The Microcinema Movement and Montreal

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ABSTRACT

The Microcinema Movement and Montreal

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This dissertation offers a cultural studies analysis of the microcinema phenomenon in the urban environment. It provides a working understanding of the term as a cultural practice located at small-scale, alternative, DIY exhibition sites that provide noncommercial, nontheatrical options for moviegoing. Identifying the key attributes of microcinema, it demonstrates that alternative film practice requires certain economic, demographic and cultural attributes of a metropolitan locale be present in order to be sustained and that the presence of cultural intermediaries such as programmers are critical to coalescing these subcultural scenes.

After presenting an overview of the historical antecedents to microcinema and of the microcinema movement that peaked in the 1990s in Canada and the US, this dissertation examines contemporary practices in four cities with vibrant film communities and gives thick descriptions of distinctive sites. It focuses primarily on the city of Montreal, Quebec and the manner in which socio-economic issues and cultural policy affect the stability of alternative, DIY venues and practices. It follows the trajectory of the creation and termination of Blue Sunshine Psychotronic Film Centre in Montreal and discusses the challenges of establishing this type of venue in the city.

Using a Bourdieuian analytical framework, a primary argument of this project is that microcinemas are often cultivated as alternatives to the well-established—and culturally and economically hegemonic—commercial movie industry and sometimes oppositionally as a rejection of it, and that practitioners purposefully differentiate their exhibition practices from those of the mainstream (public and individual). Microcinema spaces are fertile ground for investigating multiple interests at the nexus of film and cultural studies: issues of taste and distinction as expressed through cinephilia and paracinephilia; the role of hipsters, subcultural entrepreneurs and cultural intermediaries; the creative economies and cultural

policies of urban locales (conceptualized through the concept of bohemia). These issues are examined in terms of major themes that arise in the discourse surrounding microcinema, such as gentrification, alternative-ness and authenticity, that work to position the movement in contrast to perceived mainstream practices. Moreover, as sites of potential cultural hierarchy tensions between high and low forms of cinema, it argues that former concepts of fan cultures, such as paracinephiles, are not fluid enough to describe present day taste formations.

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Dedication

For my parents

Al and Bobbie Gesualdo

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Chapter I: Why Microcinema?

Culture scenes form structures of sociality that can encourage a productive and diversified cultural economy in the context of globalizing homogenizing forces.[1]
<div align="right">Janine Marchessault</div>

Hollywood dominates the huge space of "entertainment" within the public culture, and all other kinds of film and filmmaking must position themselves in relation to it.[2]
<div align="right">Sherry B. Ortner</div>

It was some time in the early 2000s that I experienced my first alternative film exhibition event. And by alternative, I am referencing a film event other than a mainstream commercial one. I was living in Austin, Texas at the time, and it was becoming somewhat common for cafes to show movies on DVD in a back room or on their outdoor patios, without copyright permission of course. Until this point, I had seen moving images exhibited in creative ways in commercial art contexts—galleries, museums, art festivals, and outdoor venues—as I worked in the contemporary art domain. But the event I headed to this one evening was going to change my understanding of what film exhibition could be. Travelling to pre-gentrified East Austin, with the address scribbled on a piece of paper, I didn't know what to expect; it was very rare for there to be anything of cinematic interest going on in that part of town. In a remote and industrial area, I found the Blue Genie warehouse space. Bleacher-like seats accommodated about forty people. The film being screened that night was *Beaver Trilogy* (Trent Harris, 2000) about a male Olivia Newton-John impersonator. While the film made an impression on me, it was the pleasure derived from being part of something that few people knew about, the experience of having to find the place in an unfamiliar area on the edge of town and the

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[1] Janine Marchessault, "Film Scenes: Paris, New York, Toronto," *Public* #22/23(2002): 69.
[2] Sherry B. Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 8.

makeshift ambience of the unsanctioned space that stayed with me. Not surprisingly, the Blue Genie stopped hosting underground film events as it focused on more commercial art activity. And thus began my understanding that the charm of these microcinema spaces was their ephemerality. Though it was sad to see one go, I knew another similar venue would likely pop up, and I would be as excited to venture to it. It became clear over the years these scenes were rooted in a persistent transience, and the precariousness of their status was precisely what imbued them with the mystique that curious cinephiles like myself found alluring.

