary Film*) and in 1972, Anthology's co-founder and financial backer Jerome Hill was invited to speak at the series.

During this time, NYU's cinema program gained further recognition in New York. Although Frederick Thrasher taught the first film course at New York University (NYU) in 1933, the Cinema Studies department was established in 1967.[126] Belonging to the School of the Arts (developed in 1965) NYU became one of the first schools in America to offer a degree in Cinema Studies and the first to offer a PhD.[127] Annette Michelson and P. Adams Sitney were fundamental to experimental film study in the academy and as David Bordwell observes, Michelson's position as professor of Cinema Studies and her status as a critic in the New York art world and contributed to her sizable influence in film study and criticism.[128]

Anthology emerged onto a vibrant New York art world, where its art institutions were increasingly friendly to experimental film and video programming. Though distinct from the MoMA, Whitney, and NYU, Anthology benefited from increased institutional support while maintaining ties to the downtown scene. Audience members across this scene consisted of Andy Warhol, John Lennon, Yoko Ono, and the dozens of

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[126] Stephen Groening. "Appendix: Timeline for a History of Anglophone Film Culture and Film Studies," *Inventing Film Studies*, Eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 405.
[127] NYU began to offer an MA in Cinema Studies in the fall of 1967; a year later they began a PhD program. "N.Y.U. Arts School to Offer Program on Stage and Films." *The New York Times*. May 19, 1967: 32.
[128] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 61.

experimental filmmakers featured in Essential Cinema, Cineprobe, the New American Filmmakers Series, and NYU lectures.

Anthology Film Archives

In the inaugurating literature of 1970, Sitney describes Anthology as the first museum dedicated to film art, declaring the institution's aim to define its scope with a canon (Essential Cinema) and the terms of its experience with a theater (Invisible Cinema).[129] In acquiring real estate, Mekas and Hill formed a node in a larger network inclusive of uptown and downtown New York City art worlds. Anthology operated under Film Art Fund, Inc., which also represented *Film Culture*, the well-known journal, and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. Film Art Fund was incorporated in 1966 so that Hill and other funders could make donations to *Film Culture* and later Anthology Film Archives. In 1972 Anthology formed a Board of Directors and began to apply for grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), New York State Council, American Film Institute, Rockefeller Foundation, Noble Foundation and forty smaller foundations. In the same year they also received several donations and sponsorships from individuals for specific projects. Anthology was rejected from the Noble Foundation but received grants from the NEA, New York State Council, and Rockefeller Foundation. To maintain their status as a non-private operating foundation, one-third of the Film Art Fund's financial support was required to come from public contributions.[130] This is distinct from

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[129] Today, Anthology functions as an archive, exhibition theater, and library of the experimental, independent, and avant-garde moving image, shedding the terms, "film art," "museum," and "academy."

[130] "Program Report for the period commencing May 1, 1972." "Minutes of the First Board of Directors Meeting. October 30, 1972, February 17, 1973, March 26, 1973."

the previous decade where Mekas largely organized underground film screenings that often violated obscenity laws.

Though Anthology sought public funding, it was Hill's financial backing that obtained real estate for the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and Anthology Film Archives. In 1967, Mekas purchased space for Film-Makers' Cinematheque at 80 Wooster Street in SoHo and in 1968, Mekas and the Film Art Fund rented space in the Public Theater on 425 Lafayette Street for Anthology Film Archives.[131] To differentiate between the two spaces, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque was also referred to as Cinematheque 1, and Anthology was titled Cinematheque 2, which remained their subtitles during Anthology's inaugurating years.[132] The Film-Makers' Cinematheque would continue programming new experimental works, while Anthology would have a rigorous selection process, focusing on the Essential Cinema canon and the history of film art. Anthology maintained their space at 425 Lafayette Street for three years. When Hill died in 1972, Anthology was forced to restructure their organization and plan for a future without the security of Hill's generous funding. The Jerome Hill Foundation (formerly the Avon Foundation) continued to provide funding to Anthology, donating a total of $1 700 000 to Film

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Jonas Mekas, "Letter to Alan A. Masur," March 16, 1972. Jonas Mekas Personal Archives, which Mekas keeps in his personal studio, hereinafter cited as JMPA.

[131] Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo* (Vilnius, Lithuania: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010), 78. After Jerome Hill's death, Anthology could no longer afford the rent at 425 Lafayette Street. In 1974, Anthology merged with the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and moved to 80 Wooster Street. Today, Anthology is located at 32 2nd Avenue.

[132] Sitney describes the evolution and history of Anthology in the *Film-Makers Newsletter*, referring to Anthology as Cinematheque 2 during its conceptual years. *Film-Makers Newsletter* February 1971, 18.

Culture and Anthology between the years 1964-1975.[133] Hill bequeathed Racoon Key, an island in the Florida Keys, to Film Art Fund, which Masur estimated to be worth $200 000 in 1973.[134]

Invisible Cinema

Much of Hill's funding contributed to the development of Invisible Cinema (1970-73), Anthology's first theater at 425 Lafayette Street.[135] Based upon the premise that the film theater is a "machine for film viewing," Kubelka believed that the room itself upheld the same duties of a machine, like the movie projector, the theater's primary function was to screen film. Invisible Cinema sought to make the film, rather than the room, a dictator of the viewer's sense of space and therefore maximized the film's authority by physically enabling the film to become the viewer's sole architect.[136] To realize Kubelka's vision, Anthology hired architect Giorgio Cavaglieri, which caused a friction between visionary and architect, and forced Kubelka to scale down his ideas for practical purposes. Invisible Cinema was built inside an existing structure and Cavaglieri and Kubelka had to work between the physical limitations of the room and municipal

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[133] "Jerome (Hill) Foundation Grants to Anthology Reach $1, 700, 000." *Variety*, (October 22, 1975).

[134] This money was used to purchase Anthology's current home, the former courthouse on 32 2nd Avenue in Lower Manhattan. Masur's estimation was recorded during the February 17, 1973 Film Art Fund board meeting. Though the property was mentioned in further meetings, its appraised value was not. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Film Art Fund, Inc. February 17, 1973, 4 P.M." *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings 1972-73*, JMPA.

