

Cultural Continuity and Technological Indeterminacy:
Itinerant 16mm Film Exhibition in Canada, 1918-1949

Peter Lester

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Continuity and Technological Indeterminacy: Itinerant 16mm Film Exhibition in Canada, 1918-1949

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This thesis charts the parallel historical trajectories of itinerant, non-theatrical forms of film exhibition practice and of 16mm projection technology, throughout the interwar years in Canada and into the post-World War II context. I argue that these two entities – a technology and a practice - developed in symbiosis with one another, and subsequently need to be understood in terms of this relationship. The cultural practice of traveling exhibition has often been considered a relic of the “early cinema” era, the first decade of the medium’s development. It is a practice that was generally assumed to have long since perished in Canada, only to have been resuscitated in 1942 by the National Film Board. This thesis argues instead that itinerant film exhibition never actually ceased to exist in Canada, and that it in fact persisted, with varying degrees of frequency, throughout the interwar period, effectively demonstrating a continuity of screen practice that is generally not widely acknowledged. Concurrent to this, I argue that 16mm technology, although introduced as a medium for amateur employment and for exhibition in the domestic space, quickly charted an additional evolutionary tract, which in turn facilitated these numerous and varied traveling cinema operations. This thesis demonstrates that this was not an historical development that was by any means predetermined, nor was it met with enthusiasm by all sectors of the film industry. Discursive practices circulated within the industry and regulatory actions implemented by various levels of

government attempted to both frame and contain the technology and its employment in non-theatrical arenas, but due to this involvement, they also served to legitimize and normalize them. The resulting narrative is at heart, therefore, essentially one of both technological indeterminacy but also of cultural continuity.

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Introduction

In 1908, at the height of the popularity of the nickelodeon theatre, an opinion piece appeared in *The Moving Picture World*, the primary American trade publication for manufacturers and operators of motion-picture technology. The author announced with outmost sincerity:

At present, the theatorium is a craze – a fad – a fashion.
People go to it because it is something new. But crazes,
fads and fashions do not last. The bicycle was a fad,
but where is it now? Ping-pong was a fad and a furious
one, but who plays the game in the year 1908?¹

As misguided as the author may have been about the collective futures of movie theatres, bicycles and the sport of ping pong, this passage is nevertheless relevant for what it reveals about popular conceptions surrounding the development and evolution of technologies and cultural practices. The author was certainly correct that nickelodeons themselves would quickly wane in popularity, but whereas he predicted the rapid demise of the movie house altogether, just the opposite occurred: theatres grew larger and more permanent. Needless to say, the same expansion was true of bicycles and ping pong. I cite this passage for two reasons. First of all, it speaks to the assumed determinacy that typifies much discussion of film exhibition in theatrical settings. Theatrical environments are typically taken as the default setting for cinematic experience, perhaps evidenced nowhere more obviously than in the term

¹ "A Coffin for the Theatorium" *The Moving Picture World*, Vol.2, no.7, February 22, 1908.

“non-theatrical,” which is consistently employed throughout the discourse and literature of the film industry to describe any form of film screening that breaks from this model. What this passage suggests is that there was nothing pre-determined about the place of the movie theatre as the natural environment for motion pictures. With the popularity of nickelodeons in the 1900s and the eventual move towards larger, permanent theatres in the 1910s, movie houses certainly established themselves as dominant screening environments in the industry, but it is an absolute fallacy to assume that this was somehow preordained. This editorial serves as a useful reminder that the movie theatre’s place of prominence was by no means a given.

Secondly, I invoke this passage for its illuminations on the lifespans of technological forms and cultural practices. At that particular moment in history, the author was quite comfortable to dismiss bicycles and ping pong as relics of the past, and to proclaim that the novelty of the movie “theatorium” was soon to join them in the footnotes of cultural history. Given the comically woeful inadequacies of this prediction – ping pong is now the national sport of the world’s most populous country, bicycle usage is astronomical, and movie theatres globally number in the hundreds of thousands – this passage serves to highlight the essential impossibility of fully grasping and assessing a technology or practice’s true cultural impact within the moment itself. Media forms come and go, to be sure, but as the essays in Charles Acland’s recent edited collection *Residual Media* demonstrate, technologies and practices are typically aleatory in their respective evolutionary trajectories, and often

find themselves in cultural contexts far removed from that in which they emerged.² The temporal charts of such phenomena frequently outdistance their respective initial periods of novelty, and often their employment, usefulness or mere presence is found in noticeably different or unintended scenarios.

Like any new technology of communication, motion pictures faced an uphill battle towards acceptance and legitimacy upon their introduction to society. And given that movies themselves obviously predate the existence of theatres specifically designed to house them, the cinema was essentially “non-theatrical” in origin. Prior to the nickelodeon boom of the mid-1900s, and the later transition towards larger, permanent theatres, motion pictures were frequently nomadic entities with no fixed venues for exhibition. Films were shown in all manner of screening environments and often took on a distinctly (and often necessarily) itinerant existence. And so, at a period in time when the success of motion pictures beyond the status of mere novelty act was yet to be established – and this was by no means a certainty – the practice of traveling cinema played a pivotal role in the development of the film industry as a whole. Writing in 1912, Frederick Talbot confidently announced: “the touring cinematograph proved conclusively the popularity of entertainments devoted exclusively to animated pictures.”³ Echoing this sentiment decades later, in his study on traveling fairground cinema, Mark Swartz asserts:

The many traveling showmen who brought the new invention to the masses of people strongly believed in the commercial potential of film. Without them, the

² Charles Acland, ed., *Residual Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

³ Frederick A. Talbot, *Moving Pictures: How they are Made and Worked* (London: William Heineman, 1912), 130.

motion picture industry would have been much slower to develop, assuming, of course, that it would have succeeded in getting off the ground at all.⁴

And Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, authors of the most complete work on traveling cinema, claim:

In the annals of American entertainment, traveling exhibition has had a long and important history. Even before there were good roads, hardy exhibitors traveled along the eastern seaboard providing phantasmagoria performances and other screen events....

Until entertainment had become a complete technological product that could be cheaply shipped, itinerant showmen were a crucial component of the American cultural landscape.⁵

At a time when the success of the medium of cinema was by no means guaranteed, the popularity of the attractions put on by the traveling exhibitors at the turn of the century demonstrated that a solid and devoted audience base for the motion picture existed and that its viability as a popular entertainment was in fact possible.

Yet surprisingly the topic of traveling cinema remains marginalized, or in many cases even invisible, within the larger field of historical film studies. In a telling observation in response to this trend, Pierre Véronneau suggests: “the study of

⁴ Mark E. Swartz, “An Overview of Cinema on the Fairgrounds” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* vol.15, no.3 (1987): 107.

⁵ Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 276.

a largely rural phenomenon seemed of no importance to historians who thought it was largely obsolete and awkward.”⁶ In a much similar vein, Calvin Pryluck claims: “Film history often falls into the anachronistic fallacy that asserts current importance as the criterion for historical significance,” and that under such an understanding, according to an unnamed scholarly acquaintance of his, “the study of the largely rural and now obsolete phenomenon of movie road showmen is ‘an obscure path of no importance.’”⁷ While this may in fact explain scholars’ reluctance to embrace the issue, it is ultimately a shortsighted form of reasoning. There is much to be learned from the study of this practice, beyond the anecdotal historical detail, however fascinating it may be.

This thesis is first and foremost concerned with the conflation and symbiosis of two specific histories: the first, the cultural practice of non-theatrical and traveling forms of film exhibition in Canada; and the second, the introduction and implications of a specific motion-picture technology, the 16mm film gauge. These two parallel histories are intimately entwined and cannot be fully understood in isolation from one another. The concern here is less with 16mm production *per se*, and more so with the various non-theatrical forms of exhibition in which films were shown, and how the dominant industry, by which I mean the business infrastructure involved in the production, distribution and exhibition of motion pictures in North America, subsequently reacted to these practices. In this respect, although fundamentally concerned with “film” and its related technologies, my focus is specifically with the

⁶ Pierre Véronneau, “The Creation of a Film Culture by Traveling Exhibitors in Rural Quebec Prior to World War I.” *Film History* 6 (1994): 251.

⁷ Calvin Pryluck. “The Itinerant Movie Show and the Development of the Film Industry” *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, vol.35 no.4 (1983): 11.

functionings of exhibition practices and the patterns of behaviour and discourse within the industry. This thesis is not generally concerned with content analyses of the various films I mention, nor do I propose any form of textual interpretation. These are valid areas of inquiry, but are not the concern of the thesis for a variety of reasons. For one, the screening activity I discuss encompassed thousands of films from an extremely broad spectrum of formats and genres, ranging from short animated cartoons, to state-sponsored films on proper wheat-harvesting techniques, to Hollywood feature films from the studio era. While some of the more popular titles are perhaps relatively accessible, many of them, especially those produced specifically and exclusively on smaller-gauge formats, simply are no longer available for viewing. But aside from logistical reasons for the omission of this strain of analysis, my interests are simply more squarely oriented towards an examination of the cultural life surrounding the environment of these screenings, and the discursive practices they initiated within the broader industry, rather than the textual or aesthetic interpretations I may have of the specific films. In this sense, I aim to situate this work more clearly within the literature of cultural history and exhibition studies than with the more disciplinary-specific strains of film studies associated with film aesthetics.

A term I employ prominently throughout this thesis that probably warrants some initial discussion is “non-theatrical.” It is a problematic term, to be sure, if for no other reason that it would seem to imply that the “theatrical” is the normalized environment for the consumption of films, and that anything that breaks with this standard is somehow deviant. Barbara Klinger, in her excellent work on domestic

exhibition culture, has expressed her dissatisfaction with the term as well. For Klinger, to speak in terms of either “theatrical” or “nontheatrical” is to engage in a “value-laden dichotomy” that “presumes a kind of superior stability in theatrical exhibition.”⁸ The particular environmental traits of a movie theatre – darkened lights or projector beams for instance – have become established and accepted as the ideal set of viewing conditions, and as such, alternative venues unable to match these conditions are subsequently perceived as inferior. This perspective, Klinger argues, minimizes the tremendous variability that exists from one space to another. Although non-theatrical (home environments, in her case) and theatrical spaces certainly have unique characteristics as viewing environments, they are not “radically discontinuous” and in fact their relationship is “richly and unavoidably interdependent.”⁹ Most importantly, Klinger reveals, framing exhibition activities within this dichotomy has historically led to a critical and scholarly neglect of non-theatrical environments and the cultural habits within them. Unquestionably, it is a term that requires some conceptual revision. My understanding of the term and all of its cultural baggage is fully in synch with Klinger’s critique. That being said, I nevertheless employ the term in this thesis for two simple reasons. The first reason is a simple lack of a sufficient replacement. The second reason is due to the historical reality that it is the term employed in the majority of the industrial discourse that forms the basis of much of my critique. I would seem unnecessarily confusing to employ a separate term than that found in the discourse with which I engage.

⁸ Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Establishing temporal boundaries for an historical project such as this can be an admittedly rather arbitrary process. Traveling, non-theatrical cinema in Canada stretches back to the introduction of the medium itself in the 1890s, and effectively drew upon a lineage of practice that included traveling carnivals, circuses and various other itinerant forms of entertainment. Alternatively, the practice is still very much in use to this day. An obvious starting point is the introduction of 16mm to the Canadian market in 1923, which served to catalyze a wave of non-theatrical screening initiatives. Prior to 16mm's introduction, however, traveling and non-theatrical forms of film exhibition employed a similar narrow gauge technology, the 28mm format. Although it was introduced years before, 28mm was formally adopted by the Society for Motion Picture Engineers in 1918 as a standard safety gauge, thus making it the preferred non-theatrical technology. The hostilities of World War I officially ceased that same year, and as such, this seems like the most appropriate starting point for this thesis. With the end of the war, the late 1910s witnessed a subsequent infusion of cultural activity on the home front resulting in part from the influx of returning soldiers and an emerging consumer economy. Also, as film historians have noticed, by 1917 the "transitional" stage of the cinema's evolution had more or less come to an end and what is commonly referred to as the "classical" period had begun.¹⁰ Besides changes in film forms and genres and the subsequent audience behavior that ensued at movie screenings, this shift was characterized by a transition from

¹⁰ Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, eds. *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). Keil, Stamp and the authors included in this collection collectively argue that the transitional era more or less spans the years 1908-1917. This period is defined by the end of the so-called "early cinema" stage, and a gradual move towards what would be known as the "classical" period, commencing in the later 1910s, when "the visual grammar and industrial structures" associated with that period began to take shape.

nickelodeons and other small-scale exhibition venues towards the establishment of much larger, permanent movie theatres. Given that much of this thesis is concerned with the conflicts in Canada between theatre owners and non-theatrical practitioners, the beginning of the classical period, when 35mm theatrical exhibition was clearly and securely established as the dominant standard in the industry, seems an entirely appropriate starting point. Although publications such as *Variety* and the *Moving Picture World* had existed in the United States for years, with the proliferation of movie theatres in this period came the rise of a trade press specific to Canada. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* was introduced in 1915, and by the end of the war it was clearly the dominant trade publication in the Canadian industry. It is a major source of research for this thesis, and so its emergence during this period is but one more reason for the starting point.

In terms of an end point for this thesis, there is a temptation to wind things up in 1939, the year that National Film Board of Canada came into existence. In the history of film in Canada, the NFB acts as somewhat of an albatross for scholars working in this field. It is such a central force not just in the motion-picture sphere in Canada, but in the overall cultural fabric of the country, that its presence tends to loom large in historical scholarship. It has been the subject of numerous monographs, as has the dominant figure behind its establishment, John Grierson.¹¹ And works not immediately concerned with the Film Board itself nevertheless use it as a reference point, such as Peter Morris's seminal *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian*

¹¹ C. Rodney James, *Film as National Art: National Film Board of Canada and the Film Board Idea* (New York: Arno Press, New York, 1977), D.B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1982), and Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988) are but a few of these titles.

Cinema, 1895-1939, which attempts to fill in the historical lacunae in the pre-Film Board years. Writes Morris in his preface,

It was popularly assumed that Canadian film began with the founding of the National Film Board of Canada in 1939, and that, if anything happened prior to this, it was neither interesting nor relevant.¹²

Embattled Shadows was motivated by a conscious effort to dismiss this myth. As important and groundbreaking as this work is, it is still anchored by the presence of the Film Board. In effect, it serves as a “pre-history” to the NFB, continuing in the tradition of viewing Canadian film history through the bifurcated lens of a pre-Film Board versus post-Film Board historical binary.

The National Film Board, as it turns out, is central in the history of small-gauge, traveling cinema in Canada as well, as detailed in Chapter Six. In this sense, conceivably it might make sense to end the thesis when the NFB comes into existence and introduces its massive circuit of itinerant cinema to the country. However, I felt it was more important to stress the continuity of cultural practice and avoid the omnipresent “pre” and “post” historical dichotomy that plagues much Canadian work in this field. This thesis is concerned with breaching this temporal divide, with critically examining how itinerant small-gauge film exhibition developed prior to the NFB, how it informed the Board’s activities, and in what forms the practice continued on once World War II was over. My concern is with examining the continuity of a certain screening practice, rooted in specific technologies and based around the

¹² Peter Morris. *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), ix.

concept of mobility, over a span of time, in which the intervention of the National Film Board is but one stop on a fascinating, albeit bumpy, road trip. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this thesis has its end point in the late 1940s, after the war has ended, when there was a mass return to peacetime civil life. The period of the late 1940s situates the project in a context in which the medium of television is poised for its grand entrance onto the Canadian cultural landscape. Given that a primary thematic concern here is with competition among media forms, and that theatrical exhibitors held 16mm exhibition as a legitimate technological threat, it seems only fitting to take the end of the 1940s as a temporal bookend, just a few years prior to the introduction of television, which would of course assume this role of a technological nemesis on a far larger scale.

A notable omission from this thesis, which merits a brief explanation, is the presence of the 8mm film gauge. Introduced for the amateur market in 1932, 8mm, unlike 16mm or 28mm, was not adopted as a widespread non-theatrical medium of exhibition, beyond private residential screenings. It was without question a popular tool among amateurs and later artists, but this thesis is largely concerned with the interventions of small-gauge technologies within the dominant industry, and 8mm's presence in this respect was far less felt than that of 16mm or 28mm. The history of 8mm production and exhibition in Canada is unquestionably a noble pursuit, and one in which insufficient research has so far been conducted, but it will remain outside of the boundaries of this particular project.

The first chapter following this introduction functions as a review of the literature relevant to the scholarly context and historical and theoretical arguments

found within this thesis. I begin with a brief overview of the academic terrain of cultural studies, and what bearing it has had on the discipline of film studies. Following this, I survey two separate bodies of literature that have emerged, or have been somehow shaped, by this encounter. The first is an engagement with concepts of the public sphere, following Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, and Nancy Fraser, and how these ideas have impacted the study of film and film culture. The second is a body of work that interrogates notions of state intervention and regulation of the cultural sphere, and is largely influenced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The subsequent sections of this chapter explore relevant strains of film and exhibition studies, with notable discussions concerning film history and modernity, theories of mobility and theories surrounding the urban/rural divide.

Chapter Two surveys the state of the Canadian film industry at the end of World War I and charts its progress into the decade of the 1920s. With the “golden age” of the itinerant exhibitor long gone, and larger elaborate permanent movie theatres clearly established as the dominant model for film exhibition, the non-theatrical exhibition of films began to expand. This chapter examines how smaller gauge film technology, initially 28mm and later 16mm, began to catalyze film-screening initiatives outside the boundaries of permanent theatres. Originally developed as a technology for amateur employment, various institutional forces, attracted by its potential for safety and increased portability, began appropriating 16mm for educational and instructional means and exhibiting films through traveling circuits. Concurrently, this chapter examines the rise of exhibitor associations in

Canada, which came together over shared concerns in the industry, particularly competitive concerns from carnivals and circuses. As Canadian film history is more often than not intimately bound up with activities in the United States, it perhaps comes as no surprise that, as revealed in this chapter, the major impetus towards opposing non-theatrical exhibition stems from an initial concern in the American industry.

In Chapter Three, we begin to see the reactions of the film industry to the rising profile of non-theatrical 16mm exhibition, both by private exhibitors but particularly by cultural and educational organizations. It is argued that during the 1930s, 16mm technology began to be less associated with amateur filmmaking and exhibition, and increasingly became identified instead as a medium of education. As 16mm employment spread, governments responded with a corresponding increase in censorship and regulatory measures. By the final years of the decade, concerned with the threat of competition, and buoyed by a vocal trade press, independent theatrical exhibitors set the stage for a vigorous campaign against itinerant small-gauge exhibition. This campaign was primarily waged during the calendar year of 1938 and forms the basis of study in Chapter Four. What is notable about this brewing conflict is that it concerned marginal groups in the industry – the independently run movie theatres and the small-scale itinerant 16mm exhibitors. Instead of rallying against the larger, more powerful vertically integrated forces in the industry, the exhibitors, perhaps dismayed by the failure of the combine investigations earlier in the decade that was ultimately unable to bring about any meaningful structural change in the industry, instead focused their attention on what was perhaps seen as a more

“winnable” battle against the decentralized, small-gauge operators. This chapter argues that the resulting conflict, much of it rhetorical, typified by the editorials of Ray Lewis, crystallized emerging conceptions regarding technology, screening environment and film content.

Chapter Five begins on the heels of that major offensive launched against 16mm exhibitors, and yet as revealed in this chapter, with Canada’s entry into the war and the creation of the National Film Board, hostilities against 16mm itinerant operations faded somewhat into the background, and a limited, tacit acceptance of the medium’s place within the industry became apparent. Provinces began reacting to changes in the industry, and additional legislation governing 16mm exhibition was gradually introduced, thereby further entrenching it in the cultural infrastructure. Distribution companies specializing in 16mm emerged and began supplying the growing number of itinerant and non-theatrical exhibitors. This chapter elaborates on the role 16mm played in the war effort, when it was made the gauge of choice to service the nation’s troops. Ultimately, this chapter posits that 16mm’s emerging acceptance was in no small part related to this crucial role it played, and the production spurred by the war through distribution deals with Hollywood producers, in turn fed into the civilian market for non-theatrical 16mm exhibition. This series of events effectively set the table for the National Film Board’s campaign of traveling cinemas, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Six introduces the reader to these traveling circuits that the NFB organized in 1942, and situates the campaign against the backdrop of World War II. Under the leadership of John Grierson, Donald Buchanan drew up the blueprint for

the program based on previous experiments both in Canada and abroad. Drawing largely from the writings of former NFB employees and various government records, this chapter highlights the continuity of cultural practice between pre-war 16mm exhibition and the elaborate system introduced by the Board.

Chapter Seven charts the progress of 16mm employment and non-theatrical screening practices in the immediate post-war period. It is argued here that 16mm exhibition emerged from the war stronger than ever. The NFB's circuits had built upon and expanded the huge audience base for traveling cinema, and there were vastly increased numbers of film titles now available, due to both the Board's production activities and the arrangements made with the Hollywood studios during the war. With peacetime came the return of thousands of soldiers contributing to both audience numbers and to the profession of film exhibition itself. This chapter argues that these developments, coupled with a growing realization that 16mm did not truly represent the threat it perhaps once was perceived to pose, led to a tacit acceptance of the technology in the industry, where it would enjoy a continued, though marginal and peripheral, presence in certain cultural milieus of film exhibition.

What follows, then, is a critical examination of the symbiotically related mechanisms of 16mm technology and itinerant film exhibition in Canada, from the immediate post WWI period through until the end of the 1940s. The cultural practice of traveling exhibition has often been considered a relic of the "early cinema" era, the first decade of the medium's development. It is a practice that was generally assumed to have long since perished in Canada, only to have been resuscitated in 1942 by the National Film Board. This thesis argues instead that itinerant film exhibition never

actually ceased to exist in Canada, and that it in fact persisted, with varying degrees of frequency, throughout the interwar period, effectively demonstrating a continuity of screen practice that is generally not widely acknowledged. Concurrent to this, I argue that 16mm technology, although introduced as a medium for amateur employment and for exhibition in the domestic space, quickly charted an additional evolutionary tract, which in turn facilitated these numerous and varied traveling-cinema operations. The succeeding chapters will indicate that this was not an historical development that was by any means predetermined, nor was it met with enthusiasm by all sectors of the film industry. Discursive practices circulated within the industry and regulatory actions implemented by various levels of government attempted both to frame and to contain the technology and its employment in non-theatrical arenas, but due to this involvement, they also served to legitimize and normalize them. The resulting narrative is at heart, therefore, essentially one of both technological indeterminacy and cultural continuity. Before we turn to this history however, the following chapter will outline the dominant streams of scholarly work in which this thesis seeks to intervene.

Chapter One

Cultural Studies, Film Exhibition and Traveling Cinema

It has perhaps become a cliché to say that film studies as a discipline marginalizes issues of exhibition and social context at the expense of aesthetic considerations and interpretations. In no small part stemming from its historical connection to English Literature and language departments, “traditional” film studies pursuits have often followed in a literary tradition, emphasizing such approaches as psychoanalysis, auteur theory and genre theory, among a litany of others. Unquestionably, the formal analysis of cinema with a focus on the purely textual and aesthetic elements of film has historically been the dominant strain in the discipline. In a 2003 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Paul S. Moore offers an explanation as to why histories of exhibition have not been treated as central to film studies. Many film scholars, Moore explains, are reluctant to consider film as a commercial or industrial product, preferring instead the art of aesthetic interpretations. Although this assumes that histories of exhibition are necessarily rooted in economic analysis, which is by no means always the case, it nevertheless provides a cogent reasoning for film studies’ apparent historical blind spot. Yet it would be disingenuous to suggest that the history of film exhibition persists as an undeveloped field, as scholarly work over the past 20 years has revealed considerable evidence to the contrary. Taken as a whole, this literature represents a burgeoning subfield of historical film studies that is directly concerned with the contextual environments of film viewing and its affiliated discourses, technologies and practices. It is to this corpus of scholarly work that this thesis seeks to make its primary contribution, in both its national (Canadian) and international manifestations. The interest beyond the textual attributes of film, in

which this branch of scholarly inquiry is invested, clearly has its roots – whether explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously – in the academic tradition of cultural studies. In what follows, I shall provide a brief overview of the intersection between the domains of cultural studies and film studies. The rich potential enabled by this engagement in no small part created a basis for the field of exhibition studies, which I shall subsequently address.

As a field of study, cultural studies draws from a wide range of disciplinary interests and methodologies and tends to concern itself with critical examinations of cultural life (with particular attention towards traditionally neglected areas), and its place within the larger social and political formations. The genesis of the field can be traced to the establishment of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the early 1960s, based primarily on the work of individuals such as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. As an interdisciplinary field, cultural studies work tends to balance the relative weight of both text and context, rather than privileging one over the other, as is the case with certain traditional disciplines. In the introduction to their 2001 edited collection *Keyframes*, Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejou understand the field as

...a set of engagements with an ongoing set of animating questions: questions about the social distribution of power, forms of social difference, theorizations about the relations between individuals (“subjects”) and their social networks, and the role that mass-disseminated commodities and representations play in sustaining the social formations that

have arisen in the expansion of the industries that produce popular culture and its ideologies.¹

The essays contained in *Keyframes* are concerned with the impact of cultural studies on the more traditional field of film studies: how “the increased presence of one form of intellectual inquiry, cultural studies, has helped to transform a particular other field, that of the study of the moving image.”² The cinema, as a widely popular system of mass communication has understandably drawn the attention of cultural studies practitioners. And likewise have a growing number of film scholars branched out beyond the literary and aesthetic boundaries of their discipline to incorporate the critical theory and methodologies that cultural studies champions.

This trend, however, is not happening quickly enough, argues Toby Miller in his contribution to the collection. Miller claims that film studies as a discipline, as it is practiced in the United States and the United Kingdom, is far too insular in its scholarly behaviour and that it effectively “doesn’t matter” outside the walls of its disciplinary boundaries.³ Miller perceives a genuine lack of relevance of the majority of film studies’ output, and a lack of engagement with other disciplines or public and popular debates about the cinema. What is required, in his view, is a willingness to embrace other methods and approaches, and to effectively “break up” the divide between the analysis of text and context. He sees the contributions of cultural history and cultural-policy studies as a “significant intellectual innovation” that should serve as an illuminating model:

¹Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo eds., *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 1.

²Ibid., 2.

³Toby Miller, “Cinema Studies Doesn’t Matter; or, I Know What You Did Last Semester” in Tinkcom and Villarejo, 303.

These areas have witnessed a radical historicization of context, such that the analysis of textual properties and spectatorial processes must now be supplemented by an account of *occasionality* that details the conditions under which a text is made, circulated, received, interpreted, and criticized, taking seriously the conditions of existence of cultural production.⁴

By occasionality, Miller refers to “the who, what, when and how of screen culture.”⁵ His essay serves as a call-to-arms for the discipline of film studies that, in his view, is quickly fading away into irrelevancy.

Miriam Hansen’s *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* demonstrates the type of rigorous scholarly work Miller is likely to champion. Drawing from critical-theory standards such as Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas, and demonstrating the importance of textual/contextual analytical balance, *Babel and Babylon* is an excellent example of critical cultural analysis dealing with early film history.⁶ It provides a fascinating model for the study of the interplay between screening environment and filmic content in the early years of cinema. Hansen adopts what essentially amounts to a dichotomous approach to her understanding of the early years of cinema, roughly the period from the 1890s through the 1920s. A central tenet of *Babel and Babylon* is that a paradigm shift occurred in cinema between the years 1907 and 1917. More specifically, this period

⁴ Ibid., 306.

⁵ Ibid., 307.

⁶ Miriam Hansen. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

saw a change in the conception of the term “spectator,” a change that Hansen argues was intricately connected with the shift from early cinema to classical cinema. This transition that Hansen describes implies two distinctly separate modes of film spectatorship associated with two specific types of films. The earliest films and those of the Nickelodeon period were, as she describes, “polyphonic” in that they offered a plurality of genres, viewpoints, narrative structures (if at all), moralities etc. And this heterogeneity of film form and content translated into the subsequent form of audience behaviour that resulted. This early cinema-going experience was not a passive experience. Much to the contrary, it was fundamentally interactive. “Spectating,” as she suggests, was but one of the numerous activities one did at an early film-screening event. Audiences listened, engaged, participated, sang, discussed and basically interacted with one another in what she describes as an “open public sphere.”

The experience of these early screenings was a communal and participatory one, not merely commercial and exploitative. The “variety format,” in which films were framed with any number of other performances, served other functions as well. As Hansen has noticed, “the alternation between films and non-filmic acts preserved a perceptual continuum between fictional space and theatre space.”⁷ This served to prevent any prolonged absorption into the fictional world of the film, thus allowing for a more “alert” form of spectatorship as opposed to one of “escapism.” The non-filmic elements, such as music, performances, and lectures, all served to make the event distinctive from any other, lending it an immediacy and singularity of a “one-time performance.” A typical theatrical screening of a film is more or less the same

⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

experience no matter what theatre it is shown in. The distinctiveness of a variety format, however, implies that “the meanings transacted [are] contingent upon local conditions and constellations, leaving reception at the mercy of relatively unpredictable, aleatory processes.”⁸

The paradigm shift that Hansen refers to, however, comes to fruition with the transition towards the dominant “classical” narrative cinema, which was more or less fully developed by 1917. As the dominant Hollywood narrative entrenched itself, Hansen argues that it was followed by a gradual implementation of what she calls the “rule of silence.” This ultimately functioned, she relates, as a tool of class and ethnic segregation, imposed by the middle and upper classes:

[It] not only imposed a middle-class standard of spectatorship; by suppressing a locally and regionally specific linguistic environment – foreign languages, accents, dialects – it contributed to the cultural homogenization of a mass audience.⁹

The greater the homogeneity and control over an audience, the greater the amount of control that can be exerted over that audience’s reception of information.

Hansen’s study is unquestionably of value for my purposes here, yet I do propose somewhat of a challenge to her historical narrative. First of all, the early-cinema mode of exhibition and spectatorship that she describes would frequently find its ultimate realization in the traveling cinema shows, even after the end of the so-called “early cinema period” and well into the more rigid classical narrative period.

⁸ Ibid., 93-94.

⁹ Ibid., 95.

While the variety format was in large part phased out from theatrical exhibition, save for certain elements such as the lecturer, and for a certain resurgence during the early sound period, it was very much preserved in the non-theatrical, traveling circuits.

Although it is true that the “golden era” of the traveling showman is largely considered to have died as the trend in exhibition shifted towards larger permanent theatres, in Canada at least, this thesis will demonstrate that it was very much maintained by both institutional organizations such as the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau and the Extension Department at the University of Alberta, and later in the 1920s and 1930s by independent exhibitors catalyzed by the introduction of portable 16mm technology.

Furthermore, while discussions of technology are perhaps not necessarily foregrounded in her writing, Hansen demonstrates a profound understanding of the intricate relationships between filmic content, screening environment, and spectatorial response. At the heart of this discussion is an engagement with Jürgen Habermas and his concept of a public sphere, as well as the subsequent revisions of that notion by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt. She adopts the public sphere as a framework for her understanding of the transformations in her history of cinema. For Hansen, the public sphere offers a “theoretical matrix” of varying levels of inquiry and methodology that helps fill in the holes left by traditional film theory and film history.¹⁰

As a concept, the public sphere has undergone a number of theoretical challenges and conceptual revisions. Habermas’s original understanding of the term was specifically tied to eighteenth-century London bourgeois coffee-house culture,

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

where private individuals could ostensibly come together with the intent of open public debate and the formulation of popular consensus.¹¹ The concept has been reconstituted and rethought by a myriad of scholars, but perhaps most notably by Negt and Kluge, and later by Nancy Fraser. Dismayed by the elitist, class-based concept the term implied, Negt and Kluge recast the public sphere as an oppositional model, rooted more squarely as proletarian in orientation rather than bourgeois.¹² This model sought to loosen the constraints of the public sphere, and allow for a multitude of voices and experiences. In a similar vein, Fraser criticized Habermas's model for its fundamental exclusivity, despite its rhetoric of openness and inclusivity.¹³ Rather than emphasizing one dominant, monolithic public sphere, Fraser championed instead a series of "subaltern counterpublics," where marginal groups and voices could formulate their own sense of public opinion, as a part of a greater whole.

Similar to Hansen, Scott MacKenzie employs the framework of the public sphere for his historical examination of the cinema in Québec. MacKenzie's central argument is that the cinema in Québec from its very origins has opened up "new discursive spaces," counter-hegemonic public spheres in effect, that have provided the population with platforms for resistance and the formation of a national consciousness. The cinema, he explains, "became a place to gather, share, debate,

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

¹² Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *The Public Sphere and Experience*, trans. P. Labanyi, J.O. Daniel and A. Oksiloff. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹³ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in C. Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 109-142.

and discuss images and experiences.”¹⁴ As such, Mackenzie -- and Hansen too for that matter -- have lofty expectations of what cinema can achieve as a political force. Following the work of these two, certain elements of a public sphere could be said to emerge in the collective whole of the non-theatrical screening initiatives I describe in this thesis, though not strictly in the Habermasian sense. For one, Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere necessitated a clear separation from the activities of the government, yet much of my concern here is with activities that were in fact, in some capacity, state ventures. Secondly, for Habermas, a distinctly political angle was crucial to the formulation of the public sphere. While there were certainly political elements to many of the initiatives I describe, they are too varied and diffuse in nature to attempt to ascribe an overarching politically motivated sense of public-sphere formation, unlike MacKenzie’s claims about the role of cinema in bringing about a collective national consciousness. Lastly, on a very basic level, Habermas saw an erosion in the public sphere with the rise of the mass media. Given the cinema’s prominence as a major part of the mass media, this would seem an immediate disqualifier. The models offered by Fraser and Negt and Kluge seem altogether more fitting for my purposes here, in that they allow for a multiplicity of publics and motivations. Yet whatever public-sphere activity we can discern, inevitably at some level, it was met with varying forms of governmental response, typically under the mantle of regulation.

The issue of state governance and regulation in the field of culture in general, and cinema in particular, represents a considerable subfield of cultural studies. Much

¹⁴ Scott MacKenzie. *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and the Public Sphere* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3.

of this literature orients itself around the writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Lee Grieveson's *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth Century America* is an example of such an application of Foucault's ideas concerning power and how it is employed in the cultural realm by the state and those in positions of authority.¹⁵ Grieveson is concerned with transformations in the American film industry during the so-called "transitional period," roughly 1907-1915. It is a richly detailed historical and theoretical project that seeks to map out the interactions between the discourses and practices of both regulatory authorities and the prominent forces in the industry. Over a series of case studies from this historical period, Grieveson traces the shift from a quite literal "policing" of the cinema during the early days of the nickelodeon, through to the more symbolic "policing" that was instituted in the form of regulation and censorship. Aside from the central themes of cultural governance, informed by Foucault, Grieveson's work has four additional points of interest for this thesis. First is his concern with the way in which discourses about film and film exhibition, emanating from both cultural authorities and the industry itself, serve, in effect, to *shape* the actual development of that industry. Secondly, Grieveson demonstrates a keen interest in the effect of regulatory practices upon not only films themselves, in the form of censorship, but also the actual environments in which these films were exhibited, namely nickelodeon theatres. Thirdly, the issue of mobility, which is perhaps not quite a primary concern in his study, is however of vital interest for this thesis. Grieveson undertakes an understanding of mobility that is essentially concerned with the distribution of film

¹⁵ Lee Grieveson. *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

across state and national boundaries, and the problems that arise from subsequent attempts to regulate this process. Finally, his work offers profound insights into the discursive tendencies that attempt to articulate the purposes and functions of the cinema along a binary system comprised of “education” on one hand and “entertainment” on the other. Grieveson details how specific segments of both the industry and the regulatory infrastructure attempted to define the “essence of cinema” within this reductive framework.

Grieveson’s work, however seminal, is but one recent example of scholarship in film and cultural studies that seeks to examine issues of regulation through a lens offered by Foucault. The concept of “governmentality” is perhaps that which is taken up most commonly among this branch of scholarship. Broadly speaking, this concept is often defined as “the art of government.” It refers to the practices and discourses through which governments operate, in order to foster a citizenry that will best fulfill the agenda of the state, or the policies of that government. Particularly prominent in this field, although not concerned with cinema *per se*, is Tony Bennett’s work on the cultural institution of the museum. Bennett’s work traces the evolution of the museum as a tool of governance, employed to regulate the social behaviour of the populace.¹⁶ In film-studies scholarship in Canada, the work of two individuals stands out. Michael Dorland’s edited collection *The Cultural Industries in Canada* and his book *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* both reveal an interest in government intervention and regulation in the affairs of the film

¹⁶ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

industry from a decidedly Foucauldian bent.¹⁷ More recently, Zoë Druick's *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board*, looks to Foucault's notion of governmentality as an organizing principle in her institutional analysis of one of Canada's most-storied governmental entities.¹⁸ For Dorland, the presence and function of discourse is paramount. Much more than just "talk," Dorland reveals that the parallel, yet often competing and contradictory, discourses of independent producers and of state agencies worked to effectively shape the field of governmental policy, and ultimately led to the establishment of the industry today, as we know it. For Druick, the national project of the NFB is interpreted fundamentally as an exercise in governmentality. Druick argues that the government's involvement in filmmaking through the Film Board is tied to an interest in population management, and that documentary film has played a vital role in the formation of national citizenship.

In the pages that follow, I describe how state intervention in the regulation of traveling cinema and 16mm technology consistently came about in reaction to pressure from market and non-governmental sources, rather from internal motivations. Accordingly, I argue that governmentality is not always the ideal framework for understanding the historical developments discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, it is indeed my intention to situate this work within this burgeoning field of work on cinema and cultural regulation and policy, both in the Canadian context and otherwise. Dorland's emphasis on the importance of discourse in directly

¹⁷ Michael Dorland, *The Cultural Industries in Canada: Problems, Policies and Prospects* (Toronto: J. Lorimer & Co., 1996) and *So Close to the State/s: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

shaping policy and conventions is particularly pertinent. Much of what follows employs discourse analysis to interpret motivations and intentions from various forces in both the government and the industry. My critique is at times rhetorical, particularly for the writings in the trade press, but equally important is an examination of how the competing discourses served to effectively shape the industry's activities.

The writings of Foucault, especially with regards to discourses, practices and the shaping of history, as it turns out, have informed some of the scholarly material related to amateur and narrow-gauge filmmaking, such as Patricia Zimmerman's *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Filmmaking*.¹⁹ Zimmerman's work traces the development and history of amateur filmmaking in America throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Her interest is clearly rooted in the discursive practices that helped shape what was understood by the term "amateur film," and less so with an engagement with specific amateur film texts. As such, it serves as a useful model for the intentions of this thesis. Traveling and non-theatrical film practices, specifically those employing 16mm film, frequently found themselves at the center of discursive debates concerning their supposed functions and places in the cultural fabric of society. For Zimmerman, industrial discourses about amateur filmmaking consistently constituted it as a mere "hobby" intended for home use, and as such denied it a progressive potential for posing a challenge to the dominant systems of production, distribution and exhibition. Sixteen millimetre employment in non-theatrical situations by both educationalist and entertainment organizations and individuals likewise had, as this thesis will demonstrate, similar intents to work

¹⁹ Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).

within an alternative structure. However, as it functioned in Zimmerman's work, the industrial discourse and that of relevant cultural authorities frequently served to constrain the employment of 16mm in areas not perceived as desirable.

Narrow-gauge film technology and its associated practices have unquestionably been marginalized within the larger field of historical film studies, but nevertheless certain key publications beyond Zimmerman's vital work exist. Alan Katelle's detailed historical book *Home Movies*, complements Zimmerman's work in its study of the home-movie industry.²⁰ While substantially less theorized than *Reel Families*, Katelle's book compensates for this shortcoming with its meticulous attention to historical detail and its technical discussion of film gauges designed for amateur usage. Anthony Slide's *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film* is so far the definitive study on that particular topic.²¹ It is as well not an overly theoretical project, but like Katelle's work, provides crucial historical detail. Charles Tepperman has written valuable articles relating to early governmental and institutional usage of narrow-gauge technology for educational purposes, and his recent doctoral research seeks to contribute to the growing body of work on amateur filmmaking.²² Additionally, two recent special editions of *Film History*, the first edited by Melinda Stone and Dan Streible in 2003 and the second by Streible, Martina Roepke and Anke Mebold in 2007, highlight the importance of non-theatrical

²⁰ Alan Katelle, *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry, 1897-1979*, (Nashua: Transition Publishing, 2000).

²¹ Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992).

²² Charles Tepperman, "Digging the Finest Potatoes from their Acre: Government Film Exhibition in Rural Ontario," in *Beyond the Bowerly: The Cinema and Mass Entertainment in Small-Town America from its Origins Through the Multiplex*, Kathryn Fuller and George Potamianos, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Anke Mebold and Charles Tepperman, "Resurrecting the Lost History of 28mm Film in North America," *Film History*, Vol.15:2, (2003): 137-151.

film exhibition and small-gauge film technology to the study of the cinema's history.²³

What many of the preceding authors share is an interest in the practices, technologies, discourses and environments of film exhibition, as opposed to the specific, localized aesthetic interpretations of motion-picture art. This is an academic interest pursued by an increasing number of scholars, and could be loosely defined under the rubric of "exhibition studies." Although interest in such affairs is hardly a new phenomenon -- the concern can be traced back to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer²⁴ -- it is only more recently that it has been understood and recognized as a coherent field of study, perhaps most notably with the publication of Ina Rae Hark's 2002 edited collection *Exhibition: The Film Reader*.²⁵ This by no means marked the genesis of the field, but rather can be seen to represent an institutionalized acknowledgement within academia. Exhibition, in the context of the collection, is understood as encompassing "all the practices that come together at a given time and place to enable viewers to watch a film."²⁶ The essays included span the past twenty-five years of writing on the subject and, as Hark explains in the introduction, exemplify the three key facets that exhibition studies entail. On a very basic level, studying exhibition is about unveiling and charting the plurality of venues and environments in which film exhibition occurs. Much of the work in this strain of

²³ Melinda Stone and Dan Streible, "Introduction: Small-Gauge and Amateur Film," *Film History* Vol.15, Issue 2 (2003): 123-126 and Anke Mebold, Martina Roepke and Dan Streible, "Introduction: Non-theatrical Film," *Film History*, Vol.19 Issue 4, (2007): 339-342.

²⁴ See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 4 1938-1940*, Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003:1939), 251-283 and Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces." *New German Critique*, No. 40, (1987:1926): 91-96.

²⁵ Ina Rae Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

research has to do with challenging the “master narrative” of the evolution of film exhibition, which assumes a linear chronological progression from the earliest types of venues, such as vaudeville houses and nickelodeons, through the stages of movie houses, drive-ins and finally the megaplexes that seem to dominate our current cultural landscape. Scholars interested in exhibition, such as those featured in the collection, are careful to uncover the problems inherent in this line of thinking, and to pay attention to the numerous heterogeneous forms of film-screening activity that may run contrary to the dominant strain of each given historical era. The second key area that makes up exhibition studies, as identified by Hark, is the acknowledgement of film’s place within society’s economic structure. Movie-going is big business, and studies of film exhibition should, at some level, be aware of the economic or industrial implications of the practice. The final facet of exhibition studies relates to the forms of spectatorship that are established during any given screening, and how environment works to structure audiences’ reception.²⁷ All of the essays in the collection work to address these issues in varying degrees, and it is the intention of this thesis to squarely engage with all three of them.

First of all, Hark herself highlights traveling cinema as an example of an exhibition activity that historically has run contrary to the master narrative of film history. While it was never dominant after its initial “golden era” prior to the nickelodeon boom of 1905-06, traveling cinema continued in a multitude of forms and locations over the subsequent decades. This thesis is concerned with detailing the range of these activities in Canada during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, and as such counters both the dominant master narrative Hark refers to, as well as an equivalent

²⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

one that views the itinerant operations of the National Film Board during WWII as the instigator of this practice (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, this thesis centers quite deliberately on the place of itinerant cinema and 16mm technology within the operations of the mainstream film industry in Canada, and as such is resolutely dedicated to the economic strain of exhibition studies. Finally, my intent here is to also address the cultural implications for the audiences of the screenings I describe. Researching audience reception to motion pictures is a difficult venture, especially when those audiences are historically based. Audiences leave little trace evidence of their actions, and historical reception studies are often speculative as a result. Here I draw particularly from Hansen's work, in attempting to reconstruct the environments of these various non-theatrical venues, and how environmental factors may have worked to structure the conditions of viewing. In this sense, I am engaging in reception analysis in that I seek to examine the specific contexts and social settings of film exhibition. I stop short of making claims about actual audience interpretation of movies, which veers too far into the realm of the speculative, but by focusing on the structural attributes of given screenings, such as exhibition venue, audience composition, and technological employment, we can nevertheless gain valuable knowledge into the cultural life of these communities of spectators.

In recent years we have seen a number of prominent publications, both monographs and edited collections, of research dedicated to exhibition studies. This scholarship is broad and diverse, spanning a range of geographical areas and temporal periods, but it remains at its core committed to both theorizing and chronicling the various practices, environments, audiences and discourses related to the exhibition of

film. Jon Lewis's and Eric Smoodin's recent collection *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method*, for instance, demonstrates such a preoccupation, as its title indicates.²⁸ Another collection, Charlie Keil's and Shelley Stamp's *America's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, shares similar thematic and methodological interests as Lewis's and Smoodin's work, but orients itself firmly in the so-called "transitional" period of American film history, roughly 1908-1917.²⁹ As such, it features the writings of some of the more prominent scholars working in this area, such as Tom Gunning, Ben Singer, Jacqueline Stewart and Lee Grieveson. Gregory A. Waller's *Moviewalking in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* provides a fascinating example of the innovative work being done on historical film exhibition.³⁰ Waller pairs up and intermingles primary-source material related to exhibition from the cinema's first century with original articles by leading scholars in the field. The book essentially works to argue for exhibition's primacy in the film industry by foregrounding it and privileging its status ahead of even movies themselves. Additionally, its inclusion of primary-resource documents functions as a pedagogical tool, with the aim of encouraging interest among students and young scholars.

Other prominent monographs dealing with specific areas of exhibition studies include Haidee Wasson's *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* and Barbara Klinger's *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New*

²⁸ Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin, eds. *Looking Past the Screen: American Film History and Method* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, eds. *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

³⁰ Gregory A. Waller, ed. *Moviewalking in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

Technologies, and the Home. Works such as these demonstrate on the one hand a firm commitment to the rigorous research and theoretical organization typical of the field, and on the other the widely divergent areas of study that the field subsumes. For Wasson, this means the introduction, circulation and exhibition of motion pictures within the operations of the MoMA.³¹ For Klinger, it is an interest in the evolving practices of film exhibition within the domestic space of the home.³² All of these works, despite their considerable differences in specific geographies, technologies and eras, are nevertheless involved in a common project, with similar theoretical orientations and scholarly intents.

Within this field of exhibition studies, there is a discernible subgenre of work dedicated more specifically to the practice of itinerant cinema. This body of literature is typically less theoretical in orientation, and would appear to borrow more from a straightforward historical tradition, unlike the work previously cited which tends to be informed by such fields as cultural studies, communication studies and film studies. Perhaps the most notable piece of scholarly writing in this area is Charles Musser's and Carol Nelson's work on Lyman Howe, the preeminent itinerant showman in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century.³³ The book, *High Class Moving Pictures: Lyman Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition*, is easily the most comprehensive work on itinerant cinema in the early years of its operation. Although they take the figure of Lyman Howe as their centering point,

³¹ Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³² Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

³³ Charles Musser and Carol Nelson. *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

perhaps more importantly Nelson and Musser make good on the second half of the subtitle, providing a thorough, detailed study of this particular field of film history. That the history that they begin to recount is described in the title as “Forgotten” is a telling indication of the import film historians previously put upon traveling cinema up until the book’s publication. One of Musser’s and Nelson’s important observations is that the cultural practice of itinerant film exhibition did not in fact die off with the surge of nickelodeon openings in the mid-1900s, as was decidedly announced by the trade press at the time.³⁴ While the nickelodeon boom admittedly impacted the audience base for traveling exhibitors rather substantially, and many indeed retired from the road to establish theatres or work in other areas of the industry, Musser and Nelson clarify that this was by no means the case across the board. In fact, they reveal that a modest revival of the practice occurred during the years 1911-1915, fueled largely by the automobile, which increased the mobility of exhibitors previously limited to rail travel. Although ignored by the trade press, traveling exhibitors carved out niches for themselves and continued to operate throughout the 1910s and 1920s, operating on the “fringe or completely outside the Hollywood system.”³⁵

Another American scholar interested in traveling exhibition is Mark Swartz, who in separate articles has examined both film exhibition on fairgrounds during the period 1895-1914 and, later, traveling exhibition in North Carolina in the 1930s and 1940s, which was at the time one of the most undeveloped parts of the United

³⁴Ibid., Musser and Nelson cite the *Moving Picture World*’s declaration that in spring 1908 traveling exhibition had “dwindled to a minimum,” and that by fall, “the moving picture theatres and store shows have put the road man on the retired list.”

³⁵ Ibid., 273.