In *Window Shopping*, Anne Friedberg considers cinemagoing as a consumer practice that originates beyond the four walls of the theater space, effectively expanding the focus of critical literature of the early 1990s, when it was first published, in a much-needed recalibration with the actual history of film exhibition. She connects film consumption to various historical cultural practices; perhaps her most insightful observation is the connection of modern day, postmodern, moviegoing to malling as a cultural activity, both of which are "commodity-experiences." The cultural practice of moviegoing was once considered as special as attending other creative art forms, like a stage play or even the opera, but Freidberg and others observe that it became as quotidian as buying shoes.[3] The mallification of movies should come as no surprise, however, as the motion picture industry in the United States has been motivated by profit since its inception. And these two cultural practices—malling and going to the movies—have

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[3] "If mallgoers loved to browse and make 'impulse' purchases for items from shoes to records, why shouldn't they be able to do the same thing for movies?" Douglas Gomery, "Thinking about Motion Picture Exhibition," *Velvet Light Trap* 25 (Spring 1990): 6. Quoted in Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 122.

been linked since the 1960s when cineplexes first began being added to or included in the design of shopping centers throughout the US and Canada.

However, the mall multiplexes of which Friedberg speaks, where moviegoing is an extension of the shopping experience with no clear boundary between the two, has given way to the model of an architecturally complex consumer destination as mini-theme park, creating "a mixed-use environment where the range of commodity-experiences 'breeds sales'" and where movie viewing is considered another commodity-experience alongside shopping, eating and playing video games.[4] Contemporary shopping centers, now sites of megaplexes with more than fifteen screens, are designed to keep individuals and families captive for hours, if not an entire day, as consumers of popular, mass-produced culture. In earlier analyses, film historians observed that cineplexes offered moviegoers more choices than the previously standard single or twinplex.[5] However, I posit that we have now transitioned into a period in which the opposite is now the case. Just as the homogenization of consumer products has occurred by replacing independently owned "Main Street" stores with franchises and chain stores that offer the same products from one mall to another,[6] standardization has occurred with movie exhibition and offerings at megaplex theaters.[7] The malling of North America and its theaters has consequently limited the moviegoer's options. All one needs to do is look at the film listings of mall theaters in any suburban, or even urban locale, to see the selections are practically the same from one megaplex to the next. Oftentimes, a

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[4] Friedberg, 112-113.
[5] Gomery, 6.
[6] William Severini Kowinski refers to malls as "the new Main Streets of America." Kowinski, The Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1985).
[7] In fact, the movie industry—its distribution schedule, marketing and content—has restructured around mall theater exhibition, which, in turn, has redefined the moviegoing experience (and reception) in North America (Friedberg 1993, William Severini Kowinski, "The Malling of the Movies," *American Film* [September 1983]: 52-56).

Hollywood blockbuster will be shown on two or more screens, while a smaller budget, independent or foreign production won't play at all. Unless you are fortunate to live in an area with an art house or independent cinema, you will have to wait until the non-Hollywood film is available for home viewing. Not only has the megaplex trend eliminated certain types of films from corporate cinema programming, but it has almost completely eradicated the opportunity to view projected 35mm films. The result for the filmgoer has been a narrowing of choices in content, mode of exhibition and venue because megaplexes, along with home viewing and digital technology, have driven independent and art house cinemas out of business.[8] Interestingly, this collapsing of diversity in commercial public exhibition has coincided with an expansion in accessibility for the individual; in other words, we have seen in the past two decades an increase in availability of a vast array of video titles and formats for domestic and other small-scale viewing.

So where do people go if they do not want to see *Monsters University 3D* (Dan Scanlon, 2013) or *Fast and Furious 6* (Justin Lin, 2013)? This dissertation begins with the observation that the state of commercial cinema, and its tendency to privilege a narrow range of films and genres, has provoked a segment of film producers, programmers and consumers (a minority, to be sure) to look elsewhere, outside of the theater, to satisfy their film exhibiting and communal viewing needs. In so doing, these organizers and spectators build liminal spaces for moving image exhibition and take part

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[8] Not only has this trend been documented by various scholars and journalists (Gomery 1992, Charles Acland, "Haunted Places: Montreal's Rue Ste Catherine and its Cinema Spaces," *Screen* 44.2 (2003): 133-153), one can also draw this conclusion by looking at the inventory of cinemas in *Film Canada Yearbook* and the numbers of screens vs. the number of theaters statistics over the past several decades (MPAA, MPTAC): the number of screens has increased while the number of theaters has declined. The smaller (single screen to triplex) theaters tend to be art house and independent/repertory theaters.