[135] Though Anthology's original programming was devoted to film art, the concept of Kubelka's theater was not bound to the same restrictions, the original design catered towards every type of cinema. Peter Kubelka, "Invisible Cinema" Interview with Peter Kubelka. *Design Quarterly 93* (1974): 35.

[136] Peter, Kubelka, "Invisible Cinema", 35.

building codes. While Cavaglieri wanted to increase theater ornamentation, Kubelka insisted on reifying his original concept, including the materialization of particular seating specifications that consisted of booths that encapsulated the viewer. In addition, seating in front of the viewer would only begin at knee level, minimizing the number of seats in the theater. Instead, Anthology's founders aimed to maximize the number of seats (120) even though Kubelka wanted to remain true to the bulky seating design that would have allowed roughly thirty seats.[137] Additionally, Kubelka's vision called for a literal translation of the black box; everything – floors, seats, rugs, walls - but the screen was to be covered in black, the final construction, however, required exit lights, and Kubelka's vision was compromised by New York City building codes.

When Invisible Cinema was completed, the Essential Cinema canon was presented in cycles, each lasting six weeks. Seating approximately ninety people, Anthology set out to mold the posture of art cinema viewers by encasing them in what Kubelka describes as a "shell-like structure," where they were immune to external sound, temperature, and peripheral vision.[138] Optimal viewing conditions also accounted for the viewer's height; if the viewer was below five feet eight inches a cushion was offered, so that each person could achieve the ideal Invisible Cinema experience. For every screening, a house manager sat in the audience and was responsible for ensuring ideal projection and implementing the appropriate film theater etiquette of silence and respectful behavior. The patron was subjected to a set of rules; if you left the theater, you would not be allowed in. Latecomers would be refused entry, and if anyone disrupted the

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[137] Jonas Mekas, P. Adams Sitney in Sky Sitney's "The Search for Invisible Cinema," *Grey Room*, 19 (Spring 2005), 104, 105, respectively. After deliberation, Invisible Cinema contained ninety seats.
[138] Peter Kubelka, "Invisible Cinema," 32.

screening, he/she would be escorted out. With immediate access to automatic focus, sound control, and a telephone connecting to the projection booth, the house manager could adjust the film during the screenings. Anthology refused to screen subtitled films; each film was screened in its original format and language and instead of subtitles, an English synopsis was included with the program pamphlet. In an interview with Stanley Eichelbaum, Mekas claimed, "Subtitles destroy the rhythm and form of the film…(Anthology is) interested in film. And our projection booth is equipped with custom built projectors geared to show even the old silent films at their original ratios and speed."[139]

Anthology's public rhetoric and theater rules demonstrate a dedication to film form and the author's intent, suggesting it prioritized exclusivity over access. However, legal documents demonstrate Anthology's persistent dedication to achieving wider access to the experimental film; its founders were still experimenting with distribution and exhibition practices. For example, in 1970, the cost of admission to Invisible Cinema was one dollar; within two years, Anthology raised the price to two dollars and as a result, began losing patrons and therefore returned to the original ticket price in February 1972.[140] In a letter to Alan A. Masur, president of the Film Art Fund and Anthology's legal counsel, Mekas advocated for Anthology's patrons and justified his decision,

> The raising of the ticket price is not the way to gain the public support, money – or otherwise. We have lost a good part of our most faithful audience; we have created a very bad feeling among a good number of our

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[139] Stanley Eichelbaum, "Cinema in its Purist Form, *The San Francisco Examiner*, January 17, 1971.

[140] The average ticket price for a commercial theater in 1970 was $1.552: in 1971, $1.645: and in 1972, $1.695. David A. Cook, "Average Ticket Price in the U.S. Each Year, 1970-1980," *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole, Vol. 9, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 491.

> supporters: they are beginning to look at us as another shark, capitalist, etc. etc. "art" organization; and we have abandoned one of the principles which we set for ourselves at the very beginning, during our first meetings: to keep our entrance ticket price minimum so that not to keep **[sic]** away from the true film lover, the film student, who very often cannot afford higher prices.[141]

Access equaled a democratized view of experimental film exhibition, seemingly opposing the hierarchical implications of a canon. Mekas, though invested in cultural capital, decried monetary gains at the behest of Anthology's board, retaining the spirit of the former decade within Anthology's more formal, institutional framework.

Essential Cinema

Invisible Cinema projected the Essential Cinema canon in repeated cycles, which would, in theory, allow viewers to experience a canonized history of film art in a single institution. A self-appointed Film Selection Committee comprised of Mekas, Sitney, Kubelka, Kelman and Broughton, formulated the canon and based their final decisions on an intuition and out of ninety filmmakers, eighty-five were male and five were female (Maya Deren, Marie Menken, Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and Leni Riefenstahl).[142] Brakhage belonged to the original Film Selection committee but chose to leave because he disagreed with the initial selection process. In its infancy, the selection process began with a long list of proposed films, followed by screenings and deliberation, but each member had to agree on every film included in the canon. The unanimous decision process angered Brakhage, prompting him to leave the committee. In addition, the selection committee considered each film to be divorced from historical context and categorization; instead films included in the Essential Cinema canon were judged in

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[141] Jonas Mekas, "Letter to Allan A. Masur," February 24, 1972. JMPA.
[142] Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde," 38.

comparison to commercial cinema. When Anthology opened in 1970, Sitney described the committee as a diverse group of individuals who share the same principle:

> The members of the Film Selection Committee in no way represent a single school of taste or thought. Within the scale of avantgarde sensibilities there is a wide divergence among these five men. However, they share a principle: that a high art of film emerges primarily when its artists are most free. They understand too that in art no rule is absolute, including the last. This committee does not purport to represent the full spectrum of film criticism. This is inevitable and desirable. Anthology Film Archives is philosophically oriented toward the PURE film, and it takes its stand against the standards of contemporary film criticism.[143]

According to Anthology's public rhetoric, the Essential Cinema canon was limitless and would grow over time. Contemporary films would be added when the committee saw fit and when further research of older films would be completed. Mekas preferred to leave Anthology's endeavors undefined and subject to change, attributing projects such as Essential Cinema and Invisible Cinema to the process of discovering what cinema is, rather than defining it, contradicting Sitney's written manifesto:

> Anthology Film Archives is the first film museum exclusively devoted to the film as an art. What are the essentials of the film experience? Which films embody the heights of the art of cinema? The creation of Anthology Film Archives has been an ambitious attempt to provide answers to these questions; the first of which is physical – to construct a theater in which films can be seen under the best conditions; and second critical – to define the art of film in terms of selected works which indicate its essences and parameters.[144]

Many critics questioned Essential Cinema for its narrow conception of film art, including NYU professor and film scholar Annette Michelson. The committee defended their

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[143] P. Adams Sitney. "Anthology Film Archives" Filmmakers Newsletter. February 1971: 18.