States.³⁶ In addition to *Moviegoing in America*, Gregory Waller's work on film culture in small-town America has similarly recognized the importance of traveling cinema. His 2004 article "Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition," similar to Musser and Nelson in approach, uses a study of a particular individual to explore larger socio-cultural practices, in this case the historical place of cinema-going in the southern United States beyond the confines of movie theatres. Like Swartz's, Waller's piece is notable also for covering the 1930s and 1940s, an era when traveling exhibition was largely considered to be non-existent. Waller differs from Swartz, however, in his assessment of the place of rural, traveling film exhibitors. Where Swartz assigns (in Waller's words) a "near mythic quality" to these individuals, which in effect places too heavy a symbolic burden on their shoulders, he instead sees these rural exhibitors as examples of "southern perseverance" in an era dominated by national and urban cultural forces.³⁷

Articles by Edward Lowry and Calvin Pryluck have equally sought to flesh out this missing portion of film history. Lowry's work brings into focus the career of Edwin J. Hadley, a former associate of Lyman Howe, who branched out around the turn of the century to start his own itinerant circuit. Hadley, Lowry reveals, specialized largely in travelogues, and serviced mostly rural America, in communities without established movie theatres.³⁸ Pryluck's study is less concerned with a specific projectionist, and focuses instead on what we can learn about traveling cinema during

³⁶ Mark E. Swartz, "An Overview of Cinema on the Fairgrounds" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* vol.15, no.3 (1987): 102-108 and "Moving Pictures on the Move," *Journal of American Culture* vol.9, no.3, (1987): 1-7.

³⁷ Gregory A. Waller, "Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition," *Film Quarterly*, Vol.57, no.2, (2003-2004): 12.

³⁸ Edward Lowry, "Edwin J. Hadley: Traveling Film Exhibitor," *Journal of the University Film Association*, vol.3 (Summer 1976): 5-12.

the late 1890s from the trade press. Focusing on such publications as the show-business paper the *New York Clipper* and the Sears-Roebuck catalog, Pryluck's study examines various advertisements for both projectors and personnel related to itinerant cinema.³⁹

In the Canadian context, most of the attention has been in Quebec, particularly the work of Germain Lacasse on the Hautrives and their touring *Historiographe* and Pierre Véronneau and his writings concerning traveling film culture in the pre-World War I period.⁴⁰ Viscount Henry de Grandsaignes d'Hautrives and his mother, Marie-Anne Tréourret de Kerstart were two French citizens who toured Canada and the United States exhibiting their "Historiographe" from 1897 until they returned to France in 1914. Much like their contemporary traveling exhibitors, they screened their films in theatres, schools and church basements in cities, villages and the remote countryside. As Lacasse explains, the Hautrives were pioneers in the field of film exhibition in Quebec, and mentored many of the individuals who would later become influential figures in the industry, such as Guillaume Bovin and Léo-Ernest Ouimet.⁴¹ In a similar vein, Véronneau's work, drawing from the archives of the Cinémathèque québécoise, examines the activities of key figures in the early years of itinerant exhibition in the province. Véronneau examines three separate itinerant operations in Quebec, all of which were active until the late 1930s or early 1940s. Wilfrid Picard

³⁹ Calvin Pryluck, "The Itinerant Movie Show and the Development of the Film Industry," *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, vol.35, no.4 (Fall 1983): 11-22.

⁴⁰ Germain Lacasse, *L'Historiographe : les débuts du spectacle cinématographique au Québec* (Montréal : Cinémathèque québécoise / Musée du cinéma, 1985); Pierre Véronneau, "The Creation of a Film Culture by Traveling Exhibitors in Rural Quebec Prior to World War I," *Film History* 6, (1994): 250-261, and Pierre Véronneau, "Cinéma ambulante et implantation urbaine: l'activité de William Shaw dans le contexte des Cantons-de-l'Est," *Cinémas*, vol.6, no.1, 47-80.

⁴¹ Germain Lacasse, "Cultural Amnesia and the Birth of film in Canada," *Cinema Canada*, no.108 (June 1984): 7.

began screening films peripatetically throughout villages north of Montreal in 1905, and continued doing so for three decades. Benjamin Paradis and his brother Jean-Baptiste, a priest, ran an operation called “Le Bon Cinéma” to promote education and religion. The brothers complemented their religious screenings with lectures and were known to change the intertitles to meet the desires of their particular audiences and to satisfy the Church. The third individual Véronneau examines is William Shaw, who began touring with motion pictures in 1903. Shaw’s screenings reached both French- and English-speaking audiences in farming communities throughout Quebec. Historical work on traveling cinema is considerably less developed in English Canada. Peter Morris’s seminal work *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1896-1939* dedicates a brief section to the topic but, aside from a few other assorted peripheral mentions, the topic of traveling cinema receives scant attention.⁴² *Embattled Shadows* is however a major reference point for this thesis, since it provides such a comprehensive study of the film industry in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century. Likewise, William J. Buxton’s edited collection for the *Loneragan Review*, “Canada’s Film Century: Traditions, Transitions, Transcendence,” while not directly concerned with itinerant cinema, provides an excellent survey of the cinema in Canada, in both historical and contemporary contexts.

What the majority of this scholarship dealing with itinerant cinema demonstrates, in both the Canadian and American contexts, is a tendency towards very narrowly focused studies of either specific geographical regions, or individual

⁴² Peter Morris. *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978).

exhibitors. My intention here is rather the opposite. While occasionally I provide detailed accounts of specific operations, or minor discussions of particular regions, my intentions clearly veer towards the macro over the micro. I am more interested in industry-wide trends, or the popular discourses regarding 16mm technology, for example, than the practices of specific itinerant exhibitors. As such, methodologically, whereas the majority of the studies I have cited are clearly based on the personal archival files of specific exhibitors, my research tends towards such evidence as trade-press articles and editorials, official documents and memoranda from exhibitors-associations and business correspondence from distributors. I intend to build upon the isolated studies that these authors have provided, and to paint a broader portrait of the industrial culture of 16mm, itinerant exhibition, specifically in the Canadian national context. An essential text for this purpose is Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry*.⁴³ Pendakur's work offers a history of the Canadian film industry based in political economy and charts the culture of dependence that has consistently plagued it. Given that I am fundamentally concerned with the tension between small-gauge non-theatrical cinema within the Canadian industry at large, *Canadian Dreams* is of critical, contextual importance for such an analysis.

Returning to the scholarship on itinerant cinema, what a great deal of this work stresses is the almost intrinsic link between this type of exhibition and the geo-cultural concept of the "rural." In his article on early traveling cinema, Pryluck comments on the implications of these trend towards "rurality":

⁴³ Pendakur, Manjunath. *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

Itinerant movie shows were principally a rural phenomenon, which raises questions about another truism about the early United States film audience as urban, proletarian and immigrant. There has been some recent discussion about the degree to which the audience was in fact proletarian and immigrant, yet none of these discussions question the characterization of movie going as a largely urban experience.⁴⁴

Along those lines, Pierre Véronneau adds

Even if there is little direct evidence, because we know that large numbers of projectors were sold in rural areas, we may state that itinerant movie shows constituted an important rural phenomenon that questions the domination of the urban interpretation of motion picture exhibition.⁴⁵

And although it is scholars of itinerant cinema who stress the links with the rural, important work has been done on the place of the movie theatre in non-urban environments. Notable here is the work of Kathryn Fuller, whose 1996 monograph *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* goes a long way to counteract the overwhelming trend towards city-based readings of film history.⁴⁶ Fuller argues that the movies were never the exclusive domain of urban dwellers, though the popular mythology of the medium tends to give that impression.

⁴⁴ Pryluck, 17.

⁴⁵ Véronneau, "The Creation of a Film Culture," 252.

⁴⁶ Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

Her work is of particular relevance given that, as she is quick to point out, during the first initial years of motion pictures, the American population was still largely non-urban in orientation. Movies were circulated, initially by itinerants, and later with the growth of small-town theatres, and they were enjoyed every bit as much by rural audiences as their urban counterparts.

And yet despite the commendable work by these scholars, the continued assumption of the cinema as an inherently urban technology persists. The roots of this tendency, I would argue, lie in the continued association of cinema with the concept of “modernity.” “Modernity” itself is a difficult term to pin down, as it used to describe a range of historical phenomena, ranging as far back as the seventeenth-century for some. But generally in the discourse of cultural critique it refers to the period beginning with the industrial revolution in the nineteenth-century and the subsequent trends towards urbanization that ensued. Strictly historically speaking, the cinema is a technology clearly rooted in what could be understood as modernity. As such, historians have frequently sought to understand the cultural implications of the medium within the framework and governing discourses of this period. Consider for instance the following passage from Leo Charney, author of *Empty Moments:*

Cinema, Modernity and Drift:

If we cannot understand the birth of cinema without the culture of modernity, we also cannot conceive modernity’s culture of moments, fragments and absent presents without

the intervention of cinema, which became a crucible and a memorial for modernity's diverse aspects.⁴⁷

James Lastra, in his work on early sound cinema is even more upfront about the importance of one to the other: "cinema is as unthinkable outside of modernity as modernity is unimaginable without the cinema."⁴⁸ Perhaps most exemplary, the edited collection *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* embodies this concern of film and cultural historians with the concept of modernity. This collection posits that not only is the cinema a thoroughly "modern" technology, but that modern culture was also thoroughly "cinematic" – before the invention of the medium itself. This is a claim that perhaps does not necessarily hold weight throughout the full body of the text, and "cinematic" is not necessarily the best term to describe a phenomenon that predates the medium itself. Nevertheless, even though many of the chapters do not even directly address the medium of film, it becomes clear that of all the fixtures of modernity, it is in fact the cinema that seems to epitomize the "period of its initial emergence."⁴⁹ As the opening introduction announces, cinema's development was in fact highly anticipated. And furthermore, in the opinion of the editors and collaborators, cinema must be understood as an essential component of the broad matrix that characterized modern life, encompassing transformations on the political, social, economic cultural levels.⁵⁰ The featured essays are organized around certain key themes in the culture of modernity to establish this loose ecology of modern life.

⁴⁷ Leo Charney. *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity and Drift* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998,) 7

⁴⁸ James Lastra. *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 4.

⁴⁹ Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds. "Introduction" *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

Essays by Tom Gunning, Ben Singer and Jonathan Crary, for instance, approach the issue of a newly mobilized human subject within the whirlwind culture of stimulation, and attempt to resolve issues pertaining to attention and perception. Others, such as Vanessa Schwartz, Mark B. Sandberg and Miriam Hansen, consider the issues of spectacle and spectatorship, and how new entertainments such as wax museums and public morgues affected the development of mass audiences. To paraphrase the editors, six general, overriding themes emerge out of the various essays, which, if not essential to, are at least largely characteristic of, the culture of modernity and its relation to cinema. First of all, the authors highlight the importance of a thoroughly urban culture with its accompanying forms of entertainment and leisure. The body is frequently seen as the central site of experience, but at the same time the authors stress the importance of a mass public or audience, to which individual response is subordinate. Furthermore, amidst this culture of distraction, the authors define an impetus towards attempts at fixing isolated moments. An increased blurring between the reality of the world and its subsequent representations is noted, and finally the essays collectively establish a significant rise in both commercial culture and consumer desire.⁵¹ In other words, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* goes a long way to establishing some key defining features of the culture of modernity.

However, the “modern life” with which this book (and most others dealing with cinema and modernity) is concerned is of a profoundly urban nature. Motion-picture technology, through the lens of modernity, is consistently posited as an essentially urban technology, that is, a medium almost exclusively of the city. To quote Tony

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

Fitzmaurice, co-editor of *Cinema and the City*: “It is, of course, a truism to point out that film is *the* urban cultural form *par excellence*.”⁵² This concept runs contrary to the historical reality that for decades itinerant cinema was for thousands of rural spectators the only practical or realistic means of witnessing motion pictures. It may very well be that “modernity cannot be conceived outside the context of the city”⁵³ as Schwartz and Charney would argue, but this is not to say elements of the modern city were not experienced elsewhere, beyond the boundaries of the metropolis. In fact, a good deal of the technology associated with modernity - trains, automobiles, telegraphs, telephones and radio for instance – all space-conquering media and forms of transportation, seem to embody at their core, in one way or another, a connection with the rural, the hinterland, and the geographic and cultural spaces beyond the city walls.

The essentially urban nature of the cinema was seemingly always implicit in historical work, if it was not always necessarily or deliberately spelled out. Certain publications such as *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* and *The Cinematic City* have taken as an objective to make this association explicit. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, in his introduction to *The Cinematic City* David B. Clarke actually feels that links between the cinema and the city *have not* been substantially explored:

...Despite the immediately perceptible cinematic qualities
that cities frequently seem to possess, and despite the

⁵² Tony Fitzmaurice, “Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context” in Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice eds. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 19.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 3.

uncredited role played by the city in so many films, relatively little theoretical attention has been directed towards understanding the relationship between urban and cinematic space....neither film nor urban studies has paid the warranted attention to their connection.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Clarke seems to feel that the “widespread *implicit* acceptance” of the importance of the city to cinema and vice versa has in fact worked against a more thorough understanding of its importance. At any rate, whether the links between city and cinema have or have not been adequately explored, it is safe to say that the associations between cinema and *country* (as opposed to the city) have only just begun to be explored.

This is another issue in which this thesis seeks to make an intervention.

Following the work of Waller, Fuller and others who have contributed to correcting the historical fallacy that equates the cinema as a medium exclusively of the city, I make the argument that itinerant cinema has historically played a valuable function in the cultural life of both rural and urban Canadians. In a country as geographically vast, and with an historically rurally-orientated population, itinerant cinema was a logical solution to the problem posed by disparity of theatre access. This is not to imply that my study is *exclusively* oriented towards the rural. Rather, I emphasize what essentially amounts to a cultural and technological dialogue between the rural and the urban. My framework on this issue is partly informed by Raymond Williams.

In his classic work *The Country and the City*, Williams reveals that concepts of city and country, the urban and the rural, are hardly fixed in their definitions, and

⁵⁴ David B. Clarke, ed. *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

instead function as dialectically related constructs. Although the historical development of both the city and the country has been incredibly complex, “certain images and associations persist.”⁵⁵ Williams’s study is above all an analysis of English literature and poetry that serves to chart the progression of the dialectically related representations of both town and country and is therefore of little direct relevance to this thesis. However, his central argument, which situates definitions of the urban and the rural as ultimately relative, unfixed and unstable by nature, is unquestionably of value. A traveling cinema by its very definition is (obviously) peripatetic and consistently finds itself in flux, between spaces. Historically, as an example, its primary sites of exhibition might have been remote, outlying communities, yet all film-exchange centres and equipment depots would have been located in urban centres, necessitating a constant mobility between the two. Each exhibition site would be different from the previous, encompassing a broad spectrum of potential locales, from the urban to the rustic country village. In other words, an ultimately infinite set of environmental permutations was possible. To view these activities in a strict binary sense, either thoroughly urban movie palace, or makeshift outdoor set up in a farmer’s field, is simply far too reductive an approach, which fails to account for the multitude of spaces in which film exhibition took place.

More recently, McLean, Landry, and Ward in their revisitation of Williams’s ideas, correctly remark that while he indeed saw the two concepts as dialectically related, he nevertheless saw them as a dichotomy, and they offer what they feel is perhaps a more apt approach: “What Williams figured as an analytical dichotomy can

⁵⁵ Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.

be more satisfactorily grasped as a series of *permeable boundaries*.”⁵⁶ Following Williams, James Carey would add that in North America, the situation is similar: the country and the city are alternatively praised and idealized, or shunned and derided, but nevertheless,

...however rendered, these images disconnect the city and the country; they place the city here and the country there, representing them as alternative rather than complementary and interdependent human terrains.⁵⁷

In keeping with the central themes of mobility and circulation, the movement of populations only serves to complicate the urban/rural divide. “Modern life” is often associated with urbanization – or in other words, an historical increase in the migration towards and subsequent densification of cities. But with modern life also came a resulting counter-flow of population movement. As McLean, Landry, and Ward notice, for some, “urbanity itself came to involve a rejection of life in the city for the country estate.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, as Stephen Kern notes in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, there was a growing awareness of technology’s effect on the blurring of the traditionally perceived boundaries between what was considered urban and rural. He cites a popular American writer from a 1906 article who observed how “telephones and telegraphs, rural free delivery, and improved roads were mixing city and country life. The expansion of the feeder railroad lines linking small towns was

⁵⁶ Gerald McLean, Donna Landry and Joseph P. Ward eds. *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

⁵⁷ James Carey “Innis ‘in’ Chicago: Hope as the Sire of Discovery” in Charles R. Acland and William J. Buxton eds. *Harold Innis in the New Century: Reflections and Refractions* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 85.

⁵⁸ McLean, Landry and Ward, 5.

making it possible for workers to commute from the suburbs.” He further predicted, Kern reveals, “that soon rural and urban types would ‘blend into the suburban’.”⁵⁹ This circulation of populations, and therefore movie audiences, between the urban and the rural combined with the mobility of the itinerant exhibitor between city and countryside provides the dynamic matrix that forms a backdrop for this thesis.

Mobility is clearly a crucial element to this discussion of the urban and the rural. Here again we turn to Williams, this time to his concept of “mobile privatization.” Williams uses this term to distinguish the wave of domestically oriented technological innovations from the 1920s onward, from the previous, public technological forms such as railways and city lighting. The increasingly “private” nature of modern society, Williams explains, “was at once an effective achievement and a defensive response, carried, as a consequence, an imperative need for new kinds of contact.”⁶⁰ This trend required a new form of communication, which these “mobile privatized” technologies, such as broadcasting, were able to provide. This concept has recently been taken up by communication scholars reacting to technological changes and domestic usage, particularly with regards to media such as the Internet and cell phones. The form of mobile cinema in which I am interested, however, would appear to operate on a model opposite to the one Williams describes. While 16mm and other small-gauge projectors were unquestionably introduced with the intent to facilitate domestic screenings – a move entirely in keeping with Williams’s arguments - this mobility also facilitated the practice of traveling cinema,

⁵⁹ Frank T. Carlton, “Urban and Rural Life,” *The Popular Science Monthly*. March 1906: 260, cited in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 209-210.

⁶⁰ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974), 26-27.

which subsequently discouraged insular, privatized activity, in favour of facilitating open, communal, even “public” cultural activity.

Following Williams, the concept of mobility is frequently explored in the literature of cinema and modernity discussed earlier. Prominent here is the work of Anne Friedberg, whose work is in no small part responsible for the widespread turn to modernity as a locus of research for the cinema. In her 1993 work *Window Shopping*, as part of her discussion on mobility, she problematizes the tendencies of scholarly work that purports to analyze the cinema through a context of modernity:

Because the invention of the cinema was coincident with the urban and cultural changes that marked modernity, the cinema has been commonly thought of as a “modern” apparatus. And yet most work on cinema and modernism retreats from theorizing modernity itself, leaving the relation between modernity and cinematic modernism ambiguous at best. Cinematic modernism has been most frequently described in analogy to the aesthetic challenges to the mimetic mandate of representation in painterly modernism or literary modernism.⁶¹

In 1993, this was likely a valid criticism. However, the subsequent work of Schwarz, Charney et al. has since seemingly emerged as a response to Friedberg’s critique, and the result has been a more thoroughly theorized body of work concerning cinema and its place within modernity. Central to Friedberg’s contribution to the study of cinema

⁶¹ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 163.

and modernity is the concept of what she refers to as the “mobilized virtual gaze” in society.⁶² Whereas a nineteenth-century observer, or a *flâneur*, may have had the luxury of mobility, it was nevertheless a purely spatial mobility. Cinema’s innovation, Friedberg reveals, was a synthesis of the “virtual gaze” provided by technologies such as photography, with a form of virtual mobility. This virtual mobility provided by the cinema was not only spatial in nature, but temporal as well.⁶³

Extending from their discussions of cinema and modernity, both Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz have taken up the concept of mobility in examinations of popular entertainments within modern culture.⁶⁴ Charney’s peculiar but fascinating work *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity and Drift* examines the concept of mobility within modernity, and finds that the viewer’s mobility was frequently interwoven into popular entertainment.⁶⁵ He links this observation to Schwartz’s examination of other turn-of-the-century popular entertainments such as museums, panoramas and public morgues, all of which stressed the mobility of the viewer:

These phenomena resituate the origins of cinema as a result not simply of technological advancements and narrative precursors but of a wider momentary culture of movement, spectatorship, and the re-presentation of reality.

...With the mobilization of the body came the parallel yet paradoxical effort to deregulate that mobility, to channel

⁶² Ibid., 4.

⁶³ Ibid, 38.

⁶⁴ Charney, *Empty Moments* and Charney and Schwartz eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*.

⁶⁵ Charney, *Empty Moments*, 70.

attention and structure the subject's potentially anarchic participation.⁶⁶

Here the emphasis is on the mobility of the viewer rather than of the attraction itself. Charney contrasts two forms of attraction that are precursors to cinema: circuses and amusement parks. Circuses operate on a model of a fixed viewer and a mobile spectacle, while conversely an amusement park functions through a fixed spectacle, but a mobile viewer.⁶⁷ In this sense, while a nickelodeon or a larger permanent theatre, particularly in the early years of the medium, might adhere to a model more similar to that of an amusement park, where the cinema screen is fixed and viewers are free to come and go, an itinerant cinematic apparatus might appear to more closely follow the model of a circus. The spectacle itself is mobile and the spectator is likely to remain fixed (given that in most rural environments, there would not be the competing attractions or other reasons for viewers to come and go at will).

Friedberg, Charney and Schwartz are far from alone in their associations between cinema and mobility. As Mark Shiel rightly notes, thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Jean Baudrillard have recognized and observed "the curious and telling correlation between the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the city and the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the cinema."⁶⁸ In a sense, the cinema's mobility is in fact its essential defining feature (at least at the turn of the century, before the introduction of sound). Many discussions of cinematic mobility, however, Friedberg's work included, are concerned with an essentially diegetic mobility, be it spatial or temporal. The concern here is with what appears within the frame of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁸ Mark Shiel, "Cinema and the City in History and Theory," in Shiel and Fitzmaurice, eds., 1.

screen itself: the specific animation of the subjects on celluloid and its ability to negotiate both time and space.

Alternatively, the concept of mobility is used to situate the technology of cinema within a fast-paced modern environment. Here motion picture technology is situated as a static fixture, amidst a culture of mobility. The speedy urban environment of modernity creates increasingly mobile audiences –“*flâneurs*,” to borrow an oft-cited term - who come and go from attraction to attraction, of which the cinema is but one of modernity’s diverse offerings. The term *flâneur* stems largely from accounts of nineteenth-century social behaviour (particularly in Paris) and was employed by Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project*. For Friedberg, the *flâneur* represents “that fundamental paradigm of the subject in modernity” and draws on the concept to, in her words, “trace changes in representation and the aesthetic experience.”⁶⁹ The *flâneur* is exclusively a male and thoroughly urban character. This term is highly gendered, and is reconfigured by Friedberg into the development of the *flâneuse*, the *flâneur*’s female counterpart, who came to being with the rise of shopping and growing consumer culture. The conventional *flâneur* was that curious, free spirit who strolled the streets of modern cities, taking in all of the sights, spectacles and distractions that were offered to him. The *flâneur*’s activity, relates Charney and Schwartz, “at once bodily, visual, and mobile, set the terms for film spectatorship and the other forms of spectatorship that dominated the period’s new experiences and entertainments.”⁷⁰ The character embodies the agency of a truly

⁶⁹ Friedberg, 3.

⁷⁰ Charney and Schwartz, 5.

mobile subject within the cultural context of modernity, albeit in a distinctly urban and masculine form.

Mobility has also been conceived through the movement and circulation of actual film reels across national and cultural boundaries. Grieveson's work undertakes an understanding of mobility that is essentially concerned with the problems of regulating film distribution across state and national boundaries.⁷¹ In *Screen Traffic*, Charles Acland dissects the industrial term "films with legs" which refers to a particular film's potential for longevity through long runs at specific theatres, circulation through various markets, both domestic and international, and mobility through various technological formats.⁷² Although dealing with a more contemporary cultural context, Acland's work nevertheless helps to expand the various ways in which we can conceive of cinema as a mobile entity.

But what all of these understandings of mobility share, be it a diegetic animation of an image, a *flâneur* strolling through a modern cityscape, or the circulation of film texts across national and cultural boundaries and even through technological formats, is a concept of an essentially static motion-picture apparatus. The cinematic screen itself is not generally conceived as a mobile entity. Recently Ronald Walter Greene has stressed the mobility, or as he terms it, the "portability" of cinema, as a crucial determining factor in its employment by the YMCA.⁷³ Greene's study examines how the YMCA employed film as a tool in its social-welfare programs in the early decades of the twentieth century. One of his findings is that cinema's portability was a crucial

⁷¹ Grieveson.

⁷² Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 23-25.

⁷³ Ronald Walter Greene. "Y Movies: Film and the Modernization of Pastoral Power." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. Vol.2, no.1 (2005): 20-36.

determinant for this employment: “It was the constellation of popularity, efficiency and portability that established the value of film as a cultural technology.”⁷⁴ Greene further draws on Acland’s work on the National Council of Education to situate the Y’s activities within “the mobility of modern life that contributed to the dispersion of educational sites and the effort of cultural authorities to attempt to organize this chaotic slice of daily life.”⁷⁵ Although not explicitly framed under such terms, Greene’s study demonstrates the appropriation by institutional forces with an explicit socio-political goal of the mobile capabilities of a cinematic apparatus. This thesis offers a concept of the mobile within the cultural environment of modernity that allows for all of the various understandings of the term mobility, but also one that, following Greene, takes seriously the idea that motion picture screens themselves were not necessarily the static entities they are often conceived to be.

It is at this point perhaps useful to suggest that the history of radio communications and its subsequent role in cultural life has a more than merely tangential relationship to this study, particularly with regard to the city/country divide. As Kern and others have noted, the radio represented another modern technology with the potential to break down geographical barriers. Mary Vipond in her history on the subject of early radio broadcasting in Canada quotes the editor of *Radio News of Canada*, a radio trade journal, in 1923: “Radio [will] assist Canada to people the country districts, and take away that sense of loneliness that has been felt

⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29. Greene is referring to Charles Acland, “Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939” *Cinemas*, Vol.6, no.1, (1995): 101-118.

by the settlers of earlier days."⁷⁶ However, in Canada at least, the radio did not necessarily immediately live up to its supposed promises of rural/urban unification. As Anne Frances MacLennan observes in her doctoral thesis from Concordia University, throughout the 1920s radio services were concentrated heavily in metropolitan centres, whereas smaller towns and rural areas suffered from inadequate access.⁷⁷ Furthermore, even as radio sales increased throughout the 1930s, MacLennan notes, ownership in urban areas consistently exceeded that in rural areas, due largely to the greater access to programming and higher quality reception that were available in cities.⁷⁸ Vipond concludes,

Thus radio, which had been particularly touted by its early enthusiasts as a boon to the isolated and remote, in fact served those Canadians poorly, if their many individual decisions not to own a receiving set are any indication.⁷⁹

Despite the rhetoric of many of radio's early supporters for government intervention in the industry, radio did not appear to successfully live up to the lofty feats that many of its supporters claimed it would.

This points to another not insignificant similarity between these two media of communication. The cinema and the radio in Canada both witnessed a significant, privately organized, largely unregulated formative period prior to government involvement in each respective industry. Historical and scholarly treatments of each

⁷⁶ Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 23.

⁷⁷ Anne Frances MacLennan, *Circumstances Beyond Our Control: Canadian Radio Program Schedule Evolution During the 1930s* (Doctoral Thesis, Concordia University, 2001), 23.

⁷⁸ MacLennan, 46.

⁷⁹ Vipond, 43.

medium and its related industry have, however, overwhelmingly focused on the period dating from governmental intervention, as though that were the true genesis of the cultural impact of the two media. For radio, Vipond calls this strain of scholarly work the Traditional School of early Canadian radio history, and a similar observation could be made about the history of cinema in Canada. For radio, the tendency is to stress the impact of the Aird Commission of 1929, the creation of the CRBC in 1932 and the subsequent use of radio for typically national, unifying, anti-commercial purposes. With cinema, likewise such government institutions as the National Film Board with similar culturalist goals are often stressed in dominant histories, with a peculiar amnesia regarding earlier, more decentralized film-exhibition initiatives. This is a trend not unique to cinema or to radio. As part of a larger nation-building project, master narratives of nationhood have typically been privileged in the telling of Canadian history, at the expense of the marginal and regional, which have not always been seen to contribute to these narratives.

The emergence of radio can also be seen as analogous to the cinema, particularly an itinerant one, with respect to power relations within the urban/rural divide. While nationalist supporters of radio frequently championed the medium's ability to conquer geography and unite the country, there was a secondary stream of thought, and perhaps not a mutually exclusive one, running through elitist cultural discourses of the time. Finding a voice in trade journals and various cultural publications, the radio, for certain forces in society, in fact represented a tool for reinforcing existing social, cultural, economic and geographical barriers that were already in place. Says Vipond:

...This sanguine conviction highlighted a particular concern of the elite in the 1920s – the drift to the city. These journalistic observers foresaw an essentially utilitarian role for radio; it would help keep “them” – especially recent immigrants – down on the farm.⁸⁰

This tendency, she argues, is typical of the fact that new technologies upon introduction to society are not necessarily put to use in novel, creative ways, but in fact often serve rather conservative purposes, “to serve existing ends rather than to challenge and change them.”⁸¹ Here we can see the way in which technology can be employed to reinforce hegemonic social structures.

Arguably, no one understood the functionings of power within societies and its relationship to both media and geography more profoundly than Harold Innis, and I would argue that his ideas have a vital relevance to this project. Particularly in his early work on Canadian economic history, Innis demonstrated a profound understanding of the metropolis/hinterland relationship that characterized much of this country’s development.⁸² In terms of political, economic and social history, it is very much in the Canadian tradition to speak of heartland/hinterland relations.⁸³ By any name -- heartland/hinterland, core/periphery or city/countryside -- this fundamental relationship between the centre and the margin has characterized, and continues to characterize, much of the country’s development. It is a complex and

⁸⁰ Vipond, 43.

⁸¹ Vipond, 24.

⁸² See Harold Innis, *Essays in Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956) and *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

⁸³ Lawrence D. McCann. “Heartland and Hinterland: A Framework for Regional Analysis” in McCann ed. *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1982).

symbiotic relationship, not easily characterized by simple assumptions and associations. Though framed as a simple binary construct, the relationship would be more beneficially viewed as a dialectic, with unfixed, “permeable boundaries,” to borrow the term employed by McLean et al. Contrary to the American concept of the Frontier, as developed by Frederick Turner, which stressed the isolation and self-sufficiency of the rural setting, Innis stressed instead the essential interdependency - symbiosis even – that characterized the city/country relationship. His approach avoids a simplistic dualistic notion of city and country and instead focuses on the shifting interplay and tensions between the two.⁸⁴

While Innis has long been a “staple” of Canadian economic and communications-based history, his contributions to Canadian cultural studies have only more recently been realized.⁸⁵ In the context of cultural studies his conceptions of power and media forms are perhaps most relevant. His concept of monopolies of knowledge, and the resulting oppositions or “disturbances,” for example, is a formidable concept when dealing with issues of dominant power structures and their associated media and technologies. Within the period of history that this thesis deals with, the dominant technology in the film industry was clearly 35mm, as it was the standard gauge for theatrical employment. As traveling exhibitors began screening operations with 16mm technology, ruptures were created within the industry. These initiatives – or disturbances - were frequently perceived as threats by the mainstream, and so action was initiated to curtail them.

⁸⁴ See Harold A. Innis *Problems of Staple Production in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1933) and James Carey in Acland and Buxton.

⁸⁵ See Acland and Buxton.

Innis's opposition to dichotomous understandings of history in favour of dialectics, dialogues and balances is useful beyond an understanding of metropolis/hinterland relations. As this project has at its heart numerous discursive binary constructions (mobile/static, rural/urban, theatrical/non-theatrical, 16mm/35mm, entertainment/education etc.) his theoretical framework geared towards a holistic, rather than reductionist, understanding of the interplay between these concepts is entirely appropriate. Furthermore, his deep understanding of Canadian economic, geographic and cultural history makes his ideas all the more relevant.

For better or for worse, when dealing with many of these themes within film history, dualistic models are often invoked. Much of the historical discourse with regard to the history of film exhibition in Canada would appear to be framed in rather simplistic and reductive binaries. In terms of cinematic apparatuses within the Canadian film-history context, the prevailing industrial discourse tends to associate the "mobile" with decentralized, marginal or regional spaces. Alternatively, the "stationary" or "static", and by implication "stable," cinematic forms come to be associated with the city-centre, and ultimately the dominant. Technology is of course central to these associations; the 35mm standard is the medium of the stable theatre houses, while more "marginal" gauges such as 16mm or 28mm are traditionally the media of accordingly marginal cinematic venues and spaces of consumption. Further implicit in this breakdown is the essential function of cinema itself. The first few decades of the twentieth century witnessed extensive debates, as Grieveson has demonstrated, as to the role of cinema in modern society. Were movies viable means of educating and influencing an impressionable public? Or was their essential

function “harmless entertainment,” a leisurely distraction, in effect, from the hardships of everyday life? Grieveson is concerned with these debates, and how they were shaped by the regulatory discourses and practices of the era. In the Canadian context, similar debates were waged and associations appear to have been drawn between wider gauges and “entertainment” films on one hand, and smaller gauges and “educational” or other alternatively functioning films on the other. These rigid associations and prescriptions for film in Canada can be seen in discursive manifestations in the industry, as in the editorial writings of Ray Lewis in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, who insisted on the strict segregation of film gauges, film sites and film content, through to Donald Buchanan who largely argued that 16mm was an educational tool for non-theatrical sites.⁸⁶ They can also be found in non-discursive, institutional forces such as the Ontario Government Motion Picture Bureau with its non-theatrical, educational use of the 28mm film or, as Acland has shown, with the members of the National Council of Education, who insisted upon the strict use of film as a purely educational medium, theatrical or otherwise.⁸⁷

Many of these issues are in part central motivators behind this thesis. As I have been indicating, a central concern of this thesis is the movement of cinema (projectors, screens and films) by traveling exhibitors to outlying rural areas in Canada not serviced by theatres, beginning in the immediate post-WWI period through the 1940s. I am interested in the implications that this practice had both in the discursive activities of the film industry and in the formation of rural cinema-

⁸⁶ See Donald Buchanan, “The Projection of Canada” in Peter Morris, ed. *The National Film Board of Canada: The War Years* (Ottawa: Canada Film Institute, 1965:1971) and “Promoting Democracy with the 16mm Film”, in *Canadian Forum* (March 1943): 351-352.

⁸⁷ Acland, “Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous.”

going cultures. As I have shown, historical film studies, especially those rooted in the concept of modernity, tend to privilege the cultural practices of urban audiences, while largely ignoring the experiences of rural audiences. A central question to consider, therefore, is, what implications did the practice of itinerant exhibition have in the formation of these rural audiences, and how did their experiences differ from those of urban audiences? Crucial to this question is the concept of mobility, which has been understood by film scholars in a number of ways. I intend a relatively comprehensive understanding of the term, but I am generally less concerned with a diegetic mobility or a mobilized subject such as a *flâneur*, and more interested in an understanding of the term that allows for an examination of the implications resulting from an ambulant exhibitor (often facilitated by other mobile, modern technologies such as trains and automobiles.) Furthermore, this thesis is concerned not just with the circulation of the cinematic apparatus itself, but also of ideas and concepts *about* cinema and cinema spectatorship. Urban spectatorship and rural spectatorship are two different breeds to be sure, but these practices operated in dialogue with each other, rather than in isolation from each other. It is my contention that the discourses that were initiated and circulated about traveling cinema and its associated 16mm film gauge reveal profound insights into the formation of specific film cultures, at a time when the medium itself was just beginning to securely entrench itself in the cultural lives of Canadians.

Grounding this study firmly in its historical context, however, we can see conflicting conceptions of nationhood operating in the background. Much like radio, with the creation of the NFB film would eventually be seen as a force for nationalist

purposes of unity and self-reflection. However, while communications technologies like film and radio were enlisted to conquer geographical realities, they were also employed to maintain hegemonic social and regional structures that previously existed. Clear conceptions of rural and urban existed, and while itinerant cinema can in one sense be seen as a democratizing force in terms of cultural access, there is also the case to be made that it served to maintain these strict divisions.

As much as this thesis is concerned with the cultural life of non-theatrical film audiences, it is at its core rooted in an interest in industrial practices and behaviour. Raymond Williams, in his work on the sociology of culture, has demonstrated a keen understanding of the functioning of art and culture within market economies, particularly the evolution of such systems.⁸⁸ Cultural production and circulation, Williams explains, has evolved historically from an artisanal stage to a capitalist, corporate market stage. This is a shift that is by no means absolute nor is it symmetrical across the cultural spectrum, but it is particularly pronounced in “new media” industries such as cinema, radio and television.⁸⁹ These fields have become characterized by dominant capital squeezing out the marginal, or what could once have been described as artisanal:

The scale of capital involved, and the dependence on more complex and specialized means of production and distribution, have to an important extent blocked access to these media in older artisanal, post-artisanal and even

⁸⁸ Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-53.

market professional terms, and imposed predominant conditions of corporate employment.⁹⁰

The itinerant and narrow-gauge non-theatrical film exhibition surveyed in this thesis is not technically “artisanal” in the context in which Williams is employing the term, in the sense that the exhibitors themselves were not producing the films they screened (though there is evidence that certain individuals on occasion would recut, alter or otherwise reconceive films for presentation). Yet the practices of these exhibitors are clearly oriented within a similar pattern of industrial calibration. The tension between the residual cultural practice of traveling cinema and the dominant force of theatrical exhibition constitutes a central focus of this thesis. For Williams, the study of industrial practices, particularly the cultural formations and forms constituted therein, is a vital and indispensable kind of analysis:

It is, then, by learning to analyse the nature and the diversity of cultural formations – in close association, as is later argued, with the analysis of cultural forms – that we can move towards a more adequate understanding of the direct social processes of cultural production.⁹¹

Furthermore, in his work on television, Williams noticed, in a telling observation,

The history of broadcasting institutions shows very clearly that the institutions and social policies which get established in a formative, innovative stage – often *ad hoc* and piecemeal in a confused and seemingly marginal area –

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁹¹ Williams, *Culture*, 86.

have extraordinary persistence into later periods, if only because they accumulate techniques, experience, capital or what come to seem prescriptive rights.⁹²

In effect, this is a model that matches the situation of itinerant exhibition in early Canadian history. Prior to any centralization of traveling circuits, independent exhibitors laid the *ad hoc* groundwork that would in turn be appropriated and absorbed by the institutional forces that would follow. The introduction and proliferation of 16mm technology is intimately tied up in this historical development.

⁹² Williams, *Television*, 147.

Chapter Two
Expanding Environments and Narrowing Gauges:
Non-Theatrical Film Exhibition in the 1920s

Here too it seems to me I must point to another cloud barring the rays of the sun from the place where the theatre owner stands. It is by no means a small or negligible cloud. I am referring to the utterly unfair and dangerous competition from nontheatrical[sic] organizations.¹

-Sydney Cohen, President, Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America, 1925

Even though motion pictures eventually found a home in permanent theatres, this coupling was by no means pre-determined with the invention of the medium. From the very outset, entrepreneurial individuals were experimenting with the concept of mobile or traveling forms of cinema and were screening films in an array of diverse venues across the country. As the 1910s began, the trend in exhibition unquestionably shifted towards the stability of permanent theatres, and construction of these theatres quickly evolved from the makeshift storefront nickelodeons of the 1900s to lavish, and much larger, movie theatres. As indicated in the previous chapter, there is a widespread assumption that the day of the private, commercially driven itinerant exhibitor was all but over by the 1910s. The work of Musser, Nelson, Waller, Véronneau and others working in the field of traveling cinema indicates that this assumption is due largely to original omissions from historical

¹ Sydney S. Cohen, "The Exhibitor's Place in the Sun," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, Vol.16, no.42, February 14, 1925, 9.

records, such as the trade press, that bore little interest in activities outside of its specific domain, and the research tendencies of more contemporary scholars, who have shown little interest in a seemingly irrelevant area of inquiry. The important work of those authors just mentioned, however, indicates that the practice of traveling cinema did in fact extend beyond its initial period of prominence, and in fact, boasts quite a rich cultural lineage.

While it is true that many traveling showmen in effect retired from the road with the passing of the “golden-era” of the itinerant exhibitor and the rise of the nickelodeon around 1906, it is entirely incorrect to assume that the practice died off altogether. In Canada, as late as 1917, individuals such as John C. Green (aka Belsaz the Magician) were still to be found on the road exhibiting films throughout the Canadian countryside.² As that decade came to close, there was in fact a palpable rise in the non-theatrical exhibition of film, by both institutions and associations of an educational or cultural nature, but also by independent exhibitors with less official intents. This chapter traces these new breeds of traveling exhibitors, and details the concurrent developments that both informed this progress and those that emerged in reaction to it. Among the former is unquestionably the introduction of smaller film gauges, initially Pathé’s 28mm format, and then later Kodak’s 16mm alternative – two developments that provided an important catalyst for the itinerant activities that ensued. Among the latter, notable is the formation of exhibitors’ protective associations across the country to safeguard their growing collective interests. The result of this emerging nexus of activity and discourse was a growing awareness of

² Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), 22.

new spheres of cultural practice, which would ultimately find itself framed in opposition to the dominance of the mainstream industry.

Before we embark on such a discussion, perhaps a few words about the state of the theatrical film industry in Canada in the post-World War I era are in order. The film industry in both Canada and the United States during this period can be most noticeably characterized by increasing tendencies towards centralization and vertical integration. The dominant historiographical strain in the study of Canadian film history at this point interprets the industry in terms of economic dependency, or as a classic “branch plant relationship” vis-à-vis the United States.³ Most historians of the era cite the rise of Jule and Jay Allen as a key moment in the development of the Canadian exhibition and distribution sectors.⁴ Their history has been retold at length elsewhere, but suffice it to say by 1915 the two brothers had established a nationally based distribution system through their company Famous Players Film Service Limited, and by 1920 they operated the largest film chain in Canada, with a fleet of 45 theatres.⁵ Key to their success was the lucrative and exclusive franchise contract signed with Adolph Zukor’s Paramount Pictures. Zukor, however, was becoming increasingly convinced that to fully control the film industry, he needed to secure a dominant stake in the exhibition sector, namely ownership of first-run movie houses,

³ See Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) and Kirwan Cox, “Hollywood’s Empire in Canada,” *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canada and Quebec Cinemas*, Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling, eds. (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), 11-41, for example.

⁴ See Morris, Pendakur, Kirwan Cox, “The Rise and Fall of the Allens: The War for Canada’s Movie Theatres,” in William J. Buxton ed, “Canada’s Film Century: Traditions, Transitions, Transcendence,” *Loneragan Review*, Number 6 (2000): 44-81., Paul S. Moore, “Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon: Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol.12, no.2, (2003): 22-45, and Robert M. Seiler, “Movie Exhibition on the Prairies: The Case of the Allens, 1910-15.” *Prairie Forum* Vol.31 No.1, (2006): 71-84.

⁵ Pendakur, 45-46.

both in the United States and in Canada. In 1918 he made an offer to the Allens for their theatres, but was promptly denied. The business relationship between Zukor and the Allens subsequently soured, and by the following year they had lost the Paramount franchise.⁶

It is at this point that the key figure N.L. Nathanson enters the picture. Nathanson, according to Paul S. Moore, would become “undeniably the most important showman in the history of Canadian exhibition.”⁷ Upon hearing of the crumbling relations between Zukor and the Allens, Nathanson, an aspiring film mogul seeking to compete with the Allens in the exhibition sector, saw his window of opportunity and approached Zukor about obtaining the Paramount franchise. Zukor agreed and the two formed a partnership, which would lead to a new company, Famous Players Canadian Corporation. Nathanson continued to build new theatres across the country, often in direct competition with those owned by the Allens. By 1923 he effectively forced them into bankruptcy and took over control of their thirty-five best theatres.⁸ This type of business practice began to typify the industry. Whereas the Allens typically built their theatres with local merchant capital, Nathanson’s strength derived from the backing of international capital from the big American companies.

Pendakur maintains that the decade of the 1920s witnessed the entrenchment of the Canadian film industry’s dependence on the American industry. Vertical integration of the three sectors of the industry extended throughout the decade “as if

⁶ Cox, 12, Moore, 26.

⁷ Moore, 24.

⁸ Moore, 27.

there were no borders between the two countries.”⁹ The exclusive franchise agreements between American producers and distributors and Canadian exhibitors effectively led to indirect control over the Canadian market. By 1925, Pendakur reveals, 95% of all films exhibited in Canada were supplied by major American film companies, and competition from rival producers, distributors and exhibitors was severely lessened by this heightened integration.¹⁰

This was the state of the theatrical film industry in Canada following World War I. However, there was a substantial amount of film-screening practice that was occurring outside the conventional boundaries of the industry. The beginning of the 1920s witnessed a noticeable growth in the employment of traveling and other types of non-theatrical film exhibition by formalized institutions and organizations. Speaking to the Kiwanis Club in Ottawa in July of 1921, Raymond S. Peck, Director of the Exhibits and Publicity Bureau of the Department of Trade and Commerce, announced that “the non-theatrical use of moving pictures is increasing very rapidly.”¹¹ And indeed this was very much the case. This bureau was established in 1918 with the intent of centralizing the film-producing and distribution activities of various federal departments. Re-branded the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau in 1923, it had as its primary mandate promoting and publicizing various sectors of Canadian life and industry, both at home and abroad. It produced films on both the standard 35mm format, primarily for theatrical exhibition, and on the narrower 28mm safety format for non-theatrical exhibition. Primarily a

⁹ Pendakur, 58.

¹⁰ Pendakur, 58-59.

¹¹ Raymond S. Peck, “Chief Speaker at Kiwanis Club,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, vol.13, no.4, July 15th, 1921. 5. Incidentally, Peck was a former editor of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. The journal will subsequently be referred to as *CMPD*.

producer/distributor, the bureau itself did not coordinate non-theatrical screenings. However, it distributed its films widely to specific interested parties across the country for this purpose. These screenings, typically sponsored by various educational, cultural or commercial groups, were held free of admission. From the very outset these events “were attended most enthusiastically.”¹²

Perhaps even more notable during this period were the activities of the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau, established in 1917. The bureau distributed films of a mostly educational nature, particularly in the field of agriculture, non-theatrically, to schools, churches and various community associations, which did not operate or have access to their own theatres. As Charles Tepperman relates in his work on the bureau, it was established during an intense period of wartime activity, and its keen interest in agriculture “complemented home-front propaganda of the period.”¹³ But perhaps more broadly, Tepperman explains, the reason for the government’s involvement in the realm of cinema, both its production and distribution, had to do with a firm belief in the power of the medium as a progressive, scientific tool to educate and to instruct. These were by no means sentiments that were universally shared during this era, as cinema’s status as an educational medium was far from settled. But certain progressive elements in the Ontario provincial government were among the growing choirs of enthusiasts who felt that the medium could in fact be harnessed for instructional purposes.

¹² Charles Backhouse, *Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, 1917-1941* (Ottawa: Canada Film Institute, 1974), 12.

¹³ Charles Tepperman, “Digging the Finest Potatoes from their Acre: Government Film Exhibition in Rural Ontario,” in *Beyond the Bowery: The Cinema and Mass Entertainment in Small-Town America from its Origins Through the Multiplex*, Kathryn Fuller and George Potamianos, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming.) Manuscript p.2.

The Ontario Bureau originally contracted films from the private sector. Pathéscope of Canada, Ltd. and Filmcraft were the initial suppliers for educational and industrial films. Pathéscope of Canada was formed in 1914 and its early activities largely centered on supplying projectors and films to various churches, schools and private homes. But by 1918 its work for the province of Ontario had become its dominant activity.¹⁴ In 1924, however, the bureau was making its own titles after opening production studios in Trenton (a move that had significantly negative repercussions for both Pathéscope and Filmcraft). As Tepperman explains, while its films were distributed to both rural and urban settings, it was the non-theatrical rural distribution that was mostly actively pursued.¹⁵ Upon its creation in 1917, the bureau purchased 50 Pathéscope portable hand-cranked film projectors, which required no electricity to run. This was not an insignificant development, as establishing sources of electricity for traveling exhibition units was a considerable problem. Portable generators were highly cumbersome, not to mention noisy, and many of the venues serviced by the outfits were not wired with electricity themselves. Additionally, the Pathéscope projectors utilized non-flammable 28mm safety stock film, which was better suited for non-theatrical venues than the standard 35mm. Of all the safety issues associated with film exhibition, theatrical or otherwise, fire safety was easily the most pressing. Theatres typically had to adhere to strict regulations pertaining to projectors and exhibition booths. Non-theatrical venues, without the built-in fire precautions of movie houses, were frequently singled out as firetraps, and were made subject to a significant public discourse surrounding their perceived lack

¹⁴ "Ontario Appropriates \$52,000 for Pictures of Educational Value," *CMPD*, Vol.4, no.13, June 29, 1918, 20.

¹⁵ Tepperman, manuscript p.2.

of safety. The employment of safety film stock did much to alleviate these widely held concerns.