in marginal film practices. These nontheatrical film activities take place in a variety of spaces, including cafés, coffeehouses, breweries, lofts, and parks. In New York, the Rooftop Films Series has even taken to the rooftops of school buildings and factories to provide unique viewing experiences for participants. The films screened in these spaces are most often films one could not find at the local multiplex, meaning locally-made, avant-garde, experimental, cult, exploitation, and B films that did not receive wide distribution upon their initial release. Furthermore, nontheatrical sites are often where older modes of exhibition are sustained, such as 8mm and 16mm projection. With commercial theaters transitioning speedily to digital projection, there remain few opportunities for watching celluloid films. Likewise with domestic viewing, most people today watch digital media in the home; whereas, in the 1950s through 70s, the standard household moving image apparatus was an 8mm, Super 8mm, or even 16mm, projector for family movies. Those who frequent nontheatrical venues are seeking formats and content that are not generally found elsewhere and make it clear they are purposefully choosing the non-mall, non-megaplex, non-Hollywood film viewing experience.

While the content of the films screened at nontheatrical sites is often critical to the turnout, the ambience is also a big draw for audience members. The opportunity to view a film while sipping a beer at a bar, picnicking upon a blanket on the grass or sunken into a shabby couch in a loft lures filmgoers who have tired of the over-stimulating and "imagineered" environment of the theater turned amusement complex one finds at most megaplexes these days. Filmgoers know exactly what to expect at mainstream theaters, as the experience, from the plush seats and eardrum-splitting sound to the super-sized and priced concessions, has been, for the most part, standardized across Canada and the US,

and exported internationally.[9] On the contrary, one's expectation when attending an event in a mixed-purpose or outdoor locale remains flexible, as a number of factors might affect the occasion: weather, noise, seating arrangement, eating, drinking and other extra-filmic activities. However, it is not necessarily an either-or situation. While there certainly exists a cadre of cinephile purists who refuse to see films at commercial theaters or reject digital projection entirely, others continue to enjoy watching films at big box theaters, but find that nontheatrical viewing offers a departure from the now well-entrenched commercial theater experience.

What this trend suggests is that nontheatrical viewing spaces open up the possibilities in the filmgoing experience—content, environment and mode of exhibition—that mainstream theaters have closed down. They become sites of distinguished consumption for individuals looking for films and viewing experiences beyond those offered by the corporate cinemas. These spaces also serve as community-gathering places, considering nontheatrical film screenings often take place in what Ray Oldenburg has described as "third places." Neither home nor workplace, third places are "informal public gathering places" where community members come together; in these spaces that act essentially as a home away from home, one can see regulars and newcomers alike.[10] These sites are necessarily "local" and could be the corner bar, the coffee shop where one gets a morning espresso, or nowadays, the neighborhood café with free wifi, which has effectively become the office away from the office. By night, these spaces—with the help of a portable projector and screen, a suspended sheet or, simply, a

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[9] Like alternative, mainstream has an understood meaning in the discourse of film scenes—commercial, Hollywood. See Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) and Ortner 2013.

[10] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, And Other Hangouts At The Heart Of A Community* (New York: Paragon Books, 1989), xvii.

plain white wall—transform into sites for marginalized film practices that exist

concurrently with commercial film cultures whether that be at theaters or in people's

homes (thanks to Netflix, BitTorrent, Video on Demand, and the last remaining video

stores).

To be clear, I do not claim nontheatrical film practices developed solely in

response to multiplex/megaplex theaters, as nontheatrical exhibition existed prior to and

has continued alongside the growth of theatrical exhibition, nor am I saying that all

nontheatrical exhibition practices are a conscious response to or rebellion against

mainstream exhibition practices.[11] What I am positing is that film cultures operating at

the margins of film practice or at nontheatrical sites are often cultivated as an alternative

to the well-established—and culturally and economically hegemonic—commercial movie

industry and sometimes oppositionally as a rejection of it, and that microcinema

practitioners, specifically, purposefully differentiate their exhibition practices from those

of the mainstream (public and individual). In Canada and the US, this is Hollywood, but

the marginal and mainstream practices need one another in the negotiation of a position

within the film industry.[12] Additionally, communal nontheatrical practices are not just

presenting themselves as alternatives to megaplex viewing, but are also attempting to

introduce sociability into increasingly pervasive individualized moving image reception

in much the same way that book clubs work to give the solitary practice of reading a

social dimension.[13]

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[11] I use mainstream film practices to indicate what has, since the 1960s, become the most common manner in which the majority of the North American public are served and consume films outside of the home: by going to a commercial cinema chain to watch a Hollywood-produced movie (eg. AMC Loews in the US and Cineplex in Canada).