[144] Mekas, "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum*, (September 1971): 10. P. Adams Sitney, "Manifesto," *Essential Cinema* ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives and New York University Press, 1975), vi-vii.

position and claimed that films would be reassessed on a yearly basis. In 1966, Film Art Fund by-laws indicated that Film Selection Committee members would be nominated "…from among filmmakers, film historians, critics, film educators and other persons deemed by the General Director, after consultation with the Publications director…"[145] In the 1975 by-laws of the Film Art Fund, Article 11 states that Anthology' general director would appoint committee members for renewable one year appointments. Potential members would consult with the assistant and general director before obtaining the position. Further, the article states that membership eligibility required the person to hold specific job positions:

> Eligible for membership in the committee shall be filmmakers, film historians, critics, film educators and other persons deemed by the General Director, after consultation with the Assistant Director, to be qualified to serve Anthology Film Archives in creating a repertory consistent with Anthology's aims and purposes.[146]

Despite the Film Art Fund's inclusion of the selection committee in the 1975 by-law modifications, the Essential Cinema canon did not evolve according to Mekas and Sitney's proclamations of 1970. In 1975, Anthology's manifesto included an addendum, in which Mekas stated that Anthology's present conditions (they could not afford multiple screenings) not allow them to exhibit the Essential Cinema canon in the original programming cycle of three programs a day.[147] In the same year, Anthology Film

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[145] "By-Laws of Film Art Fund, Inc., 1966." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.
[146] "By-Laws of Film Art Fund, Inc., 1975." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.
[147] "About/Manifesto" Anthology Film Archives website. www.anthologyfilmarchives.org

Archives and NYU published a collection of essays about the films in the Essential Cinema canon and little on the list had changed.

The Film Study Center

In conception, Anthology's pedagogical aspirations extended beyond Essential Cinema and Invisible Cinema. The 1968 agreement between the New York Shakespeare Festival and Film Art Fund explicitly states that the latter was allotted space in the Public Theater for "…film exhibitions, screenings, lectures, conferences, office space, library and archive facilities…"[148] Hill and Mekas included a separate enclave for the close examination of films and paper materials, which established an expanded idea of film study including lectures, conferences, archival material, access to films for close analysis, canonical programming, and the physical experience of Invisible Cinema.

The Film Study Center and library was the most pragmatic of Anthology's pedagogical objectives. Anthology offered equipment and space for individual and small group exhibitions, as well as close analysis, the examination of paper ephemera, semiprivate screenings, and a conference room for discussion. In 1972, the Cinema Studies department at NYU held a weekly New American Cinema seminar in the conference room of Anthology's library (used for screenings and discussion). Acquisitions grew significantly in Anthology's first two years of operation; filmmakers contributed their own films and private collections, while posthumous donations included finished and unfinished films. As of November 8, 1971, 145 films had been cataloged and organized for the film study room and were valued at $24

[148] "Agreement between New York Shakespeare Festival and Film Art Fund, November 20, 1968." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.

000.[149] In 1972, Frederick R. Adler donated 4000 antique film posters to the library valued at $50 000.[150]

With the acceleration in acquisitions came the issue of film preservation. In a May 1971 letter to Alan A. Masur, Anthology's legal counsel, Mekas explained that increases in film acquisition motivated Anthology to begin preservation. He writes,

> All these private collections and depositories will remain with Anthology, and they must be properly organized, cataloged, in a good number of cases new prints made, originals protected, etc., etc. And made available to film students in one form or another. This means plenty of work, and also expenses. But, as it's becoming clear as we now conduct our work on a practical-day-to-day basis and deal with film-makers and film students –it's becoming clear that one of our functions will be the protection and guarding of the films – finished and unfinished films – of the avant-garde film-makers when they die.[151]

In *Nitrate Won't Wait*, Anthony Slide claimed that Anthology began preservation in 1974, four years after its opening.[152] However, correspondence between Mekas and Masur indicate that Anthology acknowledged the need for preservation in 1971 and by 1972, the "Program Report" demonstrated that Anthology had initiated this process.[153] Slide also wrote that a list of Anthology's holdings could be found in P. Adams Sitney's *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives*.[154] However, Sitney's book listed only the Essential Cinema films and was therefore

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[149] $134 249 in 2011 dollars. Jonas Mekas, "Letter to Alan A. Masur" November 8, 1971. JMPA.
[150] $279 685 in 2011 dollars. "Program Report of Anthology Film Archives For the Period Commencing May 1, 1972." JMPA.
[151] Jonas Mekas, "Letter to Alan A. Masur. May 12, 1971." JMPA.
[152] Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1992), 90.
[153] "Program Report of Anthology film Archives For the Period Commencing May 1, 1972." JMPA.
[154] P. Adams Sitney, *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives* (Anthology Film Archives and New York: New York University Press, 1975).

incomplete. Anthology did not, for example, own every film in the canon and this list did not include the cataloged and non-cataloged films for use in the Film Study Center.[155]

In a 1972 board meeting, Sitney cited the importance of Anthology's relationships to universities and museums, in which they exchange reference materials, opening further access to their collection.[156] In the two decades previous, Mekas began a similar exchange program between *Film Culture* and local and international periodicals partaking in a gift exchange and Mekas and Film Culture cultivated a rare periodical collection, which was moved to Anthology's library.[157] In addition, Mekas and Hill donated several of their own periodicals.[158]