These projectors were provided to the province's anointed "specialists," most frequently agricultural experts, who then traveled into the various communities and venues to screen the films and to facilitate discussion and learning.¹⁶ Over four weeks in the winter of 1918, free screenings held in 45 counties at a rate of three per week attracted a total audience of 67,801 farmers. Over a three-week span during that same period in Simcoe County alone, 1,500 women saw "farm household pictures" at screenings held by the local Women's Institutes.¹⁷ While agriculture was the dominant interest for the bureau, these screenings were not exclusively pedagogical. According to a report in the *Globe*, the bureau was experimenting with adding entertainment films to their circuits, including the films of such stars as Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford.¹⁸ Films were distributed through other channels as well. Statistics for 1921 indicate the various arenas for the Bureau's activities:

12 Churches	196 films
39 Agricultural Representatives	907 films
9 YMCAs	143 films
2 Women's Institutions	21 films
38 Schools and Colleges	377 films
28 Miscellaneous organizations	271 films
128 Total Organizations	1915 films¹⁹

¹⁶ Tepperman, manuscript p.5.

¹⁷ "Ontario Appropriates \$52,000 for Pictures of Educational Value," *CMPD* Vol.4, no.13, June 29, 1918.

¹⁸ "Movie as Aid in Increased Production Propaganda," *The Globe*, March 13, 1918, 15.

¹⁹ "Ontario Motion Picture Bureau," Report – Amusement Branches Treasury Department, November 1, 1920 – October 31, 1921. (National Archives of Canada, "Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940" collection, Ontario Motion Picture Bureau file, Box 8.)

Any organization was permitted to borrow films from the Bureau, and no fees were charged, with the exception of certain transportation costs.

What these screenings offered in terms of spectatorship was an experience quite unlike that at the local theatre. Furthermore the bureau's commitment to rural and agriculturally based communities meant that audiences who may not even have had such a thing as a local theatre were exposed to motion pictures, both as entertainment and as education. The films were screened largely with the intent of fostering discussion related to that particular night's specific topic, and the technical capabilities that film offered proved conducive to the pedagogical intents. For example, at a screening in 1918 on the topic of "Killing and Dressing Poultry," the instructional film shown that night was played at a reduced speed, making possible for the "abattoir men" in attendance a more attentive form of reception to the techniques and methods on display.²⁰ The mobility permitted by the 28mm projector was frequently exploited as well during these events. For instance, during the screening of film no.115 *The Conformation of a Holstein Dairy Cow*, a discussion reportedly arose concerning the "comparative merits" of a local Holstein cow and "Mollie Rue Rattler," a cow from the Ontario Agricultural College. Apparently, to settle the debate, the agricultural representative from the Bureau took his Pathéscope machine directly into the barn and hung the screen immediately beside the local Holstein, where the comparison could be made firsthand. According to an eyewitness, it was a "demonstration that will be remembered by all who witnessed it."²¹ (Results of the contest are unfortunately unknown). The direct consequences of

²⁰ "Movie as Aid in Increased Production Propaganda."

²¹ Ibid.

this humorous anecdote ultimately bear little impact beyond the circumstances of that particular evening's event. However, it does serve to showcase the relative flexibility that the 28mm technology allowed, and demonstrates that it was conducive to aleatory and spontaneous moments, that all served to lend each particular screening a uniqueness unto itself.

Although Ontario's bureau was the most developed, other provinces made use of non-theatrical distribution for training and education as well. Peter Morris relates that "the use of film as an educational tool developed rapidly at the provincial level during the Twenties."²² In the province of Quebec, centralized production in one department did not formally occur until 1941 with the establishment of Le Service de ciné-photographie, but as early as 1920 the Ministry of Agriculture was employing film for various educational activities.²³ Quebec was also the first province to introduce films in schools. Saskatchewan, through the departments of both Agriculture and Education, began accumulating 28mm libraries for non-theatrical distribution. Similar developments occurred in Nova Scotia and Manitoba.²⁴ The provincial government in British Columbia became interested in film particularly early on. In 1908 it established the Patriotic and Educational Film Service largely for promotional purposes. Legislation required that all theatres in the province screen the service's short promotional films. Its activities were ceased by the 1920s, however, after repeated accusations of political bias by the province's opposition party.

²² Morris, 151.

²³ David Clandfield, *Canadian Film*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9.

²⁴ Morris, 151.

Notably, the service was headed by May Watkis, the first woman in charge of such an organization in Canada.²⁵

The considerable amount of non-theatrical activity from the late 1910s and early 1920s prompted a June 1921 editorial from the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Acknowledging that large segments of the industry did not look favorably upon this development, the *Digest* clearly lent its support in favor of non-theatrical, educational uses of cinema and sought to dispel some of the common misconceptions surrounding it. Foremost among these was the concern over potential competition for theatrical entertainment. The editorial proclaimed,

With the educational and religious field opening up at a rapid rate, manufacturers will make pictures particularly appropriate for this class of clientele, and these pictures will not in any sense be opposition to the motion picture theatre. Films will be made exclusively for educational and religious purposes, and the present supply of entertaining productions will still be produced for the theatre.

Today the barrier is slowly but surely being demolished, but now certain members of the motion picture industry have declared themselves as absolutely opposed to any apparent competition from outside interests. It is their contention that motion pictures are made for entertainment, and should continue to be used

²⁵ Clandfield, 10.

solely for the latter purpose.... This attitude is absolutely selfish and a detriment to the advance of the motion picture art.²⁶

The *Digest* sought to alleviate fears that non-theatrical cinema of an educational nature would do the industry harm. In fact, the paper argued that the opposite was true and that the continuation of this practice would only increase the fan base of motion pictures. The editorial argued that those in the industry who claim that motion pictures should be used solely for entertainment were in fact acting “selfish” and that such a stance was “a detriment to the motion picture art.”²⁷ In retrospect, this claim may seem ironic, given the standpoint the *Digest* would take later in the 1930s. But at that moment, the non-theatrical use of motion pictures, specifically with an educational agenda, was enjoying a favorable climate of opinion, boasting support from the industry’s leading trade paper, and obvious government backing across the nation. The year 1920 also witnessed the announcement of Canadian Educational Films Ltd., a company devoted to the release of films for “non-entertaining” purposes. The company handled the product of its parent company, the Educational Films Corporation of America, in which the Hudson’s Bay Company was a major investor, and boasted offices in the six leading cities in Canada (Saint John, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver).²⁸ While Canadian Educational was primarily targeted for the domestic market, Educational Films was a considerable international force, composed of American, British and Canadian capital. The *Digest*

²⁶ “Editorial,” *CMPD*, Vol.11, no.3, June 17, 1920.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “Editorial,” *CMPD* Vol.12, no.11, October 16, 1920 and “Educational Films Ltd. Secure Pictures of Canada’s Far North,” *CMPD*, vol.12, no.13, November 15, 1920, 14.

trumpeted the announcement of Canadian Educational's introduction as a major advancement for the industry. In fact, the editorial went so far as to claim,

When the history of motion pictures is written in years to come, we shall find the name of this organization given much prominence. Just as Edison will be remembered as the pioneer of the motion picture, so Educational Films will be thought of as the first organization to develop the field for educational and scientific subjects.²⁹

The impact of Canadian Educational is admittedly wildly overstated in this passage, but that such a company could elicit such enthusiasm from the industry's leading trade paper – one that was geared towards theatrical exhibition – speaks volumes about the climate for educational, non-theatrical film during this period.

The early 1920s additionally saw a rebirth of independent itinerant exhibition of a non-educational variety much more in a vein similar to that of the early turn-of-the-century exhibitors. Of particular prominence among this new wave of itinerant exhibitors was E.B. Gravelle of Ottawa. Gravelle operated a traveling motion-picture operation under the company name Enterprise Amusement Company, and according to a profile in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, he ran a very profitable business.³⁰ An itinerant exhibitor since 1913, Gravelle staged his performances in all manner of venues such as school houses, church rooms, Orange halls – essentially whatever space was available to book. Typically Gravelle would set up his own

²⁹ "Editorial," *CMPD* Vol.12, no.11, October 16, 1921.

³⁰ "Ottawa News," *CMPD*, August 15, 1921, vol.13, no.6, 16.

equipment and project the films himself, while his wife, who would travel with him, worked as the cashier selling tickets to the screenings. An evening's program typically consisted of an eight- or nine-reel show, generally running about two hours and comprising a feature and one or two short comedies. By 1921, he was typically showing the latest Pathé releases, but due to the changing nature of his audiences and routes he was able to show the various pictures that he owned as often as he desired. That particular summer, the latest Harold Lloyd releases figured prominently in his program. Along with his dramatic features and comedies secured from film exchanges, Gravelle, for the sake of variety, would also on occasion screen "official educational pictures" produced by the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce.

By 1921 Gravelle had visited "almost every part of Canada," and in that particular year focused his operations in isolated hamlets and smaller settlements in Eastern Ontario, particularly those removed from the railways and not serviced by permanent movie theatres. At this time, 16mm was still yet to be released, and so Gravelle's technology was the more cumbersome 35mm, but improvements in automobile technology greatly facilitated the ease of his travel, and proved highly beneficial to his overall efficiency, which was reflected in greater profits for his operation. By his own estimation, Gravelle himself traveled somewhere in the neighborhood of one thousand miles each month arranging and screening his shows.³¹ These were considerable achievements given that this was a single-operation enterprise. The scale of Gravelle's business was roughly comparable to that of contemporary itinerant operators such as William Shaw in the province of Quebec

³¹ Ibid.

(whose exploits Pierre Véronneau has chronicled).³² Unlike Lyman Howe's large-scale traveling film venture in the United States, which featured numerous simultaneously running circuits, Gravelle and Shaw instead ran small-scale independent operations with tightly booked circuits, which were capable of successfully drawing modest profits.

Gravelle and Shaw were by no means anomalies in the landscape of the film-going culture during this period in Canadian history. *The Canadian Moving Picture Digest* was printing classified notices for traveling projection equipment, such as the following from November 1922:

FOR SALE – One Power's Road Moving Picture
Projecting Outfit, complete, for road work. Ideal
equipment for country town use. Will accept any
reasonable offer to close an estate. Mrs. A. Brown, 770
Main Street East, Hamilton Ontario.³³

During the 1920s, the *Digest* featured a special section on projection, and columnist Guy E. McAllan gave technical advice to itinerant exhibitors, such as how to implement a "simple polarity detector" for "the traveling exhibitor is often called upon to determine which wire of a circuit is positive when setting up a show."³⁴ On the West Coast, traveling cinema shows were just coming into their own. In the province of British Columbia, for instance, in 1922 according to the provincial censor

³² Pierre Véronneau, "Cinéma ambulant et implantation urbaine: l'activité de William Shaw dans le contexte des Cantons-de-l'Est," *Cinémas*, vol.6, no.1, p.47-80 and Pierre Véronneau, "The Creation of a Film Culture by Traveling Exhibitors in Rural Quebec Prior to World War I." *Film History* 6, (1994): 250-261.

³³ "Classified Advertisement," *CMPD*, Vol.14, no.28, November 4, 1922, 13.

³⁴ Guy E. McAllan, "Projection," *CMPD*, Vol.18, no.35, January 1, 1927, 16.

board, there were over one-third as many licensed traveling cinematograph operations (28) as there were licensed moving picture theatres (74):³⁵ a rather considerable number, and this of course would not include the possibly significant amount of itinerant operations that were unlicensed. The apparent success of Gravelle and others speaks to the desires of non-urban audiences and those not within range of established movie theatres to share in the pleasures that this medium had to offer. Furthermore, the activities of Gravelle and his contemporaries highlight a continuity of a film-screening practice that is generally not adequately acknowledged.

Technological changes brought on throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s such as automobile improvements and increased rural electrification serve to emphasize the ways in which technology was increasingly impacting the practice of film exhibition in Canada. However, as concerns itinerant film exhibition, these technologies did not necessarily have the immediate impact one might assume. Take the issue of rural electrification, for example. Unlike movie theatres, where electricity was an absolute necessity, itinerant film operations could function quite adequately without access to actual electrical networks. Many projectors, such as the 28mm Pathéscope models used by the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau, were designed to be hand cranked. And for those machines that did require electricity, generators were a staple element in itinerant exhibitors' arsenals. So while it was no doubt much easier to simply plug a projector into the wall, the practice of itinerant exhibition was by no means dependent on access to an actual electricity grid. In a sense, then, while widespread availability of electricity across the country without question enabled the

³⁵ Incidentally, the license fees for traveling operators were \$25, whereas the larger "palatial" shows were \$300. "Vancouver News," *CMPD*, Vol.13, no.17, February 3, 1922, 10.

spread of movie theatres, the *slower* spread of electrification programs in rural areas can be seen as in fact potentially *increasing* the demand for itinerant exhibition. Electrification coverage roughly doubled over the decade of 1920s. In terms of actual electric pole mileage, Canada saw a jump from 20,879 miles of pole coverage to 42,913 miles in 1929. But rural electrification by no means occurred equally across the board in Canada. In her work on the situation in Quebec, for instance, Marie-Josée Dorion notes that by the 1920s only a small fraction of farms had access to electricity. Furthermore, rural electrification was significantly less developed than in Ontario, and the gap was still widening as late as 1945.³⁶ In Ontario, rural electrification was certainly more widespread, but the issue of widely divergent rates for rural areas was an equally hot political issue.³⁷ Rural areas across the country unquestionably suffered in terms of equality of access to electricity, and so a mobile entertainment that could circumvent these shortfalls served a valuable purpose. In fact, it would be feasible to claim that many of these circuits in fact persisted precisely because of this disparity in electrical coverage, as many entertainments, such as the traditional movie house, specifically required constant access to electricity.

The automobile is another technology that had some bearing on the activities of itinerant exhibitors in Canada. For showmen, car ownership was unquestionably a positive development, in that it allowed for a more flexible form of travel, and opened up venues beyond those situated near train lines, the original mode of transportation

³⁶ Marie-Josée Dorion, "L'électrification du monde rural québécois," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, vol.54, no.1 (2000): 3-37.

³⁷ Keith Fleming, "The Unification Rate and Rural Electrification Issues in Ontario Politics, 1919-1923," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol.64, no.4 (1983): 495.

for itinerant projectionists. Road quality, however, was still very much a concern for many areas across the nation, particularly in rural areas, whose citizens in fact stood to benefit the most from itinerant exhibition. In 1922, Saskatchewan boasted the greatest mileage of roads in Canada, 135,000 miles or 35% of the national total,³⁸ and it is no coincidence that that province historically has been well served by itinerant exhibitors. A related form of traveling cultural activity that significantly benefited from automotive technology was the Chautauqua, a particularly popular phenomenon in Alberta. By car and by truck, the Chautauqua could access more isolated communities and those not serviced by rail.³⁹ Greater access and higher quality roads, coupled with a general increase in the availability of automobiles unquestionably facilitated a rise in the overall scope of areas that could be accessed by traveling operations, be they film-based or otherwise. To what degree the rise in car ownership amongst the general population affected the practice of itinerant exhibition, or theatrical exhibition for that matter, at this period is considerably more difficult to ascertain.

In the 1920s we also begin to witness a further expansion of the array of potential venues available for the screening of motion pictures. In 1922, for instance, the Canadian government passed an Order-in-Council providing for the regulation of motion-picture exhibition within Canadian Federal Parks. Screening films in parks was hardly an entirely novel idea. Léo-Ernest Ouimet, for instance, one of Canada's first significant film-industry entrepreneurs, began his career as an itinerant exhibitor,

³⁸ G.T. Broomfield, "I Can See a Car in the Crop: Motorization in Saskatchewan 1906-1934," *Saskatchewan History* Vol.37, no.3 (1984): 18.

³⁹ Donald G. Wetherell, "Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure Activity in Alberta, 1914-1950," *Prairie Forum*, Vol.11, no.1 (1986): 61.

frequently screening films in Montreal's Sohmer Park at the turn of the century.⁴⁰

And George and Andrew Holland, two Ottawa-based entrepreneurs, were the first to publicly screen motion pictures on Edison's Vitascope in Canada, in July 1896 in Ottawa's West End Park.⁴¹

But the government's actions served to formally recognize and in effect entrench this practice within its field of governance. License fees of ten dollars were introduced to actual motion-picture theatres operating in National Parks, while additional levies of one dollar per motion-picture projector operator were likewise introduced. These fees were generally considerably lower than those imposed by individual provinces and cities upon theatres and operators, and the government clearly articulated that the motivations behind the fees had nothing to do with revenue generation and had everything to do with regulating and attempting a measure of control upon "places of amusement."⁴² The federal government's involvement in a project like this was rather atypical at this point in history. As Michèle Dagenais has argued, government involvement at the federal level in Canada, prior to the reforms following World War II, rarely intervened in the growing spheres of leisure and cultural activity. Municipal governments typically took up responsibility for affairs of this nature, and even then only when called upon, and rarely by their own initiatives.

⁴⁰ For a more detailed examination of Ouimet, see Léon H. Bélanger, *Les ouimetoscopes: Léo-Ernest Ouimet et les débuts du cinéma québécois* (Montréal-Nord: VLB, 1978).

⁴¹ Morris, 6-7. Morris however incorrectly identifies the Holland screenings in Ottawa as the first public film exhibition in Canada. These screenings were the first to employ Edison's technology, but the first public motion picture screening in Canada, Germain Lacasse has since revealed, in fact took place in Montreal with Lumière technology. Germain Lacasse, "Cultural Amnesia and the Birth of Film in Canada," *Cinema Canada*, vol.108, (June 1984): 6-7.

⁴² "Order-in-Council Regulates Pictures in Federal Parks," *CMPD*, Vol.14, no.4, May 27, 1922, 5.

The twentieth century witnessed a considerable expansion in terms of leisure activities available to the population – an expansion that was frequently characterized by a shift away from the more privatized nature of cultural life to a more public one. These trends were particularly more pronounced in urban environments. Unlike in Europe, where national governments were acknowledging the importance of cultural life and subsequently funding and regulating it at a greater level, the Canadian federal government to a large extent stayed clear. As a result, as Dagenais explains, “in the long process of the state’s appropriation of culture and leisure, it was the municipalities who were called on first.”⁴³ The government’s involvement in this practice of film exhibition in National Parks was certainly an early example of intervention into the realm of cultural governance, but its significance should not be overstated. The primary motivating factor would appear to be solely one of physical jurisdiction – the screenings were occurring on federally controlled areas, and therefore beyond the reach of municipal governments, who were generally the primary regulatory forces in cultural activities such as this. As such, a model of governmentality, frequently employed by scholars in relation to state governance over cultural life, does not seem entirely appropriate for this instance. The Canadian government for the most part held little interest in intervening in issues such as these, and did so here apparently only because of territorial issues, rather than some larger platform of population management.

The idea that governments needed to intervene and place greater emphasis on regulation with regards to leisure and cultural life – and places of amusement in

⁴³ Michèle Dagenais, “Political Dimensions to Leisure and Cultural Activities in Canadian Cities, 1880-1940,” *Urban History* Vol.26, no.1 (1999): 55-70.

particular - would only increase as the decade wore on, and entertainments of a peripatetic nature frequently found themselves at the center of the debate. Particularly relevant to this issue are the traveling carnivals and circuses that had been operating for decades throughout the Dominion. It was not uncommon for these types of amusements to feature cinema operators on their roster of entertainments. On one level, the belief that traveling amusements were under-regulated and the subsequent governmental responses to this issue ultimately became representative of both the increasing intent of federal and particularly local governments to rein in specific areas of cultural activity that were previously off their radar. Additionally, the clampdown on these itinerant forms of entertainment became a lightning rod for the growing power exercised by the established movie-theatre exhibitors. Exhibitor associations began forming in the late 1910s and early 1920s as movie theatre construction expanded and members sought cooperation with one another to further causes seen as vitally relevant to theatre owners. An editorial in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* in May 1918 and then another the following year effectively called exhibitors across the country into action, urging them to safeguard their interests by joining together in these protective associations.⁴⁴ These organizations developed at municipal, provincial and eventually national levels. City-based associations, such as the Montreal Theatrical Managers' Protective Association, which formed in 1921, mobilized in reaction to local situations.⁴⁵ Likewise, issues that fell under provincial jurisdictions, typically those relating to censorship, licensing and other forms of regulation, motivated the organization of provincially based associations.

⁴⁴ "Editorial," *CMPD*, Vol.4, no.7, May 18, 1918 and "Editorial," *CMPD*, Vol.10, no.11, Christmas Edition, 1919.

⁴⁵ "Montreal News," *CMPD*, Vol.13, no.2, June 15, 1921, 4.

In 1918, one such provincial organization, the Motion Picture Exhibitors' Protective Association of Ontario, Ltd. began stirring into action. Although officially formed years before, the association had been somewhat dormant up until then for a variety of reasons, including a general sense of apathy among its membership, who had neither been paying dues nor attending meetings.⁴⁶ But its president W.A. Bailie began warning of the increasing "evils" facing the industry, and launched an active campaign to reassert the association's presence.⁴⁷ Within a year, under a new president, J.C. Brady, the association focused its attention on one particular issue that it deemed particularly pressing: the increasing trend towards a monopoly in the Canadian distribution system. Brady confronted the issue in an open letter dated March 28, 1919, which was sent to exhibitors across the country and published in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Without explicitly naming names or companies, the letter detailed the manner in which independent distributors were being systematically shut out of the marketplace. Furthermore, Brady announced intentions to form an independent, national cooperative film exchange, a decision he felt was "the only solution to the problem."⁴⁸ The letter closed with an appeal to these exhibitors for support in this new endeavor. Within a few weeks, Brady announced at a meeting of the Exhibitors' Association that the charter for the new exchange had been secured and announced that it was "essential that every exhibitor in Canada should become a member of the co-operative exchange."⁴⁹ The result was the Canadian Exhibitors Exchange, Ltd., which represented a manifestation of exhibitors

⁴⁶ "Instilling New Vigor Into Ontario Exhibitors," *CMPD*, Vol.4, no.6, May 11, 1918, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ J.C. Brady, "Letter From the Motion Picture Exhibitors' Protection Association of Ontario," reprinted in *CMPD*, Vol.7, no.14, April 5, 1919, 4.

⁴⁹ "April Meeting of Exhibitor's Association," *CMPD*, Vol.7, no.16, April 19, 4.

unifying at the national level. But, as previously stated, exhibitors were rallying around local issues as well.

The issue of traveling carnivals and circuses was one such cause that many exhibitor associations took up across the country. Typically, these amusement enterprises followed in the classic P.T. Barnum circus format, with a diverse assortment of entertainments available. Since the turn of the century, operators of motion pictures often associated themselves with traveling outfits such as these, generally touring with them during the summer months and seeking shelter in halls and theatres during the winter.⁵⁰ The percentage of these in the late 1910s and early 1920s that featured cinema screenings is impossible to tell exactly, but in the eyes of the theatre protective associations, this appears to be a moot point: the practice was perceived as a threat regardless of whether films were on the agenda or not. That greater attention was accorded to these traveling carnivals and circuses says more about the increasingly vocal nature of the theatrical lobby groups than it does about an increased presence of these amusements in and around city centres. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* dedicated a substantial portion of its pages to reporting on local debates on this issue across the Dominion, a tendency that only further highlighted the concern of exhibitors. Carnivals were particularly popular in Eastern Canada, and enjoyed higher box-office returns than the circus in the early 1920s,⁵¹ a trend not uncommon across the country. The debate was particularly heated in the prairies where the Manitoba Exhibitors Association actively sought to bar carnivals altogether through a campaign initiated in 1922. At a meeting early in the year, the

⁵⁰ Musser, Charles and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 161.

⁵¹ "News," *CMPD*, Vol.16, no.19, September 6, 1924, 7.

association bragged of being successful in convincing the municipal government of Winnipeg and the municipalities in the surrounding region, as well as the Retail Merchants Association of Winnipeg, that “traveling carnivals should be barred from the city and district as being detrimental to the best interests of the community.”⁵² While this statement might hint that social factors affected the intentions of the ban, such ambiguities were effectively clarified by the time the campaign achieved its goal later in September, when traveling carnivals were effectively outlawed “in spite of the handsome tribute enacted by the municipalities in licenses.” The fear of competition ultimately became the primary factor behind the association’s motivation: “It shows what organization and persistency can accomplish, as these shows are always a severe menace to the picture house business.”⁵³

The situation in Manitoba was far from unique, however, as similar exhibitor associations across the country lobbied heavily against carnivals, circuses and other itinerant forms of entertainment. In Montreal, although the movement against carnivals was not as successful as in Manitoba, in June of 1924 the local exhibitors still managed to lobby the city council to impose a one thousand dollars per day civic fee for all carnival companies and other “itinerant troupes” in the city - a not-insubstantial levy.⁵⁴ The exhibitors’ argument was that the previous year carnivals and “side-show” people had severely cut into their profits. There were, however, exceptions to the new law. Traveling companies booked in advance by local “religious, patriotic or charity” organizations, and subsequently passed by inspection

⁵² “Manitoba Exhibitors Assoc. Move to Bar Carnivals,” *CMPD* Vol.13, no.17, February 3, 1922.

⁵³ “Manitoba Exhibitors’ Association Wins Against Carnivals”, *CMPD*, Vol.14, no.19, September 9, 1922, 4.

⁵⁴ “Travelling Shows Must Pay Penalty of Competing with Films,” *CMPD*, Vol.16, no.6, June 7, 1924, 10.

of local authorities, were allowed to have their fees waived. However, by 1930, the Montreal City Council decided to ban outright all small-sized circuses and carnivals, regardless of whether their proceeds went to charities or church organizations. The largesized “Big Tent” shows and circuses were permitted to continue operating at the fixed rate of one thousand dollars per day.⁵⁵ While it would be false to assume that the exhibitor association could claim sole responsibility for this decision, it nevertheless played an instrumental role, and this result demonstrates the growing lobby power it represented.

These incidents certainly indicate the growing awareness of local governments with respect to the expanding spheres of cultural life and the subsequent perceived need to intervene and regulate. But governments were reacting to far more than the mere protestations of exhibitor groups. Touring attractions, such as carnivals and circuses were unquestionably amusements that appealed to younger generations. And youth culture, as Cynthia Comacchio has pointed out, was prominent within the “ever-lengthening litany of contemporary ‘problems’” facing society in the post-World War I Canadian context.⁵⁶ As the North American economy was expanding in the 1920s following the end of the war, there was a noticeable corresponding increase in leisure time, particularly with regard to youth culture. With newfound income at their disposal, young people sought out the excitement offered by popular amusements. Mass culture in the form of dance halls, spectator sports, automobile trips and particularly the movies became primary youth outlets. However, the widespread availability of entertainments of this nature meant a significant element of

⁵⁵ “Show Business” *CMPD*, Vol.22, no.14, August 2, 1930, 9.

⁵⁶ Cynthia Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol.32, no.3 (1997): 6.

autonomy and personal choice, and therefore, as Comacchio reveals, a greater potential for “mismanagement.”⁵⁷ Cultural authorities, particularly reformers and the clergy, saw deep problems – moral and otherwise – in the array of modernity’s mass cultural entertainments available to youth. Comacchio states,

By regulating commercial amusements through legislation and intrusive adult supervision, and by summoning up wholesome alternatives to these through school, church and club, worried adults tried to limit the transgressive potential of adolescent citizenship.⁵⁸

Typically, consistent with Dagenais’s observations, it fell upon local governments to provide the “necessary” regulation for these activities. In this sense, the reaction of municipal governments towards itinerant entertainments in Canadian cities is consistent with the general social context of cultural regulation that was in circulation at the time. In a sense, some of this activity parallels the developments Lee Grieveson chronicles in *Policing Cinema*.⁵⁹ Following Foucault, Grieveson incorporates into his analysis the term “police,” derived from the root word “policy.” For Foucault, this typically referred to both fostering citizens’ lives and the state’s strength.⁶⁰ For Grieveson, the term is broadly employed to both

...capture the sense of the productivity of power structures to shape discourses and material realities and, more specifically, to describe the work of state and

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ Grieveson, 18.

nonstate institutions that acquire cultural authority and public power by defining “social problems” and claiming expertise in managing populations.⁶¹

Grieveson reveals how the moral discourses circulated by cultural authorities during the first two decades of the twentieth century subsequently led to the crafting of censorship laws and the reshaping of the industry. In the Canadian situation described earlier, censorship itself was not so much the issue, but moral concerns voiced by cultural authorities coupled with economic complaints registered by exhibitor groups led to a reshaping of the parameters of the state’s involvement in the industry. Culture was typically a jurisdiction of the provincial and municipal governments, and although a certain discourse surrounding the regulation of exhibition was circulated nationally, most of the actual conflicts, as we have seen, were waged locally, on a micro level.

Later in the 1920s, Ottawa was home to such debates surrounding the regulation of traveling entertainments. The initial spark to the confrontation between the theatrical exhibitors and the itinerant carnivals occurred in Spring of 1927 when the theatre owners discovered that a carnival troupe had been operating on the Gladstone Playgrounds in a residential neighborhood for a week, without paying any license fee or civic tax. Arguing that since their establishments were permanent fixtures in the city and that they were obliged to pay for numerous local licenses and taxes that all contributed to the local coffers, that so too should traveling entertainments operating within the city’s confines.⁶² Noise complaints were also

⁶¹ Grieveson, 19.

⁶² “Ottawa Exhibitors Protest Let Carnivals Pay” *CMPD*, Vol.19, no.2, May 14, 1927, 12.

registered in areas adjacent to carnival activity. The complaint levied by the Theatre Owners Branch of the Retail Merchants Association made its way to the Ottawa Board of Control, and a formal resolution was presented calling for either a complete ban against carnivals within the city, or at least the establishment of a \$200 per day license fee. The argument presented by P.J. Nolan, a local theatre owner representing the exhibitors, claimed that the carnivals were operating under the false guises of charity, but were in fact merely private, commercial enterprises that represented unfair competition to the city's theatres, and which paid no municipal taxes or license fees.⁶³ Opposition to the motion regarding banning carnivals, interestingly, came from Cercle Ste-Anne, a Roman Catholic Society. Carnivals at the time served a valuable fundraising function for charitable organizations. The exhibitors won out, however, and the Ottawa Police Commission announced that no carnivals would be tolerated in the city whatsoever, charitable or otherwise, after July 25, 1927.⁶⁴

These exhibitor associations can be understood as manifestations of what Raymond Williams called "formations," types of organization, separate from formalized institutions, that are closely related to cultural production. Williams traces the historical emergence and development of formations, from the earliest establishment of artist guilds through to the more modern forms of professional societies. A key differentiating factor between the professional societies and earlier incarnations, was that this later phase was primarily a business organization.⁶⁵ In other words, unlike the historical artist guilds and academies, professional societies were less concerned with artistic craft and more clearly oriented around business

⁶³ "Ottawa Exhibitors Protest Against Free Carnivals" *CMPD*, Vol.19, no.6, June 11, 1927, 17.

⁶⁴ "Exhibitors Win out In Carnival Opposition" *CMPD*, Vol.19, no.12, July 23, 1927, 11.

⁶⁵ Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 58-62.

interests. The exhibitor associations that emerged in Canada during this period were first and foremost concerned with delineating boundaries and protecting their industry from competition, rather than technical or artistic issues related to actual film projection and exhibition. The instances in Winnipeg, Montreal and Ottawa demonstrate the increasing collective political power that the theatre associations were amassing and exercising for their benefit. The motivations appear overwhelmingly rooted in a fundamental opposition to competition – but a form of competition that is distinctly peripatetic in nature. While certainly a concern of reformers, there is little indication of similar campaigns waged by the theatrical associations against other stable, non-itinerant forms of entertainment, such as music halls or sporting events. These campaigns were essentially “turf wars,” in which opposition was rooted in supposed claims to particular audiences in specific geographical locations. There was little concern demonstrated towards carnivals, circuses and other traveling entertainments operating in the countryside, or in areas removed from established movie theatres. But once these entertainments encroached upon space in proximity to these theatres, the newly formed associations sprung into action. These early, successful lobbying campaigns by exhibitor groups very much planted the seeds, and set the tone for the much more hostile warfare that emerged later in the 1930s, with the ascendancy of 16mm technology.

The Introduction of 28mm

Although 35mm quickly established itself as the dominant industrial medium, as early as 1899 film companies were experimenting with a wide range of film stock

widths. Statistics printed in *The Society of Motion Picture Engineers Journal* listed six alternative film formats to 35mm available at the turn of the century, from as small as 12.7mm (Prestwich, Great Britain) to as large as 95.25mm (Mutograph, United States).⁶⁶ These formats, however, died off relatively quickly, as there was simply insufficient demand and product to sustain them. The reliable 35mm format was the standard in urban theatres, but, as we have seen from a previous chapter, even though the movies eventually found a home in theatres, there was no reason to assume that this was an inevitable association. From the very outset, entrepreneurial individuals were experimenting with the concept of mobile or traveling forms of cinema and screened films outdoors, in public halls and in any number of diverse venues across the country. The 35mm format, while generally a high-quality film stock, was also cumbersome and expensive – certainly suited for theatrical exhibition, but hardly ideal for life on the road. This is by no means to say that itinerant exhibitors did not employ 35mm non-theatrically – we have already profiled a number who did. Although the size and weight of the projector represented a considerable burden, the greater variety of entertaining subjects available in this format was likely its most appealing feature. Its film stock, however, was nitrate-based and was therefore highly flammable. In response to the considerable problems that this posed, the French company Pathé was producing a non-inflammable diacetate film by 1911, which effectively broke up Eastman-Kodak's raw stock

⁶⁶ Figures cited in Gerald G. Graham, *Canadian Film Technology, 1896-1986* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 49. The others were as follows: 60mm (Demeny, Chronophotographe, France); 65mm (Sklandowsky, Germany); 60.325mm (Prestwich, Great Britain); and 17.46mm (Birtac, Great Britain).

monopoly.⁶⁷ The 28mm “Pathéscope Flickerless ‘Safety Standard’ Motion Picture Projector,” as Anke Mebold and Charles Tepperman relate in their excellent history on the technology, was clearly intended right from the outset to service a variety of users and exhibition venues. Early promotional material singled out the home, churches, clubs and schools all as viable contexts for the projector’s employment.⁶⁸ The Society for Motion Picture Engineers adopted 28mm as a “safety standard” film gauge in 1918, after a vigorous campaign led by Alexander Victor, who had introduced the first alternative 28mm projector to the Pathéscope that same year.

Twenty-eight-millimetre technology has a significant distinction in the history of the Canadian film industry, as it was the gauge predominantly employed by the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau (as mentioned previously in this chapter) and by other prominent circuits such as that orchestrated by the University of Alberta’s Department of Extension. The safety and portability offered by the format made it a much more suitable technology for both of those organizations’ non-theatrical pursuits, which were considerable. By 1926, for instance, the OMPB shipped out 4500 reels in the month of December alone, a feat, the Bureau’s director claimed, that made them the largest non-theatrical distributor in the world.⁶⁹ The safety that the 28mm format offered was one of its key selling points. In fact, to ensure this safety, the manufacturers of 28mm projectors struck a deal with manufacturers of the raw stock that only non-inflammable film would be created for such machines.⁷⁰ Twenty-

⁶⁷ Anke Mebold and Charles Tepperman, “Resurrecting the lost history of 28mm film in North America,” *Film History*, Vol.15, no.2 (2003): 141.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁷⁰ “Letter from H.N. DeWitt of Armstrong, DeWitt and Crossin, Ltd. – Insurance Agents and Brokers, To Messrs.Bain, Bicknell, MacDonell and Gordon, January 8, 1925,” (National Archives of Canada,

eight-millimetre was not long for this world, however, and its fate was more than tangentially connected to the introduction of 16mm technology in 1923 by Kodak. The Bureau's fate similarly would be tied to its decision to continue its operations with this soon-to-be-defunct medium. The Bureau apparently was wrestling with the idea of switching to the emerging medium of 16mm, a decision Pathéscope of Canada, its primary supplier of 28mm, obviously tried to dissuade them from making. Consider this letter, dated January 8, 1925 from H. Norton DeWitt, Insurance Agent, and president of Pathéscope Canada desperately trying to alleviate fears of 16mm's future. After reasserting 28mm's capabilities and safety features, he describes 16mm as follows:

The fourth class of film is made on 16 milometer [*sic*] stock and is intended for the use of amateurs. When this width of film was first put on the market by the Eastman Company a few months ago, the Vice-president of that Company stated to me that they did not anticipate it would ever be used for a picture more than four or five feet in width, in fact, the writer has never seen pictures projected from this film of more than five feet six inches in width. You will readily see that such a picture is only suitable for a small room such as would be found in a private house and, therefore, it is not anticipated that this film will ever become anything

but an amateur proposition. We do not feel that there is the slightest danger of the 28 milometer [sic] film becoming obsolete....⁷¹

Whether swayed by DeWitt's words or not, the Bureau opted to stick with 28mm and, determined to expand its film collection, proceeded to purchase Pathéscope Canada's library when the company folded in 1925.⁷² Sixteen millimetre spread rapidly upon its release, initially mostly within the amateur market, for which it was intended. Sales of 28mm, however, remained stagnant. The Bureau's commitment to an outdated technology was a primary factor in the eventual decision by the provincial government to close it down in 1934.⁷³ Although 28mm did not last as an alternative film gauge to the 35mm industrial standard, Mebold and Tepperman argue that it is incorrect to simply consider it a failed predecessor to the upstart 16mm technology. They conclude that

...28mm gauge participated in, and even anticipated, the emergence of a distinct non-theatrical film industry. Whether in schools or farms, urban department stores or affluent living rooms, the 28mm gauge charted new territory for film spectatorship by safely and substantially extending the reach of moving pictures beyond theatres and into the everyday lives of film viewers.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Morris, 152.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mebold and Tepperman, 149.

In other words, while the technology itself did not last, 28mm's legacy can be found in the new territory of usage and employment that it initiated. The gauge that would, however, find successful employment in these arenas that 28mm initially occupied, was the 16mm format.

The Introduction of 16mm

Kodak introduced the first commercially available, reversible, black and white 16mm film format in 1923. That same year, the Victor Animatograph Corporation unveiled to the public the first 16mm cameras and projectors.⁷⁵ As Jan-Christopher Horak relates, as early as 1916 Kodak had been experimenting with smaller gauges with the amateur market in mind. Ten millimetre by 7.5mm, with an aspect ratio of 1.33:1, was felt to be the minimum size for an acceptable image quality. The remaining 6mm was added due to perforations on both sides. Later in the 1930s, one side of perforations was sacrificed to allow for a soundtrack along the side of the film. The Society of Motion Picture and Engineers eventually accepted the new format as a standard in 1932, from which point on 16mm was available with a soundtrack or without.⁷⁶

Crucial to Kodak's initial success with its 16mm technology was the introduction of the Kodascope library, which David Pierce claims, "defined and dominated the early non-theatrical industry, and represented the cornerstone of a

⁷⁵ Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 30.

⁷⁶ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Archiving, Preserving, Screening 16mm," in "In Focus: The Death of 16mm?," Heather Hendershot, ed. *Cinema Journal* 45, no.3, (2006): 113.

coordinated plan to make 16mm the standard for home and educational movies.”⁷⁷ Kodak introduced the library in 1925 and initially set up exchanges in six American cities and Toronto. Kodak did not enjoy a monopoly on the small-gauge market, however. Its principal competitor (for cameras and projectors) during the 1920s was Bell & Howell, which introduced a 16mm model in May 1924. Anxious for 16mm to be accepted as the new safety standard gauge, Pierce relates, Kodak actually encouraged its competitors to adopt the technology and enter into competition with them.⁷⁸ Bell & Howell established a rental collection of its own, the Filmo Library, in January 1927 to complement its line of 16mm cameras and projectors. Hollywood studios entered the 16mm market in 1927 beginning with Kodascope’s acquisition of titles from Paramount (the largest studio at the time) in October. Universal and Pathé followed shortly after with the release of libraries of their own.⁷⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, for fear of competition with their theatrical releases, the studios delayed the 16mm release of their features from the initial 35mm theatrical release date. The major studios generally did not tend to reissue their films, and so no real conflict seemed apparent, and for the independent studios, as Pierce reveals, any revenue was welcome.⁸⁰ Metro-Goldwyn Mayer and United Artists were the only major companies with whom licensing agreements were never established.

The Kodascope library offered a diverse array of titles, which included Hollywood feature films as well as theatrical and educational shorts. The first catalog from 1925 included titles from Otto Mesmer’s *Felix and the Cat* series, the Max

⁷⁷ David Pierce, “Silent Movies and the Kodascope Library,” *American Cinematographer*, January 1989, 36.

⁷⁸ Pierce, 37.

⁷⁹ Pierce, 38.

⁸⁰ Pierce, 39.

Fleischer-produced *Out-of-the-Inkwell* cartoons and eleven Warner Bros. features, including the John Barrymore film *Beau Brummel* (Harry Beaumont, 1924). Other features dated back as far as 1914, often from defunct or independent production companies. The majors tended to sign on later, after the library established itself as a viable venture.⁸¹ Kodak was initially very firm about not selling the films outright and only made them available for rental. This stance quickly loosened, however, and titles were made available for sale at a cost of \$50.⁸²

Optimism for the new medium and its potential in the domestic sphere ran high. Writing in the *Film Daily Yearbook* on the topic of amateur motion pictures, Carl Louis Gregory announced that “there are many indications that the use of home projection machines may parallel in popularity the phonograph, the radio and the automobile.”⁸³ Clearly, 16mm was originally conceived with the amateur filmmaking and home-movie market in mind. Amateur filmmaking by this time did have a modest cultural infrastructure developed around it, but it garnered relatively little attention from the industrial film-trade press, at least those dedicated to distribution and exhibition. Patricia Zimmerman reveals how any chance for amateurs to enter the industry and pose any sort of challenge to the dominant system, at least at the level of production, was quickly thwarted by this conscious sequestering of amateur filmmaking into the domestic realm of leisure activity for the upper and middle classes.⁸⁴ Articles in photographic journals quickly appeared, which explained to amateurs how to shoot their films to mimic Hollywood films. Amateur camera

⁸¹ Pierce, 38.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Carl Louis Gregory, “Amateur Motion Pictures,” *Film Daily Yearbook* 1928, 864.

⁸⁴ Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), 30.

equipment, she explains, was quickly commodified with 16mm into a leisure activity that simply mimed the industry.⁸⁵

The popular press in Canada devoted little attention to the activities related to 16mm employment as a cultural activity, but as early as 1924 significantly sized advertisements could be found in publications such as the Toronto *Globe*, one of the nation's preeminent dailies (see Appendix A). These advertisements ran rather steadily, if not regularly, throughout the latter half of the 1920s. Eaton's and other retail outlets were responsible for the first wave of these advertisements, and they typically highlighted either the Cine-Kodak camera and its supplement projector, the Kodascope or the Victor Cine Camera, (which used Eastman Cine Kodak film). The advertisements very clearly situate the technology for employment as a domestic leisure activity. The various elements of 16mm technology were often combined as a package, which included cameras, projectors and screens, either for sale or for rental. Typically, these advertisements highlight what were considered to be the technology's key features. For instance, in Figure 1, the product's price range is described as "a cost so small that it is not a factor," and in Figure 4, the use of safety film is stressed. And every advertisement in one way or another makes mention of 16mm's incredible ease of use, such as the declaration found in Figure 6: "What a triumph of simplicity!" All of these advertisements feature relatively elaborate illustrations that reveal much about the medium's intended usage. The domestic space of the home is clearly depicted, but often dialogically with exotic scenes of the outside world. In Figure 1, we are presented a scenic view of "Indian Point" and in Figures 3 through 7, varying images of sporting life, nature, and family are portrayed

⁸⁵ Zimmerman, 31.

diagetically within the films projected onto the screens in the domestic exhibition environment. Figure 1 brings this dialogue between the domestic and external worlds to the forefront in its declaration of the potential to “Bring the Trip Home in Your Own Motion Pictures,” which implies not only the leisure activity of traveling, but also the return home for further enjoyment of the original moment. The images are typically highly gendered, but in different ways in different images. Figures 2 and 7, for example, feature active patriarch types filming and projecting the images for the benefit of the more passive female and adolescent family members. Other images, however, such as those in Figures 3, 4 and 5 demonstrate women taking more active roles in the employment of the technology, both as camera operators and as projectionists, as if to highlight its ease of use. In terms of distribution and rental, the advertisements, namely Figures 4, 5 and 7 emphasize the diversity of the Kodascope library, which of course offered a full array of Hollywood features, cartoons, travelogues etc. Clearly this was a technology marketed towards an upper-middle-class demographic and was intended to be employed within the confines of the domestic sphere.

However, what is almost immediately noticeable is how 16mm quickly became associated with both industrial and educational spheres of activity as well. Unlike amateur filmmaking or exhibiting practices, the general use of film by institutional and educational bodies was a topic more frequently covered in publications concerned with the industry, and so 16mm employment in these spheres of activity was noticed more broadly. Due to its original intent as a tool for amateur filmmaking, there was no significant production complex to supply actual films

specific to that medium, nor was any need to do so initially perceived. The Continuous Optical Reduction Printer, invented in 1918, allowed for high-quality transfers of 35mm films into the 16mm format, for both sound and image, which therefore easily facilitated a steady supply of 16mm product. Furthermore, as A.F. Victor, president of Victor Animatograph Corporation, a leading 16mm camera and projector manufacturer, relates,

It was found possible, almost from the beginning of the introduction of 16mm so-called "reversal film," to make duplicates. These were printed by contact and in turn reversed so that both the negative and the positive were actually both positives. The finer grain of the reversal made possible a result which was almost as perfect as the original.⁸⁶

Widespread production of educational and instructional films specifically filmed on 16mm would later develop, but initially transfer reductions from 35mm appeared quite feasible, and ensured a steady supply of material. Marshall McLuhan famously pronounced that the content of any medium is essentially the older medium it has replaced or extended.⁸⁷ While technically the same medium, the new format of 16mm, although it did not actually replace 35mm, nevertheless clearly reinscribed its content.

One important issue, for which 16mm offered a considerable benefit, particularly for the traveling exhibitor, was that of safety. Thirty-five millimetre was

⁸⁶ A.F. Victor, "Evolution of the 16mm Film," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1938, 693.

⁸⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

manufactured with flammable nitro-cellulose film stock (prior to 1952), which was relatively safe when handled carefully by trained projectionists in fireproof booths, but was a significant safety concern for traveling exhibitors operating in diverse and potentially less safety conscientious venues. Sixteen millimetre on the other hand, utilized slow-burning, non-nitrate, acetate-cellulose based film stock, and was so nicknamed “safety film” or “safety stock” for this reason. Also, like the 28mm before it, 16mm very much had its genesis in a greater desire for flexibility and accessibility. That its associated film stock was that much safer only enhanced its appeal. But the intention behind its introduction was never to supplant 35mm, but rather to complement it. Perhaps to alleviate the fears of 35mm theatrical exhibitors, A.F. Victor stressed,

Sixteen mm film is not intended by either the sponsors nor by most of those engaged in the manufacture of film and apparatus to replace 35mm film for entertainment purposes. It is a fact that the larger manufacturers of both of these things clearly understand that the 16mm industry would be retarded were it to encroach on the legitimate theatre field, and for that reason both manufacturers of film and apparatus have tried in every way to discourage the showing of entertainment pictures on 16mm in competition with local theaters.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Victor, 693.

As Horak reveals, shortly after its introduction, “the 16mm format quickly became the gauge of choice, not only for amateur filmmakers, but also for low-budget independents, avant-garde filmmakers, industrial and documentary filmmakers.”⁸⁹ The industry adopted 35mm as its standard gauge in movie theatres since the very beginning, and the entire production and distribution system developed around this standard. There was no question that it was fully entrenched as the theatrical gauge. The newly developed 16mm made little sense for theatrical use at this stage. Most theatres were equipped with screens tailored for 35mm projectors. 16mm film was ideally suited for screens no greater than ten to twelve feet, and when projected on larger screens, image quality inevitably suffered, and the presence of blemishes and scratches was highlighted. It is conceivable that for certain members of the public this was not an issue, but for more discerning viewers, 16mm would have been less than ideal according to the theatrical standards set by 35mm. The portable 16mm gauge however, offered a flexibility more in tune with the needs of the growing non-theatrical market. Victor, perhaps anxious not to alarm theatrical owners, argued that although 16mm was “absolutely safe” it did not ideally lend itself to theatrical use.⁹⁰ In fact, there did not appear to be a significant vocal proponent of theatrical employment of 16mm technology, either in the trade press or elsewhere at that time. No real debate was apparent on this issue; 35mm was suited for theatres, and 16mm was suited for less conventional sites.

In Ottawa in 1923, the year of 16mm’s release to the public, George F. Lewis, Deputy Fire Marshal of Ontario delivered a keynote address at the annual meeting of

⁸⁹ Horak, 113-114.

⁹⁰ Victor, 693.

the Dominion Fire Prevention Association, highlighting the potential dangers of motion-picture projection, with regard to gauges and film technology. Tellingly, he observed,

Many claims are made as to the safety of portable projectors. The danger, however, is not in the projector, but in the inflammable films which it may contain. A light from an incandescent lamp passing through a set of condensing lenses and concentrated on inflammable (nitro-cellulose) film is sufficient to set it on fire, provided the light is strong enough to make a picture of satisfactory size and brilliancy.

.....The sun's rays, when focused through a motion picture lens will ignite inflammable films almost instantly. A gun, as such, or a cannon resting peacefully on its carriage in the park, is harmless, but load either of these instruments with charges of powder and shot and they are capable of destroying human life and doing enormous damage.

.....With the use of safety film fire hazards are eliminated, consequently fire insurance rates are not increased.