[12] The fact that Hollywood occupies the hegemonic position within American (and even Canadian) popular film culture is widely accepted (Ortner, 8).

[13] I thank Dr. Will Straw for his insight regarding this aspect of alternative film scenes.

As Sarah Thornton, Raymond Williams, and others have pointed out, the perceived dominant force to which subcultural formations respond can often be just that, perceived, and the subordinate practice is rarely untainted by economic and commodity forces or truly counter-hegemonic. In fact, both dominant and subcultural practices occupy useful positions within the field of cultural consumption. The idea of the mainstream, whether real or imagined, fuels the creation of reactionary projects. To expand upon one of the epigraphs to this chapter, all non-Hollywood film practices must necessarily claim a position in relation to it. It is these counter-hegemonic projects, specifically microcinemas, which constitute the foci of my study. This dissertation will concentrate on practices that locate film consumption in various small-scale, do-it-yourself (DIY) sites within the metropolitan landscape, offering a counter-experience to a mainstream exhibition system dominated by theatrical screenings at megaplex cinemas. A desire for shared, authentic, unique experiences, manifested in a discourse of differentiation, is born out of myriad factors, including an appreciation for old technologies and difficult to access films, as well as for collective viewing among individuals with similar taste.

While some practitioners have more narrowly-defined understandings of microcinema, and some use it to describe a category of film text (small-gauge, artist-made) rather than the context in which they are shown,[14] I employ it as an umbrella term for a variety of alternative, nonmainstream and/or noncommercial, modes of film exhibition. Simply put, microcinemas—small-scale, alternative, DIY exhibition sites—

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[14] In the article "My Hollywood!," Rob Kenner and Joel Bachar discuss microcinema almost solely in terms of a style or format of film that has come about as a result of new, cheaper, and therefore more accessible, digital technologies, thereby allowing filmmakers to distribute their own films. Kenner, "My Hollywood! So you wanna be in pictures? Pick up your tools and shoot" *Wired* 7.10 (October 1999), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.10/microcinema.html.

provide noncommercial, nontheatrical options for moviegoing that open up the types of social activities that accompany viewing, such as eating, drinking, conversation and role-playing, as well as serve as sites for community organization and activism. Besides being sites of consumption, they also represent places where cultural differentiation and the cultivation of taste occur. Independent programmers, via their choices in curation and creation of the environment, shape the viewing experiences of niche audiences.

Microcinema venues take various forms but are commonly associated with cafes, bars, old churches, artist lofts, basements and clandestine spaces, but the universal understanding that binds these four-walled spaces is that they are small DIY projects that foster a communal or intimate relationship among attendees. Though the term has yet to be concretized, most organizers who have adopted it have done so for makeshift spaces that have either been turned into dedicated or part-time exhibition venues. That said, the microcinema ethos is also replicated at outdoor locales—empty lots, rooftops, brewery terraces and so on. Additionally, organizers of some nontheatrical screening series (and former microcinemas) have turned to roving, site-specific exhibition, both indoors and out, sometimes voluntarily and in some cases out of necessity. Sustaining a space for niche exhibition has its challenges, forcing some independent programmers to make do by staging one-off events at cost-effective outdoor sites or transforming an interior space for a short period of time. The latter approach, also described as "pop-up" by its practitioners, who include retailers, curators and chefs, eliminates the ongoing costs of rent, utilities, insurance and other bills that can cripple a small-scale venture at the same time encouraging creative approaches to exhibition.