As the collection expanded, Anthology requested to increase the Film Study budget. On May 12, 1971, Mekas wrote to Masur, requesting him to consider the rental of a small vault outside of New York City.[159] Two weeks later, Anthology's manager, Stephen E. Gebhardt, wrote to Joseph Papp of The New York Shakespeare Festival, requesting 1400-1600 sq. ft. of additional space at No. 8 Astor Place for the purposes of projection space, editing and work space, a darkroom, bathroom facilities, and storage

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[155] Correspondence between Jonas Mekas and Alan A. Masur 1971-1973. Anthology Film Archives Legal History. JMPA.
[156] "Minutes of the First Board of Directors Meeting Held in the Library of Anthology Film Archives Monday, October 30, 1972, at 4 P.M." *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings1972-73*, JMPA.
[157] Interview with Robert Haller, Anthology's current Director of Library Collections, August 19, 2010.
[158] Robert Haller, Director of Library Collections estimates that there are currently 44 000 individual issues in Anthology's periodical collection. Email correspondence with Robert Haller, January 6, 2012.
[159] "Letter to Allan A. Masur from Jonas Mekas, May 12, 1971." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.

space for films, archival, and office materials.[160] In a July 1971 letter to Masur, Mekas indicates that Anthology had not yet obtained the additional space, informing him of its urgency. Board members valued Anthology's pedagogical pursuits for it was attractive to foundations and the Film Study Center and library became a key to institutional and economical growth. After the death of Jerome Hill in November 1972, Anthology suffered from significant budget cuts and instead of acquiring more space, they moved to 80 Wooster Street in 1974.[161]

Anthology's activities demonstrate how it framed a specific idea about cinema through multiple viewing formations and networks. Recorded histories situate Anthology within a strict formalist and modernist position, concentrating on public rhetoric, canon, and viewing formations developed by its founders. Legal documents, however, show how Anthology's goals and activities focused on public access to the experimental film, and in fact, were largely inclusive of films outside the Essential Cinema canon. Letters between Mekas and Masur demonstrate the financial limitations that prohibited the growth of Essential Cinema and the maintenance of Invisible Cinema, while simultaneously allowing the Film Study Center and library to evolve and aid Anthology in receiving grants. Anthology was less a dictatorship and more of a pedagogical community center for the experimental film; the primary goal remained access, and through access, Anthology developed goals of preservation and pedagogy. For Anthology, access to experimental film history also included access to journals, periodicals, paper materials, audio, still photographs, and paper ephemera.

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[160] "Letter to Joseph Papp from Stephen E. Gebhardt, Manager for Anthology Film Archives." *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.
[161] "Letter to Allan A. Masur from Jonas Mekas, July 14th, 1971 (Report), *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA.

Anthology Film Archives and the University

After Hill's death, it was important for Anthology to further relationships with long standing institutions such as NYU in order to secure funding. In the spring of 1973, Mekas began talks with NYU and David Oppenheim, Dean of the Tisch School of the Arts, to develop a stronger liaison between the two institutions. Both professors at NYU and Anthology board members, Sitney and Michelson urged Anthology's board to tread carefully and supported the institution's independence from NYU. Board member Stanley Young thought otherwise and stated that the growth of this relationship would help secure funding, particularly from the Jerome Hill Foundation. To increase ties with NYU, Anthology would waive admission fees for its students, provide use of their library, and train students in library and archival areas. Furthermore, they would help NYU develop a film and tape library by acting as a liaison between filmmakers and the university. Finally, Anthology would also program films for NYU's new film theater.[162] This relationship effected Anthology's program directives and film acquisitions, for instance due to NYU's seminar on Dziga Vertov, Mekas made the acquisition of Vertov's films a priority. In 1975, NYU and Anthology co-published *Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, in 1975. Partially funded by the NEA, MoMA, and the Pacific Film Archive (PFA) cooperated with Anthology in the production of the book *Essential Cinema*, which belonged to a larger project devoted to gathering information on all American independent filmmakers from 1920 through the

[162] "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Film Art Fund, Inc. May 1, 1973 at 3 P.M." *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings 1972-73*, JMPA.

1940s.[163] Links to NYU helped forge a relationship with other funding bodies like the NEA, which supported Anthology's film preservation projects, providing $32 000 in 1973, with the promise of $25 000 over the following four years.[164] The NEA offered support for other institutions committed to supporting experimental film by granting funding to the Pacific Film Archive and MoMA to put towards the development of experimental film research and programming. This funding resulted in a 1976 MoMA film program on the history of experimental cinema and a 1973 report by Sheldon Renan on the state of experimental film.[165]

The pedagogical objectives found in Invisible Cinema, Essential Cinema, and the Film Study Center were appropriate for the academic climate of the late sixties and early seventies. In 1973, Calvin Tomkins wrote of American experimental cinema: "In every case, the major audience for their film is found in colleges and universities, hundreds of which now offer credit courses in film history or technique, and fifty-one of which offer degrees in film."[166] Moreover, the university played a significant role in addressing the scholarly potential of experimental film study as discussed in the work of Michael

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[163] "Agenda for the Meting of the Board of Directors of Film Art Fund, March 26, 1973, 4 P.M." *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings 1972-73*, JMPA. And "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Film Art Fund, Inc. May 24, 1973. *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings 1972-73*, JMPA.

[164] "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of Film Art Fund, Inc. February 17, 1973, 4 P.M." *Anthology Film Archives Board Meetings 1972-73*, JMPA.

[165] According to Decherney, Renan's report no longer exists. Though the NEA received the report on February 23, 1973, the NEA no longer has a copy. Decherney, *Hollywood and the Cultural Elite*, 203, 250.

[166] Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: All Pockets Open, Jonas Mekas," *The New Yorker*, (January 6, 1973), 32.