We must therefore consider this whole question
in the broadest and most considerate manner, using
judgment, deliberation and sober second thought.⁹¹

Employing the metaphor of weaponry, Lewis is careful to clarify that the issue here, with regard to safety, lies not with the projection machine itself, but with the quality of the film stock, an important distinction that might have not been immediately apparent to the layman. It serves as an honest and sound assessment of both the dangers of nitrate-based film stocks and the potential solutions found in safety-stock film. This was an altogether pressing analysis given that inflammable 35mm film was still being employed non-theatrically. The following year, at its annual convention, the Association of Canadian Fire Marshals actively campaigned the Canadian government against the use of nitro-cellulose film, and asked for actual legislation in favour of “slow-burning motion picture film for all motion picture machines in the Dominion.”⁹² There is much that becomes evident from these activities. First of all, the mere fact that Lewis saw a need to address the issue of safety with regard to “portable projectors” indicates that at this point in history, traveling film projection was a widespread enough phenomenon in Canada to warrant concern from the Deputy Fire Marshal of the Dominion’s largest province. And while his comments are perhaps somewhat misleading in his assertions that safety stock will eliminate fire hazards altogether, they nevertheless would have done much to widen the appeal of

⁹¹ George F. Lewis, “The Motion Picture Film Hazard, Its Regulation and Control” speech delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Dominion Fire Prevention Association, Ottawa, February 8-9, 1923.” National Archives of Canada, “Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940” collection, Box 4, Ontario-Old Material File.

⁹² “Canada’s Compulsory Legislation Against Nitro-Cellulose Film”, *CMPD* Vol.16, no.27, November 1, 1924, 6.

16mm and its associated film stock, particularly for traveling operators, who would find themselves frequently confronted with venues that were perhaps not as equipped for fire safety than established theatres, which were increasingly subject to government regulations.

Before non-theatrical exhibition, particularly 16mm, established itself as a “legitimate” cultural practice, for educational purposes or otherwise, it had to overcome considerable opposition from the established hegemonic theatrical complex. And while this opposition would eventually find quite a vocal presence in Canada, its initial manifestation was in the United States. As we have seen, there was a significant amount of continuous itinerant, non-theatrical screening throughout the 1910s and 1920s in Canada, both of an institutional/educational manner, and also of a privately run, entertaining nature. And for a period, this practice was not perceived as threatening, and in fact received considerable vocal support. In 1921, the chairman of Nova Scotia’s censor board spoke quite enthusiastically about the growing popularity of the practice, particularly with regard to its instructional value:

Through the Movies, the farmer, the mechanic, and the clerk are deriving greater efficiency and proficiency. Commercial men of special lines now carry a portable machine and a roll of film in place of several sample trunks...⁹³

The most significant institutional employment of a mobile cinema was found in the initiatives of the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta. The

⁹³ “Chairman of Nova Scotia Censors Speaks Plain Words on Movies,” *CMPD*, Vol. 12, no.23, May 1, 1921, 14-15.

department initially began running a series of traveling lantern-slide shows in 1915. In 1917, however, the department received a donation of \$4,000 from the Goodyear Rubber Company to establish the “Winged-foot Travelling Library of Moving Picture Films and Lantern Slides.”⁹⁴ Focusing on narrower-gauge, 28mm slow-burning safety film, the department began accumulating a library of movies and introducing them to the already established circuits. Its initial investment featured about a dozen projectors and a modest film library. But by 1922, the department boasted fifty machines and a library of over 300 reels of “broadly educational” subjects. In that year roughly 295 programs were sent out across the province, with a high percentage of screenings occurring at smaller rural schools.⁹⁵ The following year, 1923, 518 screenings were conducted and viewership neared 50,000.⁹⁶

Other innovative forms of itinerant, non-theatrical exhibition can be found from this period. The Canadian Forestry Association, for instance, toured villages and towns throughout the Prairie Provinces, and later to Eastern Canada by means of a railway lecture car equipped with a movie projector. Alan Beaven was in charge of the operation and the car itself was the property of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, but was used mostly on Canadian National railway lines. Beaven recalls the program’s activities:

The programme which we have been giving in the car is highly educational, but we think as a picture alone, it is better than the average show in a rural village. Often

⁹⁴ Mebold and Tepperman, 146.

⁹⁵ “Chairman of Alberta Board of Censors Gives Interesting Address,” *CMPD* Vol. 14, no.22, September 30, 1922, 18.

⁹⁶ Mebold and Tepperman, 146.

when our car arrives there is a group of cheering children on the railway station platform, all of whom crowd into the car as soon as it is prepared for the show. The plan is to visit a new town every day, and to give two exhibitions, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. At one place by actual count we had 242 children in the car for a lecture, the average number of adults and children being 140. During the season we made 125 towns, held 229 meetings, traveled 3,235 miles, and addressed 32,000 people, with the object of deepening interest in the tree planting.⁹⁷

The Canadian Forestry Association at the time featured some 32,000 members, and the activities of this screening program raised roughly \$150,000 annually. Such non-theatrical activities were occurring rather regularly across the country throughout the 1920s through the initiatives of many different organizations for a myriad of intents and purposes. This runs contrary to the assertions of Donald Buchanan, who in a report entitled "Documentary and Educational Films In Canada" wrote that during this period "non-theatrical use of films was limited for many years almost entirely to educational showings in schools."⁹⁸

The practice of non-theatrical exhibition initially did not seem to be one that was raising alarm bells among the country's theatrical exhibitors, so long as the activities remained either sequestered in the sphere of the "educational" or focused on

⁹⁷ "Show Business," *CMPD* Vol.22, no.26, Oct.25, 1930, 9.

⁹⁸ Donald Buchanan, "Documentary and Educational Films in Canada 1935-1950," Submitted to The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1.

audiences in the hinterland, far removed from established theatres. Traveling operations that took on a decidedly more “entertaining” character, such as carnivals and circuses, as we have seen, became the focal points for the theatrical exhibitors’ complaints. Occasionally, itinerant exhibitors would use the guise of “education” or “religion” to establish some sense of perceived legitimacy. This was particularly the case in the province of Quebec where a law existed that effectively banned children under the age of 16 from theatres. The law, however, did not apply to non-theatrical venues, and so traveling operations were one means of accessing a considerable market that was legally excluded from theatres. This practice very much began irking established theatre owners, citing unfair competition. They also often brought up accusations, as in the court case surrounding Joseph Rafrauge in 1930, of fraudulent intent, operating only under the auspices of religion or education, in order to disguise the actual goal of profit making.⁹⁹

Instances such as this, along with the pressure tactics employed by municipal exhibitor associations discussed earlier, indicate that the practice of itinerant, non-theatrical film exhibition was unquestionably on the radar as a cause of concern for established theatre owners. Yet it still remained marginal to the more pressing issues they faced. In Ontario in 1930, for instance, sixty independent theatrical exhibitors gathered in Toronto to discuss and address the key problems plaguing their industry and to ultimately pose three requests to the provincial government. Topping the list was a call for the abolition of the Amusement Tax for tickets from 25 cents to 50 cents (the tax on tickets below 25 cents had already been eliminated). The second request had to do with concessions related to new legislation surrounding fireproofing

⁹⁹ “Show Business,” *CMPD* Vol.22, no.35, Dec.27, 1930, 9.

theatres. And the final request asked for the elimination of a new regulation related to grading practices for projector-operating classes.¹⁰⁰ At that time, the issue of non-theatrical exhibition did not seem to be a major concern.

Why is this significant? For a start, quite a different scenario appeared to be the case in the United States, where for a number of years opposition to the practice of itinerant non-theatrical exhibition had become increasingly prevalent and increasingly vocal. Foremost among this choir was Sydney Cohen, president of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America. In his president's address to the delegates at the Annual Convention of the MPTOA in 1923, he allocated a considerable amount of time to the issue of non-theatrical exhibition, specifically with regard to the content of the films shown on these circuits: "The rapid extension of the use of feature and other drama films into non-theatrical centers is becoming a very pronounced menace to the Theatre Owners of the country."¹⁰¹ Cohen argued that departments in certain distribution companies were fully turning their attention toward this practice of extending feature-film dramas into non-theatrical screening venues. The MPTOA's concern over this issue forced them to bring it to the attention of William H. Hays, the president of the Motion Picture Association of America. Hays reportedly agreed that it was "all wrong and should be stopped," but in Cohen's opinion, motions to eliminate the practice had been insufficient and that these activities were continuing unabated.¹⁰²

For Cohen, the non-theatrical exhibition of feature films was a form of unfair competition that was exerting an ultimately disastrous effect on theatre owners.

¹⁰⁰ "Show Business," *CMPD* Vol.22, no.20, September 13, 1930, 9.

¹⁰¹ Sydney Cohen, "President's Report" reprinted in *CMPD* July 7, 1923 – Vol.15, no.10, 1923, 18.

¹⁰² Cohen, "President's Report," 18.

Central to his argument was that the itinerant exhibitors bore little overhead expense, had little or no taxes to pay and often were not subject to the safety precautions that applied to theatres. In his arguments, non-theatrical projectionists are frequently painted as amateurs, lacking the skills of trained professionals to adequately operate the equipment. Cohen echoed a common refrain among enemies of non-theatrical exhibition that the public danger would be held against the industry as a whole should any major accidents, such as fires, occur. Cohen recognized the importance of educational, religious and instructional film, but rather than arguing that this should be the ultimate function of non-theatrical exhibition, he claimed instead that such pictures should be shown in theatres as well, in the best interest of public safety. By implication, there was, in his opinion, no place for non-theatrical film whatsoever, regardless of a film's content. Religious and educational screenings could be given in mornings, he suggested, arranged through collaboration with community leaders and theatre owners. Ultimately, on the issue of non-theatrical exhibition, the final recommendations of his report were as follows:

Elimination of unfair non-theatrical competition by arrangements with producing and distributing companies, as well as through the strengthening of our mutual relations with church, school and other elements in each community where a fair understanding will be reached that all can be helpful to each other and yet none trespass upon the province of any.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Cohen, "President's Report," 24.

Cohen's audience was specifically American in 1922. Yet the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* ran the report in its entirety, so Canadian independent exhibitors were certainly following the developments in the United States. And in 1923, a Canadian division of the MPTOA was established, with the full support of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* and its editor, Ray Lewis. The *Digest* was even designated the "official paper of the Canadian Division" by Sydney Cohen himself.¹⁰⁴

Cohen retired the following year and upon his exit from the organization, issued a lengthy speech in which he highlighted some of the key pertinent issues facing independent exhibitors, which was likewise published in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. With regard to the "non-theatrical situation" Cohen reiterated that the competition it represented was "today one of the real dangers which menace the welfare of the theatre owner."¹⁰⁵ With this address he pushed his attack further, explicitly homing in on the activities of motion-picture producers, rather than merely the non-theatrical exhibitors. Cohen painted a picture of greedy capitalists who "seek the dollar from any person or association which may desire to hand it over to them" and who "seemingly have no consideration for the welfare of the Theatre Owner."¹⁰⁶ Theatre owners, he argued, who were producers' single biggest patrons, were not being allotted the proper amount of respect on this issue. It was bad enough that producers were selling feature presentations to non-theatrical operators, but they were now further aggravating the situation by establishing separate departments to handle this new area of business. With the Canadian division officially created, Cohen took

¹⁰⁴ "Organize Canadian Division of Motion Picture Theatre Owners," *CMPD* Vol. 15, no.11, July 14, 1923, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Sydney Cohen, "Sydney S. Cohen's Retiring Speech" cont'd from previous issue, *CMPD* Vol.16, no.17, Aug.23, 1924, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, "Retiring Speech," 5.

time in his speech to single out the situation as it applied to Canada. In his opinion, the non-theatrical situation in Canada was just as severe and pressing as it was in the United States. He saw no need for a revision of purposes or solutions, as the case was nearly identical. Likewise, the same corrective measures that he supported in the United States should similarly be applied in Canada. In fact, Cohen emphasized that the situation was even direr in Canada than in the US:

The Canadian Theatre Owners had the producer extension theatre trouble, the non-theatrical evil, inordinately high film prices, national and regional taxation, discrimination of various kinds and finally the attempts of producer interests to dominate the whole situation as was the same in this country, *but with greater aggravation there.*¹⁰⁷ (emphasis added)

Despite Cohen and the MPTOA's assertions that the non-theatrical situation was a greater concern in Canada than it was in the United States, there is little historical evidence to suggest that this was actually the case at this point. Recall that the issue failed to even warrant a mention at the meeting of the independent exhibitors in Ontario. And Ray Lewis, the leading spokesperson for Canadian independent theatrical exhibitors as editor of the leading industry trade paper, had yet to even address the issue prior to Cohen's assertions, nor would she for sometime afterwards (See chapters 3 and 4).

¹⁰⁷ Sydney Cohen, "Sydney S., Cohen's Retiring Speech cont'd" *CMPD* Volume 16, no.18, Aug. 30, 1924, 9.

But if Canadian independent theatre owners were not necessarily as charged-up over the issue of non-theatrical exhibition during the 1920s as their American counterparts, they were nevertheless demonstrating an augmented sense of purpose as a collective force. In addition to the various local theatre owner associations and the establishment of a Canadian branch of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America, Canadian exhibitors and distributors at roughly the same point united to form the Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada in 1924. In his seminal work *Canadian Dreams and American Control*, Manjunath Pendakur carefully traces the roots of dependency in the Canadian film industry and reveals the web of tensions between American corporate interests and Canadian entrepreneurial capitalists, particularly in the exhibition and distribution sectors. Pendakur reveals that the Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada, which became known as the Cooper Organization after its first president John A. Cooper, essentially amounted to a mere branch plant of the American Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, and its actual intents were to safeguard the American industry's interests in Canada.¹⁰⁸ In an industry plagued by rivalry between competing local capitalists and American monopoly power, Pendakur reveals that the organization spoke in a language of self-regulation and of unifying common interests.¹⁰⁹ It engaged in such activities as lobbying against censorship, amusement taxes and especially potential quota laws. But the organization was run entirely by American interests, namely the Famous Players chain, and it by no means represented the interests of the independent Canadian owned theatres. In fact, it often ran counter

¹⁰⁸ Pendakur, 79-80.

¹⁰⁹ Pendakur, 80.

to their best interests. For example, in 1925 Cooper initiated a standard contract, similar to the American version that was used by film exchanges when selling pictures to exhibitors. Pendakur reveals that this uniform contract in effect gave coercive power to distributors and helped to curtail any power of independent exhibitors.¹¹⁰

So while theatre owners were organizing themselves into protective associations at both the municipal and provincial levels across the country throughout the 1920s, and demonstrating increasing collective power, particularly on local issues through successful campaigns against peripatetic entertainment such as carnivals, they were concurrently finding themselves in an increasingly hostile market situation. The oppressive market conditions experienced by independent exhibitors – those not owned or affiliated with the major chains such as Nathanson's Famous Players - were eventually acknowledged by the federal government, which launched an inquiry under the Federal Combines Investigation Act in September 1930. The general conclusion was that a combine did in fact exist and that all US distributors in Canada as well as Famous Players were complicit. However, no resulting court cases succeeded in altering the industrial structure in any meaningful way. Independent exhibitors were feeling squeezed out of the market, yet they had no effective means of doing anything. It may seem initially bewildering, given this hostile market environment, that in the 1930s Canadian independent theatre owners would increasingly begin focusing their attention on the threat posed by small-scale 16mm operators, as we shall see in the following chapter, rather than on the obvious foreign-capital behemoth that had them in a headlock.

¹¹⁰ Pendakur, 85.

Chapter Three
Gauging Education/Gauging Entertainment:
16mm Distribution and Exhibition During the 1930s

No one has made the concert stage, with its musicians, its singers, an object for educational affinity. Neither has sculpture with its naked gods and goddesses, or the realm of the palette and brush been continually harped upon as educational propaganda.¹

-Ray Lewis, *The Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, March 1934

The 16 MM, which is educational and produced for schools, universities, etc., has nothing to do with the picture business; it should be left to those educational institutions which are desirous of using the film for educational purposes.²

-Ray Lewis, *The Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, October 1938

These two quotations from Ray Lewis, editor of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* encapsulate the growing sentiment that many in the commercial-film industry began to espouse during the 1930s. The two passages - the former with its rhetorical flourishes and the latter, in clear, unambiguous prose, both typical of its author - express the same essential disposition: an intense aversion towards the association of education with the business of motion pictures. The decade of the 1920s, as we have

¹ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.25, no.47, March 17, 4.

² Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.28, October 29, 4.

seen, witnessed the parallel developments of the introduction of 16mm technology, a large-scale movement across the nation towards the formation of both local and provincially-based exhibitor and distributor associations, and an increasing awareness and concern on the part of these groups for the practice of traveling and other forms of non-theatrical film exhibition. This chapter traces the extensions of those developments into the 1930s and examines the considerable impact of non-theatrical 16mm film exhibition by cultural and educational forces upon this emerging cultural matrix. The 1930s saw the proliferation of 16mm screening activity in both “legitimate” circles such as film societies and so-called “illegitimate” circles maintained by independent operators harnessing the medium’s vast potential for safety and mobility. As these less legitimate (in the eyes of the industry) activities began making their presence felt, dominant commercial and governmental forces ramped up efforts to effectively subdue them. As 16mm use became more widespread across the nation by a diverse array of individuals and organizations, increased regulation and censorship logically ensued. The technology’s rise to a greater position of prominence was vehemently contested by the independent exhibitors – those exhibitors not affiliated with the major vertically integrated companies – who found a potent champion in Lewis. This developing battle, in both its rhetorical and actual form, brought to the forefront key issues involving technology, screening environment and film content, and made apparent the underlying power structures that governed the industry.

Crucial to an examination of 16mm’s spread in the 1930s is an understanding of the film exchange system that was in place in the industry. In the early years,

producers supplied exhibitors with their film product directly. As the industry quickly grew, however, this arrangement became less and less logistically feasible. The film-exchange system developed, initially at a local level, to help facilitate the circulation of films. Exchanges functioned as middlemen, in effect negotiating the flow of film titles between producers and exhibitors. Historically, two types of film exchanges have populated the industry: those controlled by the producers themselves, and those that have been independently owned and operated. In Canada, young entrepreneurs such as Jule and Jay Allen got into the film-exchange business early and secured exclusive franchises to American and other countries' film product.³ But, as indicated in the previous chapter, it did not take long for the film-distribution situation in Canada to reflect ownership patterns similar to those in the exhibition situation. Just as American capital backed the dominant force in the exhibition market -- Famous Players Canadian Corporation -- all of the major distribution companies eventually became American subsidiaries. For this reason, throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, the Canadian market for film distribution was "generally accepted as part of the domestic [US] market,"⁴ and the *American Film Daily Yearbook* included Canada in its annual surveys of the industry. As Manjunath Pendakur reveals, the ten major exchange companies operating nationwide in Canada were either American corporations or their subsidiaries. They were as follows: Famous-Lasky Film Service; Regal Films Limited; RKO Distributing Corp of Canada Ltd.; Fox Film Corporation Ltd.; Vitagraph Ltd.; Canadian Educational Films Company Ltd.; Canadian Universal Film Company; United Artists Corporation Ltd.;

³ Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 47.

⁴ "A Survey of the Industry in Canada," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1928, 831.

Columbia Pictures of Canada Ltd.; and Tiffany Productions Ltd.⁵ Each of these exchanges supplied films from its respective affiliated production company, and frequently others as well. These large distribution companies, Pendakur reveals, effectively operated as a cartel under a trade association, the Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada, commonly known as the Cooper Organization, after its first president, John Alexander Cooper.⁶ At the beginning of the 1930s, Famous Players was easily the dominant force in Canadian exhibition and distribution – a position it maintained until the 1940s. With the cooperation of the other major companies in the cartel, Famous Players was able to exert considerable pressure in the industry and made every effort to squeeze out the independent exhibitors from the market. The cartel's control over the distribution and exhibition sectors made it very difficult for independent exhibitors to secure quality films for their theatres. Throughout the 1920s, the major distributors frequently engaged in discriminatory pricing of film rentals and booking practices that only further marginalized independent exhibitors.⁷ It may initially seem peculiar that the independent theatre owners turned their attention towards the threat posed by itinerant 16mm operators, rather than towards this stranglehold that was imposed upon them by the American-backed corporate forces.

While many of the larger film exchanges in Canada by this point operated nationally, regulation and taxation were handled provincially. Primarily for logistical reasons, the actual distribution of films, both 35mm and 16mm, was handled on a more regionally based system, with the major exchanges all housed in major cities

⁵ Pendakur, 67.

⁶ Pendakur, 68 and 79.

⁷ Pendakur, 72.

across the country (usually in one specific building, apparently for safety reasons). The province of Manitoba, for instance, had regulation and taxation jurisdiction over all films distributed in the province. However, film exchanges operating in Winnipeg also serviced certain parts of north western Ontario and parts of Eastern Saskatchewan. The regulation was provincially oriented, while the actual day-to-day practical activities assumed a more regionally based structure. On the surface this situation might indicate the potential for jurisdictional problems, but there appears to be little evidence of this actually occurring.

Although it certainly made an impression upon its introduction to the public in 1923, the popularity of the 16mm film gauge unquestionably surged during the 1930s. Control over the licensing of projector operation and for running exchanges was the jurisdiction of each province, and generally 16mm was subject to different regulations and rates of taxation than 35mm. Furthermore, each province chose to address the licensing of 16mm differently. In Ontario, for instance, the Inspection Branch of the Ontario Treasury Department first began issuing licenses for operating 16mm projectors and for operating 16mm film exchanges in 1924, and it charged fees for both. Quebec on the other hand chose to impose much less regulation on 16mm and charged no fees. There are no clear reasons for this, and we can only assume that such differences in regulation arose from specific local conditions.

In the early years, before the widespread vertical integration of the industry and its dominance by American capital, film exchanges would rent films to traveling exhibitors on a flat-rate basis, meaning they could be shown as often as they wished.⁸ Films could be purchased outright as well. But as the major vertically-integrated

⁸ Pendakur, 47.

companies exerted more control over the industry, and independent theatrical exhibitors began feeling squeezed out of the market, so too did the independent traveling exhibitors. For the first few years of the 1930s, few records were kept regarding the number of itinerant exhibitors operating in Canada, but there is certainly evidence to indicate that it was indeed a practice that was still occurring, despite the hostile marketplace. Two-page advertisements for instance, ran in consecutive issues of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* in February and March in 1932, profiling Northern Electric's "Portable Equipment for Road Shows" (see Appendix A, Fig.8).⁹ This series featured a portable 35mm projector, an amplifier, a screen and a loudspeaker set-up that all conveniently packed into suitcases, "specially adaptable to road show work."¹⁰ That Northern Electric would pay for a two-page advertisement in the leading Canadian trade paper for this product would hardly indicate that it was some fringe technology, with little employment. The fact remains, however, that this equipment was nevertheless 35mm equipment. As we have seen, 16mm was by no means a marginal technology by this point. Yet as detailed in the previous chapter, its employment was largely to be found in the amateur, educational and industrial spheres. As a presence in both the discourse and the exhibition practices of the dominant industry, it was yet to be fully acknowledged – as a potential threat or otherwise.

But by the mid-1930s, 16mm's presence was much more pronounced, and much of this stemmed from an expansion of the medium's usage into areas beyond its initial employment. Provincial governments had been regulating 16mm operating

⁹ "Northern Electric's 'Portable Equipment for Road Shows' – Advertisement," *CMPD*, Vol.23, no.44, February 27, 1932, 6-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

and distribution licenses in some form or another since the 1920s. But the issue of censorship for 16mm titles had so far mostly been avoided. Due to its origins in the amateur and home filmmaking market, initially most regulators did not see censorship of 16mm film necessary, desirable or even feasible in some cases. The censorship of homemade movies was simply an untenable and needless task. But as films increasingly became available in the 16mm format, the issue of censorship began to come to the forefront, particularly in Ontario. This is of course the era of the Hays Code, and government authorities in Canada had established censorship boards for the monitoring of 35mm feature films. With no such government infrastructure or legislation in place for the regulation of the steadily growing number of 16mm titles, it perhaps comes as no surprise that authorities, namely provincial governments, perceived a need to intervene.

The film that appears to have catalyzed this discussion more so than any other was Sergei Eisenstein's *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1928), or as it's also known, *October*. The film, generally regarded now as a classic, was based on the novel by American journalist John Reed and chronicled the events of the Russian Revolution. While labelled as propaganda by many upon its release (perhaps justifiably so, as its production was closely monitored by Stalin, who reportedly forced Eisenstein to edit out any references to Leon Trotsky), the film nevertheless traveled in film-society circuits, where it was understandably praised, among other things, for its innovative montage sequences. By the early-mid 1930s a 16mm version of the film was widely circulating non-theatrically throughout Canada. Up until this point, films in the 16mm format were presumed to be "generally shown

privately or in educational or religious circles” and that they would therefore “be checked by their sponsors.”¹¹ Prior to 1935, all film of this type was exempt from censorship. The provinces felt little need to step in and regulate or censor 16mm titles. However, with the widespread screening of Eisenstein’s film, and others, according to the Ontario Board of Censors of Motion Pictures in their annual report, “complaints regarding propaganda and improper use were received.... And it was thereupon ruled that all such film must be subject to censorship.”¹²

Interestingly enough, while the film’s political content obviously served as a lightning rod for this issue of censorship, it appears that commerce was just as crucial a factor in the Board’s decision. Non-theatrical exhibitors had been charging admission for the film, and it is on these grounds that many of the original complaints had been levied.¹³ And so, provincial boards, with Ontario leading the way, from this point on began paying greater attention to 16mm titles. Censor boards began reviewing them, and in most cases, censorship fees began to be implemented. Within the first year of official censorship for 16mm films in Ontario, 1935-1936, the Board was very active:

Despite difficulties, particularly with foreign language films which had neither superimposed English subtitles nor proper transcriptions, the Board reviewed a total of seventy-nine 16 millimetre subjects, or a total of 282,000 feet in the past year, including duplicate

¹¹ “Censorship for 16mm Films?” *CPD*, Vol.26 no.45, March 2, 1935, p.6. (Reprinted from the *Toronto Globe*).

¹² Annual Report of the Board of Censors of Motion Pictures, 1936. Ontario Censor Board File, Box 4, Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada. 2.

¹³ “Censorship for 16mm Films?”

copies. This difficulty has been partially overcome by notifying the distributors of such films “that the true dialogue of all foreign language films – standard or 16 millimetre – must be inserted in superimposed English subtitles, before submitting such film to the Board for approval.” Among the films examined were German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian and Jewish language subjects, as well as industrial and educational pictures.¹⁴

Non-theatrical, 16mm exhibition was unquestionably on the rise, and evidently its employment was serving diverse audience groupings. A certain standardization was implied in theatrical screenings of Hollywood feature films, and while there were without question concerns and debates about the content of these films, discussion usually centered around issues of morality. The diversity of audience groupings coupled with the uncertainties typical of non-theatrical environments, and situated within the context of a highly politicized decade in general, meant that 16mm and its associated screening events were viewed with more than just an air of suspicion, and this in no small part fuelled the perceived need for censorship.

The majority of the employment of 16mm up to this point had been for private, educational and religious purposes. Institutional forces were gradually noticing 16mm’s many merits – its affordability, its portability - and as a result many cultural and educational associations were beginning to harness its potential.

¹⁴ Annual Report of the Board of Censors of Motion Pictures, 1936.

According to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, for instance, by 1937 there were 260 projectors in schools across the nation.¹⁵ While this is perhaps not an overwhelming figure, it nevertheless points to a growing acknowledgement of the benefits 16mm offered for the school system. Donald Buchanan, founding member of the National Film Society, in a report on the use of educational and cultural film in Canada, described the activities of the Catholic School Commission of the City of Montreal, which coordinated an office dedicated to educational films. The office appointed a specific instructor in charge of film operators, and it maintained its own library of films, which were sent out for exhibition in classrooms throughout the city's secondary schools. The instructor's duties were "perambulatory" in nature, and he traveled from classroom to classroom with a projector and instructional material. "This system," Buchanan explained, "while advanced for Canada, would be considered backward in other countries, where the use of cinematography in schools has been well developed."¹⁶ Buchanan cites the use of 16mm film in a few other school boards, but stresses that these systems were just beginning to be developed. He also cites adult-education programs, notably a series established in Manitoba in which both entertainment and documentary films were shown in rural schools to various community audiences. The communities themselves covered the expenses related to projection equipment and film rentals.¹⁷

¹⁵ Figures cited in W.C. Gray, *Movies for the People: The Story of the National Film Board of Canada's Unique Distribution System* (Montreal: National Film Board, 1973), 12.

¹⁶ Donald Buchanan, "Educational and Cultural Films in Canada: A Survey of the Situation in Regard to Educational and Cultural Films in Canada Together with Recommendations for the Establishment of a National Clearing House for Information on Educational Films," (Ottawa: National Film Society of Canada, 1936), 9. This report was financed by a grant given to the National Film Society of Canada by the Canadian Committee of the Carnegie Corporation.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

Organizations such as government departments, universities, forestry and agriculture associations, and church missionaries (as discussed in the previous chapter) were all among the various other diverse number of groups that dabbled in itinerant, non-theatrical 16mm exhibition for educational purposes during the 1930s. A major concern, however, as highlighted by Buchanan and D.S. McMullen, Director of Visual Education of the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers of Quebec in their "Report to Executive of National Film Society of Canada" in 1938, was that commercial interests had too great a stake in the distribution of educational films.¹⁸ This report, often known simply as the Buchanan-McMullen Report, was commissioned by the National Film Society to appraise and give recommendations concerning the state of educational film in Canada. The 1930s had witnessed the rapid proliferation of film societies in Canada, the first appearing in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver in 1934, and others following in major centres over the next few years. The National Film Society was formed in 1935 with a mandate to "encourage and promote the study, appreciation and use of motion pictures as educational and cultural factors."¹⁹ As Charles Acland has revealed in his work on the subject, the National Film Society and other culturalist volunteer associations from the era did much to establish a privileged position for educational film as a national concern in the two decades preceding the establishment of the National Film Board in 1939.²⁰ The Buchanan-McMullen Report, which would indirectly contribute to the creation of the

¹⁸ Charles R. Acland, "National Dreams, International Encounters: The Formation of Canadian Film Culture in the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol.3, no.1, (1994): 19.

¹⁹ Gray, 27.

²⁰ Ibid. See also Charles R. Acland, "Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939," *Cinémas*, vol.6, no.1, p.101-118 and Acland, "Patterns of Cultural Authority: The National Film Society of Canada and the Institutionalization of Film Education, 1938-1941," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol.10, no.1 (2001): 2-27.

Film Board, highlighted, in addition to its concerns over commercial interests in the distribution of educational film, the need for greater cooperation with American, French and British producers of educational film, further production in Canada, increased circulation of these films to rural areas and communities, and initiatives to further standardize the regulation of 16mm film across the country.²¹

This period is very much typified by this transformation: a shift away from a popular conception of 16mm as a technology designed for amateurs, and employed by them privately, towards a more institutionalized conception of the format, to be used non-theatrically for specific audiences, with an educational agenda. Buchanan, who would later help orchestrate the National Film Board's elaborate system of traveling cinema, was a prominent figure during this period. He was perhaps the most renowned chronicler and advocate of non-theatrical film exhibition, albeit from a strongly culturalist and educational point of view. In his brief history "Documentary and Educational Films in Canada, 1935-1950," he lays out the strong educational bent to non-theatrical screenings prior to 1935:

Non-theatrical use of films was limited for many years almost entirely to educational showings in schools. A few of our more imaginative community groups did, it is true, occasionally borrow portable 16mm projectors and so manage to screen some of the available documentary or instructional subjects; yet as late as 1935 the only organized non-commercial distribution of

²¹ Acland, "National Dreams," 20.

such material was through the Department of Extension
of the University of Alberta.²²

As we have seen, Buchanan's assertion that non-theatrical screenings were limited "almost entirely to educational showings in schools" is simply not true. However, by the early 1930s, while it was by no means a practice "entirely" limited to schools, it is safe to say that the majority of such screenings did seem to fall under the general category of education, and he is certainly correct to single out the University of Alberta as the leading proponent of the practice. The net result of this traveling, 16mm educational activity is that we began to witness a process under which the two come to be intimately associated with each other. Although there is nothing inherent in the medium of 16mm that should indicate it as an exclusively educational tool (recall its initial intent was for the amateur and home markets), it nevertheless became identified as such. And "educational" film was obviously not meant as synonymous with "documentary" film, as the title of the report would suggest by distinguishing between the two (although they certainly would have frequently overlapped). For Buchanan and the Film Society, "educational" was very much a broad (and ultimately subjective) term, which could have potentially included certain dramatic features, experimental cinema and foreign films. As Acland notes, much of the critique of popular "entertainment" cinema, as evidenced in the Buchanan-McMullen Report but also broadly typical of national conceptions of culture at the time, hinged first and foremost on issues of "quality" rather than of national origin. That Canadians were

²² Donald Buchanan, "Documentary and Educational Films in Canada, 1935-1950." Submitted to The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.

flooded with foreign, particularly American, films was not necessarily the problem. That the films were Hollywood features, and not sufficiently “educational,” was.²³

The classification of films under the categories of either “education” or “entertainment” was obviously a subjective undertaking. But this nevertheless typifies much of the growing discourse surrounding the function of film in Canadian culture and society in the 1930s.²⁴ Worthy of consideration on this issue are the writings of Ray Lewis in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Based initially in Montreal, the *Digest* was founded in 1915 and edited by Merrick R. Nutting with contributions from journalists across the country. In 1918, the *Digest* acquired the *Motion Picture Bulletin*, a publication of the Universal Film Co., and the editor of the *Bulletin*, Raymond S. Peck, succeeded Nutting at the helm of the *Digest*. Shortly after this transaction, the *Digest* was relocated to Toronto, which was quickly asserting itself as the capital of the film industry in Canada. Peck’s tenure as editor-in-chief would be short-lived, however, and by September 1918 he had moved on to manage the Montreal office of Mutual Films. Ray Lewis was hired within the month as editor-in-chief of the *Digest*, and by early 1923 she was its owner. She maintained editorial control for three-and-a-half decades until her death in 1954. Lewis (née Rae Levinsky) was reputedly a vaudeville and stage performer earlier in her career, before settling into her position with the *Digest*. As Louis Pelletier and Paul S. Moore remark in their biographical work, while Lewis is often remembered (and critiqued) for her exuberance and eccentricity, far too often overlooked is the vital role she

²³ Acland, “National Dreams,” 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. Acland cites Governor-General Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfeld, Honorary President of the National Film Society and author of the preface to Donald Buchanan’s *Educational and Cultural Films in Canada*, published in June 1936, as an example of a manifestation of this binary.

played in the development of the Canadian film industry, primarily as editor of its leading trade publication.²⁵

Much of Lewis's editorial writings from the early 1930s concerned the combines investigation into Famous Players Canada Corporation. But by 1933, her attention was slowly being drawn to the topic of educational film, specifically as it related to non-theatrical exhibition. Initially, Lewis was unsympathetic to the whole concept of films serving an "educational" purpose. In her first major editorial on the subject, in March of 1933, she put forth an opinion that

The Educational alibi has outworn its usefulness, [*sic*]
let Motion Pictures concentrate on the Entertainment of
Show Business and not enter into competition with
itself, by stimulating non-theatrical exhibition and
Television, lest it repeat the mistake it made when it
tried to be producer-distributor-exhibitor over a world
territory eliminating its own Trade consumers!²⁶

This is Lewis's first major intervention on the issue of motion pictures serving an educational purpose, and it is clear that at this stage, it is not something she viewed favourably. But her concern, implicit in these words, is the creation of unwanted competition within the industry; it is not somehow rooted in an ideological opposition to the movies serving an educational function. A year later, however, with the increasing use of motion pictures in educational milieus, Lewis stepped up her

²⁵ Louis Pelletier and Paul S. Moore, "Une excentrique au cœur de l'industrie: *Lady* Ray Lewis et le *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* » *Cinémas*, Vol. 16, no. 1, (2005): 51-90. All historical information about the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* and Ray Lewis in this paragraph is drawn from Pelletier and Moore's work.

²⁶ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.24, no.45, March 1933, 4.

opposition. Without denying its ability as an educational medium, she nevertheless asserted that,

aside from the fact that The Motion Picture Industry can be utilized, and has been utilized as a powerful educational medium, I persist in objecting to having the educational complex, or utility of Motion Pictures continually attached to it.

...Pictures made for educational purposes should be made for distribution in clinics, schools, universities, etc. This is a non-theatrical enterprise and has no relationship to Show Business, even should such pictures develop into a profitable business.²⁷

This passage is significant because here we find Lewis in 1934, for the first time, fully articulating a stance that demarcates clear boundaries for issues regarding film function and screening environment. In many respects, they reflect a Canadian acknowledgement and response to many of the concerns regarding non-theatrical exhibition outlined by Sydney Cohen and the American exhibitors years prior, as detailed in the previous chapter. However, whereas Cohen spoke out about the evils of non-theatrical film in general, Lewis was careful to imply only that the educational film should remain in the domain of the non-theatrical, not that the practice should be eliminated entirely. The stipulations posited by Lewis very much anticipate the key concerns that come to typify a much larger debate that plays out later in 1938, as we shall see in the following chapter.

²⁷ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents" *CMPD*, Vol.25, no.47, March 1934, 4.

But considering all of this talk of educational film and non-theatrical cinema, it is important not to overlook the fact that, despite the claims made by Donald Buchanan and Ray Lewis, itinerant, non-theatrical exhibition of a non-educational or rather, “entertaining” nature was in fact occurring during the first half of the 1930s, with both 16mm and 35mm technology. By 1934, there appears to have been a significant number of operators in Canada, with a particularly noticeable presence in the Prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Even in these relatively sparsely populated regions, there were at least 12 independent operators serving over one hundred small towns regularly during the summer of 1934, compared to 96 established theatres within the same geographical territory (as delineated by the boundaries established by the film exchanges).²⁸ Permanent exhibitors in these provinces responded to this trend with demands for much stricter government regulations for itinerant operators. Foremost among these demands was the desire for a law dictating that no traveling operation could screen films within ten miles of an established theatre. The ten-mile radius was a loose guideline that itinerants tended to honour, but the only province to actually enact a law and enforce it was British Columbia, and even then the limit was three miles rather than ten.²⁹ It was felt that itinerants were not always following the rule-of-thumb, and that actual legislation needed to be passed to ensure that they did.

By January of 1935, by a conservative estimate, there were about 300 places in Canada being served by traveling showmen, employing both 16mm and 35mm

²⁸ “A Survey of Canada and Newfoundland,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1935, 1026.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

technology.³⁰ Admittedly, these figures can be somewhat ambiguous. Certain itinerant exhibitors held steady circuits, rotating through set towns and villages several times a month. Others kept confined to specific areas, screening films more regularly, but in a smaller number of venues. Certain exhibitors operated only during the summer months, while others operated year-round. The shows performed were broadly diverse. Some followed the variety format of the early years of itinerant cinema, where films were but one of the attractions offered. Certain films were screened with accompanying lectures or travelogues. Others followed the general structure typical of theatrical screenings. The venues of exhibition were equally heterogeneous and comprised all manners of establishments, but none fitting the broad characterization of “movie theatre.”

Furthermore, there appeared to be considerable regional disparity across the country in terms of itinerant operation. Ontario and the Prairies, as we have seen, were well served by these outfits. By 1937 in Manitoba, in fact, the number of public halls licensed to exhibit movies actually outnumbered the amount of licensed theatres by a margin of 514 to 391.³¹ Granted, this figure only represents the number of licensed venues, rather than the actual frequency of screenings at these venues, it nevertheless indicates a considerable interest in the practice. Traveling showmen during this period in the Maritimes, on the other hand, at first glance, were conspicuously absent. According to an announcement at the Maritime Film Board of Trade annual meeting in January 1938, the fact that “NO ITINERANTS” were operating in the region, which included all three Maritime provinces and

³⁰ “Canada and Newfoundland During 1936,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1937, 1171.

³¹ JJ Conklin, “Conklin in Winnipeg,” *CMPD*, Vol.29, no.44, February 19, 1938.

Newfoundland, was stressed.³² However, by November, new sections were being hastily inserted into the New Brunswick Theatres and Cinematographic Act to further regulate the practice of itinerant 16mm exhibition – motions that would hardly seem necessary if the province and region were truly free of itinerant operators.³³

What is even more disingenuous about that statement from the Maritime Film Board of Trade is its dismissal of the state of itinerant exhibition in Newfoundland. Michael Taft, in his study on the topic, has revealed a rich historical tradition of traveling “movie-men” who served the outports and communities of Newfoundland during this period, and dating as far back as the 1920s. Taft explains the tendency of many scholars to stress the historical isolation of Newfoundland from North American society and culture. Itinerants, as he explains, were but one of the various forces that in fact did the opposite – brought mainland culture to the island and its various communities.³⁴ For his study, Taft conducted oral interviews with these movie-men decades after they had retired from the road (or sea, in many cases). These projectionists traveled along the coast in motorboats or, where roads were available, traveled inland by car or truck. Ideally, according to Taft, the movie-men chose their circuits based on the size of the community. An ideal location had a population large enough to make the evening worthwhile, yet not too big that there would be other events with which to compete. These individuals frequently found creative means to publicize their events. A woman from Placentia Bay remembered a man who fashioned small billboards stationed throughout the communities he

³² Alice T. Fairweather, “Notes from the Maritimes,” *CMPD* Vol.29, no.39, January 15, 1938, 11.

³³ Alice T. Fairweather, “Fairweather in the Maritimes,” *CMPD* Vol.30, no.29, November 5, 1938, 8.

³⁴ Michael Taft, “The Itinerant Movie-Man and his Impact on the Folk Culture of the Outports of Newfoundland,” *Culture & Tradition*, Vol.1, (1976): 107-119.

serviced. Another would attach his public-address system to his car, and drive around the community announcing the details of his event. Members of the community frequently helped set up the evening's entertainment. Children were particularly helpful, often assisting in such tasks as the loading and unloading of equipment, setting up the screen and arranging chairs for the audience. The children were so helpful that one showman even recalls sending them for packs of cigarettes.³⁵ Shows were typically held in church halls, fisherman's halls or schoolhouses, and usually began after sundown, given that many venues were not equipped with proper drapes or blinds.

Interestingly, many viewed these events as performing essentially a class-levelling function. "The merchant family, clergyman or teacher" would all sit together, and "the rich would be sitting with the poor," recalled one projectionist.³⁶ A recurring theme at these screenings – one that seems to be a common theme among a good number of non-theatrical events – was the impassive form of spectatorship that transpired amongst the audience. People would frequently talk and comment throughout the film and react strongly to its various episodes. One showman recalls how certain particularly rowdy audiences would "throw stuff at the screen."³⁷ Taft attributes this behaviour not to a lack of sophistication, as some have remarked, but rather to the comfortable and informal surroundings at these events. Spectators were surrounded not by strangers in a darkened theatre, but rather by friends and family, in familiar spaces. Film programs varied, but generally the most popular films with the audiences were cliffhangers and serialized shorts. The movie-men would stress how

³⁵ Ibid., 111.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 112.

these types of films helped maintain their audiences, who would return every week to follow the progression of the story. The most popular feature-length genre films were almost always westerns and comedies. And interestingly enough, many of these individuals stress the blurring of the lines between the text of the films and the context of the evening. “You couldn’t really separate the projector and the delco [generator] from the movie—it was part of the whole feeling of the thing.”³⁸ These events effectively became ritualized experiences, and as Taft notices, the event itself frequently became much more important than the film to the people in these communities. People attended regardless of whether the film actually appealed to them or not, “just to get out,” as one participant recalled.³⁹

Ultimately these screenings put on by itinerant exhibitors represented one means by which rural Newfoundland communities entered into a dialogue with the “modern” culture of the mainland. Taft’s main argument is that it is wrongheaded to view the history of the island as if it existed in a cultural vacuum, and motion pictures delivered by the itinerant exhibitor served to break through this rural/urban divide. Taft’s study serves to challenge the urban-centric nature of historical film studies, and provides firm evidence that contradicts the assumption that no itinerant exhibition was in operation on the island, such as the claims put forward by the Maritime Film Board of Trade in 1938. Other regional areas in the country were similarly serviced by traveling exhibitors and, in certain situations, actual filmmakers who both shot and screened in these rural communities. Alfred Booth, for instance, toured British Columbia in the 1930s, shooting and screening scenes in small villages and

³⁸ Ibid., 114.

³⁹ Ibid.

settlements.⁴⁰ And Quebec, where there were half as many movie theatres as in Ontario, and a large majority of them in Montreal, was well served during the 1930s by these itinerant exhibitors. Some regions, such as Gaspé, had no theatres at all. As a result, David Clandfield argues, rural visits by itinerant projectionists and the circuits that operated through the schools and parish halls were the “major vehicle for film culture in the province.”⁴¹ The central figures from this era are Albert Tessier in Trois-Rivières and Maurice Proulx in Abitibi. Tessier shot and edited his own films, which typically dealt with issues of history and rural identity, and screened them, with lectures and commentary, across the province. He is estimated to have conducted some 3,000 of these screenings.⁴² Maurice Proulx was a filmmaker as well, and he worked for various government departments. His films typically dealt with issues of agriculture, rural tradition, cooperative management and self-sufficiency and were screened throughout the provincial countryside.⁴³

Returning now to the national scene, this period was marked by a distinctive move towards making many of the non-theatrical spots more permanent. Under pressure from theatrical exhibitors, further regulation by governments and deliberate actions by distributors, over a period of approximately two years “a gradual process of changing these traveling shows into permanent theatres” was enacted.⁴⁴ According to data provided by the *Film Daily Yearbook*, the roughly 300 “situations” that were in service as venues for traveling exhibition across the country were reduced over this period to approximately 50. In this context, the use of the term “situation” would

⁴⁰ David Clandfield, *Canadian Film* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴ “Canada and Newfoundland During 1936,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1937, 1171.

seem to imply a predicament that somehow needs to be addressed, rectified or dealt with. Furthermore, in the Western territories, eighty of these venues served by itinerant exhibitors were equipped with fireproof projection rooms and permanent equipment.⁴⁵ In the exchange territory serviced by Calgary-based distributors, for instance, the year 1936 shows a considerable increase in the number of reported theatres from ninety-five the year before to 167, mostly due to the large number of venues in small towns that were previously serviced by traveling showmen and subsequently converted into “permanent situations.”⁴⁶ This is a trend very much prefigured in previous historical circumstances, where the activities of traveling operations, deemed undesirable by more established forces in the industry, are effectively subdued and curtailed. The logic of the industry dictates that itinerancy is unstable and marginal, and that external pressures force these elements into submission, either through driving them out of business entirely, or forcing them to adapt to the more “stable” and sedentary existence that they themselves embody. The terminology of “theatrical” and “non-theatrical” implies a rather strict, impermeable binary. Yet this historical process effectively demonstrates a confounding of this simplistic binary system. Historically the mobile cinema units are associated with the non-theatrical realm, and the established theatre is decidedly permanent and static. At this juncture, we witness a period of transition whereby traveling cinema could, in fact, be associated with both the theatrical and the non-theatrical – a not insignificant development.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1173.

More or less simultaneously, in November 1937 in Manitoba, the provincial Board of Censors introduced a \$2 per reel censor fee for “amateur” films (16mm and 8mm). This move (for the time being, at least) essentially put an end to private and other forms of non-theatrical exhibition of sub-standard film, as the supply houses in Winnipeg, which up to that point carried some 200 – 300 amateur films for rental, closed up those respective branches of their operations. The films had previously been rented at an average price of 75 cents, and occasionally even provided free of charge for religious and charitable organizations. Not surprisingly, the move to introduce the censorship fee came as a result of the established theatre owners, who had “protested against the freedom allowed amateurs in exhibiting films.”⁴⁷ The term “amateur film” in this context is slightly misleading, as it refers to both amateur-produced reproductions of films and films shot originally by amateurs themselves. The fee was levied explicitly for the former, the “standard productions” that had been remade on 16mm film stock. The latter, pictures taken by amateurs themselves, were not subject to the fee. But the closing of the narrow-width sections of the exchange libraries dealt a serious blow to the non-theatrical exhibition market.

While actions such as these effectively curtailed itinerant activity for the time being in certain areas, particularly the Prairies, the practice had by no means been dealt the deathblow many in the industry felt it had delivered. Despite the intense lobbying of exhibitor groups, the practice of itinerant exhibition refused to disappear, and by 1938, fuelled largely by 16mm technology and the rapidly increasing availability of titles in that format, the practice had hit a critical mass, so to speak, so

⁴⁷ JJ Conklin, “Conklin in Winnipeg: \$2.00 Censor Fee on 16 Millimetres,” *CMFD*, Vol.29, no.29, November 6, 1937, 17.

much so that dominant forces in the Canadian industry truly felt that it faced a crisis situation. That year in Ontario, the activities of the Inspection Branch of the Ontario Treasury Department, which was responsible for licensing projectors and exchanges, merged with the Ontario Board of Censors in 1938 to form the Motion Picture Censorship and Theatre Inspection Branch. (The Board of Censors, although now a part of the new branch, continued its operations as usual). According to available records, during the years 1938-40, the branch had approximately one hundred active 16mm licenses in the province, forty-one of which were based out of Toronto, and the remaining fifty-seven from outside of the city. Of these one hundred licenses, nineteen were issued for film exchanges, the large majority of which (fifteen) were based in Toronto and two were based out of province (Montreal and Winnipeg). Unfortunately, it is difficult to distinguish exactly how many of the companies that were issued licenses were stable theatrical operations and how many were travelling exhibitors. The majority, however, would appear to be itinerant and rural, rather than stable and urban.⁴⁸ One hundred may not seem like that large of a number, but the records indicate that only approximately sixteen licenses had been issued prior to 1938, under the auspices of the Inspection Branch of the Ontario Treasury Board. There were likely significant numbers of unlicensed operators both before and after 1938, but without question that year certainly appears to be a watershed for the widespread use of 16mm film.