The microcinema movement in its broadest sense includes film exhibition that takes place outside of what are now traditional viewing spaces—corporately-owned theaters, independent, art house and repertory theaters, museums/art galleries, cinematheques, universities, airplanes and the home. To this list, I add film festivals because they are quickly becoming a familiar alternative to mainstream viewing while still taking place in traditional spaces such as movie theaters and/or university screening rooms. Furthermore, they are generally annual events around which communities of filmgoers gather for brief, concentrated periods of time. This is not a precise marking of a boundary, as some microcinemas do actually occur in the organizer's domestic space, which in the evening serves as *une salle du cinema*. Microcinema, then, is not strictly defined by venue, but also by content, atmosphere, audience, programmer and the peripheral activities that are combined with film viewing all coming together to make a subcultural scene.

As there is no strict taxonomy for this practice, multiple understandings of microcinema exist among those who participate in and write about the phenomenon. Within that grey area, I have observed that certain qualities associated with these types of venues seem to remain constant: a do-it-yourself approach to exhibition; a small-scale, makeshift space; a low operation budget (or low budget operation); dedicated, passionate and involved organizers or programmers (often filmmakers); a sense of community among likeminded individuals with shared taste; a love for cinema among participants; and risk-taking content that is not readily available at other theaters, video rental sites, or

online.[15] It is this set of characteristics that I employ when determining what to include and exclude in my study of microcinema in Montreal.

The significance of this project is its careful consideration of the multiple factors that determine not only the viability of the microcinema paradigm itself, but also the vital characteristics of a host city. The questions explored in this project are: What role has microcinema occupied in the history of film exhibition and what is its relationship to mainstream exhibition practices? Why are microcinemas, as individual organizations, transient? And specifically, what is the status of the movement in Montreal? Alluded to in these questions, and necessary to the study of nontheatrical sites, is an investigation of cultural formations, or more specifically film scenes, which must include an analysis of individual and group identity among scene members and the role of place (both venue and geographic locale). Moreover, these formations cannot exist without the intervention of certain pivotal individuals acting as organizers, programmers, curators, archivists, collectors, and filmmakers. These people are not only instrumental in the success and sustainability of a site and its community, but also serve as cultural intermediaries and/or tastemakers in the cultivation of niche audiences, begging the question: what is the role of programmers in cultivating films scenes that coalesce around taste?

To address these questions, my research consists of a study of contemporary nontheatrical and nondomestic exhibition practices that reveals the cultural significance of microcinema within the wider field of film practice, broadly defined as the totality of

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[15] This list of characteristics assumes a somewhat regular screening schedule (i.e. daily, weekly or monthly).

moving image consumption, production, distribution, and exhibition.[16] It is important to

remember that these sites are not purely sites of film consumption but are places of

commerce, work or residence, and are spaces where other non-cinematic activities take

place, despite official legal strictures to the contrary. Whether they are businesses, lofts,

or non-profit organizations, they must make money or find funding to continue operating.

In some cases, it is the other exchanges—sale of food and drink for example—that allow

these spaces to remain open and offer free or inexpensive film screenings. Whether

public or private, these sites are bound by city regulations, be they fire codes or other

safety measures, which sometimes complicates the logistical planning of events. Such

details must be considered when piecing together the stories of these spaces. It is evident

that some of the film programs I discuss, and others like them, operate in blatant defiance

of city regulations and sometimes under the radar of studio copyright enforcement; in

other words, they do not get city permits or pay for the rights to screen films. So it is with

the utmost discretion that I share information about these phenomena.

Due to the transitory nature of these sites, some of those discussed have already

vanished since I began my research in 2007, and likewise, new ones have emerged.

Because this project also provides an historical contextualization of these film practices, I

consciously include spaces that have already disappeared to demonstrate the variety,

history and transitory nature of these scenes. I, as accurately as possible, document the

duration of the microcinema—its conception and termination—but there exist,

unfortunately, no substantial archives of these sites and scenes. They often come and go

with only a newspaper article, Facebook reference or blog post to confirm their existence,

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[16] By nondomestic practices, I mean filmviewing that is not undertaken in the home but would exclude
individual viewing anywhere. Many microcinemas occupy domestic spaces, but that filmviewing is open to
the public and communal, and the spaces are often nontraditional (eg. a church or funeral home).

or, in many cases, only remain in the memories of organizers and participants. This project serves to document these ephemeral practices.