Zryd.[167] At Anthology's first board meeting in 1972, Mekas and Sitney stated the importance of Anthology's relationship to universities:

> Jonas Mekas gave a brief history of the Anthology Film Archives. He explained the reasons for its coming into being, the main one is to assist Universities, Museums and Schools across the country (and abroad) in the viewing and study of modern American cinema responding to the growing number of requests from the learning and art institutions of this country…He pointed out that the number of universities in which film is being taught in this country has increased multi-fold during the last five to seven years…At the same time, the film educators are becoming aware of how few Institutions there are that can seriously assist them in their work. Mr. Sitney termed this period as the "heroic period" of film criticism and film education. Anthology Film Archives is in the forefront of this work and has to fulfill many requests and demands of film educators.[168]

When Anthology came into existence in 1970, it declared itself a didactic institution devoted to the study and exhibition of film art. It would be experienced in the form of lectures, conferences, private film study, programming, and the physical experience of the theater. Anthology's relationship to universities and museums was vital for grant applications and the board's support, and from the onset Anthology established important financial relationships with these institutions. The 1972 fiscal year program report declared profit from university class projections at NYU, Cooper Union, Yale University, and the Philadelphia College of the Arts. In the same year Anthology attended the first National Conference on Teaching Resources of Film and Media and loaned Bruce

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[167] Michael Zryd. "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* 45 no. 2 (Winter 2006), 17-42" and "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," *Inventing Film Studies*. Eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 182-216. Both texts are further discussed in the introduction.

[168] Minutes of the First Board of Directors Meeting. October 30, 1972. *Anthology Film Archives Legal History*, JMPA. Anthology's first Board of Directors included members of the film and artistic community (Mekas, Sitney, Annette Michelson, Peter Beard, Walter Gutman), Masur, and local advocates of the arts. "Day by Day." May 31, 1972 (List of Board of Directors). *Paper and Board Minutes for 1972-73*, AFA.

Baille's notebooks to SUNY Buffalo, the conference's sponsor. The library also participated in a still photograph exchange program with the British Film Institute and American avant-garde preservation projects were initiated between Anthology, the Museum of Modern Art, the American Film Institute, and the Pacific Film Archives. Anthology simultaneously cooperated with the Department of State. As the first major center for American experimental film, Anthology garnered attention from foreign film scholars and filmmakers. As a result, Anthology's employees made themselves available for personal interviews, discussions, consultations, and special film programs that were coordinated by the Department of State.[169] This helped to garner a significantly expanded understanding of American film within an international scene that had previously understood American cinema as coterminous with Hollywood.

Conclusion

The history of Anthology Film Archives is primarily documented through the lens of the Essential Cinema canon and the polemical discourse written and discussed by Mekas and Sitney. Scholars such as Rabinovitz and Decherney expand experimental film history in a socio-historical and political context - Rabinovitz through an examination of the female filmmaker's role in a predominantly male avant-garde milieu and Decherney in his study of experimental cinema and the foundation grant – Anthology's history remains within the context of the Essential Cinema canon.[170] However, Anthology also belonged to a group of institutions and artists who changed how and where experimental

[169] Program Report for the period commencing May 1, 1972, 7, 10, 14. JMPA.
[170] Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 2003 and Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Cultural Elite: How Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005),

film was exhibited, and it is important to reframe Anthology's history in the experimental film narrative. Anthology is more than a canon of filmmakers and a set of polemical claims, it is also an institution that served experimental film as a significant node in a larger network of art institutions and communities.

Though the history of Essential Cinema's formation and the politics of its selection are significant to the history of Anthology and experimental film, the study of Anthology's other institutional directives and its ties with various New York art systems offer another critical lens to this history and demonstrate the significance of Anthology's links to SoHo, art institutions, and university programs. In the late 1960s, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque at 80 Wooster Street became a space for all performance media, avant-garde plays, operas, dance, music, and film thrived at this particular space. Additionally, the Cinematheque provided a meeting space for artists and the Fluxus movement. On June 5, 1970, the SoHo Artists' Association held a meeting to review the City Planning Commission's proposal to legalize residential artists' lofts in SoHo, while Maciunas curated several Fluxus events such as the Flux Fest and performances and work by himself, John Lennon and Yoko Ono.[171] In 1974, Anthology returned to 80 Wooster Street and SoHo, where they remained until 1978. Once in SoHo, Anthology began programming video art screenings and performances by video artists, such as Nam June Paik. Simultaneously, the MoMA and the Whitney cautiously included experimental film programs in their repertoire and NYU's Cinema Department began. Anthology founders Hill and Sitney were invited to speak at the MoMA and Anthology shared its facilities with the NYU Cinema Department. Invisible Cinema and Essential Cinema were covered

[171] Bernstein and Shapiro, SoHo Artists' Association Poster, *Illegal Living*, 146.

in the popular press including *Vogue*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Variety*, and the *Village Voice*.[172] Out of all of Anthology's endeavors, Essential Cinema received the most extensive scholarly criticism in experimental film history, yet it was Anthology's Film Study Center and library that most aided Anthology in marketing to foundations and board members. This helped to establish Anthology as a beneficial resource to the experimental film research and teaching community and expand its relationship to institutions like the MoMA, Whitney, and American Film Institute. Anthology actively participated in the growth of SoHo, experimental film distribution and exhibition, and film study in the university, broadening the experimental film network. In addition to the critical examination of Essential Cinema, Anthology's history must be further scrutinized and also recognized for its experiments in film pedagogy, preservation, distribution, and exhibition.

[172] Reviews of Anthology in the popular press are further discussed in the introduction.