This year, 1938, is also the first year that statistics on 16mm usage in Canada began to be printed in the *Film Daily Yearbook*. Canada was divided into six

⁴⁸ *Licenses for 16mm Films (1924-1968)* The Motion Picture Censorship and Theatre Inspection Branch, Ontario. Source: Archives of Ontario.

Exchange Territories at this point: the Toronto Territory housed distributors that supplied the province of Ontario; the Montreal Territory served the province of Quebec; the Saint John Territory served New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland; the Winnipeg Territory served the province of Manitoba, the eastern half of Saskatchewan and a portion of north western Ontario; the Calgary Territory supplied western Saskatchewan, the entire province of Alberta and seven towns in British Columbia; and the Vancouver Territory, which was the smallest in Canada at the time, supplied the remainder of British Columbia.⁴⁹ By this point, all jurisdictions, with the exception of Quebec, charged 16mm fees; usually between \$50 and \$300 for exchange license fees, and between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per reel for censorship fees (35mm fees were generally more expensive).⁵⁰ What all of this indicates is that by this point, the film exchange system in Canada, despite the turbulence and uncertainty of previous years, had absorbed 16mm within the operations of the industry, for better or for worse.

And these were no longer nameless, rogue exhibitors. While the National Film Board tends to receive credit for its innovative later use of mobile theatre vans during World War II,⁵¹ itinerant 16mm operators in the 1930s were conducting essentially the very practice, privately and independently. Essentially updating the model created by turn-of-the-century itinerant showmen described by many of the authors cited in Chapter One, these outfits simply employed contemporary automotive and 16mm technology to make the job that much easier. Consider, for

⁴⁹ "Canadian Exchange Territories," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1939, 1133.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See, for example, Marjorie McKay, *History of the National Film Board of Canada*, (unpublished manuscript, 1964) and D.B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981).

example, one such traveling organization called Superior Road Attractions. As detailed in the Canadian edition of *Box Office* in August of 1938, this company invested \$4,000 into a truck, a generator and 16mm projection equipment.⁵² It was the project of Superior Films Ltd., a Canadian distribution company (licensed by the Ontario Inspection branch) and under the management of Harry Price. The traveling unit functioned very much like the NFB model would a few years later. It was a one-man show: the driver was also the projectionist and outfitted with a 9x12-foot screen. The van was designed so that the operator could effectively live in it during the course of the circuit. This particular unit travelled the Ottawa Valley and other communities not serviced by theatres, but plans were in place for an additional van to be sent to the Prairies. Shows were held both in open air and in town halls and lodges. Specializing in one-night shows of an “entertaining” nature, patrons apparently frequently asked for return engagements. Hall rentals typically cost about ten dollars, and admission generally ran at 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children.⁵³

These were the typical activities of a 16mm traveling projectionist. The circuits maintained by these itinerant exhibitors during this period represent a considerable challenge to the hegemonic position occupied by the established theatres. They represent the realization of a separate sphere of leisure activity, specifically for audiences, such as the rural communities of Newfoundland, who previously were frequently isolated from permanent movie theatres. Furthermore, while the distribution system was merging with that of the mainstream industry, these units nevertheless posited an alternative structure of film circulation to the established

⁵² “16mm Film Caravan Launched by Price” *Box Office*, August 6, 1938.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

systems of motion-picture exhibition, which were established and maintained by the dominant market forces. Many of these exhibitors screened Hollywood feature-film programs to groups of five or six circuit points on a regular weekly basis.⁵⁴ A wide variety of motion pictures were available in 16mm format in the 1930s. One of the largest suppliers of 16mm product during this decade was Eugene W. Castle's Castle Films, founded initially in 1924. Castle Films specialized in short-subjects and condensed feature-length films on both 8mm and 16mm, primarily for the home-exhibition market. One of Castle's distinguishing features was his decision to offer titles for outright sale, where other companies dealing in non-theatrical typically limited their activities to rentals.⁵⁵ In addition to his rental activities, many of his shorter titles were made available for sale in drug stores, department stores and toy stores. Castle Films' series of short colour cartoons such as *Sinbad the Sailor* (Ub Iwerks, 1935) and *Aladdin's Lamp* (Frank Moser, 1935) were popular selections. Official Films, Inc. was another prominent company of the time. It was established initially in the late 1930s to produce 16mm instructional, sponsored and entertainment shorts for sale, but quickly discovered a lucrative market for small-gauge public-domain Charlie Chaplin shorts, to which the company added music and sound effects.⁵⁶ Other films available at this time from other companies included Otto Messmer's *Felix the Cat* series, which were not uncommon visitors to non-theatrical screens. Full-feature films were also in circulation, such as *Silas Marner* (Frank P. Donovan, 1922), *The Mill on the Floss* (Tim Whelan, 1937) and the Laurel and Hardy

⁵⁴ Gray, 13.

⁵⁵ Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 99.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

film, *March of the Wooden Soldiers* (Gus Meins, Charley Rogers, 1934). By 1939, some 300 16mm titles, both sound and silent, were in circulation throughout Canada.⁵⁷

On the surface, there should be nothing immediately alarming about this behaviour for established independent theatre owners. There was a “general understanding” that 16mm showings would not be held within a specific radius (usually ten miles, as mentioned earlier) of standard theatres, though most provinces did not enforce this with actual legislation.⁵⁸ But nevertheless, the practice of mobile 16mm exhibition increasingly came to be perceived by established forces in the industry as a serious threat to their operations, and just as they had done previously in history, a considerable campaign was mounted in opposition. It is to this campaign that we now focus our attention.

⁵⁷ Gray, 19.

⁵⁸ “Canada and Newfoundland During 1938,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1939, 1131.

Chapter Four

“As Benign and Harmless as a Cancer:”

Ray Lewis, Canadian Independent Exhibition and the 16mm Menace

Sixteen mm film is not intended by either the sponsors nor by most of those engaged in the manufacture of film and apparatus to replace 35mm film for entertainment purposes.

The two fields should be separated. One should not encroach upon the other.¹

-A.F. Victor, President, Victor Animatograph Corp., 1938

No field is so ripe for fanatics and reformers as this field of the 16mm. No field will more quickly kill the millions and millions of dollars invested in motion pictures as Show Business, than the 16mm²

-Ray Lewis, Editor, *The Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, 1938

A very palpable tension between the film industry's competing interests marked the distribution and exhibition sectors during the 1930s in Canada. Manjunath Pendakur pays a considerable amount of attention to these tensions that came to characterise and dominate the industrial discourses of this period. His focus, however, is distinctly theatrical, and noticeably absent is any discussion of either non-theatrical

¹ A.F. Victor, “Evolution of the 16mm Film,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1938, 693-695.

² Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 4.

screening activity or conflicts resulting from the 16mm format.³ A rather peculiar omission, given the standpoint of the independent theatrical exhibitor, at least as expressed by Ray Lewis in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, that in 1938 16mm constituted “a peril of a much more serious nature than any competition with which Motion Pictures has had to contend.”⁴

Lewis’s regular column in the *Digest*, “Ray Presents,” frequently addressed pressing issues of the day relevant to the best interests of “the little exhibitor” whom she and the publication claimed to represent. By “little exhibitor” *The Digest* generally meant those exhibitors not in business with the major chains, the so-called independents, which operated theatres in towns with populations of roughly 5,000 or fewer. For Lewis and other influential figures in the trade press, the greatest peril independent theatre exhibitors faced in the late 1930s was not, as Pendakur would have it, the stranglehold imposed on their industry by American corporate interest – the threat from above – but rather the threat from below, the 16mm “fire” that had “burst its bounds... leapt out and threatens to burn the house down.”⁵ And it was a threat, the *Digest* believed, that was by no means limited to those small-town theatres, but instead which potentially threatened the entire field of motion-picture exhibition. Whether the independent 35mm theatre owners truly felt that the threat posed by 16mm exhibitors was on par with the rhetoric employed by the trade press is not entirely known, but it is evident that it was a phenomenon they were not taking lightly.

³ Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

⁴ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents”. *CMPD*, October 29, Vol.30, no.28, 1938, 4.

⁵ Harold Kay, “16mm Marches On!,” *Canadian Independent*, November 1, 1938.

It would appear that more so than any other issue, what initially concerned established theatre owners about 16mm itinerant practice was that its operators would begin violating the unwritten rule (except in British Columbia, as noted earlier) of maintaining the ten-mile radius from theatrical operations. Increasingly, the concern was that these 16mm showmen would begin to set up shop in permanent locations, and in more urbanized settings – where established theatres already were struggling to survive amidst the hostility of monopolies and vertical integration of the industry. Harold Kay, a Toronto-based independent theatre owner and member of the Independent Theatres Association of Ontario, writing in the *Canadian Independent*, (the official organ of that association), reveals an initial suspicion among exhibitors when 16mm first started making itself noticed. But he himself admits, “I, for one, was slow to believe it could be a serious competitor to the regulation film,” citing a limited supply of feature subjects and that “theatre comforts [are] too well developed.”⁶ He felt that 16mm would be confined to rural districts and to areas that were at least ten miles from an established theatre. But he goes on to describe the chaotic situation that had evolved into “40 itinerant exhibitors in Ontario fighting for territory, overlapping, crowding each other for show dates...” and, worst of all, “covering up each other’s posters!” His primary concern, and those of other like-minded individuals, was that 16mm was creeping “where it doesn’t belong” – essentially, into towns, “closer and closer to established theatres.” What is interesting is that there simply doesn’t appear to be evidence that this was happening on any significant scale. Kay is capable of citing only two semi-permanent 16mm showplaces: one, a 150-seat venue in Welland, Ontario, and the other, a 183-seat

⁶ Harold Kay, “16mm Marches On!” *Canadian Independent*, November 1, 1938.

theatre in Grand Valley, which was putting on only three shows a week. Of the two communities, only Welland appeared to have had an established 35mm theatre anyway, run by Famous Players. Lewis, for her part, cites this hall in Welland that screened 16mm films as well, operating “right on [the] doorstep” of the Famous Players theatre.⁷ She goes on to claim that

Other exhibitors claim that they are being surrounded by the 16mm, these pictures being exhibited within a radius of five miles from their theatre, and that hand-bills and posters are being distributed in their towns for the 16mm exhibition.⁸

This one theatre in Welland is continually cited as the incontestable proof of encroaching 16mm establishments.

Kay’s argument was that theatre owners contributed to their communities, and this was an issue that would frame much of the subsequent debate. Theatre owners paid 15-cent seat taxes, business taxes, and real estate taxes, and they provided local jobs. They were also obliged to pay considerable amounts of money on safety renovations for their theatres. A considerable burden, he felt, which 16mm operators managed to unfairly avoid:

If the Motion Picture Bureau can step in and regulate the 35mm theatres for the safety and comfort of the patrons, why are 16mm showplaces permitted to run practically unregulated, in fire traps without proper

⁷ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, vol.30, no.32, November 26, 1938, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*

exits in untaxed town halls by exhibitors who pay negligible license fees per year, take the town's money and move on?⁹

This was an issue continually addressed by opponents of 16mm exhibition. Lewis, in perfect harmony with Kay, insisted that “most” of the halls showing 16mm films were firetraps and that in fact “many should be condemned for public gatherings.”¹⁰ This rhetoric of “public safety” typifies much of the anti-16mm discourse, perhaps a stance with some irony, given that 16mm was made from cellulose acetate and commonly understood as “safety stock,” unlike 35mm’s highly flammable nitrate stock. This discussion of safety prompted a spirited letter to the editor by Harland Rankin, of the Plaza Theatre in Tilbury, Ontario, which ran in a December 1938 edition of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, describing his experiences in a public hall featuring 16mm films:

Dear Miss Lewis:

Your recent articles on 16mm are most commendable and received our heartiest endorsement.

The average small town has from 15 to 25 thousand [dollars] invested in a theatre, a street zoning and a large film rental.

The government insists he keep in the red, with new modern equipment, and a well protected building against any fire hazards; a business tax, a performing

⁹ Kay, “16mm Marches On!”

¹⁰ Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, vol.30, no.32, November 26, 1938, 4.

rights tax, a theatre tax, amusement tax and score charge (the latter for which I have yet to receive a satisfactory explanation).

Along comes 16mm in a \$5.00 per night hall, including heat and electricity, to show in apposition [*sic*] to this small town exhibitor, who has helped to build the community and become one of its useful citizens.

The last hall I was in, was upstairs over a drug store, with ten year old scenery, stored on the stage, and dirt from the last year's New Year's Dance. Benches were used as seats, the farm lads were palming lighted cigarettes for sneak drags. Only one fire escape, I would doubt its safety, with a pile of ashes from the drug store below. A perfect, ill-ventilated fire trap, which may show 16mm and nothing is done about it. Yet there are many exhibitors sitting back on their haunches, ever indifferent to the whole thing.

Toilets were not to be found, and there was a strip across the auditorium, to trip over.

In cold weather, a stove is used for heating, a good smokey stove pipe going across the auditorium.

I have sung in most of these halls, and I would hate to think of what would happen in case of a fire, when the lights were out. Sheets were used for curtains, and stoves became overheated.

Mr. Art Stock of Petrolia, has seen fit to fight in the interest of the small town exhibitors, interviewing Col. Cooper and the Government. He should receive the loyal support of every exhibitor. This is a Democratic country and let's see that our movies do not fall into the hands of a dictator.

We want to thank you for your recent article, which is on a most worthy cause.

Yours very truly,

Harland Rankin

Plaza Theatre, Tilbury Ontario¹¹

Rankin's description is certainly a vivid evocation of what many felt characterised a typical 16mm, non-theatrical screening. He is careful to highlight both the economic hardships a typical theatre owner endures as well as its juxtaposition with the numerous potential safety hazards on display at a non-theatrical event. Not to discount the concern over a safe environment for film screening, but what exactly is at stake here? Is this truly an issue about 16mm film? Whether this letter paints an accurate picture of a typical non-theatrical screening itself is in question, but even if that were the case, and a fire were to start, it would not likely be the result of the

¹¹ Harland Rankin, "Letter to the Editor," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.33, December 3, 1938, 10.

16mm projector and its “safety stock” film. It would be the result of the “farm lads palming cigarettes” or any other of the various potential threats highlighted in this letter. That these venues posed a potential safety problem is possible and even probable in certain situations. But the language of opposition implies that this insecurity is attributable to the 16mm apparatus itself, which is a dubious claim. Would not a dance or other such activity under the very same circumstances, but minus the projector, pose exactly the same threat? The issue of “safety” appeared to be a ruse invoked by 16mm’s detractors to help to discredit it. Let’s not forget that the only individuals or associations that raised any concern over the issue were theatre owners themselves.

But the issue of public safety was by no means the only front on which independent theatre owners waged war on itinerant 16mm exhibitors. Perhaps even more pressing on their collective mind was the issue of taxation. The Amusement Tax was first introduced in Ontario and the rest of Canada in 1916 to help raise funds for the war effort. Although there had been some talk of eliminating it over the years, by the 1930s it was still very much in effect. The tax had been a considerable source of income for the government of Ontario: a provincial auditor’s report from 1920 cited total revenue from the tax, from the period of its instatement until March 31, 1920, as \$2,689,602.08.¹² In 1932, the Allied Theatre Owners of Ontario met and drafted a memorandum in protest against the tax, in an early show of solidarity among independent theatre owners. The language of the resolution cited motion

¹² Provincial Auditor’s Report, May 11th, 1920 – “The Amusement Tax”, The Archives of Ontario.

pictures as “a necessity, not a luxury” against the backdrop of the depression.¹³ It was the only form of entertainment available for low-income, working families and farmers. The resolution cites a drop in theatrical attendance and that taxation was only furthering this trend. If further taxation were imposed, which was always a possibility the association argued, it would have to be either absorbed by the exhibitors themselves who were barely getting by as it was, or instead, passed on to the public, which would further decrease attendance figures. A further complaint of the memorandum was the opposition voiced towards potential new legislation that would make concrete floors mandatory in movie theatres – a clause that would represent an expense of thousands of dollars for many exhibitors.

The arguments of the theatre owners were sound ones indeed, and it is not difficult to sympathize with their plight, especially given the economic environment of the time. Results did not come immediately, but pressure on the province was maintained. In 1937, S.H. Falk, Managing Editor of the *Canadian Independent*, wrote to Ontario Premier Mitchell Hepburn on behalf of the Independent Theatres Association,¹⁴ advising him on various petitions from exhibitors across the province to remove the tax. She writes,

Be assured that you shall have the gratitude of a large
group of people in the low-salaried class if you see fit

¹³ “Resolution of Allied Theatre Owners of Ontario,” February 19th, 1932. Memorandum re. Amusement Tax, The Archives of Ontario.

¹⁴ The Independent Theatres Association was formed in Ontario in 1935 by N.A. Taylor, but according to Pendakur it was closely affiliated with Famous Players and never really earned the confidence of the independent exhibitors. It would later be renamed the Motion Picture Theatres Association of Ontario in 1942. Pendakur, 102-105.

to remove this obstacle to the only recreation they can afford.¹⁵

Eventually, their efforts paid off, and Hepburn formally abolished the Amusement Tax in June 1937 (at the time, Ontario was the only province to do so). However, it was abolished on the condition that theatre owners promise they would pass on the savings to the audiences. A year after its repeal, the *Mail and Empire* reported that this was not happening, and that benefits were not being passed on to patrons. In fact, prices had actually increased since the tax cut.¹⁶ The *Canadian Independent*, interestingly enough, ran a piece claiming that the abolition of the tax had in fact led to substantial savings for the public and for exhibitors.¹⁷ However, its only proof of this assertion was based on a calculation of how much tax was paid the previous year, a figure in the neighbourhood of \$2 million. This calculation failed to take into the account the rise in ticket prices that theatres installed in its place. Hepburn came out publicly, “blasting” theatre owners that had failed to pass on the benefits to movie patrons, claiming that he had a “solemn swear” from the owners that they would in fact do so.¹⁸

What can we make of all of this? The theatre owners rightly protested what may have very well been an unjust tax, and were successful in its repeal. Yet they were apparently unwilling to hold up their part of the bargain in terms of passing on the benefits on to the consumer. This was all playing out at the same time as the furor

¹⁵ S.H. Falk, Letter to Mitchell Hepburn, Premier of Ontario, February 27, 1937. Amusement Tax File, Box 1, Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada.

¹⁶ “Theatres Break Faith, Hepburn Hears,” *Mail and Empire*, March 19, 1938.

¹⁷ “Defunct Amusement Tax Savings to Ontario Substantial” *Canadian Independent*, February 1, 1938

¹⁸ “Premier Hepburn Threatens Investigation of Theatre-Owners,” *CMPD*, vol.29, no.49, 1938, 11.

surrounding the increasing presence of 16mm exhibitors. Sixteen millimeter opponents lashed out at how these operations could function “untaxed,” in Kay’s words. But from 1935 until the tax’s repeal two years later, 16mm operators were subject to the Amusement Tax just as 35mm operators were. *The Amusements Tax Act and Regulations Hereunder* clearly states that

‘Places of Amusement’...shall mean and include
theatre, moving picture hall... any other place where an
exhibition or amusement is given.¹⁹

This is even more clearly spelled out in a memorandum for Hepburn, outlying the 1935 amendments:

With the amusements Tax now applying on all prices of
admission, the tax will apply on games, shows and rides
at Summer Parks, Travelling Carnival Shows, Fairs and
Exhibitions.²⁰

The only exemptions to this tax were “entertainments held by church organizations where the entire gross proceeds are devoted to church work,” changes that were introduced in June 1935.²¹ And prior to the tax’s repeal, traveling amusements were subject to quite specific stipulations. Each proprietor of a traveling show, film-based or otherwise, was required to forward to the Director of the Amusements Revenue Branch a copy of their itinerary at least one week in advance, including license

¹⁹ *The Amusements Tax Act and Regulations Hereunder*, May 1936. Archives of Ontario.

²⁰ Memo for Ontario Premier Mitchell Hepburn from the Treasury Department, May 3, 1935. 1935 Amusement Tax Campaign File, Box 1, Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada.

²¹ Memo to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council from the Prime Minister and Provincial Treasurer, Ontario, May 1, 1935. 1935 Amusement Tax Campaign File, Box 1, Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada.

information for each specific venue. Furthermore, each week they were required to make a return for the previous week, showing admission costs, admission figures and various other specifics.²² In fact, the Motion Picture Inspection Branch's records of charges and prosecutions display a disproportionate number of infractions levelled against 16mm non-theatrical operations. Many of the charges and fines against non-theatrical and 16mm establishments were based on license infractions, but even more resulted from a failure to charge amusement taxes.²³ Additional suspensions were typically administered for violations relating to the projection room. (Examples include, having reading material in the booth; smoking in the booth; being drunk in the booth; too many people in the booth; and having no one in the booth).²⁴ While it was being levied, 16mm operators by no means bore immunity from the Amusement Tax.

Theatre owners frequently referred to 16mm outfits as "unfair" competition. A June 20, 1938 meeting of the directors of the Independent Theatres Association of Ontario addressed the detrimental effects that 16mm was causing their industry as "further competition to an already depressed box office."²⁵ The overriding concern was that its increasing presence would in fact be detrimental because "its use cannot be confined to outlying situations as originally planned."²⁶ The "outlying situations" referred to in these comments imply that 16mm was originally conceived as a medium designed for employment in remote, non-urban settings. But there is nothing

²² Ibid.

²³ *Records of theatre fires, suspensions, prosecutions and examinations (1934-1948)* Motion Picture Censorship and Theatre Inspection Branch. Archives of Ontario.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Local Industry Heads Oppose 16mm – United Artists sell indies again," *Box Office* June, 1938.

²⁶ Ibid.

inherent in the technology that should dictate geographic limitations on its usage.

While it may have originally been intended for amateur usage, this by no means implied that its employment be limited to rural or more peripheral locations, away from city centres. Furthermore,

It is feared that clubs, schools, churches and fraternal organizations with negligible taxes and expenses would set up exhibition units in competition to highly-taxed theatres expensively staffed and equipped and employing union operators. This sort of competition, the Board of Directors felt, would mean the slow bleeding of the regular exhibitor.²⁷

Admittedly, although not immune from the Amusement Tax until its abolition, the 16mm exhibitor's nomadic status did exclude it from certain expenses borne by the theatrical exhibitor, such as property taxes. But this can hardly be understood as unfair. Although 16mm operators may have found themselves without the expenses of a stable home, it only follows that they also found themselves without the benefits that such a home provides. And furthermore it seems logical that patrons might have found some appeal in a cheaper, alternative form of entertainment, when theatrical owners were absorbing the benefits of the tax cut themselves, rather than passing it on to the consumers.

The actual licensing and regulation of 16mm product and practice were other fronts on which the independent exhibitors pushed for greater government presence. The Inspection Branch had been issuing operational licenses since 1924, but in terms

²⁷ Ibid.

of actual regulation, it was felt that greater government intervention was required. A meeting of the Motion Picture Branch of the Toronto-based Board of Trade was held June 16, 1938, and a resolution was passed stating,

Resolved that if 16mm theatres are allowed by the governments of the provinces of Canada, they should be subject to the same regulations as 35mm theatres.²⁸

Shortly thereafter, the Province of Ontario clarified its admittedly occasionally nebulous stance on 16mm projection, and explicitly stated that

Any exchange distributing this product shall pay an annual tax of \$50. Public halls showing 16mm shall pay a yearly license fee of \$10. Travelling exhibitions shall pay an annual license fee of \$10..... All 16mm theatres are subject to the same building law regulations as govern theatres operating 35mm films.²⁹

The last section is perhaps the most important, given that maintaining safety standards in their theatres is what owners frequently cited as the most expensive operating cost, aside from taxes. Strangely enough, despite the rhetoric of the independent owners and its enshrinement in government enactments, the evidence doesn't really indicate that 16mm theatres were a widespread phenomenon (recall the theatre in Welland, the only one that Kay and Lewis are capable of identifying). But the threat alone was enough to constitute an action and a regulatory response.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ "Ontario Enactments on 16mm" *Canadian Independent*, 1 July, 1938.

With all of the attention accorded to 16mm, it is important not to overlook the place of 35mm itinerant exhibition. Traveling 35mm shows had seen a rapid decrease in usage during the mid-1930s. Concerns over safety greatly led to its decreased usage, and some provinces, such as Manitoba in the spring of 1938, passed legislation prohibiting the use of 35mm technology in traveling shows. This was done ostensibly for reasons of public safety, but also very much to assist the established, tax-paying theatre owners.³⁰ The ban extended to any venue not suited with a proper projection booth. Projection booths equipped for sound were becoming increasingly affordable (roughly \$400 in 1938, and marketed by several different firms) and so smaller theatres previously unable to afford 35mm sound equipment could now install this equipment, a further blow to itinerant 35mm exhibitors who were capitalizing on this previous lack of sound shows in certain areas. For these reasons, 35mm usage for itinerant exhibitors made little sense by this point.³¹

But as 16mm became increasingly popular among itinerant exhibitors, so too did the sentiment that further control needed to be exercised. In the spring and summer of 1938, provinces across the country began passing more legislation to further control both the sale and the exhibition of 16mm film, and to address the wider concern of itinerant exhibition in general, which was increasingly concerning exhibitor groups. In Ontario, for instance, legislation was passed specifically concerning the distribution of 16mm films. This came about largely as a result of the increased circulation of uncensored 16mm films, often dealing with “sex and propaganda,” that were “flooding” into the province and keeping police busy

³⁰ “Manitoba Regulates Itinerant Motion Picture Shows,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.4, May 14, 1938, 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*

rounding them up and charging those responsible for their importation and distribution.³² Legislation typically emerged from concerns from either police or from exhibitors' groups. In Saskatchewan, the province's Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association, which represented roughly half the theatre owners and managers in the province, was lobbying heavily against the showing of 16mm films where proper safety equipment was not present, as defined by the regulations governing theatres.³³ The law in that province allowed for itinerant exhibitors who did not charge admission and who screened exclusively "educational" films. Those who did not meet these criteria, however, were those singled out by exhibitor groups and the provincial government as the real offenders.³⁴ And similarly, in the Maritimes, the Allied Exhibitors of Nova Scotia actively campaigned the provincial government so that 16mm films would fall under the same regulations as 35mm films.³⁵

But what soon became apparent was that while exhibitor groups often supported increased regulation of 16mm exhibition, it was not unanimously felt to be the best tool to deal with this perceived threat. Most notable among those opposed to increased regulation was Ray Lewis, the *de facto* leader in the movement against 16mm operators. Before the debate specifically concerned 16mm, Lewis's first major intervention on the issue of non-theatrical exhibition as a competitive threat to theatrical exhibition came in a 1933 editorial in the *Canadian Motion Picture Digest*, as noted in the previous chapter. But by 1938, with 16mm use much more widespread and gradually becoming legitimized within the industry, Lewis turned her

³² "Stop! Look! Listen!" *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.5, May 21, 1938, 8.

³³ Meryl Lea, "The Spotlight," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.25, October 8, 1938, 11.

³⁴ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD* Vol.30, no.23, September 24, 1938, 4.

³⁵ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD* Vol.30, no.23, September 24, 1938, 4.

editorial gaze squarely on this issue and ignited a fierce rhetorical crusade. Her first such diatribe to explicitly single out 16mm exhibition ran in the June 18 edition of the *Canadian Motion Picture Digest*, and from that point onwards through until the end of the year, her editorials continued *ad nauseum* warning of the imminent threat posed by these operators. The 16mm “menace” of which she warned was a threat particular to the independent theatrical exhibitors (for whom her publication was mostly intended) because, as she explained, it was much more likely to encroach upon territory in smaller towns and villages than it would interfere with business based in larger towns and cities.³⁶ Since small-town exhibitors frequently relied on drawing audiences from surrounding rural areas and smaller villages without theatres, Lewis was quick to point out that increased 16mm exhibition in town halls and other non-theatrical venues would likely make a considerable dent in this component of their audiences, as it would remove the incentive to drive “ten to twenty miles to town” when movies could be seen much closer to home.³⁷ The motions by certain provinces to entrench in law what had previously been an unwritten guideline preventing itinerant exhibition within a ten-mile radius of a regular theatre, while admirable in her eyes, did not adequately address the situation, since so many independent exhibitors relied on the patronage of audiences beyond these ten miles anyway. It was this patronage that kept theatres in towns of under 5,000 people afloat, she claimed.³⁸ Furthermore, she discounts the notion that neither radio nor the looming spectre of television were the pre-eminent threats to theatrical exhibition, by ultimately asserting that 16mm exhibition in town halls or churches was the “real”

³⁶ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.12, July 9, 1938, 4.

opposition to the independent exhibitor.³⁹ The technological determinist in her argued that radio and television could not be effectively stopped, as they were the “instruments of our Time,” but, as she saw it, “for our Industry to aid and abet the spread of motion pictures in Town Halls and Churches is not progress, but Insanity!”⁴⁰

Initially, Lewis saw increased governmental legislation and control as the solution to curtail the threat, and this legislation could only be brought about by cooperation from all forces in the industry:

For the control of a real menace which *The Digest* considers we face when our film industry becomes non-theatrical, all units of this Industry should meet, directing their efforts toward securing legislative protection for the millions invested and the thousands employed.⁴¹

Lewis herself was generally not in favour of a high degree of government presence in the affairs of the industry, but initially in the case of 16mm she felt it was required. If not, she felt, independent exhibitors' existence at all was truly in peril. However, Lewis quickly changed her opinion regarding increased regulation, and was soon in fact arguing *against* increased legislative control. The film industry as it stood was legislated enough already, and Lewis was of the opinion that it should not continually

³⁹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 4 and Vol.30, no.11, July 2, 1938, 4.

⁴⁰ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.23, September 24, 1938, 4.

⁴¹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.11, July 2, 1938, 4.

“run to the government” to further this.⁴² Increased legislation, she came to believe, did not actually help the independent exhibitors in the long run and in fact did them a substantial disservice by acknowledging and recognizing 16mm as a legitimate part of the motion-picture industry. Instead, she was very much a proponent of self-regulation for the film industry. It was important for the industry in Canada to demonstrate to the government that it was fully capable of managing and regulating its own affairs and conduct. And so the onus for curtailing 16mm exhibition fell, Lewis believed, not with the government, but with the various sectors of the film industry themselves:

HERE IS A CASE WHERE THE EXHIBITORS
SHOULD UNITE ACROSS THE DOMINION OF
CANADA, in the US or wherever this 16 mm. film is
spreading, AND DEMAND FROM PRODUCER-
DISTRIBUTORS THAT THEY DO NOT SUPPLY
SUCH FILMS.⁴³

A heavy responsibility fell with the major producers, who Lewis warned would be making a “colossal blunder” if they began making their features designed for 35mm theatres available on the 16mm format.⁴⁴ This would in essence create unneeded competition within the industry and would drive out independent theatres initially, but later would adversely impact the vertically integrated chain exhibitor/producers as well:

⁴² Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.28, October 29, 1938, 4.

⁴³ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.23, September 25, 1938, 4, (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.11, July 2, 1938, 4.

Our viewpoint is that the 16mm is not a little exhibitor or a little trouble; the 16mm is as benign and harmless as a cancer and that gradually it will eat out the territory of the little exhibitor and spread to the zones of the big fellows.⁴⁵

This would not, as she invokes a classic metaphor, “be the first time in history that a little David killed a Goliath with a stone from his sling!”⁴⁶ This is perhaps a bizarre analogy to make, given that she aligns herself and the theatrical field with the invading Goliath, rather than the heroic David. Crucial to preventing this scenario, Lewis felt, would be the formation of producer/distributor alliances with the agreement to severely limit the number of 16mm titles created and circulated, and to discourage distributors from dealing 16mm titles to exhibitors. And that year, in fact, at a June 20 meeting of the Independent Theatres Association of Ontario, the board of directors passed a resolution addressing this issue that was forwarded to the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America and to the general managers of all major film exchanges in Canada:

Be it resolved that this association go on record as being unalterably opposed to the practice of the major distributors making 16mm copies of their photoplays and making them available for distribution in this country.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol. 30, no.28, October 29, 1938, 4.

⁴⁶ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.12, July 9, 1938, 4.

⁴⁷ “Local Industry Heads Oppose 16mm – United Artists Sell Indies Again,” *Box Office*, June 1938.

Writing from London in July 1938, Lewis relates how in Great Britain theatrical exhibitors did not fear the 16mm “little fellow,” for, they claimed, no distributor would sell 16mm rights to a church, town hall, or any other similar non-theatrical venue, nor would they sell the picture outright to an exhibitor.⁴⁸ The same should be true in Canada, she argued. And if 16mm couldn’t be halted entirely, there should at least be a guarantee that no 16mm film of a feature picture be released until at least two years after its initial theatrical exhibition.⁴⁹ As she saw it, the competition resulting from the same films being shown concurrently on 16mm film in churches and halls for a nickel or a dime, and on 35mm in more expensive theatres, would be catastrophic for the independent theatre owner: “The 16mm will kill the independent field,” she wrote, “that is if the producer-distributors furnish the ammunition.”⁵⁰

Lewis was insistent that any new legislation would do very little to affect its distribution in the province. Once again, she insisted quite unequivocally that “LEGISLATIVE CONTROL IS NOT THE CONTROL DESIRABLE, NOR IS IT THE RIGHT AND EFFECTIVE CURE FOR THE 16MM SICKNESS.”⁵¹ The various forms of legislation and control, such as license and censorship fees, that were introduced largely in response to lobbying efforts from exhibitor groups only served to further recognize and legitimize 16mm film as part of the Canadian film industry. This, for Lewis, was not the right course of action:

I think this is a mistake; the Industry is taking on plenty
of trouble when it takes on a new infant to raise, and the

⁴⁸ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.12, July 9, 1938, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.28, October 29, 1938, 4, (emphasis in original).

kind of infant which, when grown up, will eat up its foster-parent. All that the 16 MM does, it is operations as presented at town halls, churches, schools, etc. will be operations for which Motion Pictures will be held responsible. IT IS A RESPONSIBILITY WHICH THE INDUSTRY SHOULD NOT ASSUME, IT IS FULL OF DYNAMITE!⁵²

These rhetorical flourishes typified much of Lewis's writings on this issue. Her regular rants about the evils of 16mm and the immediate peril it represented are rich with hyperbolic metaphors of Biblical proportion. A month after the previous quotation equating 16mm with an ungrateful, cannibalistic foster-child, 16mm appears as an octopus with vicious tentacles and the only way to kill it is to "knife it in its one soft spot – between its eyes, as its head darts toward you."⁵³ She is perhaps at her most provocative when she compares the 16mm menace in Canada to the increasing aggression of Nazi Germany:

How can I help you? Let me know; I'm in fighting trim, and full of resentment toward the bullying spirit which seeks to grab Czechoslovakia, or to grab generally. We know that "bull" in our own Industry. Horn in on the grab! Stop it!⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.30, November 12, 1938, 6.

⁵⁴ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.23, September 24, 1938, 4.

She justifies her hyperbole when she states that “no language is too strong with which to condemn this unethical, unbusinesslike and unfair competition.”⁵⁵ And hyperbole was not the only rhetorical implement at Lewis’s disposal. Here, in June 1938, she deadpans with perfect irony, a comparison of the current 16mm crisis with the early days of the nickelodeons:

Well the good nickelodeum [*sic*] show days are coming. In Toronto several enterprising individuals are preparing to rent stores, install chairs, and grind out an all-day and night show at ten cents. Encouraged by the fact that the major companies are to provide 16mm films, and that our big men of the Industry see enough in the 16mm field to make it a “sweet” business for themselves, it’s everybody’s little shooting gallery now, for it means no theatre investment, just the lease of a store, or a hall!

Films will be cheap, in fact, THEY WILL BE the giveaways for chain stores of groceries and merchandise. “Buy your canned goods and get a can of film unreeled for you, free.”⁵⁶

The *ad hoc* nature of 16mm screenings in the 1930s certainly did lend them a certainty affinity with the early nickelodeon screenings of the 1900s. But while historians and those in the industry typically regarded that period with a fond

⁵⁵ Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.30, November 12, 1938, 6.

⁵⁶ Ray Lewis, “Sweet Sixteen,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.10, June 25, 1938, 2.

nostalgia, Lewis's invocation and comparison is hardly a favourable one. The nickelodeon era may have been "golden" in its time, but in Lewis's mind there is nothing progressive about a return to those roots: "What is this 16mm feature picture development, a return to the store-age, a goose-step backward to the cave man?"⁵⁷ The result, as is implicit in her words, is an overall "cheapening" of the motion-picture experience. The issue of taste is very much a common theme in her musings on this topic, and frequently comes to the forefront of her rhetorical arguments. She laments how in certain of these venues, mere sheets are used for screens. "Sounds like a morgue, and Show Business the Dead Body!"⁵⁸

Ray Lewis had a very clear concept of what "going to the movies" constituted and precisely what function the activity played in society. Movie-going was an activity meant purely for the realm of entertainment, and movie-theatre exhibitors were first and foremost "showmen" whose primary function was to keep audiences amused. Sixteen millimetre itinerant (and non-itinerant, for that matter) exhibition posed a considerable challenge, not just to the economic well-being of theatrical exhibitors, but to Lewis's whole conception of the natural state of being in the film-exhibition landscape. Sixteen millimetre's employment over the past decade-and-a-half certainly frequently found itself operating under the banner of "education." This in itself did not so much concern Lewis, but 16mm's encroachment beyond this field did. "Commercial" films, precursors in a sense of today's advertisements, were one such encroachment that began to startle her:

⁵⁷ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD* Vol. 30, no.33, December 3, 1938, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Have you been following general products' conventions, and observed how many Industries, outside of motion pictures, make Commercial Films to stimulate sales of their product? These films are shown free!⁵⁹

Short commercial films of this nature were indeed being produced by various industries and agencies to showcase their products or services. Shell Oil, General Motors and International Harvester were but a few of the major commercial enterprises with their own production studios, creating 16mm sound films.⁶⁰

For Lewis, the mere existence of educational or "non-entertaining," films were not so much the issue; she even admitted that they could be "interesting, since many of them are utilized in science and commerce to show us life growing, or product in the making."⁶¹ She was however, vehemently opposed to the screening of such films in established movie theatres, venues she felt should be reserved strictly for high-quality entertainment. There was a fundamental issue of taste attached to this argument, and the screening of such films alongside standard movie theatre fare threatened to "cheapen" the experience, just as 16mm screenings in non-theatrical venues such as "honky-tonk"⁶² town halls and churches cheapened the entire process of film exhibition:

Our pictures are not made for Church or Town Hall patronage, for such a patronage is not made up of

⁵⁹ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 4.

⁶⁰ "Manitoba Regulates Itinerant Motion Picture Shows," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.4, May 14, 1938, 11.

⁶¹ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

movie fans, but more likely composed of people who dislike motion pictures and are in the nature of reformers, interested in eliminating what they call their “influence.”⁶³

According to Lewis, non-theatrical audiences were therefore not true fans of motion pictures, but rather reformers with specific socio-political agendas. She felt that such audiences actively sought out “objectionable” material in the movies with the goal of further spreading their “gospel for reform.”⁶⁴ She describes this particular audience as a new “generation” with a strong “socialistic tendency” and who are “inclined to be severely critical of the average film.”⁶⁵ It was from this group, she posited, that the driving force behind the idea that movies needed to be educational was largely born. The only legitimate venues for the 16mm film, she argued, were schools, and even then only for the screening of films that were intentionally and explicitly produced as “educational.”

The obvious method of ceasing the spread of itinerant, non-theatrical 16mm exhibition would be to cut off their supply of feature-length entertainment films. As Lewis consistently argued, the responsibility for this lay with the distributors to cease supplying these operators. Despite her considerable vocal interventions on the subject, there was still a widely held belief by many in the industry that non-theatrical exhibition still restricted itself to screening educational films. As we have seen, however, a considerable number of 16mm films were made from regular features, and certain distributors were supplying various non-theatrical exhibitors with them.

⁶³ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMFD*, Vol.30, no.19, August 27, 1938, 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Lewis warned of the considerable dangers for the industry if the producer-distributors continued to produce such material and to lease them to exhibitors other than established theatres:

If the producer-distributors desire to keep motion pictures in Show Business, and their exhibition in theatres properly constructed for such purpose, then it should be their business to keep out of any participation in non-theatrical film enterprise.⁶⁶

Furthermore, commenting on the idea that the industry should attempt to assume control of this rogue sector, she reasserts her claim that this should not be the desired end result:

The alibi that it is better that the Industry control the non-theatrical field than someone outside this field, may be an alibi, but it is not good sense nor good judgment.⁶⁷

Legitimizing this practice within the boundaries of the established film industry was the wrong course of action. The best path to follow was to discredit the practice entirely, save for the exhibition of certain educational films in schools, where there was some limited value. Lewis urged distributors to promise not to do business with non-theatrical venues and itinerant 16mm exhibitors, and failure to do so, she warned, would lead to their own demise down the line. Additionally she urged all independent theatre owners to “saddle the old gray mare (mayor)” with agreements

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

that would prohibit the leasing of town halls and other buildings for the exhibition of motion pictures.⁶⁸ An exhibitor who effectively did nothing in protest against the non-theatrical exhibition of motion pictures in his/her municipality, even in churches where admission was paid, Lewis argued, was “doing his own theatre property a greater injury than any Monopoly could inflict upon him.”⁶⁹

The crux of her argument is very much based on a notion of segregation within the industry for specific film technologies, exhibition venues and film content. It was unacceptable to legitimize 16mm as technology for employment in the wider film industry. Its use was to be ideally relegated solely to the exhibition of specific films – those of an explicitly educational character – and only in schools and other obvious places of education. Conversely, Lewis maintained, theatres should continue employing the standard 35mm technology and were to remain places of amusement. The two were not to cross into each other’s territory:

Our pictures do not belong to Town Halls and Churches. We belong to Show Business. We are Show People – not Educators! Town Halls and Churches are tax-free, they should Mind Their Own Business which is varied in its Service; our business is to Entertain!⁷⁰

It is evident that Lewis had very clear purposes ascribed for the various sectors of the film industry. And were it up to her, ne’er the twain should meet, “for the two do not mix, no more than oil will mix with water.”⁷¹ As she consistently argued, the onus

⁶⁸ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.9, June 18, 1938, 9.

⁶⁹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.23, September 24, 1938, 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.28, October 29, 1938, 4.

was on producer/distributors dealing in 16mm to cease and desist all negotiations with traveling and non-theatrical enterprises. As 1938 came to a close, Lewis's rhetorical battle continued, but the tide did not appear to be going in favour of her cause. An opening editorial, curiously titled "The 'Gimme' Gender," in the November 12 edition of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* served to highlight and reassert her unwavering stance:

Knowing what film conditions are in Canada, we ask the exhibitors to take a definite stand against the 16mm feature picture distribution, with no compromise for legislation, but a demand for the elimination of the distribution of 16mm feature pictures by Exchanges.⁷²

However, despite her repeated attempts to clamp down on this practice, the presence of 16mm film titles within film-exchange libraries continued to rise, rather than fall. Lewis implicated the representatives from the major distributors for deliberately misleading the independent exhibitors about the potential threats caused by the presence of 16mm. Likewise she argued that they downplayed her repeated warnings, to alleviate the exhibitors' fears:

The exhibitors were told by their own Independent representatives that the 16mm was a harmless child, that *The Digest* had a flair for getting excited, "jousting at windmills" we believe was the literary flavour given to the dope by which the exhibitors were put to sleep.⁷³

⁷² Ray Lewis, "The 'Gimme' Gender" *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.30, November 12, 1938, 3.

⁷³ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.29, November 5, 1938, 4.

At this point, November 1938, according to Lewis, 16mm “had its sale forces all over Canada,” and one of the major distributing companies alone had about ninety features available for rental, having made contracts with Gaumont-British and Universal for their 16mm titles.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Calgary-based Sovereign Films, a subsidiary of Empire-Universal, and Regina-based General Films had both recently expanded their operations, focusing specifically on the 16mm market.⁷⁵ The exchanges were so committed to the cause of 16mm distribution that it was even reported to the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* that certain of their representatives were threatening exhibitors that if they didn’t carry their trademark films, the pictures would be shown in 16mm format in a store or whatever non-theatrical theatre was nearby.⁷⁶ The combination of the reported activities of 16mm operators, the reported behaviour of distribution agents, and the inflammatory rhetoric of Ray Lewis unquestionably created a climate of fear and paranoia within the film industry in Canada at this particular historical juncture.

Interestingly, it was at this moment that the *Digest* initiated a new column entitled “Legally Yours,” managed by M.S. Millstone. It was a short-running advice column for questions pertaining to legal issues in the Canadian exhibition and distribution industries. What is notable about the column, however, is its almost total dedication to the 16mm/non-theatrical issue. Ostensibly a forum for the paper’s readership to gather informed advice relevant to their trade, the column can perhaps more aptly be seen as a separate platform for the *Digest* to further its message, only

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “16m. In Canada May Develop Film Battle,” *CPMD*, Vol.31, no.1, April 22. For a more detailed discussion of these two firms, see the following chapter.

⁷⁶ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CPMD*, Vol.30, no.29, November 5, 1938, 4.

this time with the fine veneer of legality. The first such column ran in the November 19 edition, and it highlighted clearly what the dominant issue was for the *Digest* for that year. A question was posed by an exhibitor in Preston, Ontario:

If a representative of an exchange, calls on an Exhibitor, and tells him that if he does not play the product which his company is selling, that he will present this product in 16mm film in a store across the street from the customer's theatre.

(1) Does this constitute a threat?

(2) Is the company liable for what the salesman said?⁷⁷

This question plays into the climate of fear for independent exhibitors fostered by Lewis and the *Digest* over the course of 1938 and directly references the intimidation tactics of exchange representatives reported in the publication two weeks prior. The *Digest* had gradually been insinuating that the peril posed by 16mm exhibitors came not just from the operators themselves, but increasingly from the distributors who were supplying them. The publication of this letter should be seen as very much as part of this coupling. The published response to this query is equally revealing.

Millstone admits initially,

There is nothing in the facts as stated by you to constitute a threat within the meaning of the Criminal Code of Canada, and there is nothing in the facts which would constitute a good cause of civil action.

However, he continues,

⁷⁷ "Legally Yours," *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.31, November 19, 1938, 8.

If.... the exchange in question acts in concert with another exchange, the act might become illegal and be in violation of the Combines Investigation Act or of the pertinent sections of the Criminal Code, relating to combines, in which event both civil and criminal proceedings could be taken.⁷⁸

This response is telling in that it signifies the growing burden of guilt that the *Digest* was levelling against the major distributors for their role in facilitating the 16mm threat, a peril, to quote Lewis, “of a more serious nature than any competition with which Motion Pictures has had to contend,” and which ultimately constituted “a definite plan to annihilate the little exhibitor.”⁷⁹ The response given by Millstone attempts to link the localized problems facing individual exhibitors to larger patterns of dominance in the industry by the major vertically integrated companies. However, his response to the second question posed hints at the difficulties in assigning liability for this particular situation, given the current state of legislation:

(2) Anything that the salesman does within the scope of his employment is deemed to be done with the consent and authority of the company, and the company would be liable therefore. However, since what the salesman did in this particular matter is not by itself illegal, there would be no liability on the part of the company.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.28, October 29, 1938, 4.

⁸⁰ “Legally Yours,” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.31, November 19, 1938, 8.

This draws attention to the fact that this form of intimidation allegedly performed by the distribution agent towards the theatre owner, as described in the original question, is not acting outside of the boundaries of the law. This no doubt served to draw attention to the pressing need to address this issue. But as Lewis would have argued, it was a moral imperative for the distributor to see the folly in dealing with 16mm product and conduct business accordingly, as seemingly unbeknownst to them, they “in turn, [were] being annihilated.”⁸¹ The industry should be self-regulating as much as possible, and not constantly seeking legislative assistance from the government.

The following week, more queries concerning 16mm exhibition were published. One question from Toronto raised the issue of 16mm’s coverage under the provisions of the Theatres and Cinematographs Act, in Ontario. The second question, however, from Winnipeg, returned to the issue of non-theatrical 16mm exhibition, specifically the legality of such enterprises with regards to taxes and market competition:

Has a Town Hall, erected by public funds, any authority to rent this hall for the exhibition of motion pictures, thereby entering into a business operation in competition with private tax payers of the municipality?⁸²

Millstone’s response stressed that municipalities derive their authority from Provincial Legislatures, and that they were technically not allowed to do anything not authorized by the province. Municipalities therefore would not be allowed to rent

⁸¹ Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents, *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.32, November 26, 1938, 4.

⁸² S.R. “Legally Yours.” *CMPD*, Vol.30, no.32, November 26, 1938, 8.

their halls or other venues for motion pictures (or for anything else) unless they were specifically sanctioned to do so by the provincial legislature. Municipalities could not in effect enter into business that would constitute competition with those who pay taxes, without actual legislation that specifically permitted it.⁸³ It is a vague answer, to be sure, but it suggests that potentially certain provinces may have been acting outside of the law in their arrangements with 16mm operators.