To achieve the above outlined research goals, I have chosen to investigate the development of microcinema in Montreal, Quebec, an urban cultural center with a thriving film scene. Focusing on one locale allows me to delve deeply into the multitude of factors relevant to the study of a cultural phenomenon like alternative film exhibition. That said, as part of the broader history of microcinema development, I do discuss similar practices, past and present, in other cities, both in Canada and the US. This is necessary in order to contextualize the film cultures in Montreal. Many respected cultural studies ethnographies have focused on one location—Waller's Lexington, Stewart's Chicago, Shank's Austin, Radway's Smithton— and I continue in this tradition of executing a close examination of a cultural practice in a single locale, shedding light on various broader issues that inform and are informed by the cultural practice under study. As a participant and observer in microcinema events and scenes and a habitant of the city, I analyze the alternative film culture environment in Montreal and make key observations about how these spaces operate within the broader socio-economic framework of this field of cultural production—film exhibition.

From August 2007 through June 2013 I lived in Montreal and participated in the alternative film culture of the city. Many scholars, like Barry Shank, Sarah Thornton and Richard Lloyd, have also been residents in the cities where they undertook their research. Knowing the communities about which one is writing offers considerably more privileged access to the sites of study and their inhabitants; it also offers a certain insider perspective that is evident in the relationships I built with my interviewees over a period

of several years and a specialized insight that informed what questions to ask. Living in the city of my study also allowed me to attend numerous events, as a participant observer.

The scope of this project covers those events or sites that are organized around alternative film practices. I do not include film festivals or events at art institutions or galleries. While not theaters, these phenomena do not constitute microcinema or marginalized practices; festivals and institutional screenings are sanctioned activities, often with a commercial agenda, and studies of these types of spaces already exist. Grey areas persist when marking an area of study. Consequently, I devote chapter four to working toward a clear understanding of microcinema in order to eliminate ambiguity and define an emerging field within nontheatrical exhibition studies.

In this dissertation, I first map out a history of nontheatrical exhibition practices in Canada and the US from the inception of movie going. I then outline the different understandings of the microcinema concept, providing key features that are common to most sites, and contextualize the emergence of the microcinema in general by giving a broad overview of the movement. After presenting a history of microcinema in the US and Canada and an account of contemporary practices in Toronto, Ontario, New York, New York and Austin I discuss the manner in which the movement has developed in Montreal, amidst other nontheatrical exhibition practices, and identify the factors that make the city both an enticing and challenging locale to establish and sustain small-scale exhibition venues.[17] Lastly, I present a case study of Blue Sunshine Psychotronic Film

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[17] These cities were selected for a variety of reasons: they were accessible to me during the years of my study; I had contacts at venues in these cities so I could arrange visits and interviews; and this collection of cities offers a wide range of demographics within the US and Canada (language, race/ethnicity, population size, regional [north vs. south] and provincial [Ontario vs. Quebec] differences), as well as cultural similarities regarding thriving arts scenes and academic institutions.

Centre, a venue that epitomized microcinema, offering an in depth account of a single site, its organizers and its complex relationship to the city of Montreal.

In order to provide a broad analysis of microcinema, I attended numerous screenings and film-related events in Montreal and outside, spoke to and interviewed many individuals—organizers, filmmakers and habitués—and referred to a vast array of written sources, both academic and journalistic. I have catalogued in the appendices all of my site visits and the people to whom I spoke during the six years when I conducted my research. Appendix A lists the eleven microcinemas/organizations that are or were operational in Montreal; I attended more than thirty-five events at ten of these sites. In Appendix B, I list all alternative exhibition sites I visited both in and outside Montreal— nine microcinemas/organizations outside Montreal, nine alternative film events (annual and one-off) in Montreal, three nontraditional film festivals that engage in alternative exhibition in Montreal and two film festival panels pertaining to the subject of my research, one in Montreal and one in Austin—representing another twenty-seven events attended.

A great part of my research consisted of talking with organizers, filmmakers and participants to record the history of Montreal's microcinemas and create an archive of spaces past and present. The thirteen formal interviews with a total of seventeen interviewees, conducted in English and catalogued in Appendix C, lasted forty to eighty minutes each and took place at various sites that were convenient for the subjects, typically at exhibition locales. I asked the same fifteen multi-part questions, with slight modifications for each individual, in all formal interviews. The template for the interview questions can be found in Appendix D. Most interviews were one-on-one and four were

conducted with two people simultaneously for all or part of the interview, as indicated in

Appendix C. Interviewees represent twelve organizations/sites: Blue Sunshine, Double

Negative Film Collective, Concordia University Communication Studies Department,

Cinequanon, Montreal Underground Film Festival (MUFF), Film POP Montreal, Aurora

Picture Show, Le Cinéclub/Film Society, Volatile Works, Mascara and Popcorn Film

Festival and Trash Palace. All interviews were video recorded for documentary and

archival purposes. As well as formal interviews, I had four informal interviews or

meetings with programmers, organizers and archivists, such as Martin Heath of

CineCycle and Eric Veillette, a cultural journalist and archivist based in Toronto, during

which I took notes; these are also documented in Appendix C. Additionally, I engaged in

undocumented conversations with numerous participants at the various sites I visited.