Conclusion
Experimental Distribution and the Experimental Film

Contemporary parallels of 1970s alternative art networks are dispersed throughout New York City. In particular, organizations Light Industry (LI -alternative moving image programming), *Triple Canopy* (TC – online arts, culture, and political magazine), and The Public School New York (TPSNY – self-organized educational space facilitated by a committee and through a website) reflect historical counterparts such as Cinema 16, *Aspen*, and 80 Wooster Street.[173] In 2010, LI, TC, and TPSNY shared a donated storefront space at 177 Livingston in downtown Brooklyn where they screened films, held classes, threw benefits, and ran an online magazine. When they lost their space at 177 Livingston, each organization became itinerant as they searched for a new residence. LI solicited help from Manhattan film institutions to continue their programming and moved from small galleries in the Lower East Side to the *Film Forum* and the MoMA, while TPSNY temporarily held classes at spaces that included the experimental music venue Issue Project Room, 60 Wall Street, New School, and Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. During their itinerancy, the organizations raised money to share an arts and cultural center in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, which they have simply titled, 155 Freeman. Recognizing the shifting economies of contemporary forums, exhibition, and publication, each organization is an ongoing experiment in format and distribution. LI, TC, and TPSNY are progressive organizations that continuously experiment with circulation, distribution, media, and exhibition as they face technological and economical changes analogous to those faced by their SoHo counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s. The

[173] The Public School New York website: http://nyc.thepublicschool.org/; Triple Canopy website: http://canopycanopycanopy.com/; and Light Industry website: http://lightindustry.org. Accessed May 20, 2012.

logistics of their physical movement – losing 177 Livingston, itinerancy, raising money, and obtaining grants to open 155 Freeman – mirror the history of 1960s and 1970s downtown New York. And much like the organizations of 1960s and 1970s New York, LI, TC, and TPSNY offer new ways to think about the culture of reading, learning, and watching, but in this case, for the 21st century. As a venue for film and electronic art influenced by past alternative film networks, LI's goal (stated on their website) is to "…explore new models for the presentation of time-based media."[174] In an interview with Chris Wiley for *Kaleidoscope* magazine, LI specifically states that they are interested in progress:

> However, while we're inspired by these early models – the Vogel's catholic view of cinema, Mekas' indefatigable energy, the Collective's intellectual rigor – we see Light Industry not as an exercise in nostalgia, but rather a rethinking of what cinema can be in the 21st century and an exploration of how this tradition can move forward.[175]

TC's mantra is to "slow down the internet.[176]" The magazine plays with the format of reading on the screen (instead of scrolling vertically, users read each page horizontally) and taking cues from *Aspen*, TC regularly integrates moving images and photography within their online pages. More recently, TC published their first print book in October 2011, *Invalid Format* as "artful archiving" – a way to keep a record of online work.[177] TPSNY solicits class proposals from the general public. The website offers two options: "I can teach this" or "I'm interested." Instructors (ranging from artists to writers to university professors or archivists) or students from any field can offer to teach and past

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[174] "About" Light Industry website http://lightindustry.org/about/. Accessed May 20, 2012.
[175] "155 Freeman," Interview with Chris Wiley. *Kaleidoscope* Issue 14 (Spring 2012): 22.
[176] "155 Freeman," Interview with Chris Wiley. *Kaleidoscope* Issue 14 (Spring 2012): 20.
[177] *Invalid Format An Anthology of Triple Canopy Volume 1* (New York: Canopy Canopy Canopy, Inc., 2011), 3.

participants include NYU professor Alexander Galloway and archivist Rick Prelinger. Instructors do not get paid and classes are free (though participants may donate any amount). From the onset, the organizations recognized the similarities between them and the community it generates. Engaged in discussion with Wiley, TPSNY states that each organization shares the goal of "…pursuing rigorous, intellectual, creative pursuits; engaging with various publics – while remaining independent in our own identities. We say '155 Freeman' as shorthand to refer to ourselves collectively in the space, but there is no actual fixed 155 Freeman entity."[178] These organizations, inspired by New York City's long history of alternative art, education, and film spaces continue to question how to exhibit time-based media, write about art, and develop panels for discussions and classes in a time when we must all adjust to increased dependency on digital forms of communication.

In this thesis, I have argued that Anthology Film Archives emerged from the same experimental and expanded systems of art and film distribution in the 1960s and 1970s as LI, TC, and TPSNY. Art and film circulated through the post and in magazine format, performance art and movements like Fluxus were performing in various parts of the city. Gordon Matta-Clark utilized an outdoor wall to paint an invitation to his exhibition and Trisha Brown choreographed on rooftops and alongside buildings.[179] As I have discussed in detail in chapter one, artists, editors, and exhibitors alike experimented with different formats of art exhibition - magazine, post, loft – associating art and film with objects

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[178] "155 Freeman," Interview with Chris Wiley. *Kaleidoscope* Issue 14 (Spring 2012): 20.
[179] *Invitation for Gordon Matta-Clark: Open House*, 19-21 May 1972. Original photograph: Carol Gooden in *Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2011), 196.

most commonly linked to the domestic sphere: couches, LPs, newspapers, and small gauge projectors. Miniature and mobile spaces for art increased as artists found ways to circumvent the gallery system. For the experimental film, these experiments in distribution led to the development of a permanent screen and home for experimental film exhibition and study, yet as I argue in chapter two, experimentation did not stop when Anthology opened in 1970, it continued inside and outside of the larger institutional context in which Anthology belonged. Regular experimental film screenings at the modern art museum were only beginning and museums sought Anthology's founders to speak about experimental cinema, while the Whitney borrowed films from Anthology's collection for its screenings. Anthology also formed during the nascent years of NYU's cinema program and held an important relationship with the program and its instructors. The growth of Anthology's pedagogical resources is analogous to NYU's own Film Study Center and lends insight to the growth of film pedagogy in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In downtown New York City, alternative methods of circulation and spaces of exhibition were created and contributed to the formation of an artists' ecosystem in SoHo. Before the commercial development of SoHo galleries, the artists' magazine materialized as a social and participatory space for art and artists and inhabited dual roles as both art object and art space. Furthermore, SoHo real estate became politically charged spaces and street addresses transformed into geographical emblems of artistic process, ideas, imagination, and subversion. Representing a community and an artists' ecosystem, SoHo galleries and spaces were branded by their street address. As a manifestation of resistance and a symbol of the self-sustaining artist, artists' magazines and SoHo

cooperatives articulated their ideas in varied forms of transit and exhibition, which effected the distribution and exhibition of experimental film. The history of experimental film is traditionally distinguished from the development of artists' magazines, SoHo, video, and performance art. In the study of the shared spaces and experimental distributions of the 1960s and 1970s, I have drawn links between experimental film, its surrounding context and interactions with artists' magazines, video, and performance art spaces, in order to further understand the development of Anthology Film Archives.