The year 1938 proved to be unequivocally the apex of the tensions between the activities of traveling and non-theatrical 16mm operation and the independent exhibitors in Canada. While the practice of itinerant exhibition had operated relatively under the radar on a modest scale over the course of the previous few decades, by the end of the 1930s it had become a force that some theatrical exhibitors could no longer ignore. The threat of the itinerant operations settling semi-permanently in non-theatrical venues in close proximity to existing movie theatres, be it merely perceived or truly legitimate, was not a trend independent exhibitors and its trade press would take lightly. Over the course of the anti-16mm campaign, we see a gradual recognition that the traveling operators themselves were not the only guilty parties, and that dominant forces from the film industry, most notably the vertically integrated distributors were equally responsible, due to their growing willingness to facilitate these activities. Independent exhibitors had been wrestling against monopolistic tendencies in their industry for decades, most notably with the Combines Investigation Act of 1932. Many likely felt that it was an unwinnable war. The campaign against 16mm itinerants, however – the threat from below, rather than the threat from above – was a front where perhaps a victory seemed achievable. This

⁸³ M.S. Millstone, *ibid.*

no doubt inspired much of the early enthusiasm for the rhetorical crusade. But by the end of 1938, despite the inspired and impassioned pleas by Ray Lewis and the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, and the apparently active efforts of the independent exhibitors themselves, the 16mm “peril,” with some minor distribution support from the majors, was still very much a presence in the film industry. In fact its presence had grown considerably, and for all intents and purposes it had become entrenched as a legitimate entity in the Canadian motion picture exhibition market.

Chapter Five
Legitimation and Proliferation: 16mm Goes to War

Among the Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah copied out, was proverb: "As a dog that returneth to his vomit, So is a fool who repeateth his folly."¹

This oft-quoted biblical passage graced Ray Lewis's opening editorial the week of November 5, 1938. As the year drew to a close, the intense anti-16mm campaign waged by Lewis and the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* showed little signs of success as 16mm screening activities continued unabated. Known for her dramatic rhetorical flourishes, Lewis directed this passage specifically to her core readership – the smaller scale, independent Canadian theatrical exhibitors. Throughout the year she had warned them about the impending danger of tolerating 16mm exhibitors' presence in an already competitive environment; their folly was in passively allowing the practice to continue. For Lewis, 16mm was "not competition, but opposition," and should producer-distributors continue to make available their product in this format, "the Independents would have a problem of self-preservation to cope with, more formidable than any monopoly problems with which they have to contend."² By accepting further legislation from the government with respect to 16mm film, and by idly standing by while non-theatrical practices carried on across the country, the

¹ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD* Vol.30, no.29, November 5, 1938, 4.

² *Ibid.*

independents were modern day equivalents of the proverbial dogs; “just fools who repeat their folly.”³

Perhaps Lewis was demanding too much of her audience, because by 1939 there was little indication that 16mm was going away anytime soon. In fact, after the intense hostilities of the previous year, 1939 marked a rather curious cessation of the anti-16mm campaign. While this conflict over film gauges and screening environments would resume in various guises throughout subsequent years, there was a discursive ceasefire of sorts, as Canada’s involvement in World War II took precedence in the industry. So while 1939 is often cited as a watershed moment in Canadian cultural history, due to both the war and the establishment of the National Film Board, it is also notable for the significant realignments that occurred and re-characterized the film industry. As the industrial discourse shifted away from technological and environmental debates, 16mm witnessed a certain amount of tolerance and acceptance, however tacit, within the exhibition sphere. This chapter traces the events that led up to and helped establish this acceptance within the industry and documents the eventual adoption of 16mm by the armed forces, as both a tool of training and of entertainment. These developments would not have been possible without the proliferation and gradual entrenchment of the technology within the industry over the previous decade, and they served to set the stage for the NFB’s appropriation of the technology two years later as a primary medium of communication.

³ Ibid.

Although it did eventually abate, anti-16mm sentiment did not simply disappear with the changing of the calendar year. With the specter of war looming overseas in Europe, the war of words pertaining to 16mm exhibition that preoccupied much of the film industry discourse in 1938 continued on into the following year. And as we have seen, the fervently anti-Nazi editor of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, Ray Lewis, was quick to draw comparisons between German aggression in Europe and aggression at home in the film industry. As 1938 came to a close, small victories for the independent theatrical exhibitors were won with regard to further regulation of 16mm exhibition, although increased regulation was not the desired end sought by Lewis. In New Brunswick, for instance, new sections were added to the Provincial Theatres and Cinematographic Act to further control 16mm screenings. These motions targeted revamping the licensing laws and put greater emphasis on censorship. The changes to the Act were as follows:

Section 7(a). All itinerant or traveling entertainers having cinematograph motion picture machines or similar apparatus shall pay a road license of \$100.00 for a period of one year of \$10.00 per month. Under such license the licensee shall not exhibit motion pictures at any town or place in the Province in which there is located a licensed picture theatre and that all equipment used by itinerant operators must be of the 16mm safety type equipment approved by the inspector.

“That Section 6 of the said regulations be amended by inserting the following as item 3(b):

“3(b). All 16mm films industrial, educational or otherwise shall be submitted to the Board of Censorship, and the rate of censorship shall be charged at \$1.00 per four hundred feet.⁴

Within these regulations we see the realization of many of the oft-echoed concerns regarding non-theatrical exhibition. The threat of competition with existing theatres in proximity, perhaps the single greatest economic concern of the anti-16mm crusaders, is clearly addressed by this amendment. Similarly, the concerns regarding safety are spelled out in the requirement insisting upon the employment of safety equipment. As far as censorship of 16mm films, the conditions established by these amendments more or less reflect the regulations governing the rest of the provinces, save for Quebec, which was at the time the only province that did not charge license or censorship fees.⁵

With the networks of 16mm distribution widely expanding, and larger numbers of titles entering the country primarily from the United States, censorship boards across the country felt the need to expand their jurisdiction. The amendment to the New Brunswick legislation stipulated that all 16mm films, “industrial, educational or otherwise,” would be subject to censorship. The key concern was that films that had previously been shown without any censorship whatsoever would now fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial Board of Censors. Thirty-five millimetre

⁴ Sections from the New Brunswick Theatres and Cinematographic Act, cited in Alice T. Fairweather, “Fairweather in the Maritimes,” *CMFD*, Vol.30, no.29, November 5, 8.

⁵ “Canada and Newfoundland During 1938,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1939, 1133.

films had long been subject to censorship boards, but the looser regulations governing 16mm meant that any number of films with “troubling” subject matter, be it political or moral, was potentially being circulated without the authorities’ knowledge.

Similar developments unfolded across the country. In Saskatchewan, for instance, a few months later in March 1939, a bill was introduced to amend its provincial Cinematograph Act, with the intent to further control the operation of 16mm motion pictures. Brought about largely due to the recent agitation against the unrestricted use of 16mm, the primary function of this bill was to allow for “proper censoring” of these films. The exceptions to the law were those films distributed by universities or other institutions approved by the Minister of Education, and the changes still permitted “freedom to exhibit proper films in churches and schools.”⁶

In its annual summary on the industry in Canada, the *Film Daily Yearbook* reported that over a three-year period culminating in 1938, the employment of “35mm portables” had been eliminated in Canada. This was due, the publication argued, to a successful campaign waged against the practice due to the dangers this format presented to the public and its general unprofitability for distributors.⁷ While there is little evidence of a noticeable campaign against itinerant 35mm exhibition specifically during this period, the cultural disturbance marked by 16mm’s rapid proliferation, coupled with the reasons cited by the *Film Daily Yearbook*, certainly had all but eliminated the practice of 35mm itinerant exhibition, at least for the time being. The *Yearbook* likewise indicated that “most portable machines now in use in the rural districts in Canada are 16mm sound,” noting as well that the supply of films

⁶ “Saskatchewan Legislating Against 16mm Films,” *CPD*, Vol.30, no.46, March 4, 1939, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*

was limited and that by now was subject to censorship in most provinces.⁸ With 16mm's ascendancy in the sphere of non-theatrical and specifically traveling forms of film exhibition, and its subsequent entrenchment within the infrastructure of the film industry in the form of government regulation and censorship, it would only follow that specific distribution companies would emerge to address the limited supply of 16mm film titles.

By 1939 there were two primary 16mm film distribution companies of note in Canada: General Films Ltd. of Regina and Sovereign Films in Calgary. General Films was formally established in 1936, but actually traced its roots back to 1919 when in a previous incarnation it was founded as the Regina Photo Supply. By 1939 it had national offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg in addition to its home base in Regina. It employed a staff of 40 and offered product for both sound and silent technology.⁹ According to the company's secretary, in April of that year it announced it was supplying close to one hundred 16mm exhibitors in Saskatchewan alone, many of whom were already operating, even though May was typically the month in which the "trade" was in full swing.¹⁰ General Films' foothold in Saskatchewan was apparently well earned. It spent much time, energy and money navigating the market, doing its best to avoid conflict with the 35mm industry, scouting out and developing new territories in the province and promoting the screening of educational films in schools and other various institutions, leading it in time to be considered "an integral part of the western film trade."¹¹ But the presence

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "16mm in Canada May Develop Film Battle," *CMPD* Vo.31, no.1, April 22, 1939.

¹⁰ "100 16mm Operators," *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.1, April 22, 1939, 26.

¹¹ "16mm in Canada May Develop Film Battle," *CMPD* Vo.31, no.1, April 22, 1939.

of Calgary's Sovereign Films, which boasted distribution rights for Empire Universal titles, began to disrupt this foothold, and in the opinion of General's Vice-President and Treasurer Stan Atkinson was doing so unethically.¹² Many of General Films' exhibitors were signed to five-year contracts, but Sovereign allegedly began practices to undermine and influence these contracts. In an interview with the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, Atkinson claimed,

We have excellent reasons to believe that representatives of Sovereign Films are endeavoring to influence exhibitors to violate contract and license agreements with General Films.¹³

Such was the market that a war of competition quickly developed between the two 16mm film exchanges that the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* characterized as "bitter, but so far undeclared."¹⁴ So consumed was the independent theatrical industry in its campaign against 16mm that it was quick to overlook that its opposition was not necessarily the homogenous monolith it thought it was. Concurrent to this emerging conflict between 16mm distributors was the ongoing struggle to quell the concerns of the 35mm industry that had long opposed their operations. Atkinson expressed the viewpoint that 35mm had nothing to fear from 16mm's presence on the scene, claiming there were no grounds for dispute. He was of the opinion that 16mm exhibition in fact boosted 35mm's audience, rather than drew from it. Sixteen millimetre exhibition effectively opened up the "movie habit" among people whose previous experiences with motion pictures were sporadic at

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "16mm in Canada May Develop Film Battle," *CMPD* Vo.31, no.1, April 22, 1939.

best. He claimed, for instance, that in a small town called Pense, just outside of Regina,

...80% of the people in the district had never seen a talky, and a surprising number had never even seen a silent picture. That was two years ago. Many of these people are regular film fans now and when they go to the city they take in a show before returning home.¹⁵

While General Films supplied both educational and “entertaining” film titles, Atkinson was of the opinion that 16mm’s future was securely in the realm of the educational. Its primary attributes, safety and affordability, made it well suited for use in schools, churches and related institutions. The firm not only distributed educational films, but was beginning to become involved in their production as well. The “educational end,” he claimed, was growing adding that in the near future he predicted it would form the largest part of General Films’ business. Additionally, Atkinson was adamant that it was always the policy with General Films not to supply films for commercial exhibitors “in any city, town, village, or ham’let where 35mm film is in regular use,”¹⁶ which, as we have seen, was one of the primary criticisms levelled against 16mm operation.

It is on this issue, however, that concern continued to be expressed, particularly by Ray Lewis and the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*. Permanent theatres using 16mm technology did not appear to be a widespread phenomenon, but their possibility alone made 35mm theatrical owners rather uneasy. The one 16mm

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

theatre that was continually cited as an example in the trade press was the property of a Mr. Brooks in Welland, Ontario, which happened to be in relative proximity to a large movie theatre. Apparently Brooks originally signed a distribution contract with General Films prior to the opening of his theatre. The contract was voided, however, by the company's headquarters in Regina, due to the proposed 16mm theatre's proximity to the larger 35mm theatre. Other distributors, such as Associated Screen News, reportedly turned Brooks down as well, and by the time of his theatre's completion he found himself unable to obtain 16mm product. However, Brooks apparently subsequently hashed out a deal with Sovereign Films, despite the theatre's breach of the unwritten but frequently observed proximity rule.¹⁷ The air of mystery and uncertainty surrounding all of these dealings was typical of the manner in which they were reported, but the fact remains that this appears to have been an isolated instance not typical of the industry as a whole.

By 1939, with various regulations enacted across the country, its rapid adoption by churches and schools, and the emergence of two *bona fide* distributors, 16mm had all but legitimized itself within the Canadian film industry. Recall that the campaign against the 16mm field spearheaded by Lewis called not for further government intervention and censorship, but rather for a disallowance of the practice altogether, save for isolated instances in the educational sector. Despite Lewis's intentions and her hard-fought battle, the various governmental regulations set in place in response to the anti-16mm campaign only served to further legitimize its usage and entrench itself within the mechanics of the industry. Opposition to 16mm's usage continued throughout 1939 and into the 1940s, but the vitriol of its opponents'

¹⁷ Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *CMPD*, Vol. 30, No.35, December 17, 1938, 5.

rhetoric dissipated and the arguments generally only centered on specific situations, with the knowledge that the medium was in fact there to stay.

But still, Lewis was not prepared to give up the fight entirely. In her first editorial of 1939, with the ironic title “More about Sweet Sixteen,” she lashes out again at the purported rampant safety violations of the *ad hoc* 16mm screening environments:

In certain of the halls where the 16mm is being shown wires are run around the halls and used around the patrons in these halls, we are told. Stoves are used in these halls without the Fire Marshall insisting on any protection against fire from these stoves. Chairs are not fastened to the floor.¹⁸

Citing the lack of safety precautions was one of the more common critiques levied against 16mm exhibition. But Lewis followed with an entirely original criticism:

...we are surprised that the Performing Rights Society has overlooked the collection of fees from the 16mm which uses the same kind of music as the standard film.¹⁹

Typically, the arguments levied against 16mm exhibition are all incidental to the actual technology itself, and they stem from a concern about the environment surrounding its employment. But the bottom line remained that despite the industry’s growing acceptance of 16mm, the battle apparently was not quite over. But where

¹⁸ Ray Lewis, “More about Sweet Sixteen,” *CMPD* Vol.30, no.38, January 7, 1939, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

previously Lewis would have called for boycotts and alliances with the intent of muscling 16mm out of the picture entirely, by 1939 she was merely calling for governmental investigation and intervention concerning those “glaring inconsistencies” – a tacit acceptance of 16mm’s status.

As the editorial rhetoric surrounding 16mm died down in the early stages of 1939, the tone of the technology’s coverage changed considerably. Where previously the issue was dealt largely through the subjective, argumentative form of editorials and letters to the editor, its further entrenchment in the industry led to more standardized coverage. Lewis was an avid internationalist, and 16mm ceased to be the hot-button topic dominating her editorial rants as her attention was increasingly being drawn to the developments in Europe. Instead, the coverage of activities in the 16mm field was handled just like every other item of interest, in the weekly news stories. And 16mm usage, particularly by traveling exhibitors, appeared to be thriving. Saskatchewan in particular, no doubt largely due to the presence of General Films’ head office, truly witnessed a boom in itinerant 16mm activity. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* in fact at this time began displaying an inordinate amount of column space for itinerant activity in that province. Consider the minutiae found in these complete news stories from spring 1939:

W.A. Thompson, 16mm exhibitor in Sifton and Lumsden, has added Craven to his growing circuit.²⁰

And the following month:

J.L. Dortman, Herbert, has purchased up-to-date sound and projection equipment and is exhibiting 16mm

²⁰ “16mm Expansion,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.5, May 20, 1939, 4.

product in various towns extending from Tompkins in the west to Central Butte and Hodgeville in the east. He reports business in these towns is excellent.²¹

And shortly thereafter in Ontario:

Mr. Harold Phillips will present motion pictures in the halls of Shelburne, Arthur, Durham, Palmerston, Markdale and Dundalk every week.²²

The mundane quality of these reports speaks more to the growing acceptance of itinerant 16mm exhibition than anything. A year prior, any such activity likely would have elicited frantic editorials and letters to the editor. But here they are presented as simple updates of a healthy sector of the film industry. And apparently in some instances, the popularity of 16mm traveling attractions was reviving, and even being replaced by similar 35mm operations, which previously had been all but eliminated:

D. Karby, formerly with Jack Zaitzow in Melville, has developed a 35mm circuit of his own in southern Saskatchewan. Among the towns on his itinerary are Stoughton and Avonlea, both former 16mm centres.²³

Evaluating overall statistics for itinerant 16mm operations at this point in time can be a tricky endeavor. The Province of Ontario issued approximately one hundred 16mm licenses during the 1938-1940 period, although what percentage were for

²¹ "16mm Business Up," *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.10, June 24, 1939, 4.

²² "16mm Circuit," *CMPD*, Vol.32, no.6, May 25, 1940, 20.

²³ "Karby Forms Circuit," *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.5, May 20, 1939, 7.

traveling operators is not known exactly.²⁴ Over the course of 1939, 133 traveling shows were licensed by the province, but once again details concerning the percentage that consistently operated motion pictures on the bill is not known.²⁵ In Saskatchewan, as mentioned previously, General Films was boasting some one hundred itinerant 16mm clients of its own. A more conservative figure, however, emerges from the annual survey of the film industry by the federal government, which cites 107 itinerant operators in all of Canada for 1939. Some 60% of itinerant show business in the country was conducted in the three Prairie Provinces alone. In terms of admission numbers, the survey claims itinerants played to 893,921 spectators during that year with a gross of \$210,105. Adjusted for inflation, in 2007 Canadian dollars this amounts to roughly \$3,054,603. The previous year, 1938, admissions were 631,569 and the gross was \$134,146, or \$1,908,335 today. Although these numbers obviously pale in comparison to the figures for the theatrical gross (\$34,010,115 in 1939, equivalent to \$494,454,748) they are nevertheless significant amounts when considered aggregately, and they represent a substantial increase from the totals of 1938.²⁶

With the increased governmental regulation of 16mm film, it only follows that there would be an increase in related legal activity, which was indeed very much what transpired. A court case and its subsequent appeal involving an alleged breach of

²⁴ *Licenses for 16mm Films (1924-1968)* The Motion Picture Censorship and Theatre Inspection Branch, Ontario. Source: Archives of Ontario.

²⁵ "Ontario Censor Board Reports No USA Productions Banned," *CMPD* Vol.32, Vol.3, May 8, 1940, 4.

²⁶ "British Columbia Patrons Spend \$4.38 Per Capita on Screen Fare," *CMPD*, Vol.32, no.24, September 28, 1940, 4. Historical currency conversion is based on the Bank of Canada's inflation calculation system which takes into account Statistics Canada's listings of monthly Consumer Price Indexes. The average cost of theatrical admission in 1940 was 24.5 cents, which translates into approximately \$3.52 in 2007 Canadian dollars. Additional conversions will be indicated in parentheses.

contract by two “transient” exhibitors, Joseph and Harold McElroy, filed by General Films made headlines for a few weeks in the spring of 1939.²⁷ (The less favorable term “transient” begins to emerge around this time, and was typically reserved for contract violators and other illegal traveling film operators). In Ontario, the Board of Censors had a busy year, reviewing 2,681 films in total, 544 of those on 16mm, the remainder on 35mm. The primary source of trouble for the Board, according to its 1938-1939 annual report, was with “propaganda” films, rather than “indecent” or “immoral” films.²⁸ And among these propaganda films, foreign films were singled out by the Board as particularly incendiary. As a result, chairman Omri J. Silverthorne announced that, for the time being, no foreign-language films would be considered by the Board, on either 16mm or 35mm. According to Silverthorne, 16mm was primarily responsible for this edict. He claimed many “transient” exhibitors were screening these foreign-language propaganda films on 16mm to the “foreign population” in small towns across the province, which in many cases resulted in “race riots.” The term “race riots” no doubt conjures up images quite removed from the actual scenarios that Silverthorne was describing. Typical of what he was describing was a situation in October 1939 during a non-theatrical screening by a traveling war lecturer for a largely Polish audience in Toronto. The film featured footage from Warsaw that was deemed by those in attendance as overtly critical of a Polish army leader. The audience grew furious over the film’s content, and tensions nearly boiled over, before a Pastor present at the screening was able to calm the

²⁷ “Appeal 16mm Case,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.3, May 6, 1939, p.2. and “16mm Appeal Postponed,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.5, May 20 1939, 2.

²⁸ “Foreign Propaganda Ontario Censors Biggest Headache,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.5, May 20, 1939, 2.

crowd and quell the situation.²⁹ Concerned over events such as these, the Censor Board, Silverthorne claimed, was determined to stop such actions, and barring foreign propaganda imports was the first measure it took to do so.³⁰ However, by year's end only one foreign-language film, a 16mm Ukrainian silent film, was seized at the request of the federal government.³¹

The overall film industry in Canada witnessed modest growth over the first eight months of 1939, but with war declared in September the indices went down sharply.³² The overall trend was noticed equally in the itinerant 16mm sector. In Saskatchewan, the hotbed of itinerant activity at the time, the small-town situation pretty much mirrored the national one. That month harvesting operations were in full swing, and rural residents spent any spare time they had listening to the radio to catch up on the latest developments in the war. Sixteen millimetre operations had ground almost to a complete standstill, according to Stan Atkinson of General Films.³³ As discussed in the following chapter, 1939 marked the establishment of the National Film Board of Canada, and while its traveling circuits were not introduced until 1942, its theatrical series *Canada Carries On* and *The World in Action* were beginning to be major audience draws.

The immediate negative impact of the war on Canada's film industry did not last long, however, and businesses were reporting quick recoveries within months, and the 16mm business rebounded with the same verve as the rest of the industry. By

²⁹ "Incensed Poles Threaten to Attack War Lecturer, Pastor Quells Disorder," *Toronto Evening Telegram*, October 13, 1939.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Ontario Censor Board Reports No USA Productions Banned," *CMPD*, Vol.32, no.3, May 8, 1940, 4.

³² "Canada and Newfoundland During 1939," *Film Daily Yearbook* 1940, 1081.

³³ "Business at Standstill," *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.21, September 9, 1939, 6.

early 1940, with the war in full swing, six licensed 16mm distributors were operating in Ontario and 526 16mm-film titles were in circulation, having been approved by the Censor Board that year.³⁴ The two big 16mm distributors in the west, Sovereign Films and General Films, were likewise doing solid business. In July, General obtained the exclusive (and timely) Canadian rights for 16mm distribution of the fictionalized anti-Nazi drama, *Hitler, Beast of Berlin* (Sam Newfield, 1939), trumping in fact the release of the 35mm version.³⁵ This film was the first release from Producers Pictures Corporation, an early incarnation of the Producers Releasing Corporation, run by Sigmund Neufeld (the director's brother), which was one of the larger of the independent "Poverty Row" studios of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The company was established in 1939, and *Hitler, Beast of Berlin* was the first of five features released that year. In January 1940, the T. Eaton Company, Canada's largest department store, introduced a new home-film service for 16mm equipment. Equipment and films were sold and rented from the company, and titles were mostly made up of cartoons and "genre pictures."³⁶ That year, the number of privately run, traveling 16mm operations was recorded as 85 – only slightly fewer than the previous year – and admissions were a healthy 680,054 with receipts of \$159,346 (\$1,961,220 today) over 9,405 total days of operation.³⁷ Anti-16mm rhetoric in the trade press had quieted down, and in fact certain published reports were explicitly downplayed the situation that had previously stirred such intense animosity. Discussing the exhibition market in British Columbia, for instance, Frank H. Gow, Suburban Supervisor for

³⁴ "Ontario Censor Board Reports No USA Productions Banned," *CMPD*, Vol.32, Vol.3, May 8, 1940, 4.

³⁵ "'Beast' 16mm Film," *CMPD* Vol.32, no.13, July 13, 1940, 7.

³⁶ "T.Eaton Co. Adds Film Exchange," *Canadian Independent*, February 1, 1940.

³⁷ "16mm Operations Since 1940," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.38, September 18, 1946, 2.

Famous Players, B.C., revealed that the situation with 16mm exhibitors was “not serious nor was it likely to be in the future.”³⁸ Gow cited the provincial law banning itinerant exhibitors from presenting films within ten miles of a fully licensed movie theatre. Operating on separate itinerant licenses, most of these exhibitors in the province seldom screened films more than once or twice a week in each town, which meant their activities bore “little effect on already established theatres.”³⁹

Some of 16mm’s growing acceptance by the industry may in large part be due to the role that the medium began to play in the war effort. Interest in the war led to a noticeable increase in 16mm screenings. In 1940 the Regina branch of the National Film Society of Canada, for instance, began a series of free screenings featuring short feature films of “an informative nature” mostly concerning Canada’s role in the war effort.⁴⁰ But more importantly, in early 1940 it was announced that 16mm film would be adopted as the gauge of choice for Canada’s troops, with an initial library of seventy-five training films quickly established.⁴¹ In May, the War Board placed the largest single order for 16mm projectors in the nation’s history, when it ordered thirty-nine Victor Animatophones from General Films Ltd. The projectors were to be used by the various sectors of the armed forces for instructional purposes at its training centres across the country. Additionally, the War Board bought fourteen silent Victor projectors and fourteen still film projectors for the Department of

³⁸ “War conditions may bolster British Columbia Box Office,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.52, April 20, 1940, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Gow actually cites the law as 12 miles from an established theatre, but all records indicate that it was actually ten miles.

⁴⁰ “Regina Film Society Plans New Activities,” *CMPD*, Vol.32, no.35, December 14, 1940, 11.

⁴¹ “Motion Picture Aid in Training Canada’s Soldiers,” *CMPD*, Vol.31, no.51, April 13, 1940, 4.

National Defense. Some films for these machines were given to the department by the Royal Air Force from Great Britain.⁴²

This initial investment by the armed forces into 16mm technology was earmarked specifically for instructional and educational purposes for Canadian troops. However, during the first few months of the war, representatives from the Department of National Defense approached prominent members of the Canadian film industry about enlisting their assistance for the war effort. On May 6, 1940, almost one year to the day after the passing of the National Film Act, a committee was established to oversee the activities of the film industry related to the entertainment of the nation's troops at its various training camps, to be known as the Navy, Army, Air Force (NAAF) Films Committee, also known as the Honorary Advisory Committee of Film Entertainment of Canadian Navy, Land and Air Forces. Industry giant N.L. Nathanson was named honorary chairman and Colonel J.A. Cooper was made honorary secretary (a position that would later be filled by Ray Lewis). Nathanson was at the time the president of the board for Famous Players Canadian Corporation, and Cooper was the longstanding president and later chairman of the eponymous Cooper Organization, the Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada. He also later served as Secretary-Treasurer for the Musical Protective Society, which represented the interests of the Canadian film industry in all matters relevant to performing right licenses. These were two of the most prominent individuals in the Canadian film industry, and so their involvement in this project served to bridge a considerable gap that had for years existed between the non-

⁴² "War Board Purchases 16mm Sound Projectors," *CMPD*, Vol.32, Vol.3, May 8, 1940, 4.

theatrical sector and the commercial industry – two forces that historically operated in considerable opposition towards one another.

The responsibility for securing the bulk of the films for the various camps was entrusted by military authorities to the NAAF, which had as its “special and only task, the entertainment of enlisted men in Canada.”⁴³ So while there was a clear employment of 16mm in the armed forces as a training medium, there existed a parallel usage as a medium for providing entertainment as well. This ran contrary to the American situation, where 35mm was adopted as the gauge of choice for domestic army camps.⁴⁴ Eventually American camps overseas were supplied by 16mm entertainment films through Hollywood’s War Activities Committee, but at home 35mm was the gauge that was employed.⁴⁵ It was the desire of the Canadian armed forces that no admission be charged to the soldiers. This also ran contrary to the practice in the United States and in Great Britain, where admissions (however nominal) in similar army camps were regularly charged.⁴⁶ While the NAAF Films Committee had as its task organizing the distribution arrangements to these camps, the actual day-to-day screening of the films was conducted by four national service organizations, which had ties with the armed forces dating back to the First World War. These were the YMCA, the Canadian Legion, the Salvation Army and the Knights of Columbus. In fact, it fell upon these groups to finance the rentals and screenings as well. The service organizations did the real work on the ground –

⁴³ “16mm Entertains Canada’s Uniformed Men,” *The Canadian Motion Picture Exhibitor*, Vol.7, No.1, Jan.1, 1941, 1.

⁴⁴ “Canada and Newfoundland: A Survey,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1943, 936.

⁴⁵ Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 144.

⁴⁶ John A. Cooper, “16mm Films at War,” (Toronto: Sixteen Millimetre Motion Picture Distributors Association, 1945), 6, 10.

receiving the films from the distributors and physically traveling in circuits throughout the various camps across the country, and conducting the actual screenings.

Cooper and Nathanson set up special arrangements with the distributors that cut costs considerably. Typically the rental price for 16mm titles was \$60.00 per week, but under the contracts established by the committee with the distributors that price was slashed by half.⁴⁷ Films from the major Hollywood studios had been available on 16mm since they began contributing titles to the Kodascope library in 1927, but only certain titles produced by the studios were available on this format, and it was a widely held practice to delay the release of 16mm versions of films until the first-run 35mm versions had done their full circuit, so as to not provide competition for the established theatres. As a result, the 16mm titles available for distribution in the army camps (and elsewhere, for that matter) were typically major Hollywood releases, as well as those from smaller production studios, but only those titles that were at least one year old. As a result, during the first year of the NAAF initiative, certain sections of the audience base started complaining about the programming. Among these military audiences, “city boys,” to quote Cooper, were not uncommon critics during the early years of the war. These were the soldiers who were familiar with most of the titles exhibited, and who were growing impatient and restless with these older films.⁴⁸ There is evidence that audience response to the programming on these circuits actually served to guide the subsequent actions of the

⁴⁷ John A. Cooper, “War Work of the Motion Picture Industry (with special reference to work of the Motion Picture Distributors)” (Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, June 1943.) Source: John Alexander Cooper Papers, North York Public Library, Canadiana Collection, Motion Picture Industry Series, Box 12, File 35.

⁴⁸ Cooper, “16mm Films at War,” 13.

committee. Consider, for example, this audience-response letter from one of these “urban film critics,” written presumably following a screening in Camp Petawawa, intended as a protest against the quality of film titles. Addressed to the “Government Film Department” and signed under the pseudonym “Victor Winner” the letter inquires,

“Why can’t we have some modern copies of motion picture films in this camp – Petawawa?”

“You ought to send us something up to date and CAN the stale ones coming here to the Canadian Legion, the YMCA and the Salvation Army (emphasis in original).

“We are intelligent soldiers and can reason out why you haven’t given this field of Entertainment your best! You must be old like the films, or, too busy enjoying yourselves out in Civilian Life where you can select your own up to the hour entertainment...”

.... enough of that old junk give us your Best if you want our Best!⁴⁹

The letter goes on to cite *King Kong* (RKO, 1933) and *Beau Geste* (Paramount, 1939) as films that were just screened, and then segues into a vitriolic diatribe about Canadian politics, soldiers’ pay and the general state of the world. It’s important not to overstate the relevance of the letter’s contents, as it is largely anecdotal and could

⁴⁹ Victor Winner, “Letter to the Government Film Department,” July 5, 1941. Source: John Alexander Cooper Papers, North York Public Library, Canadiana Collection, Motion Picture Industry Series, Box 12, File 7.

hardly be gauged as a typical audience response. Yet it is clearly something Cooper took seriously, as he consistently referred to it in publicity about the program, and kept the original handwritten letter in his personal files. Regardless, while every soldier did not necessarily articulate themselves quite in the fashion of “Victor Winner,” it is safe to say that the sentiments expressed in this letter, at least as far as they concerned the nature of the programming, were relatively widely felt.

Amazingly, these pleas did not go unanswered.

Part of the duties entrusted with the committee was to facilitate cooperation between the army and the film industry, and due largely to the growing frustration towards the nature of the programming, one such task was to persuade the major American producers to provide Canada with more recent 16mm copies of their films for use in the camps. Nathanson, influential man that he was, was able to convince the American producers to alter their long-held practice of withholding 16mm copies of their titles from the Canadian market until well past the initial 35mm release date. The arrangement he secured effectively permitted 16mm release dates that were simultaneous to the 35mm dates. In October 1942, RKO, Paramount, Universal and Columbia all granted the Canadian distributors rights to new 16mm releases, with the other studios to follow shortly thereafter.⁵⁰ The distribution arrangements were established with three 16mm film exchanges, General Films Ltd.; France Film Co. (distributors of narrow-gauge French-language films;) and Sovereign Films, which

⁵⁰ John A. Cooper, “Memorandum for the Four Service Organizations RE: Day and Date Releases” October 13, 1942. Source: John Alexander Cooper Papers, North York Public Library, Canadiana Collection, Motion Picture Industry Series, Box 12, File 22.

had recently become a subsidiary of Nathanson's holdings.⁵¹ General Films boasted an extensive catalogue of 16mm, both educational and "recreational" in nature. The French-language films supplied by France Film Co. logically went to greater use in the province of Quebec. Sovereign Films initially supplied the camps with reduced one- and two-year-old features from Paramount, Universal and RKO. Through Nathanson's efforts, they were able to secure similar product from Columbia and Warner Bros.⁵² Warner Bros. would later release 16mm through its own Canadian distribution offices, as did Twentieth Century-Fox and United Artists.⁵³

By 1943 almost all of the major American producers were supplying Canada with 16mm versions of their titles, and supplies were keeping up with the rapidly growing demand. When the program began in 1940, thirty-five camps were being served. By January 1941, that number had increased to 127 camps, operating three to six days a week.⁵⁴ By May, 179 camps were in operation, which made the armed forces technically the largest movie circuit in the country at the time.⁵⁵ As the program was extended, the funding for additional equipment was financed by the service groups, and the distributors continued the special discount, usually about half of the ordinary commercial rate. By the end of 1942, the program was operational in

⁵¹ "16mm Entertains Canada's Uniformed Men," *The Canadian Motion Picture Exhibitor*, Vol.7, No.1, Jan.1, 1941, 5.

⁵² Ibid. This report claims that Columbia and Warner Bros. had never previously made titles available in 16mm, but David Pierce has noted that Warner had in fact supplied the Kodascope Libraries with 18 feature films prior to this date. David Pierce, "Silent Movies and the Kodascope Libraries," *American Cinematographer*, January 1989, 38.

⁵³ Cooper, "16mm Films at War," 20.

⁵⁴ "16mm Entertains Canada's Uniformed Men," 5.

⁵⁵ "Canada's Largest Movie House Opened at Camp Borden," *The Canadian Motion Picture Exhibitor*, Vol.7, no. 10, May 15, 1941, 1.

roughly 400 camps, and that number rose again to 600 in 1943.⁵⁶ By that year, the majors were releasing 16mm titles simultaneously with those on 35mm. In some cases, however, due to fear of competition for the established industry, distributors were asked to delay their circulation somewhat so as to not clash with first-run theatres. Generally, this tended to mean that 16mm versions were shown roughly six months following the general 35mm release of the title.⁵⁷ The largest of the army camp ventures was a 16mm theatre at Camp Borden, which seated 5,000 spectators and measured 225 feet from the lens of the camera to the screen.⁵⁸ In 1943, 16mm screenings in these army camps were providing entertainment to approximately two million soldiers a month, or twenty-four million annually. And amazingly, due largely to the involvement of the service groups, this feat was accomplished at hardly any cost to the army or to the various war departments.⁵⁹

To listen to the rhetoric of Cooper and Nathanson regarding their campaign, one might get the impression that they single-handedly convinced the major studios to both produce and release their brand-new films on 16mm at the same time as 35mm. In fact, the major studios had already begun to create these copies for circulation in American overseas camps, with the USA's recent entry into the war. As it turns out, as Schatz has shown, in many cases American overseas camps saw 16mm versions of Hollywood films *before* domestic audiences did, sometimes as much as a year in advance.⁶⁰ And following the United States' entry into the war, the American War

⁵⁶ "Canada and Newfoundland: A Survey," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1943, p.936 and, "A Survey of Canada and Newfoundland," *Film Daily Yearbook* 1944, 801.

⁵⁷ "Canada and Newfoundland: A Survey," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1943, 936.

⁵⁸ "Canada's Largest Movie House Opened at Camp Borden," *The Canadian Motion Picture Exhibitor*, Vol.7, no 10, May 15, 1941, 1.

⁵⁹ "A Survey of Canada and Newfoundland," *Film Daily Yearbook* 1944, 801.

⁶⁰ Schatz, 145.

Activities Committee, working in conjunction with the army's Overseas Motion Picture Service eventually distributed 43,000 copies of 16mm commercial films and 33,000 short-subject titles to American overseas camps.⁶¹ What was significant about the actions of the NAAF Films Committee, however, is that on a technological level, Canadian army camps were the only exhibition environments in domestic North America that were seeing first-run, 16mm releases of major Hollywood films. Taken as a whole, this moment in Canadian exhibition history is notable on a very basic level for the sheer scale of its activity. But it bears significance beyond this, namely in terms of the considerable realignments that were catalyzed within the mainstream industry. As I have indicated earlier, the dominant discourses of the industry tended to orient themselves around simplistic understandings of motion pictures, their screening environments and the technologies employed. Throughout the 1930s, the 16mm gauge was still widely understood as a tool of amateurs and educationalists, and non-theatrical environments were argued to be the exclusive domain of educational film, but this historical example served to fundamentally undermine these simplistic notions. As we have seen in previous chapters, these screenings were by no means the first to do this. But what this initiative did do was grant a certain industrial legitimacy to these practices, even if it was limited to wartime. The "rogue" actions of previous small-gauge, itinerant and non-theatrical exhibitors drew a considerable amount of ire and scorn from influential sectors of the industry, notably the trade press, throughout the 1930s. However, when individuals such as Nathanson and Cooper intervened, not to mention the considerable cooperation of the

⁶¹ William Friedman Fagelson, "Fighting Films: The Everyday Tactics of World War II Soldiers," *Cinema Journal* 40, no.3 (2001): 99.

major Hollywood studios, the widely held determinist conceptions of how film was to be “properly” exhibited were ultimately challenged and undermined, regardless if this was a stated intent (which it was not). In effect, the actions of the NAAF Films Committee and the service organizations served to bring a very palpable legitimacy to a technology and a cultural practice that had been hotly contested, and they served to normalize these entities within the functionings of the film industry. The relevance of this should not be too greatly overstated, given that 16mm exhibition of Hollywood films did not exactly explode in popularity following the war. But the furor and controversy that surrounded the practice and characterized the pre-war period unquestionably abated.

In his study of 16mm screenings in the overseas American army camps during World War II, William Friedman Fagelson stresses the improvisational and non-standardized qualities of these makeshift screening venues.⁶² Furthermore, he stresses the distinctly unique form of spectatorship that frequently resulted. The screening environments were not uncommonly found outdoors, or under tents, with an obvious proximity to the natural environments. A healthy dose of “tomfoolery” was typical of these events, and much of the spectatorial activity could be described as a call-and-response format between the soldiers and the audio-visuals of the movies. Projectors would frequently break down, interrupting the intended flow of the films. Fagelson notes,

The distracting and liberating space of the front-line theater, in conjunction with the soldiers growing

⁶² Ibid, 94-112.

distrust of Hollywood, engendered a particular audience reaction.⁶³

The spectators Fagelson describes are anything but the typical passive, quiet and orderly patron that we might expect (or hope for) at a contemporary theatrical screening. Implicitly, the screening environments he describes recall Miriam Hansen's writings on spectatorship in the early cinema period. Hansen describes the initial years of cinematic experience as "polyphonic" in that the heterogeneity of film formats that existed corresponded to the subsequent forms of audience behavior that resulted. Early cinematic spectatorship was a fundamentally interactive experience, and whatever meanings emerged were completely dependent on the unique circumstances of each screening.⁶⁴ When Fagelson refers to the call-and-response nature of the soldiers' behaviour and cites their "growing distrust" of the information presented in major Hollywood films, a very similar form of participatory spectatorial activity was clearly at play. His study is based on American situations at overseas army camps, but it's entirely likely that Canadian camps were not that dissimilar.

So while 16mm was embraced wholeheartedly by the armed forces, its use by itinerants in the film industry continued throughout the war at a solid, steady pace. After an initial hiccup in the industry at the onset of the war, it recovered quickly, and both 1940 and 1941 saw the setting of new Canadian records for both theater receipts and film rentals, even though prices had been fixed and no new theatres had been opened since October 1940 due to the imposition of numerous controls on the

⁶³ Ibid, 97.

⁶⁴ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 93-94.

industry. The previous records had been set in 1930.⁶⁵ In 1941, seventy-eight traveling 16mm exhibitors were operating with admissions of 558,595 and total receipts of \$131,267 (\$1,772,104 in 2007 dollars) – a modest decrease from the previous year – but in 1942, they numbered eighty-four and admissions climbed to 617,027 with receipts of \$164,109 (\$2,067,773).⁶⁶ (Incidentally, during that period there were twelve 35mm itinerant exhibitors in operation, who played to 205,360 admissions and grossed \$55,050 [\$743,175], an increase of \$27,936 [\$377,136] from the previous year).⁶⁷ In Ontario, the Censor Board reported a noticeable increase in 16mm traffic in the 1941-42 period over the previous year, as titles submitted increased in number by 112 to 548 total, of which 509 were approved, thirty-eight altered and one rejected. As a point of comparison, 2084 35mm films were submitted during that same period. Also, the Board administered 2392 public-hall licenses and 123 for traveling shows.⁶⁸

Changes were occurring in the distribution sector as the American studios kept making product on 16mm. A new player on the scene in Canada, Hanson 16mm Movies Limited was able to acquire the rights to Paramount's small-gauge product in April 1942, which numbered between seventy-five and one hundred films, after Sovereign Films had relinquished the account.⁶⁹ (Hanson lost the 16mm Paramount account to General Films two years later in 1944). Sovereign in turn secured Columbia's 16mm product, which amounted to around fifty titles, for the Canadian

⁶⁵ "Canada and Newfoundland During 1941," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1942, p.935 and "Canada and Newfoundland: A Survey," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1943, 935.

⁶⁶ "16mm Operations Since 1940," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.38, September 18, 1946, 2.

⁶⁷ "'42 Was Big Film Year in Canada," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.9, no.10, March 8, 1944, 11.

⁶⁸ "Ontario Censor's Annual Report," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.27, July 2, 1942, 1,4.

⁶⁹ "Hanson Gets Para's 16mm's," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.18, April 29, 1942.

market the following month.⁷⁰ And perhaps the most significant development during this period with regard to 16mm distribution was the formation of the Canadian 16mm Motion Picture Distributors Association, established in March of 1943. The head office was located in Toronto, and William Redpath of General Films Ltd. was selected president and Colonel John A. Cooper was made chairman. Little historical record remains of this association, save for a 1945 pamphlet about the NAAF's wartime activities that it published, but this is nevertheless a particularly relevant event, given Cooper's history as the first president of the Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada. Cooper and the activities of this association, as Manjunath Pendakur has shown, served to safeguard the American industry's interests in the Canadian market.⁷¹ We can only assume that with Hollywood's entry into the 16mm feature film market, Colonel Cooper and this new organization mirrored the activities of the original Cooper Organization. In early 1945, the major American studios, now involved in 16mm production, established an organization along the lines of the American Motion Picture Producers and Distributors, also known as the Hays Office – the organization on which the Cooper Organization was modeled. This new group was called the 16mm Producers Association of America.⁷² That a Canadian lobby group for 16mm distribution was established two years before an American lobby group for 16mm production testifies to the important role that 16mm held in the Canadian film industry.

⁷⁰ "Sovereign Handles Columbia 16mm's," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.20, May 13, 1942.

⁷¹ Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 79.

⁷² "16mm Producers Plan Hays Office," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.10, no.18, May 2, 1945, 1.

While the war was in full swing further controls were being implemented in the realm of 16mm exhibition, which only served to further entrench the medium's strong presence in the industry. Ray Lewis's concern from 1939 about the failure of the Performing Rights Society to collect fees from 16mm films was addressed in February of 1942, when the Copyright Appeal Board granted that association the right to impose a tax. The Society had asked for the rights to impose a \$20 semi-annual fee for each 16mm machine. Instead, the Board granted the Society the right to tax all positive prints of 16mm films used commercially in Canada, at a rate of one dollar per print. Fees were applied annually, and were payable within ten days of importation for imported films, and within ten days of distribution for films produced domestically.⁷³ Furthermore, increased measures were being taken with respect to wartime controls in the industry. In March of 1942, the Theatre and Film Section of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, under the direction of R.C. McMullen, made a request that the details of all deals and negotiations between all exhibitors and distributors be submitted prior to any action being carried out. This request was made to "prevent the false expenditures in work and money which may result from scanty knowledge of the Board's rulings."⁷⁴ Interestingly, McMullen, speaking for the Board, singled out itinerant exhibitors as particularly difficult to keep track of and announced his intention to call upon the Advisory Council for guidance on how to properly monitor this sector of the industry.⁷⁵

⁷³ "Tax 16mm Films," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.9, February 25, 1942, 1.

⁷⁴ "McMullen Adjusts Distribution, Ponders Giveaways, Itinerants," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.10, March 4, 1942.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The Theatre and Film section was established to implement controls in the industry, such as ticket and price regulations and ceilings, and as Pendakur has observed, it was a clear articulation of the federal government's strongly interventionist posture during the war years.⁷⁶ And as far as film exhibition was concerned, it represented a serious obstacle to the dominant Famous Players and Odeon Theatres chains. As noted in previous chapters, independent exhibitors had long found themselves in an oppressive market environment, continually being shut out by the major chains. And while various local and provincial exhibitor groups had formed over the years, no true national body existed prior to 1942 that truly represented their interests. The aforementioned Motion Picture Exhibitors and Distributors of Canada, despite what its name might imply, did little to actually represent the interests of the Canadian independents. With the highly regulated market situation established by the Federal government, the independents sensed it was their time to strike, and so in January of 1942 the Independent Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association was formed. One of the Association's first moves was to create the National Council of Independent Exhibitors of Canada, which would liaise with McMullen and the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. The IMPEA's concerns appear to have been unequivocally rooted in opposition to the predatory actions of the major theatrical chains, and not with the behavior of small-scale 16mm operations, as they once were. This is more clearly evidenced in the association's widely distributed 1942 "Memorandum of the National Council of Independent Exhibitors of Canada to

⁷⁶ Pendakur, 102.

the Wartime Prices and Trade Board,” which explicitly highlighted these pressing concerns.⁷⁷

With their previous foes, the independent theatre owners, preoccupied with the War Board and the chains, 16mm itinerant exhibitors were able to function relatively unscathed and uncriticized for the better part of the war. As it drew on, however, some hostilities did begin to resurface, though never on a level comparable to the pre-war period. Independent traveling 16mm operators had continued their activities at a steady pace throughout the war, and by 1943, the federal government was reporting 88 licensed exhibitors playing to 820,329 admissions and a record \$230,404 (\$2,903,090 adjusted for inflation) in receipts.⁷⁸ The Wartime Prices and Trade Board’s moratorium on theatre construction in no small part likely contributed to the rising numbers of operators. British Columbia was still the only province in the country to legally ban traveling exhibitors from operating within ten miles of a licensed theatre, although most respected this as a *de facto* practice across the country. But by 1943, with an augmented presence of 16mm itinerants, concern among theatrical associations began to resurface that exhibitors were crossing this threshold. (The Quebec Allied Theatrical Industries and the Motion Picture Theatres Association of Ontario were particularly vocal).⁷⁹ Interestingly, a reason singled out for this growth was the surplus of 16mm film titles available by that year. Thanks to the arrangements made by the NAAF with the American studios, there was an abundance of 16mm Hollywood titles released to meet the needs of the Canadian

⁷⁷ Kirwan Cox, “The Indies vs. the Chains: Canada’s Theatrical Wars,” *Cinema Canada*, (June-July 1979): 50.

⁷⁸ “16mm Operations Since 1940,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.38, September 18, 1946, 2.

⁷⁹ “16mm Competition Irsome,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, No.4, January 20, 1943, 1.

army camps. These films, having served their purpose for the armed forces, were now finding their way into the hands of independent exhibitors, eager to furnish their personal film libraries.⁸⁰ The National Film Board of Canada was also producing 16mm titles on a much larger scale domestically. It is during this period that the NFB's traveling film circuits really began to take full swing.