To uncover the process and progress of experimental distribution practices and the legalization of experimental film exhibition spaces, I used textual ephemera (both primary and secondary research findings) such as, posters, programs, certificates of occupancy, letters, program reports, agreements, and mail licenses to indicate how cinema traveled and where it traveled. In this way, I have established connections between experimental film, video, and performance art based on experimental distribution and exhibition practices to demonstrate how Anthology Film Archives' history is intimately linked to Fluxus and SoHo. By making 80 Wooster Street a space for the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, Anthology Film Archives, experimental opera, theatre, music, video, and performance art, Mekas and Maciunas – experimental film and Fluxus - shared the same real estate and fought similar battles against the city to legalize residential, work, and exhibition space.

In examining circulation routes and exhibition space, I demonstrate how the history of experimental film is more than a study of film texts and medium specificity; it is also a history composed of an entire culture of experiments in production, exhibition, *and* distribution. Experimental film *required* experiments in distribution within and

outside of institutional bodies and throughout this thesis I have argued that experimental distribution practices propelled the formation of a permanent physical space and screen for experimental film. By foregrounding experimental systems of distribution, circulation, and dissemination, I suggest that movement is a significant form of critical discourse that helps us to understand the formation, progression, and future of particular kinds of cinema. The study of circulation – how cinema moves – is a method of analysis that shifts film study from medium specific and production discourses to include the culture that helped sustain particular types of cinematic practice. Particular economies shape the dissemination of media and the study of distribution adapts to constant economic and technological changes. This methodology is an approach derivative of progress over nostalgia and it is an attempt to work with, not against inevitable changes in the circulation of cinema. Furthermore, it provides a platform for discussion between art, literature, and film worlds, which have increasingly encountered similar questions about navigating media circulation in the 21st century.

To illustrate, I will again refer to the contemporary examples of LI, TC, and TPSNY, who must all consider a balance between digitization and physical space. TC is primarily an online magazine, but it also organizes panels and forums to discuss the content of the magazine *and* its own experiments in publication, thus physical space has become significant to the evolution of the magazine.[180] The spirit of TPSNY, though it

[180] On May 23, 2012, *Triple Canopy* held a discussion about the politics of anonymity online with Gabriella Coleman, David Auerbach, and James Grimmelmann. Coleman and Auerbach will discuss their recent articles in TC. http://canopycanopycanopy.com/programs Accessed May 21, 2012. *Triple Canopy* editors also participated in Columbia Colleges *Art in Circulation*, held on March 15, 2012 in Chicago. Editors also discussed *Triple Canopy*'s first book publication *Invalid*

operates and communicates with participants on their website to organize and propose classes, participants meet at a physical space in order to further engage with and create community, while LI continues to rethink ideas about cinema and physical sites of exhibition. A networked history helps us to understand these contemporary movements and questions, where they came from, how they confront technological shifts, and where they could possibly go. The details of circulation - from floor plans to certificates of occupancy to call slips – trace the logistics of dissemination and the economies of distribution, allowing us to negotiate and navigate throughout these sprawling networks. Technology is in continuous flux, forcing distributors and exhibitors to constantly consider how to adapt to these changes and recognize its possibilities. In moving image studies, new methods of analysis help us to understand the entangled networks of film distribution that must consider and adapt to the inherent flux of technological change and the factors that shape the continuous need for a physical space where people can read, view, and discuss. Anthology Film Archives is one such example of an institutional node forced to negotiate between digital circulation and physical sites of distribution. Within experimental film history, Anthology must be examined beyond canonical discourse and in addition, its history needs to be examined beyond experimental film. The history of Anthology's networks and the growth and experimentation of cinematic distribution is analogous to the questions they face today, as well as the small organizations that must also navigate between the ephemeral and the sustainable.

Today, Anthology negotiates between increased digital distribution and the physical site of their archive and exhibition theaters. On July 13, 2010, Anthology

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Format in the panel *Passive Recreation / How to Print an Internet Magazine* on January 18, 2012 at the New York Society Library / McNally Jackson Books.

launched its new website and in three phases, Anthology will become a hybrid analog and digital archive. Currently, the website provides a small selection of promotional videos and experimental film clips. Seven of the eight videos are streamed through Vimeo, while Harry Smith's *No. 11 Mirror Animations (1956-57)* can be accessed through YouTube. The eight videos provide a sample (Maya Deren, Paul Sharits, and Smith) of established avant-garde filmmakers, while introducing the relatively unknown experimental filmmaker, Lowell Bodger.[181] After his death in 2009, Anthology acquired all of Bodger's films and paper materials; however, canonical dominance (Anthology's top ten most requested files include eight filmmakers from Essential Cinema) hinders the potential for researchers to explore historically peripheral experimental filmmakers.[182] As with all archives, curatorial decisions must be made, minimizing public access to Anthology's vast collection and it is their goal to balance curatorial decisions between physical and online space. The first stage of the Web archive enables the viewer to enter into the canonical experimental film while potentially being introduced to a new filmmaker. Online curatorial decisions also work in tandem with the programming of Anthology's physical theater, as exemplified in the September 16, 2009 screening of

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[181] Five video transfer clips are available on the Anthology website. *NYC-Downtown*, Lowell Bodger, Date unknown: *Wintercourse,* Paul Sharits, 1962: *Morton Street*, Maya Deren, Date unknown: *No. 11 Mirror Animations (1956-1957)*: Harry Smith, 1956-57: *Coney Island*, Summer 1969, from the Bob Parent Collection. Three promotional films are also included: *Persistence of Vision*, Tom Brenner (date unknown): *Anthology Film Archives promotional video,* 1999: and *Anthology Film Archives Television Spot,* Gotham TV, Episode #9, 2000. This list is based on October 2011 access of Anthology's website.

[182] Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, Harry Smith, Paul Sharits, Robert Breer, and Marie Menken were included in the Essential Cinema list and remain among the top ten most requested files. Carolee Schneemann and Yvonne Rainer round up the list. Library Appointment Binder, Anthology Film Archives.

Bodger's films, *Wave Symmetries* (1971), *Favorable Conditions* (1973), *A Recent Animation* (1974).

Anthology's Web archive will, over time, showcase lesser known experimental filmmakers, and also orphan films: home movies, unfinished student films, and behind the scenes porn footage will be made available to a larger public. By promoting orphan films, Anthology believes that this type of cinema will grow a bigger audience and new scholarship can arise. Such films are less likely to be photo-chemically preserved and it is Anthology's belief that access will provide its sustenance. Archivist Andrew Lampert discusses access as a route to preservation:

> There's a lot of films in the collection which, frankly probably won't ever get preserved through a traditional photo-chemical process, especially as that becomes more expensive, time intensive, sometimes fruitless…And to do what will be digital preservation is still in flux, but to give access in the mean time to some of these things, I think will generate an interest that could lead to full on preservation down the line. Nobody wants a film preserved that they've never heard of or they've never seen.[183]

In conjunction with access, Anthology prioritizes context. By incorporating digital access to paper materials, journals, audio, and photographic stills, Anthology is creating an online film study center parallel to the one originally established in 1970. As the website evolves into a larger archive, Anthology will ask permission from filmmakers and estates where possible and if necessary. Otherwise, it will post material and remove it if requested by the verified copyright holder. Although the perpetual modifications of copyright rules situate many of the films within the public domain, Anthology continues to seek permission from the filmmakers.[184]

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[183] Andrew Lampert, personal interview, New York, August 20, 2010. Lampert worked as Anthology's archivist from 2003-2011, when he transitioned into the role of curator.
[184] Andrew Lampert, e-mail correspondence, April 2, 2011.

The final stage of the Web archive will contain a dossier on a preservation project funded by the Andy Warhol Foundation. Anthology received a multi-year grant to preserve over sixty experimental films made between 1975-1990. In order to contextualize the preservation and exhibition of the films, Anthology will provide a complete dossier of the Warhol project including clips and films of the preserved filmmakers, criticism, interviews, and audio. The paper material will be available to download, offering free access to rare materials, including the journal *Film Culture* and the top ten most requested filmmaker files at Anthology. In addition, a selection of Anthology's audio files will be downloadable.[185] By offering both moving images and paper materials, the archive will provide an expanded, multimedia film education experience similar to Anthology's early goals of the 1970s. With increased online access, Anthology's collection becomes decentralized and gives researchers access to rare materials, which were previously restricted to those able to visit New York City. Online dissemination breaks the physical and geographical barriers of the Film Study Center, while maintaining the goal of increased circulation.

Distribution of the experimental film is a perpetual negotiation between the value of the original artifact and that of its decentralization and distribution as a reproducible object. Though many filmmakers, such as Peter Kubelka, are committed to celluloid, copies, in addition, have long been revered within the experimental film community, as it provides increased access to non-commercialized cinema.[186] Before constructing the

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[185] As of August 2010, 220 audiotapes have been digitized.

[186] At a lecture in 2005, Peter Kubelka unspooled a 35mm print of his own film, passed it around the audience and encouraged the examination of each frame, promoting celluloid

institutional and pedagogical aims of Anthology's Film Study Center, Mekas believed that the 8mm format would profoundly change the distribution and consumption of the experimental film: copies, not institutions would overcome censorship and public viewing obstacles. Today, through new technologies, the Web archive offers a fragment of Mekas' 8mm dream. The experimental film can now be transferred onto video, downloaded, and stored on a hard drive or USB key. It can be economically burned onto a DVD and circulated to a larger public. Mekas, in the same resilient energy he embodied in the 1960s, consistently promotes digital technology and wider distribution in the twenty-first century:

> (YouTube and UbuWeb) are all very, very, very important outlets for all videotaped, taped material. It becomes very open and democratic… Much of it will disappear, but some of it, people will protect and it will remain. They will make copies and they will see that it does not disappear, because video materials, DVDs, CDs, are fragile and their lives are limited. Film can survive under good conditions, one hundred and more years. Even under bad conditions it can survive fifty years. Video, the current technology, whatever it is, on YouTube and video, will be gone. It's very fragile, unless one makes a copy, picks out the transfers and keeps it…[187]

For more than fifty years, Mekas has argued for increased distribution of the experimental film, which he has implemented into Anthology's exhibition policies. Domestic distribution of the experimental film is not restricted to the Web and video; for Mekas and Anthology, the concept began with a particular set of social dynamics in Greenwich Village. In a small and dense community, political forces, art movements, and

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and demonstrating film objecthood. Travis Bird, "An Empty Frame is a Piece of Art: Reflections and Projections on Archiving and Restoration." Le Giornate del Cinema Muto 2005: The Collegium Papers 7. Eds. Luca Giuliani and David Robinson. Gemona: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2006http://www.filmintelligence.org/collegium-2006.htm Accessed January 15, 2009.

[187] Jonas Mekas, personal interview, New York, August 20, 2010.

portable moving image technology permeated experimental film exhibition. Ideas about art and its distribution were synchronous to new developments in film technology, which helped shape new ways of distributing experimental film. Often marginalized, the experimental film functioned within a cultural economy composed of specialized and ostensibly hermetic forms of exhibition, and when Anthology opened in 1970, it demonstrated that wider distribution could raise the cultural value of the experimental film object. This particular centralization collides with the infrastructure of the previous decade, where verbal and postal networks decentralized the art object, miniaturizing and manipulating its scale to transgress conventional gallery access. Experimental film followed suit and though peripheral exhibition networks metastasized, the basic need to see and experience experimental film persisted, causing a tension between shifting ideas about art objecthood and the necessity for a public space to engage with such art. The art object's newfound pliancy altered public exposure, as well as the *spaces* in which art was viewed. Contemporary online art distribution, manifest in the proliferation of independent and institutionalized Web archives is an evolution of the embodied pull between the decentralization of art and the art institution. It compresses and expands exhibition spaces, and in the film community, preservation, exhibition, and pedagogy are repositioned through the malleability of material and spatial entities. Portability transformed distribution of the experimental film enabling it to travel to multiple sites with relative ease, thus changing the way we view cinema through a modification of how and where it is experienced.

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