By 1942, after a two-decade-long uphill battle, practitioners of itinerant 16mm film exhibition in Canada were finally able to enjoy a modicum of respite from the hostile forces in the industry. The past three chapters have charted the historical trajectory of these intertwined entities - the first, a cultural practice of mobile exhibition facilitated by the second, a novel, portable technology, the "new media" of its day. The innate properties of 16mm, namely its facility for mobility and its capacity for safety, allowed it to effectively transcend its original market-defined intent. And itinerant exhibition, a practice widely thought to be a relic of the past, found itself in fact catalyzed by this technology, and witnessed subsequent growth in a diverse array of platforms. This historical development, as we have seen, was met with considerable hostility from certain sectors of the film industry. Yet by and large, these considerable obstacles were surmounted, and by the midway point of the war it was safe to say that as a non-theatrical technology 16mm found itself on solid ground. Having emerged unscathed from the format wars waged against it, and having subsequently proved itself a competent technology for the purposes of mobile cinema, 16mm would find itself at the center of attention for the National Film Board's ambitious and expansive wartime film circuit initiative.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Six
Lash's Circuits:
The National Film Board of Canada and Non-Theatrical 16mm Film Exhibition

More and more as this non-theatrical distribution expanded, it became evident that those who directed, photographed, edited, and prepared a film for 16mm. circulation, were only the first participants in its creation as an instrument of communication. The men and women who finally gave it life and useful activity were those who projected that particular movie in some small hall, some factory or school or club room, and so related its values to local needs and aspirations.¹

-Donald Buchanan, *Documentary and Educational Films in Canada (1945-1950)*

In his famous essay on early cinema and the "Aesthetic of Astonishment," Tom Gunning confronts the mythological accounts of the cinema's first spectators.² Citing the panicked response to Lumière's *Arrival of a Train* that reportedly sent audiences flying from their seats, Gunning in fact discounts this widely held notion that early cinema spectators were the naïve witnesses to this novel technology. Canada, if we are to believe the projectionist reports from the National Film Board, had its share of incredulous reactions from rural spectators experiencing motion-picture technology

¹ Donald Buchanan, "Documentary and Educational Films in Canada (1935-1950)," Submitted to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.

² Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 1997), 114-133.

for the first time as well, albeit a few decades later during the Second World War. In an almost verbatim retelling of the *Arrival of a Train* myth, an audience in a remote, northern Saskatchewan village was seated on makeshift wooden pews in a rustic community hall for an evening's screening of a motion picture. That night the film on display featured a train barreling down the tracks towards the audience, just like the Lumière classic. The audience, many of whom had never seen a train before, let alone a film of one, leaned further and further backwards as the train rapidly approached, ultimately tumbling backward off of their seats.³ In a similar vein, a story published in 1944 recounts the experiences of an old man who needed to be repeatedly convinced to focus his attention on the projection screen, rather than staring directly into the illuminated lens of the projector.⁴ At a screening of *High Over the Borders* (Raymond Spottiswoode, 1942), a film about bird migration, in a small rural community centre in Alberta, an owl reportedly flew into the screening venue, swooped in front of the movie screen and subsequently defecated on it in the process. This ominous incident prompted an elderly lady in attendance to remark out loud, "My! How realistic!"⁵

It is perhaps unwise to draw too many conclusions from anecdotal evidence such as this. Gunning's work after all demonstrates that the historical anecdote that came to be accepted as a quintessential early-cinema spectatorial experience was in fact apocryphal. This is not to suggest that the National Film Board somehow manufactured these stories of rural audiences' initial encounters with the cinema, but

³ C.W. Gray, *Movies for the People: The Story of the National Film Board of Canada's Unique Distribution System*. (Montreal: National Film Board, 1973), 38-39.

⁴ Anne Fromer, "Canada's Rural Movies Building Citizenship." *Saturday Night*, March 11, 1944, 19.

⁵ Gray, 38.

there is nevertheless reason to suspect their authenticity, or at least to question their claims to typicality. The NFB's rhetoric regarding these circuits was frequently rooted in ideas of modernization, and these brief instances offer support, however humorous, to these intents. These tales stem from the accounts of NFB operatives, and they should be read as essentially urban recollections and interpretations of the rural, rather than as some objective or "truthful" observations of these non-urban communities' experiences. It is also important to realise that despite what these anecdotes might imply, encounters with motion pictures in remote areas of Canada had occurred far prior to the efforts of the NFB. There are records of film exhibition in even the most isolated parts of Canada dating back to the turn of the century. Recalling his journeys to some of these areas early in the twentieth century, F.A. Talbot describes a motion-picture operation in the village of Cochrane, Ontario, 175 miles from the shore of Hudson Bay. Most of the 300 inhabitants lived in wooden shacks and tents, and the makeshift theatre, installed in a "cheap wooden building" was "thronged the whole evening."⁶ Talbot in fact recalls the presence of moving pictures at an even more remote location, in the village of Hazelton near the Hudson Bay post on the Skeena River in British Columbia, 186 miles from Prince Rupert, the nearest town. Here, an exhibitor established a screening room in an unventilated cellar in an excavation in the side of a hill overlooking the town. Boxes, barrels, and logs served as seats, and the improvised theatre was "packed to suffocation on the opening night."⁷ The showman ordered his films from Vancouver, some 550 miles away, and they arrived by boat. A good portion of his audiences were native peoples,

⁶ F.A. Talbot, *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked* (London: William Heineman, 1912), 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

who according to Talbot were “amazed,” although many of the white population, while certainly amused, had been used to higher quality pictures from the city. In a fascinating passage, Talbot describes this scenario:

In comparison with the luxurious conditions under which the triumphs of the art may be seen in London, NY or Paris, the “Hazelton Picture Palace” was a half-pathetic, half-laughable spectacle – a strange link between civilization and the aboriginal. I saw it after being immured for several weeks in the primeval bush; and though the pictures in the cellar danced and flickered on the screen, they seemed to me like a welcome handshake with the great world.⁸

Talbot speaks rather condescendingly, but his words highlight the confrontation between an isolated, rural environment with a thoroughly modern technology and clearly mark a much different form of cinematic experience from the urban equivalent. Experiments such as these indicate that even the most remote areas of Canada, from the earliest stages of the medium were in contact with motion pictures. And as the previous chapters have demonstrated, traveling cinema throughout the first half of the century continued to venture beyond the limits of cities and urbanized areas, screening films to audiences in rural and remote parts of the country. Nevertheless, it’s still quite conceivable that by the time of World War II, there continued to exist a considerable portion of the population for whom movies were still a new experience. The National Film Board of Canada’s campaign of traveling

⁸ Ibid.

film projectionists, first introduced in January 1942, was for many rural residents the first exposure to moving-picture technology.

No other institution dominates the landscape of Canadian film history quite like the National Film Board. Since its creation in 1939 by an Act of Parliament, the board has established a worldwide reputation for the quality of its films, and for better or for worse, the NFB has persisted in its mandate to “interpret Canada to Canadians.” But while many of its exploits are well worthy of their attention and praise, it is the board’s intervention into the realm of non-theatrical exhibition during World War II that is particularly relevant to the history of traveling cinema and small-gauge technology. During its initial years of operation, the Government Film Commissioner, John Grierson, arranged significant theatrical distribution for the film board’s films, namely the *Canada Carries On* and the *World in Action* series. These were monthly “public information” film series produced by the board for both domestic and foreign markets. Through these theatrical circuits, the Film Board’s films were reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers monthly. However, as Marjorie McKay notes in her unpublished history of the NFB, Canada was still very sparsely populated with over half of the population still living in rural areas, most without local movie theatres. If these Canadians were to be reached, the NFB felt it needed to develop alternative methods of distribution.⁹ As we have seen, for decades itinerant operations were extending beyond the boundaries of cities and towns and bringing moving pictures to audiences not in close proximity to theatres. It was at this point that Donald Buchanan, an employee at the NFB and founder of the National Film Society, drawing on this tradition of itinerant cinema in Canada, particularly the

⁹ Marjorie McKay, *History of the National Film Board of Canada* (unpublished, 1964), 33.

blueprints established by provincial governments and the Extension Department at the University of Alberta, proposed a massive new program consisting of traveling projectionists to cover the areas of the country that could not be reached by the theatrical circuit that was already in place.¹⁰

John Grierson had previous experience running the film units for both the Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office in Great Britain. Here he had established non-theatrical traveling cinemas to gain wider circulation. Based on a similar, successful venture in Germany in the 1920s, these consisted mostly of trucks and vans equipped with generators and projectors, that toured the countryside screening government information films.¹¹ The geographic situation in Great Britain is obviously much different from Canada's, but Grierson felt there was no reason why a similar venture could not be successfully operated here. Buchanan devised the system and was put in control of its operation. The program, although carried out by the NFB, was funded jointly with the Wartime Information Board headed by Herbert Lash, and the circuits were subsequently dubbed "Lash's Circuits" as a result.¹² The format of the non-theatrical program was relatively simple and suited perfectly the Canadian geographic situation. Early on, Buchanan approached existing organizations with 16mm libraries, mostly university and government departments, to request assistance and support in getting the program established. Typically, the Board appointed the heads of these departments as regional agents. As such, they themselves hired the projectionists and coordinated the operations of the rural circuits

¹⁰ McKay, 34.

¹¹ C. Rodney James, *Film as National Art: National Film Board of Canada and the Film Board Idea* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 53-56.

¹² Donald Buchanan, "Promoting Democracy – With the 16mm Film." *Canadian Forum*, March 1943, 351-352.

during the program's initial six-month trial period at the beginning of 1942.¹³ Helen Watson Gordon, who worked with Buchanan, recalls the genesis of the program:

I left rural work in Winnipeg and came to the film board to work with Donald Buchanan. One day I presented a film in the town of Bright, Ontario and followed it with a discussion. The audience responded beautifully. And so it was in this area that we started the first film circuit, with the cooperation of the Ontario cooperatives and Guelph Agricultural College.¹⁴

The board originally hired individuals to operate thirty rural circuits, with a significant expansion following shortly thereafter. The projectionists were typically chosen among applicants who already owned 16mm equipment.¹⁵ The private itinerant 16mm entrepreneurs who were in operation prior to the war constituted an obvious labour pool from which to draw personnel. The board paid these individuals monthly salaries of \$130 plus an additional \$28 a month for the use of their equipment, and further funds for mileage and traveling expenses. Each had a scheduled circuit and conducted approximately forty screenings per month – twenty for schools and twenty to the wider populations of these rural communities.¹⁶

The NFB supplied the projectionists with new packages of films at the end of each month/circuit. The program for the inaugural English-language circuit in January 1942 comprised the following films: *People of Canada* (James Beveridge,

¹³ Gray, 40.

¹⁴ Helen Watson Gordon, quoted in *Four Days in May: A Report*, (Montréal: The National Film Board of Canada, 1975).

¹⁵ Gray, 40.

¹⁶ Gordon, *Four Days in May*.

1941); *Heroes of the Atlantic* (J.D. Davidson, 1941); *Ottawa on the River* (Graham McInnes, 1941); *Toilers of the Grand Banks* (Stuart Legg, 1940) and *The Thrifty Pig* (Walt Disney, 1941).¹⁷ The first four of these titles were produced by the NFB, while *The Thrifty Pig* was a four minute-long colour animated short produced by Walt Disney Productions specifically for the Canadian Government, as a War Bond promotion. The film used recut footage from *The Three Little Pigs*, with a few short new animation pieces added. Disney films were of course hugely popular, and after an appeal from the Canadian government the studio recut the film to help promote the War Bond program.

In her recent study of the NFB, Zoë Druick characterises a typical evening's program as composed of "a set of short films on agricultural improvement, profiles of various 'peoples of Canada,' propaganda for the empire, and morality tales."¹⁸ Much of the programming, she argues, was consistent with the Canadian state's objective of integrating immigrant populations (a large percentage of whom lived in rural areas) through public-information campaigns.¹⁹ Druick's project is to situate the activities of the NFB under an overall process of governmentality, and accordingly, she pays particular attention to those aspects of citizenship-building that characterized the rural circuits. Yet it should be clarified that this was by no means the exclusive intent of the Board's program. She quotes a journalist's report from the period, which explains how just about any film about Canadian activities or about international, political or economic issues could in effect be "adapted in the hands of expert leaders to

¹⁷ Gray, 42.

¹⁸ Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 81.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

discussions of citizenship.”²⁰ In other words, issues of citizenship and immigrant acculturation were not purely the intent of the NFB’s traveling film project, but the content of the circuits was flexible and malleable depending on the specific contexts of any given screening. And so the governmentality project unquestionably surfaced, but it would be incorrect to assume that the issue of citizenship was the sole intent of the NFB’s initiative. A typical program, for instance, lasted between seventy and ninety minutes in length, and might have featured educational films about farming or the war, but they would be combined with animated war bond shorts, or even shorts with entertainers such as Bing Crosby.²¹ Programs were mixed bills and were not always orchestrated as platforms for indoctrination through government propaganda. Furthermore, the very nature of the programs was to be open-ended, and despite the NFB’s attempts to guide the discussion period any given event was subject to the aleatory nature of group dialogue.

The individual exhibition outfits were supplied with complete mobile projection units with all the necessary screening equipment. Generally, school matinee screenings occurred during the day, and the “main event” followed later that night in the largest hall available.²² The Film Board presented these programs free of charge, and the various sponsoring committees took care of the venue arrangements. Of the first 60 units, at least 35 of them were equipped with their own portable power

²⁰ Graham McInnes and K.R. Gauthier, “Canada: Film Producer,” *Canadian Forum*, June 1945, 42, cited in Druick, 81.

²¹ Gray, 42.

²² Fromer, 19.

generators, which thus facilitated screenings in areas not yet serviced by electric power lines.²³

In his anecdotal history of the Film Board's early distribution systems, W.C. Gray, himself a former field representative, paints an occasionally unappealing portrait of a wartime traveling exhibitor's life on the road. Field representatives generally hired projectionists who knew the region in which they would be conducting their activities. This was important as many of these remote areas were poorly served by roads, which were often little more than dirt or gravel paths. Wartime operations meant that strict restrictions were in place, and tires and gasoline were tightly rationed. During the winter months, snow frequently blocked many of the roads. Train travel filled in when cars could not function, but even then operators often had to subsequently travel by sleigh or other means to transport their equipment. Gray cites use by some projectionists of makeshift sleds powered by automobile engines and propellers, known as "snowplanes." Other means of transportation included tractors, dog sleds, tugboats and water-taxis. Decent meals were even a problem in some of the more remote areas. While the portable generators were essential for many of the venues not serviced by electricity, they were considerable burdens for the projectionists to lug around, some of them weighing as much as 300 or 400 pounds. While the lightweight 16mm projectors made travel to areas serviced by electricity a simple affair, the places that were not posed significant challenges, as a projection unit is only as lightweight as the sum of its parts, including the cumbersome generators. The rest of the equipment caused problems as well. The

²³ Roly Young, "The National Film Board," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.17, April 22, 1942, 6 (reprinted from *The Globe and Mail*).

harsh cold of the winter adversely affected the 16mm projectors, and when subjected to temperatures below 40°F, it was discovered that it took a warm-up period of roughly an hour to run properly. Projectors used on these circuits normally needed overhauls three or four times a year. In south-western Manitoba one operator, Will Dougall, discovered, perhaps worst of all, that in order to operate a rural film circuit in that region “he had to learn to square dance.”²⁴ In this sense, geography is both Canada’s defining characteristic and its greatest challenge. And it could be argued that in these arduous campaigns faced by the NFB’s itinerant exhibitors we see most Harold Innis’s ideas concerning hinterland/metropolis relations most evidently. While in his vocabulary, film is a space-conquering medium, this particular victory over space was not easily won.

Despite these hardships, the life of a traveling projectionist was no doubt a rewarding one. As McKay explains, the arrival of the projectionist into these small communities was considered a major social event. Upon his arrival, the projectionist would be frequently greeted by cheers, and everyone would help carrying and setting up the equipment. “His visit was the biggest event of the month.”²⁵ One projectionist in Québec reported, “C’est un vrai plaisir pour moi d’arriver dans une paroisse, car aussitôt les enfants crient ‘voilà le monsieur des vues’ et tous se rendent à la salle à ma suite.”²⁶ Circuits were typically arranged so that a projection unit would visit each community on a regular date, roughly once per month. For many Canadians, these events provided an entirely new experience, and if we are to believe the reports of

²⁴ Gray, 47.

²⁵ McKay, 34.

²⁶ Quoted in Donald Buchanan, “The Projection of Canada,” *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, April 1944.

W.C. Gray and other exhibitors as many as one half had not seen movies with sound before, and some had never even seen films at all, as the circuits reached some very remote parts of the country.²⁷ One program was sent by boat for a six-week tour up and down the coast of British Columbia. The Hudson's Bay Company on occasion sent a film-board program with its annual summer expedition up north to be screened films for thousands of Inuit spectators.²⁸ Said *Globe and Mail* columnist Roly Young, the shows brought messages "of propaganda and education to a huge audience that hitherto [had] not been serviced by this medium."²⁹

Shortly after the introduction of the rural circuits, the NFB established more non-theatrical circuits to screen films for industrial workers. The National Trade Union film circuit, commencing in May 1942, was co-sponsored by the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and the Workers' Educational Association, and featured monthly screenings from May to September in union halls across the country. Films were typically accompanied by various other units of training on such topics as unemployment and labour relations. These events generally drew audiences of approximately 40,000 per month. The following year, larger industrial circuits were introduced, which typically drew an estimated 400,000 spectators. The NFB's itinerant projectionists presented these screenings right in the plants and factories themselves.³⁰ These Industrial and Trade Union circuits

²⁷ Gray, 39.

²⁸ Young, 6.

²⁹ Young, 6.

³⁰ James, 98.

represented the urban, flip side of the coin to the NFB's rural circuits. By 1944-45, 3,112 prints of 761 films were shown on both the urban and rural circuits.³¹

Initially, theatre owners in the industry watched these developments at the NFB closely and with a significant amount of suspicion. They had long battled with the independent 16mm operators, who they felt had unfairly trespassed into their market territory. The NFB's new exhibition campaigns, financed with public funds, represented a similar alternative exhibition practice, but functioned on a much larger scale than these previous incarnations. Within months of its operation the traveling rural circuits were servicing 1,300 communities across the country through sixty separate traveling units. Cooperation with both public and private organizations provided assistance with both facilities and audiences. The NFB was also beginning to open 16mm film rental libraries in cities, charging 25 cents per reel.³² There was concern among theatre owners that these operations, which were originally confined to strictly rural areas, would step beyond those bounds and pose significant competition. And other groups were developing circuits of their own. In conjunction with the NFB, such service groups as the Junior Chambers of Commerce and Kiwanis International introduced free projection services. By 1944, these volunteer screening services had been established in thirty-one Canadian cities across the country, and in many of these areas private citizens and local industries lent equipment.³³ Worried by this potential competition, theatrical exhibitors, as they did previously, called for 16mm showings to be confined to clearly defined geographical limits, citing the

³¹ "National Film Board Annual Report 1944-45" p.8, National Film Board Annual Reports, Box 2, Dreamland – History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada.

³² "16mm Competition Irksome," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.4, January 20, 1943, 1.

³³ Donald Buchanan, "Documentary and Educational Films in Canada, 1935-1950," document submitted to The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 9.

“free-lance style of distribution and exhibition” as “decidedly unsatisfactory.”³⁴ The NFB, speaking on behalf of itself and these various projection services, quickly defended against this genre of criticism, echoing the arguments of previous non-theatrical supporters. It made a point of deliberately not competing with entertainment programs in movie theatres, and on the rural circuits stuck primarily to screening its own educational and informational films, with the exception of the odd entertainment short and certain Walt Disney films, which were shown to boost the sale of war bonds and savings certificates. Grierson consistently reiterated that the NFB’s activities with rural audiences would ultimately benefit the film industry as a whole, as these “country folks” were being “conditioned” to become *bona fide* movie spectators, thus creating a demand that could be “filled commercially after the war.”³⁵ In fact, the considerable audience numbers that the rural circuits were reaching and subsequently potentially creating for the theatrical market led Roly Young to suggest that the commercial industry might be wise to contribute a substantial “cash subsidy” for such “invaluable missionary work.”³⁶

By January of 1945 the number of itinerant rural operators had increased to ninety-four, and according to the board’s Annual Report for 1944-45 numerous foreign countries, impressed by the rural circuits’ success, were inquiring about specifics. Roughly two-thirds of these circuits were fully financed by the Board and the other one-third was financed in co-operation with agriculture and educational bodies throughout the provinces. Thirteen of these operations carried French-language films. The Board’s field representatives presented approximately 1,700

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Canada Shows Hollywood How,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.8, no.52, December 23, 1942.

³⁶ Young, 6.

community and school shows each month.³⁷ School showings were typically held at each centre during the afternoon and preceded the evening's program for adults and families. According to Buchanan, the traveling theatres were bringing in enthusiastic monthly audiences of 300,000 across the country.³⁸ Central to the rural non-theatrical program was the fact that the film itself was frequently but one facet of the whole event. For instance, if the theme of the evening was agriculturally based, then perhaps the provincial agricultural representative might make an appearance. The same would go for a screening related to health or other issues. Helen Watson Gordon remembers,

When our programmes were scheduled across Canada on the circuits, we would send out leaflets and study booklets which tied in with the programs in the community. And we did have discussions at the end of the film program of 60 minutes. We tied in with farm forums and citizens' forums whenever possible, and many projects resulted from joint community action programs. Credit unions, community centres, libraries and many other concrete projects were organized in the ensuing months. There was a tremendous tie-in with provincial governments on these projects, and many others.³⁹

³⁷ NFB Annual Report 1944-45, 9.

³⁸ Buchanan, *Promoting Democracy*, 351.

³⁹ Helen Watson Gordon, quoted in *Four Days in May*.

Anne Fromer, writing in *Saturday Night* magazine in 1944, stressed the importance of the element of debate and discussion as well:

When the lights go on, the most eagerly anticipated part of the program begins. Because from the very start of the undertaking audiences declined merely to watch the films and then go home, but insisted on holding “post mortem” discussions of every aspect of the showing, many of the projectionists, originally appointed only for their technical ability, have had perforce to become chairmen of ‘town meetings,’ experts on the subjects with which their films deal, armchair strategists, who can expound clearly and accurately the affairs of the world.⁴⁰

This all served to make the evening much more than a simple passive information session. Perhaps nothing contributed to this more than the element of participation and discussion that was actively encouraged and fostered by the facilitators. Information regarding upcoming screenings was mailed to the communities well in advance, thus allowing participants to be informed on the various topics and therefore more likely to participate in a discussion. At some screenings there was apparently some initial hesitation among the audience to contribute to discussion. The NFB devised a “new movie technique” to break viewers out of their passivity and to encourage them to come forth with opinions and thoughts. Three-minute “discussion movies” were screened, featuring four characters informally debating a topical issue.

⁴⁰ Fromer, 19.

These films were shown as trailers to the major feature presentations.⁴¹ The films apparently had the appropriate effect. McKay relates,

Leaving the hall was no easy matter. To the adults this film showing was as big an event as it was to the kids, many of whom came back in the evenings. Everyone stayed and talked about the film and the weather, the crops and the roads, until almost midnight.⁴²

The films, it would appear, served as catalysts for larger debates and discussions on all matter of topics relevant to the community. But perhaps even more significant about the discussion and subsequent feedback from the people was its ultimate effect on future National Film Board productions and programs. Projectionists attended special conferences on film utilization and discussion techniques and sent in monthly reports of audience reaction, opinion and suggestions. Evelyn Cherry recalled that

...the business of the flowback from the people... at the time it was simply tremendous. Through our distribution system, we had the most splendid flow of enthusiasm, and ideas for films coming back from the people.... a great deal of the work of Helen Watson. We didn't sit in committees or consultations and decide what the films would be. Rather the film ideas came in, and then we sat and talked about how we could do it. "We'd say "Now how can we get this done in order to

⁴¹ Buchanan, "The Projection of Canada", 16-17.

⁴² McKay, 35.

send film back to them.” It was a very fine and splendid period in the history of the cinema in Canada.⁴³

And Helen Watson Gordon adds, “Yes I could name films that resulted as an idea from a film discussion or from a projectionist’s monthly report.”⁴⁴ In the collective mind of the Film Board, this represented a truly integrative system in which the participatory elements of film exhibition ultimately affected future film production. Meaningful results were brought about by the sharing of ideas and concepts ultimately reflective of issues relevant to the respective communities.

The NFB was very keen on active community involvement in these screenings. Fromer relates how certain members of the community began stepping forward:

Sometimes the projectionist need not ‘officiate’ and discussion is led by the most learned and eminent local citizens, since the film nights have taken on such a constitutional aspect, the film board, in collaboration with the Canadian Council of Education for Citizenship, now prepares a booklet of ‘lecture notes’ for every program, giving the discussion leader a preview of the night’s films and hints on how to conduct the meeting.⁴⁵

⁴³ Evelyn Cherry, quoted in *Four Days in May*.

⁴⁴ Helen Watson Gordon, quoted in *Four Days in May*.

⁴⁵ Fromer, 19.

Buchanan adds further comment into the origins of community initiative in facilitation:

Forums, of course, did not spring up spontaneously. They are mostly organized by rural educationalists connected with university extension departments who have taken advantage of the travelling movie theatres to create a new stimulus, develop a new vigour, in rural social life.⁴⁶

Facilitators were advised to “make sure the discussion never lags... discourage those who wish to make long speeches by interrupting them with questions.... don’t let the argument centre on one point.”⁴⁷ This, in itself, is rather telling about the structure of communication within an individual screening event. A problem, however, involving the group discussion sessions at these screenings began attracting more attention.

Often, it appeared, the most vocal members frequently took over the discussion, and no effective participation by all members of the group was being realised.⁴⁸ A proposal was submitted for an academic study of how film use could be improved by refining the discussion method. Participation and discussion were seen as the necessary elements in order to maintain audience numbers. The results of the study, McKay relates, found,

Under this programme, an informal atmosphere was created in the meeting by the chairman. The film was shown and the chairman endeavoured to involve

⁴⁶ Buchanan, “*Promoting Democracy*,” 351.

⁴⁷ Fromer, 19.

⁴⁸ McKay, 101.

everyone in the discussion and to permit the audience members to talk to one another rather than to him. Those least likely to express an opinion were involved, those likely to take over the discussion were gently sidetracked and were convinced of the value of everyone taking part. The result was a friendly informal meeting with people talking to one another about the subject, and with all viewpoints being heard. Many people now came to the screening, not so much to see the film, but to take part in the discussion which followed.⁴⁹

It became apparent that in order to maintain levels of involvement, it was essential to focus on those elements that made these screenings distinctive and that were unattainable elsewhere. Facilitators strove to include audience members of the group in the proceedings of the screening and discussion and to make them feel as though they were a part of the “bigger picture.”

This concern for media literacy and the emphasis on participation and discussion at the Film Board’s screenings can be seen as a precursor to the later initiatives of the Film Council of America during the 1940s and 1950s. In his recent study on the FCA’s activities, Charles Acland describes the association as the “most visible, national and influential U.S. film education organization” of that era.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁹ McKay, 102.

⁵⁰ Charles R. Acland, “Classrooms, Clubs and Community Circuits: Cultural Authority and the Film Council Movement, 1946-1957.” *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2008), manuscript p.380.

FCA took upon itself implementation of a considerable film-screening infrastructure of libraries and inventories. But parallel to this, Acland relates, was an equal concern with the expansion and circulation of ideas and discourses about film analysis and literacy. Screenings orchestrated by the FCA typically encompassed lectures and discussions in addition to the films themselves, and they covered a range of local and international topics, all under the banner of modern citizenship building.⁵¹ For those in attendance, participation in the event was encouraged and even expected, and audio-visual educational material was frequently circulated in advance to help facilitate this process. “In other words,” Acland explains, “this incarnation of the council movement was as invested in ways to disseminate talk as it was in film itself.”⁵² Regardless of whether it was actually ever fully acknowledged, the model of exhibition espoused by the FCA had a precursor in the activities of the NFB during the wartime period. And its screening initiatives, much like those of the NFB, were catalyzed by the benefits of 16mm’s portability, allowing for an easy transformation of a diverse assortment of locations into potential venues for exhibition.

In his recently published memoirs about working at the NFB during the War years, filmmaker Graham McInnes provides a counterweight to these frequently idealistic accounts of the non-theatrical circuits. In a telling passage he discusses the “inferiority complex” of those involved in the production of films intended for non-theatrical audiences:

While, especially for documentalists, ‘non-t’ was supposed to embody all the passionate zeal for which

⁵¹ Ibid, manuscript p.403.

⁵² Ibid, manuscript p.404.

the medium was now famous, it lacked glamour. 'Theatrical' connoted garish publicity, blazing theatre marquees, massed audiences of thousands streaming bleary-eyed into the cold streets after three hours in the world of make-believe and fug. 'Non-theatrical' meant audiences sitting rapt at their lathes and presses, or in schoolrooms and church basements, or in hospitals and laboratories and museums; this was somehow, while worthy, a lot less exciting. Non-t audiences could and did run into the millions, but it was millions made up of countless small groups of fifty to a hundred watching in a darkened hospital ward the 16mm Bell and Howell projector twitch and flutter, and listening to the shattering distortions which always seemed to be inseparable from 16mm sound. There might be the odour of an earnest and even exciting search after truth, but there was little sense of commitment. And in the end you were always totally unnervingly dependent on the projectionist, often an eager amateur to whom you were grateful but who could ruin your film by misframing, misthreading, poor focusing, turning up the sound too loud, or forgetting to turn it up, or going out for a smoke in mid-reel while skeins of undulating film

from a broken splice slowly gathered about the ankles
of the faithful.⁵³

The glitz and glamour of theatrical screenings was apparently far more enticing, for many NFB staffers, than the earnest and rather mundane non-theatrical counterparts. He continues:

‘Theatrical’ lapped you in soft Lydian airs in a plush seat with a close-up ten feet in diameter. It was seductive, unmaning, false and thrilling. The villain of the industry. With non-t, realism always obtruded: the dim corner of the school desk; the imperfectly masked window letting in the daylight; the not-too-distant flush of a school toilet; the aroma of the bubbling coffee urn ready, once the lights were turned up, to lubricate the question period with the expert who normally came with the film.⁵⁴

These passages differ rather substantially from the rhetoric employed by Buchanan, McKay, Watson Gordon et al., which is typically utopian in tone when recounting this stage of the board’s activities. While the country was fighting for democracy in Europe, the Film Board was promoting it at home through community screenings, or so went the refrain. And this “democratic” quality to the rural circuits, with its emphasis on process and community involvement is implicit as well in a comparison with the NFB’s theatrical circuit. Grierson had secured theatrical distribution for

⁵³ Graham McInnes with Gene Walz, ed. *One Man’s Documentary: A Memoir of the Early Years of the National Film Board*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 47-48.

certain NFB productions, namely the *Canada Carries On* and *World in Action* series. These films, made during the context of World War II, however, were rather propagandistic - a term Grierson favoured himself. Perhaps just as pertinent as the films' content and authoritarian tone are the venues in which they were shown. They were shown in privately owned movie theatres and often preceded feature-length narrative films. Therefore the circumstances surrounding these screenings allowed for no reciprocal behaviour on the audience's part. These films were designed with the intention of imprinting a message, in this case informing and gathering support for the war effort, and the means of exhibition in turn reinforced and ensured this one-way transmission of information. Different films were shown on the different circuits. *Canada Carries On* and *World in Action* were screened in the theatres, but the non-theatrical circuit, in addition to war films, tended towards, as Daphne Lilly Anstey, one of the early organizers of these screenings, relates, "units dealing with various aspects of Canadian life: agriculture, industry, arts and crafts and the people."⁵⁵ Typical titles included *Windbreaks on the Prairies* (Evelyn Cherry, 1943), *Five Steps to Better Farm Living* (Evelyn Cherry, 1945) and *Just Weeds* (Sol Dworkin, 1945).⁵⁶ The NFB sought to cultivate with its non-theatrical circuits an innovative, community-oriented system of film screenings, in which audience members were encouraged to interact and participate in the event itself, and where information was shared and discussed, rather than merely consumed. Buchanan was particularly

⁵⁵ Daphne Lilly Anstey, quoted in *Four Days in May*.

⁵⁶ "National Film Board of Canada Annual Report, 1944-45," p.8, National Film Board Annual Reports, Box 2, Dreamland - History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1940 Fonds, National Archives of Canada.

enthusiastic about the development and emerging structure of these circuits, when recounting them years later in his submission to the Massey Commission:

More and more as this non-theatrical distribution expanded, it became evident that those who directed, photographed, edited, and prepared a film for 16mm. circulation, were only the first participants in its creation as an instrument of communication. The men and women who finally gave it life and useful activity were those who projected that particular movie in some small hall, some factory or school or club room, and so related its values to local needs and aspirations. As a result, what had started out to be a war information film programme, directed from above, now slowly changed in emphasis, as local desires and problems began to find expression through the medium of the reports sent in by the chairmen of these circuit and volunteer showings.⁵⁷

That the rural projection circuits were motivated in large part by a sense of contribution to the overall “national” project of the NFB is evident and unmistakable. Furthermore, the utopian declarations of “bottom up,” decentralized reorganization of the board’s organizational structure perhaps promised more than they actually delivered. Nevertheless, the fundamental structural accomplishments introduced by this campaign are considerable. It is important to temper enthusiasm for this project by acknowledging that it would simply not have been possible, at least not on an

⁵⁷ Buchanan, “Documentary and Educational Films in Canada, 1935-1950,” 9.

equivalent scale, without the original *ad hoc* blueprints laid out by the entrepreneurial endeavors of the previous two decades. But by creatively drawing from these previous models of traveling exhibition and employing technology proven to be suitable for such ventures, the NFB through its partnerships with various organizations managed to develop a huge infrastructure of non-theatrical exhibition. Much of this success stemmed from the decision to hire many of the original, independent projectionists, who had circuits established and knew specific routes and communities intimately. In many cases, what existed previously in the independent, private sector effectively became coordinated under a centralized public system. The end result was unquestionably larger in scope than the previous independent systems. Regardless of the admittedly debatable effects of the actual screenings themselves, the sheer scope and scale of these circuits was undeniable. While the itinerant exhibitors of the pre-war period broke new ground by bringing motion-picture technology to new audiences and environments, they were nevertheless limited in just how far their operations could be carried. The NFB, by centralizing and bringing together the resources required, was able to expand the limits of non-theatrical exhibition in Canada. Mobile cinema facilitated by 16mm may have had *de facto* acceptance in terms of the film industry, but this centralization, through both the NFB's activities and those of the NAAF, served to further recognize, entrench and legitimize both the practice and the technology. New film-going audiences were established and exposed to different ideas and screening practices, and in a sense a certain form of media literacy was promoted through the circulation of new ideas about how to watch movies.

Chapter Seven

Projecting into the Post-War Period: 16mm in the 1940s

Potentially this event is as big as the advent of sound.... for we are pioneering a revolutionary development in the motion picture industry. We are not a major studio, and this is not an epic production but we feel that this is a significant step in film history, since we take a frame five-eighths of an inch in size and project it on a standard theatre screen. It means that the 16 millimeter industry has arrived and through this medium will enable Hollywood to reach even the most remote places in the world.¹

-Jack Seaman, President, Planet Pictures, 1946

One evening in March of 1948 at the Uptown Theatre, one of the largest downtown movie theatres in Toronto, an experiment in film-screening practice was conducted that prompted the *Canadian Film Weekly* to pronounce the event as “one of the most interesting and important in Canadian motion picture history.”² That night, in anticipation of an announced forty-five-minute power outage, the 2,743 seat first-run theatre, operated by the Loew’s Inc. chain, showed a 16mm print of its scheduled feature to avoid the interruption to the evening’s entertainment. The Ampro Arc 16mm projector ran on power provided by a Diesel Delco generating system, which

¹ “16mm Preem in 35 House,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, April 3, 1946.

² “16mm in Toronto Key House,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.13, no.11 March 17, 1948, 1.

management had installed for this purpose. The theatre's wiring system featured two separate lines: a 550-volt power line, which operated the projectors, and a smaller 120-volt line, which fed the theatre's remaining operations, such as the lights. Because the power outage affected only the larger power line, the theatre was able to maintain operations. The projector was installed in the theatre's usual booth, 120 feet from the screen, and was operated by the theatre's regular projectionist. Lit by a carbon arc, the machine featured a two-inch lens and cast an image only slightly smaller than the theatre's 24-foot screen. Rather than running the entire night's operation on the 16mm projection, the theatre's management opted to run both the 35mm and the 16mm simultaneously, only with the sound and sight disabled on the smaller-gauge projector. When the power outage took effect, those features on the 16mm projector were simply switched on, creating a virtually seamless transition between the two technologies. Securing 16mm titles was made possible through Sovereign Films, which distributed Universal-International productions from Empire Universal. With additional scheduled daily power outages that month, the 16mm experiment carried on for a 3-week period, and such was the quality of the projection of the image, lighting and sound, that the theatre's patrons registered not a single complaint. In fact, no one even seemed to have noticed any difference at all.

The actual historical relevance of this event falls well short of the hyperbolic promises of the *Canadian Film Weekly*, as 16mm never really took off as a *bona fide* theatrical technology, despite whatever benefits it offered. However, this experiment nevertheless functions as a telling microcosm of 16mm's place in the film industry in Canada in the 1940s. Buoyed by a high-profile employment in the Canadian army

camps both as an instrument of training and for entertainment, and by the NFB's widespread rural and industrial circuits, non-theatrical 16mm exhibition emerged from the war stronger and more popular than ever. What this instance of theatrical employment of 16mm technology reveals is a concrete example of the dominant mainstream film industry appropriating the emergent, rogue media form, after two decades of grappling with it. This was clearly not an affair that would last, however, as the mainstream tendency in the film industry, largely stemming from competition with the new medium of television, turned its attention towards going "big" with such technological innovations as Cinerama and Cinemascope, rather than pursuing this potential with the smaller-scale 16mm gauge. But it nevertheless represents a telling moment in the history of the medium. This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive examination of the place of 16mm in post-war Canada, nor as a detailed study of the related practice of itinerant exhibition during this period. Rather, through a survey of a number of developments in the film industry during the latter half of the decade, what becomes apparent is an essentially ambiguous state of affairs. These various developments include the continued integration of 16mm into the marketplace, through both experiments with its use in permanent theatres, as well as its ongoing employment on itinerant circuits, and a return to the rhetorical and discursive format conflicts that characterized the pre-war period. The 1940s, in other words, essentially demonstrate the indeterminacy of 16mm's evolutionary route.

By war's end, thanks to the Herculean efforts of the National Film Board, its non-theatrical audience encompassing its rural, industrial and volunteer projection

service numbered an estimated one million Canadians.³ And much like all sectors of Canadian life, new adjustments were being made in the Canadian film industry for life in a post-war context. While the war had temporarily eased tensions between historically opposed segments of the film industry, unifying them somewhat in a common goal towards the war effort, these hostilities quickly resurfaced with a return to peacetime. Sixteen millimetre activity in the country had reached its highest point in its history during the war, and with the industrial infrastructure in place, and the equipment and film titles widely being circulated, there was little indication that the medium's presence would abate. Certainly, with the war's end there was significantly less demand for 16mm projectors and films in army camps across the country. But this also meant that a vast amount of equipment and numerous film titles were suddenly available for resale and for distribution in non-military circles. Significant developments unfolded in the 16mm distribution sector late in 1945, including the introduction in the United States of *Film World*, a trade publication devoted solely to the 16mm industry. At war's end, there were three major 16mm distributors in Canada: Sovereign Films; General Films Ltd; and Hanson 16mm Movies Ltd. In November of 1945 a new player was introduced to the 16mm distribution scene, the International Theatrical and Television Corporation. IT&T offered roughly one hundred programs per year including various Hal Roach MGM shorts, such as his *Laurel and Hardy* titles, Harry Sherman's popular *Hopalong Cassidy* features, as well as some assorted titles from the Poverty Row studio PRC.⁴ That fall, General Films signed an exclusive contract with Planet Pictures Inc., a

³ C. Rodney James, *Film as National Art: National Film Board of Canada and the Film Board Idea* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 98.

⁴ "IT&T of Canada in 16mm Field," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.10, no.47, November 21, 1945.

Hollywood studio that produced 16mm first-run color features. The first three film titles released for distribution – exclusively on 16mm - were *Jeep Herders* (Harvey Parry, Richard Talmadge) a contemporary Western about war veterans, and the crime drama *Detour to Danger* (Harvey Parry, Richard Talmadge) late in 1945 and the musical comedy *The People's Choice* (Harry L. Fraser) shortly thereafter in 1946. General Films was to receive an additional nine films for distribution from Planet Pictures, which were all designed to meet the standards of “schools and churches.”⁵ Following the war Paramount chose to withdraw its 16mm distribution activities in Canada. After losing that lucrative contract, General Films attempted to fill the gap it created by signing a long-term deal with Twentieth Century-Fox in 1947 to complement the distribution contracts it also held with RKO and United Artists.⁶ For its part, Hanson 16mm Movies by 1947 had secured the Canadian rights for entertainment films from Eagle-Lion, a critically well-regarded “B” movie studio; Monogram Pictures Corporation, another “B” studio, but a larger one perhaps best known for its “East Side Kids/Bowery Boys” series starring Leo Gorcey and Huntz Hall; and a smaller studio called Alliance Films. In addition, Hanson carried titles from the libraries of Gaumont British Instructional and Religious Films Ltd., both of London, England.⁷

To import 16mm films from the United States required paying a twenty per cent *ad valorem* import duty and an 8 percent sales tax upon entering Canada, whereas British films were charged no such taxes. These films could be distributed without restrictions, but there was an agreement between the major production studios

⁵ “Planet 16mm Via General Films,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.10, no.48, November 28, 1945, 1.

⁶ “General Films Gets 20th Fox 16mm,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, vol.12, no.39, 1947.

⁷ “Painter to Britain for Hanson 16mm,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, August 20, 1947, 11.

and the theatre chains that no 16mm film would be rented for exhibition within ten to twelve miles (depending on the province) of a 35mm theatre.⁸ The amounts charged to exhibitors varied rather widely and were often worked out on scales by which larger amounts were charged for the initial two days, and less for subsequent days. A typical charge for exhibitors operating in smaller villages would usually be in the neighborhood of \$45 per film per week, but there were great variances depending on a film's length, quality, demand etc. On the occasions where 16mm films were sold outright, the starting price was usually at least \$35 per reel.⁹ Given that two decades earlier, film titles from the Kodascope library could be purchased for \$50 each (per title, not per reel),¹⁰ these prices do not seem particularly exorbitant, and I include them here only to demonstrate their essential typicality, as proof of a general normalization in the industry.

One of the reasons that the production of 16mm films saw such a boost in the immediate post-war years was that it was widely believed that the same size would be used for television transmission, and increased production meant new demand for distribution. *Canadian Film Weekly* in fact speculated in 1945 that both widespread non-theatrical 16mm film exhibition and new channels of exhibition through television would in fact create an entirely new "star" system, rooted specifically in 16mm productions and quite distinct from the system in the regular motion picture industry.¹¹ Aside from the major studios, which were releasing titles specifically on 16mm, independent producers, such as Planet Pictures Inc., saw the benefits of

⁸ "Attack Dom'n Trade Practices," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.13, no.22, June 1948, 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Pierce, "Silent Movies and the Kodascope Libdrary," *American Cinematographer*, January 1989, 38.

¹¹ "16mm Producers Plan Hays Office," *Canadian Film Weekly*, May 2, 1945, 12.

releasing titles in this format for non-theatrical and itinerant markets initially, with the distinct possibility of an even wider audience down the road with the looming availability of television. Little discussion of increased domestic production or of a distinctly “Canadian cinema” was apparent at this point, as the industry remained primarily interested in the distribution and exhibition sectors.

Privately run 16mm operations for the year 1945 numbered 162, with 1,531,345 admissions and total receipts of \$433,963, or \$5,316,046 in contemporary dollars.¹² Rentals, the total gross amount made by 16mm distributors, accounted for \$1,198,016 (or \$14,675,696) that year. Initially this figure may seem puzzling, given that the rental grosses were more than twice as much as the attendance receipts. This is largely explained by the huge attendance numbers from army camps, which charged no admission, and the various other non-profit 16mm operations, which typically showed films at greatly reduced prices, and where Amusement Taxes were not charged. The *ad hoc* theatres largely disappeared as many of the army camps themselves were closed following the cessation of hostilities. The Army, Navy and Air Force Films Committee disbanded with war's end, and with government appropriations also ending those camps still in operation and desiring to continue screening 16mm films were forced to coordinate the distribution arrangements themselves. The distribution of entertainment films to camps during the war was supervised by various service organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, the Salvation Army, the YMCA and the Canadian Legion, but after an announcement by the Canadian Army Film Bureau in 1946, this now became the individual concern of

¹² “16mm Rentals Pass Million \$s,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.38, September 18, 1946, 2. This figure includes the Amusement Tax – total receipts without the tax were \$345,334 or \$4,230,341.

each camp, and admissions were subsequently charged where previously they had not been. Overall rentals for the year in Canada were therefore assumed to decline, especially since the deals with the Hollywood studios were explicitly meant for the wartime context. Interestingly, many major studios began looking to foreign markets to exploit with their 16mm product. United Artists, for example, announced a massive program in 1946 designed to distribute its titles on 16mm across the world. The films were to be mostly 35mm reductions, rather than 16mm originals, but they were carefully dubbed into non-English languages. Sixteen millimetre was the gauge of choice for this project, as many regions across the world did not have 35mm facilities, and due to postwar shortages they were not likely to have significant 35mm distribution capabilities for some time.¹³ So although 16mm production from the major studios continued, especially for European and Latin American markets, not all studios were prepared to continue offering their 16mm titles to the Canadian audiences. But despite the decrease in 16mm activity resulting from the closure of the army camp theatres, there was a corresponding increase in itinerant activity on the home front. Men and women returned from overseas and subsequently greatly increased both the cinema-going audience, but also the number of itinerant operators as more individuals sought to establish themselves in post-war civil life.

Also noticeable in Canada within the first year of war's end was the renewed emphasis on the actual manufacturing of 16mm projectors. The Ottawa-based Northern Tool & Gauge Co. Ltd., for instance, from February to September 1946, manufactured about one thousand 16mm projectors, about half of which were sold to schools, churches and hospitals throughout the country, with the remainder exported

¹³ "UA Maps World Drive," *Canadian Film Weekly*, April 3, 1946.

to South American and European countries, such as Argentina and Portugal, with additional distributors established in Africa and China.¹⁴ The portable projector came in an aluminum case, was approved by the Canadian Standards Association and life tests proved its durability for over 3,000 hours. The Audio Visual Educator, as it was known, retailed at \$585 in 1946 (roughly \$7,100 today) but was available to tax-exempt organizations for \$430 (\$5,200). It was the only noteworthy 16mm projector manufactured in Canada at the time and was actively promoted, and demand was known to exceed supply. By 1948, for instance, the principal distribution outlet in Montreal was a full six months behind in supplying new machines to customers. By that year it was estimated that 6,000 16mm projectors were in use in Canada, many of which were the product of Northern Tool & Gauge Co.¹⁵

Amazingly, even with the rising amount of 16mm production, of both equipment and film titles, and the presence of several prominent film exchanges, 35mm itinerant exhibitors were still operating. Thirty-five millimetre admissions hit an eight-year peak in 1944, playing to 233,190 spectators, only to fall rather dramatically in 1945, the last year of the war, to 49,958.¹⁶ But within a year, these numbers jumped back up again. Overall figures in Canada during 1946 for 35mm itinerant operators numbered 196,548 total admissions, a noticeable increase of 146,590 from the previous year, with total grosses at \$49,905 (\$605,727), not including the Amusement Tax. Amusement Tax figures jumped from \$4,566 (\$55,933) to \$10,094 (\$122,517). These audiences were served by a total of thirteen

¹⁴ "Dominion 16mm Proj'r Being Sold," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.38, September 18, 1946, 1, 16.

¹⁵ "Attack Dom'n Trade Practices," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.13, no.22, June 1948, 10.

¹⁶ "35mm Itin Take Drops Sharply," *Canadian Film Weekly*, Vol.11, no.39, September, 1946, 1

exhibitors nationwide, compared to just five in 1945. The provincial breakdown was as follows: five operators in British Columbia (which included the Yukon and the Northwest Territories in its totals) played to 36,534 admissions and \$14,762 (\$179,175) in receipts; three operators in Quebec (where previously none existed in 1945) with 81,068 admissions and \$17,411 (\$211,328) in receipts; two operators in Prince Edward Island; two operators in Manitoba; and one operator in Saskatchewan.¹⁷ Noticeably absent from this list is Ontario. This absence is likely best explained by that province's highly developed 16mm infrastructure, making it a far more obvious technological choice for itinerant exhibitors. Although thirteen operators is still a relatively meager aggregate, the overall increase in 35mm exhibitors countrywide, is mostly attributable to the post-war influx in soldiers returning from the war.

With this continued vigor in the non-theatrical sector, despite the numerous regulations introduced by provincial governments, and the legitimized presence of 16mm producers, distributors and exhibitors in the industry, theatrical owners continued to protest what they deemed unfair competition. Theatrical 35mm exhibitors in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta were the most vocal opponents in 1945, calling explicitly for more rigid enforcement of clearance and zones. At the Annual Meeting of Quebec Allied Theatrical Industries late in 1945, discussion related to 16mm competition was particularly prominent, and the following resolution was passed:

¹⁷ "35mm Itinerants Grosses Jump," *Canadian Film Weekly*, December 31, 1947, 6.

WHEREAS: The rapid expansion of the 16mm showings is proving a serious threat to the legitimate theatre.

WHEREAS: The tremendous revenue derived by the producer from the legitimate theatre entitles, we believe, the theatre to a better protection on the product he is showing than is now being given him.

BE IT RESOLVED THEREFORE: That the various distributors be asked to agree to the condition of the following clause to be the standard exhibition contract:

“It is also a condition of this contract that the distributor shall not rent, except for military reestablishment purpose, any 16mm version of this film for at least a year after the presentation of said film by the exhibitor in his theatre.

It is further agreed that no presentation of a 16mm version at the expiration of such delay shall be made within a radius of 10 miles from the said theatre, except also for military purposes.”¹⁸

These were relatively standard demands from exhibitors with regard to itinerant and other non-theatrical 16mm operations. The particulars in the clause proposed by the exhibitors were the very same as those echoed across the country. Typically however, these issues were followed as a rule of thumb and were generally not

¹⁸ “Quebec Allied Protest Encroachment of 16mm,” *CMPD*, November 17, 1945, 6.

manifested in actual provincial legislation, with a few exceptions. Up until this point Quebec had been somewhat slower to adopt the same regulations as other provinces, and 16mm films were not even subject to censorship until 1947. This appears perhaps surprising given that the province had a long-standing law banning children under the age of 16 from attending movie theatres. This inadvertently led to a significantly large class of spectators eager to be served by either church or privately run, non-theatrical screening events. But at any rate, this meeting is evidence of the movement to bring the province up to speed with the rest of the country.

A key concern for theatre owners across the country, as had long been the case, was largely related to the threat of 16mm exhibition venues becoming permanent and posing unfair competition to established 35mm theatres. Because of the rapid growth of the 16mm field, in 1945 *Canadian Film Weekly* reported that neither the film exchanges nor any of the provincial bureaus carried lists of venues that had become “permanent situations and are advertised as theatres.”¹⁹ Theatre owners were annoyed with privately run 16mm itinerant operators, but also with the non-profit operations conducted regularly during the course of the war, both the NFB and local service clubs. The NFB maintained that it made every effort to steer clear of territory in range of these theatres, and the operations coordinated by service clubs tended to frequent smaller communities without the luxury of theatres, or alternatively, they both offered distinctly different programming in those communities with theatres. Much of the justification during wartime was to keep residents rooted in their own communities and to keep them from traveling to neighboring towns and cities, and in the process encourage local shopping. As a

¹⁹ “MS Ferris Buys Alcan 16mm....” *Canadian Film Weekly*, No.5, January 31, 1945, 2.

result, local merchants frequently supported these screening operations, as they contributed to keeping consumers spending in their own communities. These non-profit screening events were not charged the twenty per cent Amusement Tax that 35mm theatres had to bear – an additional source of frustration for theatre owners.²⁰ After continued lobbying by theatrical exhibitors, this plan of action was reversed in May 1947 when the Minister of Finance announced the federal government's intention to begin imposing an excise tax on non-profit 16mm screenings.

While competition was the key concern for the theatre owners, public safety was typically the primary concern for governments. That year the provincial theatre inspection chiefs from across the country met in Montreal to discuss safety regulations for 16mm exhibition venues and other issues of relevance to the field. Meetings were subsequently held with Col. Cooper, the head of the Canadian 16mm Motion Picture Distributors Association. In Ontario, a fire at a screening in Hamilton prompted a transfer of authority over public halls from the theatre inspection branch to local municipal officials. Early in 1947, after repeated complaints of “fire traps” appearing advertised as legitimate “theatres,” a committee was appointed by the Motion Picture Theatres Association of Ontario, head by Dick Main, Ralph Dale of the National Theatre Services and Arch H. Jolley of the MPTAO, to address the issue.²¹ Sixteen millimetre's safety features itself were rarely in question, while those of the various venues in which it appeared continually were. In 1948, Main, then president of the MPTAO, addressed its membership at their annual meeting on the

²⁰ “16mm Rentals Pass Million \$s,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, No.38, September 18, 1946, 2.

²¹ “Main Heads 16mm Committee,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, vol.12, no.4 January 22, 1947.

topic of 16mm exhibition, and provided perhaps the most level-headed assessment of the situation to date:

There is no legislation which prevents the exhibition of 16mm programs anywhere. The exhibition of 16mm shows is an entirely legitimate way of earning a living and this Association has neither the right nor the power to try and prevent such exhibitions. The Association does consider the use of frame structures, second story halls, lack of proper lighting and exit facilities, and loose chairs a serious hazard from the standpoint of fire and panic and is hopeful that the proper authorities will in time recognize the inherent danger of gathering large numbers of people together under such conditions. It is to be hoped that such places will eventually be subject to more rigorous inspection and regulation, bearing in mind the fact that they do fill a need for entertainment in the community too small to justify the expense of a 35mm standard theatre.²²

Main highlights the key, oft-repeated concerns relating to safety in more, shall we say, "rustic" 16mm venues. But most importantly, this passage represents an overt acceptance of privately run 16mm non-theatrical and itinerant exhibition, and concedes the legitimacy of the practice within Canadian society. Such words from the president of the theatrical exhibitors' lobby from the nation's most populous

²² "Ontario Exhibitors and 16mm Pix," *Canadian Film Weekly*, November 24, 1948.

province represented a serious breakthrough for 16mm operators. And perhaps most significant is Main's explicit reference to *entertainment*, and the role these operations play in providing this to communities "too small to justify the expense of a 35mm standard theatre." The theatrical industry had for some time tacitly accepted non-theatrical exhibition of an educational nature. However the recognition of its legitimacy as a provider of entertainment, aside from its usage in military camps and in communities removed from theatres, was nevertheless a watershed moment for 16mm exhibition.

In fact, so strong was the 16mm market during this period that an American report on the Canadian industry published in the *Canadian Film Weekly* described it as "outstandingly favorable and worthy of development in the immediate future."²³ Interestingly, the report, commissioned by the American federal government, stressed the arguments that itinerant 16mm exhibitors themselves long put forth in defense, and implicitly argued against the standard objections of the theatre owners:

The considerable portion of the population which lives in theatreless villages constitutes a keen audience for showings of theatrical films in town and parish halls and by mobile projection units. Revenue from the rentals of 16mm films is a separate source of income which does not even partially supplant that obtained from 35mm films.²⁴

²³ "Attack Dom'n Trade Practices," *Canadian Film Weekly*, vol.13, no.22, 1948, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

This offers essentially the same argument as those put forward by 16mm exhibitors themselves. The passage stresses the mobile units' usefulness in serving communities without the benefits of theatre houses and clearly argues that no revenue is diverted away from theatres to the independent itinerants.

The ongoing pattern of complaints from the theatrical industry and subsequent responses from governments and regulators typified much of the activity surrounding itinerant and non-theatrical exhibition since 16mm's introduction in 1923. Over this span of time, 16mm and non-theatrical exhibition became a gradually normalized presence in the industry, as evidenced by Main's speech to the MPTOA in 1948. What becomes truly notable in the immediate post-war context, however, is the manner in which theatres eventually opened their own doors to the small-gauge technology, and began experimenting with it themselves, after two decades of suspicion, aversion and frequent outright hostility. Thirty-five millimetre theatres had long feared the encroachment of semi-legit, semi-permanent *ad hoc* 16mm theatres that they claimed were cropping up across the country. But in the mid-1940s 35mm movie houses, particularly the larger urban variety, began experimenting with 16mm technology and the various benefits it entailed. Among these benefits was the belief that due to its slow-burning film, the strict building regulations for fire prevention would become unnecessary.²⁵ The fusion of 16mm and 35mm projection described in the anecdote that opened this chapter occurred in 1948, but the Uptown Theatre in that particular instance was by no means the first theatre to screen 16mm films. The first high-profile screening of 16mm entertainment in Canada or the United States was in the spring of 1946 in the Marcal Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, of all

²⁵ "16mm in Toronto Key House."

places. A complete 16mm program was screened that night, all in colour, including a newsreel, a cartoon short, Gene Blakely's *Adventures in Yosemite* and the Harry Fraser comedy *The People's Choice*, all productions of the pioneer 16mm studio Planet Pictures. Following the premiere, *Detour to Danger*, another 16mm Planet Pictures Kodachrome feature was double-billed with *The People's Choice* for an extended run. (These were two of the films that General Films Ltd. had secured from Planet Pictures for distribution in Canada months earlier in 1945). This event was advertised in the trade press under the heading, "A New Motion Picture Industry Comes of Age," and marked the first time a narrow-gauge double bill was featured in a standard movie theatre.²⁶ Jack Seaman, president of Planet Pictures, expressed his excitement over 16mm's theatrical debut:

Potentially this event is as big as the advent of sound... for we are pioneering a revolutionary development in the motion picture industry. We are not a major studio, and this is not an epic production but we feel that this is a significant step in film history, since we take a frame five-eighths of an inch in size and project it on a standard theatre screen. It means that the 16 millimeter industry has arrived and through this medium will enable Hollywood to reach even the most remote places in the world.²⁷

²⁶ "16mm Preem in 35 House," *Canadian Film Weekly*, April 3, 1946.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Evidently, from both this passage and the rhetoric that accompanied the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter, the introduction of 16mm into standard movie houses was not some minor experiment, but was in fact considered to be a major event in the evolution of the film industry. Following this initial trial run in the United States, similar experiments unfolded in Canada. In May 1946, the first major movie theatre to incorporate 16mm technology into its activities was the 605-seat International Cinema in Toronto. The theatre operated two 35mm projectors for its standard features, but began screening its foreign, documentary, art and Kodachrome shorts on a third 16mm projector. The projector beamed a fifteen-foot image from ninety-five feet away, and once again image and sound quality did not seem to be an issue for the theatre's patrons.²⁸

While 16mm in theatres was by no means a widespread phenomenon at the end of the 1940s, and was actually a relatively rare occurrence, these examples nevertheless can be seen as microcosmic representations of the medium's place in the Canadian industry. Upon its introduction, 16mm was never meant as a challenge to 35mm's dominance, but was intended rather as a complementary force. While its history is checkered with fearful opposition, its intention was never to supplant 35mm, but rather to address certain cultural lacunae that 35mm could not adequately fulfill. Its acceptance by the industry was slow and arguably never fully realized. But after years of amateur and institutional employment, gradual government regulation, and the eventual involvement of film exchanges, 16mm's appearance in standard movie houses is in a way a culmination of its development in the industry. This is unquestionably a curious culmination, given that theatrical use was never the

²⁸ "Toronto House Used Both 16mm and 35mm," *Canadian Film Weekly*, May 22, 1946, 3.

stated intent of the technology nor was it really fully embraced in that environment, except for certain subcultural milieus, such as adult theatres, as Eric Schaefer has notably shown.²⁹ But given the opposition 16mm faced as a competing technological form, its appropriation by the established 35mm theatrical film industry, however temporary, would appear to mark a certain notable point within the context of this specific history. And furthermore, in the related histories of non-theatrical and traveling cinema, it marks a specific milestone as well, as the medium was partly reined in, however temporarily, and made sedentary within the confines and defined boundaries of the theatre. This is by no means to say that the cultural practice of non-theatrical exhibition in any sense ceased to continue with these few instances of theatrical 16mm projection – much to the contrary. Nor is it meant to imply that this coupling of 16mm technology with established theatres would be an affair that would last, as just the opposite actually occurred. But read metaphorically, it serves as an appropriate symbolic endpoint for the parallel histories of 16mm technology and itinerant film projection in Canada.

²⁹ Eric Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature," *Cinema Journal* 41, No.3, (2002): 3-26.

Conclusion

A Celluloid Past and a Digital Future?

With this thesis I have attempted to chart the parallel historical trajectories of itinerant, non-theatrical forms of exhibition practice and of 16mm projection technology throughout the interwar years in Canada and into the post-World War II context. It has been my assessment that these two entities – a technology and a practice – developed in symbiosis with one another, and consequently they need to be understood in terms of such a relationship. Whereas 16mm was conceived as a medium designed for amateur filmmakers, the technology soon found itself employed in an array of non-theatrical spheres of cultural activity. And traveling cinema, a process widely believed to be archaic, instead persisted as a vibrant cultural practice, well past its supposed expiration date. I have shown that the activities initiated by this relationship were met with hostilities from sectors of the mainstream industry, namely independent theatrical exhibitors, who interpreted this behavior as unfair competition in a marketplace that was already tight to being with. The conflict took both a discursive shape, particularly in the rhetoric of the trade press, and it resulted to varying degrees in intervention by state and cultural authorities. As 16mm non-theatrical activity continued, it was eventually subsumed by “legitimate” organizational bodies, such as the NAAF and the NFB, and found itself gaining respectability and acceptance within the exhibition industry.

This is the historical narrative I have recounted. But just as significant are the cultural consequences and implications that this activity bore. I have attempted to demonstrate that the exhibition of motion pictures in Canada has not historically been the sole domain of urban audiences. Itinerant cinema was in fact largely motivated

by a desire to reach audiences without access to movie theatres. The technology's facility for mobility is essentially what made this exhibition process possible. Furthermore, these events should be seen as one of the earliest examples of a cultural disturbance that threatened to disrupt the dominance of theatrical 35mm film exhibition – or at least it was so perceived. This amounted to what was essentially a technological format war, wherein 16mm was thought to be trespassing into the traditional domain of its older brother. I would suggest that the implications of these developments have a greater relevance beyond the specific historical context in which they occurred, and with this conclusion I would like to explore some of these links within the contemporary North American media environment.

The preceding chapter was prefaced by a quotation from the president of a film-production company concerning the impending introduction of 16mm projection equipment into standard movie theatres. With grandiose rhetorical flourishes, Jack Seaman characterized the event as “big as the advent of sound” and a “revolutionary development in the motion picture industry.”¹ This technological prophecy was clearly misguided, and 16mm's tenure in established theatres was decidedly short-lived, but for a brief period theatre owners were experimenting with the employment of the smaller-gauge technology in movie houses that traditionally had projected 35mm film. I invoke this anecdotal moment in exhibition history again to make a comparison with a more contemporary scenario. At the Los Angeles premiere of the major Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007) in July of 2007, in a very similar fashion two projection units were installed in the theatre's booth. Within this scenario, a new digital projector bore primary projection duties, and an “old-

¹ “16mm Preem in 35 House,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, April 3, 1946.

fashioned” 35mm celluloid machine was riding shotgun, a co-pilot in case the young upstart “became unruly.”² The parallel is obvious, and the duality is typical of periods of media transition. I cite this example to introduce the recent technological interest in digital projection and, perhaps not so subtly, to invite thoughts on potential comparisons between the “new media” represented by the digital format and the “old media” of 16mm.

The “digital revolution” in theatrical projection is certainly not one that is happening instantaneously. As of March 2008 just 4,600 of about 37,000 screens across North America had converted to digital, and that is after nearly a decade of the technology’s availability.³ Just about every article on the subject in both the trade and popular press indicates that the primary determining factor in the pace towards the digitization of projection booths is the issue of financing. Just who exactly is going to foot the bill for the extremely high start-up costs of this new technology? The cost of converting one auditorium to digital is currently in the neighborhood of \$75,000, which is considerably higher than the cost of 35mm equipment. Furthermore, digital projectors do not seem to enjoy the lifespans of their 35mm counterparts, and maintenance, upgrade and eventually replacement costs all figure to be substantial. Film projectors, on the other hand, one reporter has indicated, are like “Cadillacs in Cuba...[They keep] humming for decades with cheap replacement parts.”⁴

² “The Final Frontier,” *The Economist*, July 14, 2007, Vol.384, Iss.8537, 75.

³ David M. Halbfinger, “With Theaters Barely Digital, Studios Push 3-D,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 2008, E1.

⁴ Halbfinger, E1.

Currently, exhibitors seem reluctant to jump wholeheartedly into the digital era. Even for those that have invested in the technology, many seem to prefer a platoon situation in which both digital and 35mm projectors work side by side, quite like the scenario prefigured during the 1940s with 16mm. This reluctance largely stems from a general uncertainty about the availability of titles, as not all films are currently released on both formats simultaneously.⁵ As a result, in many theatres today there exists a hybrid form of digital/analog projection.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those in the industry pushing the hardest for digital projection are the distributors. A digital copy of film can be made and distributed for roughly \$300, it's estimated, as opposed to the current price tag of about \$1,800 to produce and ship 35mm films on reels. Given that there are an estimated 135,000 theatres worldwide, the potential savings figure are enormous.⁶ In addition to this are the sheer logistical benefits such a transition entails. When 16mm was introduced, its light weight and ease of use made it an inherently more mobile technology than 35mm. Digital technology, in a sense, improves upon this mobility even further. Where it stands now, 35mm film reels are very cumbersome and the physical delivery and set-up involved is rather onerous. Distribution via digital cinema is currently possible through two channels, either delivering a physical, downloadable hard drive, which is substantially smaller than 35mm's large canisters, or through satellite streaming, a process that removes the physical delivery altogether. The celluloid print, Charles Acland has noticed, has long been regarded by many in the industry as

⁵ Annlee Ellingson, "Booth Buddies for Digital Days Ahead," *Boxoffice*, January 2007, Vol.143, issue 1, 12.

⁶ Rick Merritt, "Soon Movies Will No Longer be 'Films,'" *Electronic Engineering Times*, October 11, 2004, issue 1342, 18.

a “troubling object,” a frustrating and expensive material entity prone to damage.⁷ Digital projection is perceived ultimately as a “solution” to these nagging problems that have hitherto plagued producers, distributors and exhibitors. On a surface level, the benefits, both logistic and financial, are immediately apparent and difficult to argue with.

To listen to the rhetoric of these sectors of the industry, however, one would get the impression that this transition is occurring entirely out of the best interest for audiences, as if there was some widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of 35mm projection. Rick McCallum, a producer of the *Star Wars* films, claims,

This is about the quality of the experience, the adventure of going to the movies. If you care about the audience, you'll insist on digital.⁸

Are viewers truly unhappy with the state of 35mm projection? Is there an actual epidemic of “shaky pictures caused by worn sprocket holes in prints?”⁹ Do audiences indicate any particular preference for digital projection, which is consistently billed as “free of scratches and dust” with a “perfect image”? The truth seems to be that audiences do not particularly care about digital projection or even notice if it is present. Kurt Hall, president and CEO of Regal CineMedia Corp., which runs some 6,000 movie screens, revealed,

Most people we tested didn't notice the difference [with digital projection] or didn't care, so we won't be able to

⁷ Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 217.

⁸ Jumana Farouky, *Time International*, November 21, 2005, vol.166, iss.21, 38.

⁹ Barry Fox, *New Scientist*, July 26, 2003. vol.179, issue 2405, 8.

increase the number of viewers or the ticket costs....

There isn't a lot of evidence there will be much benefit
to us.¹⁰

And Larry Allen, owner of a ninety-four-screen chain in New Mexico, who converted the majority of his chains to digital, claims that the image quality is “not always as good as they say it is” and that he’s “not so sure our customer even knows we have it.”¹¹ What does this say about a technological “revolution,” when the results of the improvements get by without even being noticed, and only seem to strive to do as sufficient a job as its predecessor?

This is a central part of an argument put forth by John Belton in a 2002 article. Belton’s claim is that the transition to digital projection cannot be considered a revolution because it does not fundamentally offer anything substantively different for the audience.¹² From the standpoint of a phenomenological experience, there is nothing in the transition to digital that marks it as a significant development, unlike, say, the move towards sound or the introduction of Imax or 3-D. However, Acland is quite right when he points out that Belton fails to consider the potential temporal restructuring that digital projection could represent – the “when” of movie going, in effect. Digital projection will give theaters a vastly increased flexibility in what programming they carry and when they choose to show it. The changes brought about by 16mm exhibition facilitated a similar disruption to the standard flow of theatrical exhibition, as we have seen in the preceding chapters.

¹⁰ Merritt, 18.

¹¹ Halbfinger, E1

¹² Belton, John. “Digital Cinema: A False Revolution.” *October*, no.100 (2002): 98-114.

So what purpose does it serve by pointing out these similarities between 16mm exhibition in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s and the current trend towards digital projection? There are obvious similarities between what 16mm technology initially offered and what is now available from digital projection. I have already noted the heightened sense of mobility that accompanies the two. (The possibilities that portable digital projectors represent for traveling cinema are another story altogether.) Furthermore the two simply aim to do what their technological predecessor (in both cases, 35mm) did, but with fewer overhead expenses. Image-quality issues have dogged both formats, but rarely was that made the defining issue. But despite these surface-level comparisons, the key difference between these two media, at least as far as their adoption as standards by the industry is concerned, is the significant capital, motivation and backing that accompany digital cinema, which were simply not associated with 16mm on a comparable level. It is here that the comparisons end. It is on the discursive level, however, that I argue bringing these two technologies together is most fruitful. Consider once more the quotations from the previous chapter that I reiterated earlier. The move towards theatrical use of 16mm technology was articulated as being as “big as the advent of sound” and a “revolutionary development in the motion picture industry.” In what respects does this differ from *Canadian Business* magazine proclaiming in 2001 that “going from film to digital will be the largest revolution in movies since the introduction of talkies back in 1927.”¹³ As unsuccessful as Jack Seaman was in predicting the outcome of theatrical 16mm, he was remarkably astute, unintentionally of course, in anticipating the “revolutionary” rhetoric that would typify the discourses circulated in the film

¹³ Andrew Wahl, “Cinemasaurus,” *Canadian Business*, September 3, 2001. Vol.74, issue 16, 46.

industry over the past ten years on the issue of digital projection in movie theatres. This is not to deny the potential veracity of the claims articulated regarding digital projection's future. But rather it is important not to put too much stock in deterministic and hyperbolic claims about media ascendancy. If historical precedent is any indication of future conflict, 35mm will be a tough opponent for digital projection to unsettle.

As an industrial standard for theatrical employment, 35mm has enjoyed its reign essentially since the very beginning of the cinema. One could say that the technology has demonstrated a curious tension marked by a form of industrial hypochondria on one hand, and a remarkable tendency towards resilience on the other. Now, over a century since its inception and subsequent adoption by the film industry as its standard format, the fundamental characteristics of the medium remain surprisingly intact. Cameras and projectors have improved, and their use has been mastered, yet the core principles of the technology itself have changed very little. Thirty-five millimetre's reign, however, as a dominant standard in mass communication has been marked by frequent cultural disturbances (such as 16mm), be they real or imagined, which have set off panics heralding the death of the medium. The recent challenge posed by digital projection that I have just described is but the latest in a series of these disturbances that have in varying degrees represented perceived threats to the medium's dominant position, a lineage that would include such developments as the introduction of television and the later widespread availability of home-video rentals. Crucial to the tension that has consistently plagued 35mm's tenure of dominance is a recognition that the conflicts posed by

these competing media forms represent far more than mere issues of technological performance. Sixteen millimetre technology did not offer an image “superior” to that of 35mm, nor did television. Beyond the obvious technological tone to these debates, they bear considerable social and political implications. The discourses surrounding these media *mêlées* ultimately function as sites of contestation over competing venues of cultural consumption and participation, over the formation of audience groupings and over issues of actual filmic content (as opposed to technological form,) the result of which has been governing industrial and popular discourses that all too frequently find themselves expressed in seemingly paranoid dispositions, as we have seen with the writings of Ray Lewis and the trade press during the 1930s. However, despite all the talk of a technological *coup d'état*, 35mm has yet to be usurped, and for now it continues to enjoy its dominant industrial position.

But perhaps there is something different about the recent move towards digital film production and exhibition. That 35mm will remain the dominant standard in the film industry is far from assured. Digital film production has already established itself as a legitimate alternative to traditional filmmaking technologies, and if we are to believe the rhetoric of the National Association of Theatre Owners, the largest exhibition trade organization in the world, the full transition to digital theatrical exhibition is only a matter of time.¹⁴ A separate (though not entirely unrelated) challenge perceived by dominant forces in the industry, which threatens its status quo, is the issue of film piracy. Even the most casual moviegoer cannot have failed to notice the massive anti-piracy campaign waged in recent years by the Motion Picture Association of America, and a visit to the association’s website makes it abundantly

¹⁴ “National Association of Theatres.” <http://www.natoonline.org>.

clear how much importance it attaches to this issue.¹⁵ While there is nothing particularly novel about the issue of piracy itself, its recently assumed prominence in the discursive activities of the film industry is noteworthy. What is interesting about piracy is that this issue, more than any other, is where the industry's rhetoric of moral outrage is most clearly evidenced and articulated. Much of the language present in the contemporary discourses surrounding piracy and the "evils" that it represents seem to replicate the tone and content that frequently characterized previous historical discourses surrounding threats posed by competing technologies. "Rogue" cultural practices such as piracy facilitated by "new media" technologies are frequently framed as unprecedented threats that the industry must confront, when in reality these threats are very much prefigured in a number of historical instances. There appears too often an assumption that digital technologies and their related "new media" configurations, along with the practices associated with them (perceived as "legit" or not) present somehow entirely new challenges to dominant models of communication. While perhaps an argument could be made that the sheer scale and scope of the "digital revolution" certainly have a certain distinctiveness, this tendency nevertheless obscures the reality that debates surrounding the nature and function of film technology and its relationship to the practice of film exhibition are very much prefigured in similar historical instances of cultural and technological disturbance. The interest here is not so much in the veracity of the claims and assumptions that appear throughout these historical debates, but rather to acknowledge that by putting too much stock in the rhetoric of these discourses, we run the risk of in fact

¹⁵ "Motion Picture Association of America," <http://www.mpa.org>.

overlooking the true impact that emergent technologies have had, and will continue to have, upon alternative spheres of moving-image culture and practice.

This thesis has demonstrated that non-theatrical 16mm film exhibition in Canada effectively posed an early example of such a cultural disturbance, which served to disrupt the dominant model of film exhibition, both in terms of technology and in terms of screening environment. Non-theatrical 16mm exhibition entailed a widely heterogeneous array of cultural practices, but it was never consciously used to dislodge 35mm from its dominant place in the industry. Instead, 16mm in its various non-theatrical guises sought to cover the cultural lacunae that 35mm theatrical exhibition could not address. Nevertheless, as this thesis has demonstrated, traveling 16mm exhibition was perceived as a legitimate point of concern and was treated accordingly. Given that at our current historical juncture, 35mm's reign may actually be in question due to the very real threat represented by digital technologies, such a consideration of a previous historical threat that it has faced seems perhaps altogether appropriate. This thesis has sought to offer a detailed examination of the impact of the introduction of 16mm technology to the cultural landscape of film exhibition in Canada in the inter-war and immediate post-World War II period, and the concerted efforts by segments of the industry at large to curtail and contain this rival format that threatened the interests of these dominant forces.

The hostility shown towards both non-theatrical and theatrical 16mm film operators in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s is emblematic of a genuine concern for a potential new form of competition in an already tight market, but it is more fundamentally representative of a malaise far from unique to the particular historical

circumstance. This historical example demonstrates far more than a simple technological battle between a dominant medium and an emergent one. A more comprehensive understanding of this particular historical circumstance reveals, rather, that the determined efforts of the Canadian trade press and theatrical organizations to limit the activities of 16mm operators were fundamentally rooted in a desire to manage the functioning of their industry, and to safeguard their interests. Sixteen millimetre exhibition led to the development of separate spheres of cultural activity and new models of screening practice, and it effectively offered up alternative circuits of distribution. These activities crossed into territory “where they didn’t belong” and threatened to agitate the dominant, entrenched systems of film exhibition that governed the activities of the industry.

Interestingly, in the eyes of many, it is now 16mm that faces the threat of extinction with the rapid proliferation of new emergent audio-visual technologies, but, as a special section dedicated to the medium in a recent edition of *Cinema Journal* argues, claims of 16mm’s demise have been grossly overstated. The contributors collectively argue that 16mm will persist as a relevant residual media format in various spheres of cultural activity, and in some institutional settings, even continue to enjoy a dominant position.¹⁶ Jan-Christopher Horak, for instance, reveals compelling evidence of 16mm’s continued relevance, particularly as a medium for preservation, but also, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, for production as well. Kodak’s subsidiary Protek, he reveals, in fact claims substantial increases in sales of 16mm film stock over the past few years. Furthermore, improved transfer techniques

¹⁶ Heather Hendershot, ed. “In Focus: The Death of 16mm?” *Cinema Journal* Vol.45, No.3, (2006): 109-140.

have made it possible to strike high-quality digital versions from 16mm negatives, reducing the incentive for filmmakers to shoot on 35mm. Prominent Hollywood director Michael Bay, Horak explains, shot large portions of *The Island* (2005) on 16mm before transferring it to a digital platform. Similarly, the long-running hit TV series *Law and Order* is shot on 16mm and subsequently transferred to digital for editing. This allows for considerable financial savings for producers.¹⁷ Archives continue to employ 16mm and 35mm formats in their preservation activities. In fact, no long-term archival medium currently exists in a digital format, so preservation in the meantime must continue in both of these celluloid forms, despite whatever trends in exhibition transpire. In an ironic twist, John Belton argues that it would make far more sense for digital productions to be transferred to celluloid for long-term archival storage, given this uncertainty of digital formats.¹⁸

Scott MacDonald cites 16mm's historical primacy as the gauge of choice for avant-garde and experimental filmmakers as a reason for its resilience. For those institutions that take film seriously – museums, major archives, universities – 16mm will continue to see continued employment. He explains,

For those whose interest is in the ongoing discourse of cinema, as well as the ongoing discourse *about* it, the maintenance of the widest range of exhibition formats has always been, and will continue to be, of the essence.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jan-Christopher Horak, "Archiving, Preserving, Screening 16mm," in "In Focus: The Death of 16mm?," Heather Hendershot, ed. *Cinema Journal* vol.45, no.3, (2006): 113.

¹⁸ John Belton, "Digital Cinema: A False Revolution," *October*, no.100 (2002): 98-114.

¹⁹ Scott MacDonald, "16mm: Reports of its Death are Greatly Exaggerated" in Hendershot, 126.

MacDonald's arguments admittedly fall into a form of reasoning about why 16mm *should* be actively maintained as an exhibition format rather than why it *will* be – just because historically it has played a crucial role in experimental film by no means *guarantees* that institutional interest will sustain this prominence – but his central claim that it is too important simply to abandon rings true. Many experimental artists, moreover, continue to employ 16mm as their medium of choice. Zoe Beloff, a filmmaker profiled in the *Cinema Journal* piece, continues to work with 16mm, among an array of other media, precisely because of its inherent technical qualities. Furthermore, 16mm's residual nature is clearly evident among collectors, archivists and organizations such as the Orphans Film Symposium. This biannual event brings together hundreds of scholars, filmmakers, curators and members of the general public who share a common interest for preserving and discussing long-lost historical films that would be considered outside of the “commercial mainstream.”²⁰ Though not specifically oriented towards 16mm productions, they clearly make up a sizeable portion of the group's interest. Evidently, the considerable groundswell of 16mm activity, in the spheres of production, exhibition, or preservation, is substantive enough to ensure that the technology has a stable platform on which to operate, however marginal and residual it may be. It would appear that the eulogies for 16mm technology are premature.

Perhaps the day is not far off when *Cinema Journal* will be running editorials about the “Death of 35mm.” As we have seen, the trade press and certain sectors of the industry have already begun a rhetorical campaign announcing as much. As things stands now, that 35mm will retain a dominant position in the industry is far

²⁰ “The Orphan Film Symposium,” <http://www.sc.edu/filmsymposium/orphanfilm.html>.

from assured, perhaps even unlikely. What this thesis has demonstrated, however, is that deterministic concepts of technological development, coupled with hyperbolic discourses of fear and paranoia about potentially competing media forms, reveal very little about actual cultural practice. They in fact obscure far more than they illuminate. To accept such debates and discourses on their own terms runs the risk of ultimately clouding the far more complex manners in which technological change impacts audio-visual screening practice and the spheres and environments in which it takes place.

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Appendix A

Advertisements for 16mm and 35mm Equipment, 1924 – 1932



Bring the Trip Home in Your Own Motion Pictures!



The Victor Cine Camera is compact, easy to operate, uses Eastman Cine Kodak film, and is fully guaranteed.

AT LAST in your own home you can have your own motion pictures. Prohibitive costs and intricate details have been eliminated, for you.

Today—at a cost so small that it is not a factor—you can have the thrilling enjoyment that only the “living” pictures can provide.

The Victor Cine Camera, using Eastman Cine Kodak film, is inexpensive, and you can operate it with ease. Its use will soon become general.

Mail the coupon to our nearest office and we will send full information by return.



The Victor Cine Projector shows a perfect picture of ample size, and attaches to ordinary light socket or storage battery.

THE FILM & SLIDE CO. OF CANADA, LIMITED
 156 King St. W. Ad. 6772
 TORONTO
 Montreal—Winnipeg—Vancouver

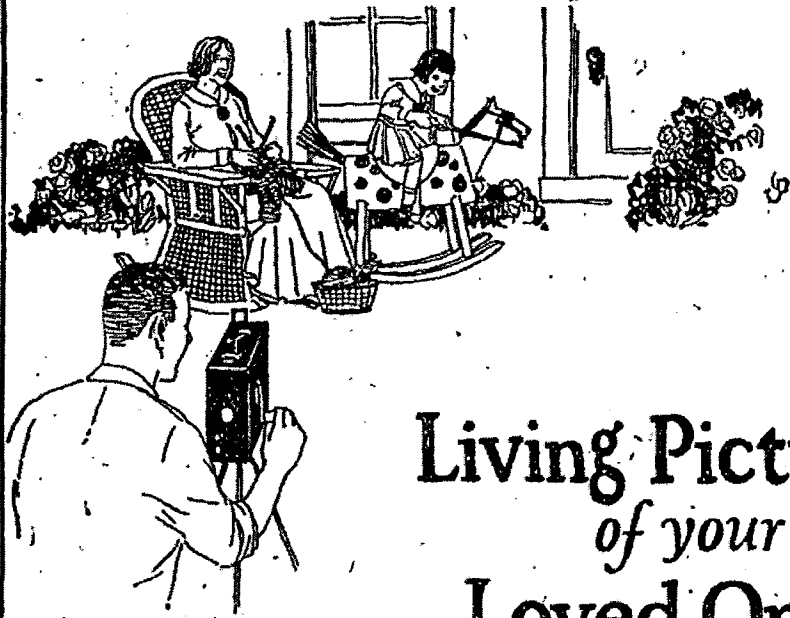
The Film & Slide Co. of Canada, Limited

Please send me, without obligation, copy of your booklet, “The Victor Cine Camera.”

Name

Address

Figure One – *The Globe*, April 16, 1924, page 14.



Living Pictures
of your
Loved Ones

NOW you may own a "living" family album. Think of the pleasure it will be five years hence to screen daughter as she is today, to see her when she played beside Grandma as a little tot. How easy it is to imagine the innumerable pleasures that can be your's—and her's—as the years go by. What could be more interesting than motion pictures YOU made of your loved ones?

The Victor Cine Camera and Projector—using Eastman Cine Kodak film—make these supreme pleasures possible. Excessive costs are gone. Intricate details have given place to the simplicity of an ordinary camera.

This outfit has been perfected for YOU, and is fully guaranteed.

Send This Coupon

THE FILM & SLIDE CO. OF CANADA

156 King St. West, Toronto, Ont.

Limited

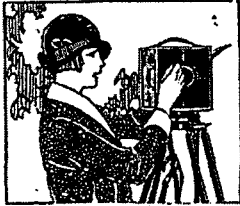
Please send me your descriptive booklet on the Victor Cine Camera and Projector.

NAME

ADDRESS

Figure Two — *The Globe*, April 29, 1924, page 7.

THE T. EATON CO LIMITED



The Cine-Kodak Takes Motion Pictures

Of Your Family and Friends—
Of Birthdays, Weddings and
Other Memorable Events—In-
teresting to Throw on the
Screen Now, More Interesting
Still in Years to C o m e

SOMETHING BETTER than happy memories of how bonny were your babies when they were toddling about . . . something better than stories of the fun you used to have at your holiday camp when your boys and girls were growing up . . . something better than photographs of the wedding party when your eldest daughter was married . . . something better than the "family" group at the silver anniversary of your own marriage—the motion picture way, the Cine-Kodak way, is a far better way of bringing to eye and mind these precious incidents and memorable milestones. This modern marvel of photography takes pictures that live and move and smile and gesticulate. The Kodoscope, its supplement, throws these pictures on the screen now or years from now.

The Cine-Kodak is as easy to operate as a Brownie Camera. No fear of things going wrong: unless reel of film is properly adjusted the camera will not close. You may place it on a tripod and crank it by hand. Or use a motor drive attachment and merely press the button.

The projector called the Kodoscope throws the film on the silver screen. This has supports of its own which can be rigged up in a moment on any table at the end of the room.

The Camera Department will demonstrate both kodak and projector and explain all the technical details.

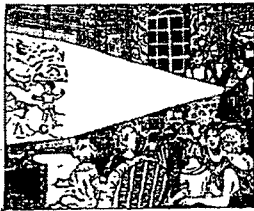
For Sale or To Rent

Price of Cine-Kodak—camera, projector, screen and tripod or electric battery and motor—\$364.00.

100 feet of film (equal to 200 feet standard film)—\$8.00. This includes developing and printing.

Arrangements for the rental of the Cine-Kodak and Kodoscope can be made at the Camera Department.

—Main Floor, James St.



*You Were
Acquiring?*

"Charm Mirror" — Ten even for fifty cents less than the sum in your challenge. Can you cock a mental eye and pleasure her black gazing noble centred by Chinese green compact and candlestick? The vision materializes in a new polychrome glass that unites in enchanting colors with a hirt glass. You may have a high come post with a "lip" or a hirt, broad one that rolls on a black stand. Elmer is \$120. And the candlestick, \$100 a pair. Same design, if you prefer, in robin's egg blue and malberry.

36 G.—Your modesty is only exceeded by that of Charles Lamb when he told William Hazlitt that he knew no further than shop windows. Starting that if he explained lateral secrets he would be laying out complimentary shillings rather than give trouble without remuneration. Knowledge in the drawer of the showman would have been gladly drawn forth for your inspection. They are secreted these mainly in reserve supply. Most of the white knitted jumpers you desire are imports from Paris or London, knitted or crocheted in artificial silk. These done by hand are specially beautiful and there's a wide variety as to sleeves and necklines. Charmingly cool and casual with a white pleated crepe de Chine skirt. Prices are from \$5.00 to \$20.00. So glad you admire the Spence Shop. It will get prier every day.

"Lark"—What remains for us but the bromide "Dare's you deserve a holiday"? All the books in your list are at hand: A paper-covered edition of Margate Ethel Nardonn, by her husband, the Prime Minister of England, is coming; "A Lost Lady," by Willa Cather, \$1.75; "Madame Chate," by Gustav Eriz, 25c; and "The Fox," by William Dudley Pelley, 25c.

The Spence

Store Hours: 8.30 to **5**. Saturdays 8.30 to 1 o'Clock

THE T. EATON CO LIMITED

Figure Three - The Globe, June 25, 1924, p.18

Motion Pictures the Kodak Way



Two finders provide for holding the Ciné-Kodak at waist level or at eye level—as you wish.

The enticing thrill of
action is at your command in
Kodak pictures

Every sort of picture that is of interest to you, every picture that you can snap-shot with Kodak or Brownie, you can now stage *in motion* on the screen at home.

Making motion pictures with a Ciné-Kodak is as easy as making snap-shots with Kodak or Brownie. The pictures are amazingly good. The cost is astonishingly low—about one-sixth as much as for "standard" movies. Safety film is used and the price includes the finishing in the Kodak laboratories.

And it is all the simple, Kodak way. Daylight loading with film in the yellow box, no focusing, no tripod. Two finders provide that the Ciné-Kodak may be held at waist level in the old, familiar Kodak way or used with Sight Finder at eye level when you wish.

To supplement your own pictures, when you wish, Kodascope Library rents you reasonably, from a choice of over 100 subjects, just the sort of pictures you want for an evening's entertainment.

The Ciné-Kodak, Model B, with Kodak Anastigmat $f.6.5$ lens, is priced at \$80; with Kodak Anastigmat $f.3.5$ at a hundred and ten. The Kodascope C projector is \$70. A complete outfit now—Ciné-Kodak, Kodascope and screen—as low as \$162.00.

Many Kodak dealers are now prepared to demonstrate the Ciné-Kodak.
If your dealer is not yet ready, write us for Ciné-Kodak booklet.

Canadian Kodak Co., Limited, Toronto

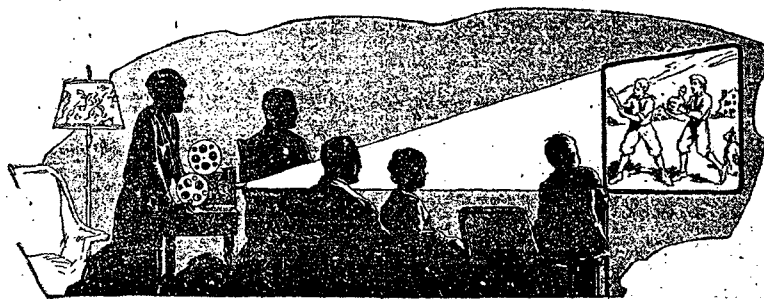


Figure Four – *The Globe*, July 14, 1926, page 3.



Make a Movie of it with a Ciné-Kodak

NEW, Eastman equipment presents you with a new pleasure—movies you make yourself. The camera is the Ciné-Kodak and it's as easily worked as a Brownie. Press the release—the spring motor starts and the movie's in the making. The projector is the Kodascope. Turn on the switch and you're seeing the action over again on the screen.

Vacation adventures, the children at play, Ed's golf, Mary's dive, the roadside picnic—but you know the things you'd like pictures of—now that the magic of *movies* is yours.

Nor is this new sport expensive—quite the contrary. The cost as compared with "standard" movies has been cut about five-sixths. Safety film is used and the price includes finishing by Kodak experts in Kodak laboratories.

There's fun enough in your own movies, but the sport doesn't stop there. Kodascope Libraries rent you reasonably from a choice of over 100 subjects, feature photoplays, dramas, comedies, travel and animated cartoons so that your program may have the professional touch when you want it.

The Ciné-Kodak Model B, with Kodak Anastigmat f.6.5 lens, is priced at \$80; with Kodak Anastigmat f.3.5, at a hundred and ten. The Kodascope C projector is \$70. A complete outfit now—Ciné-Kodak, Kodascope and screen—as low as

\$162

Many Kodak dealers are now prepared to demonstrate the Ciné-Kodak. If your dealer is not yet ready, write us for Ciné-Kodak booklets.

If it ain't an Eastman, it ain't a Ciné-Kodak



Professional Movies for Home Projection

A few from the long list of movies that may be reasonably rented from Kodascope Libraries for home projection with your own Kodascope: John Barrymore in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*; John Barrymore in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*; John Barrymore in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*; John Barrymore in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*...



Write for booklet that gives you the whole story of Making Pictures the Kodak Way!

Canadian Kodak Co., Limited, Toronto

side the road as you won't have to
and protection of 201 and of 200
out to me then, and from April I
to April in our chronic case it is
open to the public. Then you can
come in and see the pictures
they have and have a look at the
book. Bring your own glasses with
you and you can see the "real"
the life of the wild scene. The
shown in early in the morning. There
lines date 2 to 12 if you get the
from the main roads to the middle
give you a view of this little
that there is no more need to
This state will be "closed" every
at 8 o'clock sharp to prevent
is more in to come. Please don't
come when it is raining or shortly
after while the ground is still
drying because there are never any
through these the grounds. You

Anyone can use a Cine-Kodak

As simple as a Brownie—prices from \$80.00 up

Ask for a demonstration at our store, or send for latest catalogue

Ramseys

For Kodak

66 KING ST. WEST,TORONTO, ONT.

Figure Five – The Globe, August 11, 1926, page 5.

PLEASE ACCEPT this wonderful book that tells you how to make marvelous Home Movies. See offer below.



Drama... Adventure... Romance

Get these thrills in movies that you make yourself

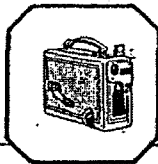
LOOK around you! Pictures everywhere. Tragedy... adventure... romance. The Drama of Life. How close it touches all of us. So real. And now so easy to preserve.

For today, by just pressing the switch of a marvelous camera, you can capture life as it is... in action... to reproduce whenever you please.

The rhythmic action of your children at play... the majestic peak of a snow-capped mountain... the dramatic second when football games are won or lost... are now easily registered for all time on a thin strip of film, to flash into life and live again in the quiet of your darkened room.

A Big Thrill

If you haven't made a movie, you've missed one of the biggest thrills in life. It's so simple anyone can do it with the assur-



ance of professional results. Into a marvelous little camera weighing only 5 pounds, Kodak Scientists have concentrated every vital essential of movie production.

What a triumph in simplicity! No need to focus. No grinding crank. Just sight the camera, either from waist height or eye level.

Then press the button. A shutter whirrs inside, and the film slides swiftly behind the ever-focused lens.

Instantly every action in the scene before you is registered on your film.

... we do the rest

After the film is taken, your work is done. No troublesome developing. No bother or fuss. We finish your films at no extra cost, and return them to you ready to run.

Ciné-Kodak embodies the Kodak Company's forty

years' experience in devising easy picture-making methods for the amateur. Unbiased by the precedents and prejudices of professional cinema camera design, the men who made "still" photography so easy have now made home movie-making equally simple for you.

Complete outfit now costs only \$162

Today a complete outfit, Ciné-Kodak, Kodascope Projector and Screen, may be had for as little as \$162. Ciné-Kodak loads in daylight with amateur standard (16 m/m) Ciné-Kodak safety film, in the famous yellow box.

See the Ciné-Kodak at dealers listed below and mail coupon for booklet.

Ciné-Kodak

The Simplest of all Home Movie Cameras
CANADIAN KODAK CO., LIMITED, TORONTO
Please send me, FREE and without obligation, the
booklet telling me how to make my own movies.

Name _____
Address _____

CARNAHAN'S DRUG STORE,
741 Yonge St.

EASTMAN KODAK STORES LIMITED,
66 King St. W.

THE T. EATON CO., LIMITED

J. D. FORD RADIO CO.,
974 Bloor St. W.

G. H. ROBINSON
3083 Dundas St. W.

H. C. TUGWELL AND CO., LIMITED
223 Bay St.

THE ROBERT SIMPSON COMPANY
Limited

J. C. WILLIAMS,
5-7 Richmond St. E.

Figure Six, *The Globe*, May 21, 1928, page 3.



CHRISTMAS . . . it's a day of happiness that shouldn't be allowed to slip into the forgotten past . . . and needn't.

A home movie film will keep it for you . . . permit you to re-create at will your holiday festivities . . . enable you to throw on your own home screen during future Christmases the treasured incidents of this one.

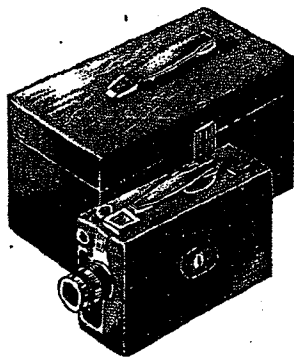
How easy it is!

With the Ciné-Kodak, it's simplicity itself—movies are actually as easy to make as snapshots. Unbiased by the precedents and prejudices of professional cinema camera design, the men who made still photography so simple, now have made home movie making equally simple for you.

You merely sight the Ciné-Kodak, press a lever, and then send the film to one of the Kodak Company's processing stations. In a few days it comes back to you all ready to show, and your Koda-

This Christmas give a Ciné-Kodak

simplest of home movie cameras



Ciné-Kodak, model BB with 1.9 lens, in blue, gray, brown or black—the last word in home movie cameras.

scope, the home movie projector that operates as simply as a phonograph, flashes

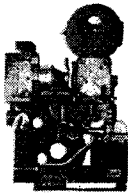
the pictures on your silver screen.

Take them in Color, too!

It is just as easy to take and show movies in beautiful, natural colors—from the most delicate tints to the most brilliant hues. The same Ciné-Kodak (f.1.9 with B or BB model) that takes black and white movies, takes color. The same Kodascope (model A or B) that projects black and white, projects color. You simply use the Kodacolor Filter and Kodacolor Film when making or projecting Kodacolor.

Also, to supplement your own films, Kodak Cinegraphs, 100-, 200-, and 400-foot reels of comedy, travel-and cartoons are available at your dealer's. They cost only \$7.50 per 100 feet.

Don't let another Christmas go by without making a picture record of your family. See a Ciné-Kodak dealer today. Canadian Kodak Co., Limited, Toronto.



Western portable projector, specially adaptable to street show work.

Now the PORTABLE for ROAD

On with the Road Shows...



Type of portable amplifier used in the larger halls and auditoriums.

No. 205 Reproducer on table with two loudspeaker and condenser which fits into suitcase below.

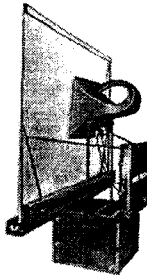
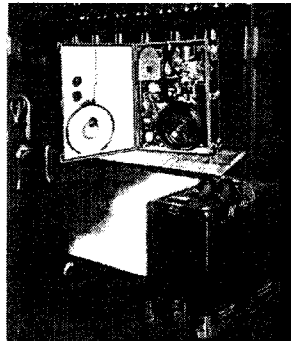


Illustration of portable amplifier, 4000 watt speaker system made for sale.

EQUIPMENT SHOWS



... THE Northern Electric portable sound motion picture equipment showing the standard 35 m.m. film will bring back this type of entertainment and profits to you.

This equipment has been developed by the same laboratories that developed the sound equipment used in 8,600 theatres throughout the world.

Two types available to meet all your requirements.

Write us for prices... they are extraordinary low.

RESEARCH PRODUCTS
SALES DEPARTMENT
637 CRAIG ST. WEST, MONTREAL



Figure Eight - Canadian Moving Picture Digest, February 27, 1932 Vol.23, no.44, pages 6-7.