To provide a full account of alternative film practices in Montreal and to

demonstrate how these practices are discussed in the public sphere, I also looked for

media coverage about alternative DIY venues, events and participants in the local,

national and international press and blogs. The Montreal-based sources are primarily

English language and included: *The Hour, Montreal Mirror, Midnight Poutine, The

Gazette, Canuxploitation!* and *Ion Magazine.* I also took note of what people have been

saying in the national and international popular mass media about microcinemas and the

Montreal cultural scene in general; for example*, Le Monde, The Telegraph, Vancouver

Sun, Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, The Austin Chronicle, The New York Times, Spin*

and *Wired* magazine. Applying a modified method of discourse analysis to listen "to the

ways in which people spontaneously seem to say or write the same things in many

different contexts," certain narratives or ideological tropes begin to emerge and get

repeated like "Microcinemas offer something different (i.e. better) than mainstream theatres" and "Microcinema participants—programmers and visitors—are more passionate about film."[18] Oftentimes, alternative sites only get coverage when they open and close, and the nostalgic way about which they are written in the local press typically reveals a disappointment in the community for not being able to sustain such a cultural treasure. In addition to print and online media, I studied the cultural policy reports that outline Montreal's long-term plans for development of the city's cultural resources. I combed through these texts along with the interview material for not only descriptions of practices but also attitudes of practitioners and city officials toward marginal practices. This has provided me insight regarding how members perceive their own scenes, their perceptions of city officials and policies, as well as how external observers, like journalists and academics, understand these phenomena—in short, I searched for evidence of what practitioners and non-practitioners are saying about these practices.

To interpret and contextualize the data gathered, I have adopted a mixed methodological approach using cultural historiography and ethnography (observation and participation). To provide historical context, along with relevant precursors, for microcinema practices, I look back to early and mid-twentieth century activities. However, my study of contemporary practices begins in the mid-1980s with what is considered to be the first microcinema and continues through to 2013. A periodization of microcinema culture whose beginning coincided with the decline of art house cinema and the underground film movement and the start of independent film culture and the introduction of VHS, and whose demise may align with unfettered urban development and city policies and plans that prioritize large scale cultural projects over small, seemed

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[18] Ortner refers to this as "cultural ethnography through discourse," which I discuss below (31).

an appropriate way to bookend the project, keeping in mind that microcinemas to some degree still exist. In defining her area of study of American independent film culture, Sherry B. Ortner argues that it began more or less in the late 80s, coinciding with several trends in American society: the end of the American dream, the polarization of wealth (i.e. the manifest effects of neoliberalism) and the coming of age of members of Generation X (the generational membership of the majority of indie filmmakers).[19] Peaking in the 1990s, the microcinema movement basically parallels independent film (and music) and DIY culture; therefore, the socio-cultural-economic factors that Ortner cites as significant to the nurturing of an independent film scene are a determining contextual feature of the present study.

To complement the cultural history of microcinema, ethnographic research, like that conducted by Ortner when investigating the American independent film scene, Thornton, who integrated herself into the club culture of Birmingham, England and Shank, a musician-researcher who wrote about the music scene in Austin in the 1980s, is a major component of my research. Using these scholars' methods, all working within the Geertzian framework for the study and interpretation of culture using "thick description," I have adapted an ethnographic method specifically suited to my project.[20] The Ortner study represents an anthropological "interface ethnography" amalgamating "stories" collected from "'natural' encounters,"[21] field notes and interviews; from this, I will draw upon her "cultural ethnography through discourse" method for analyzing stories and texts—affording insight into the way members think about their scenes—and

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[19] Ibid., 15-20.
[20] See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[21] This includes "ordinary talk and conversations." Ortner, 27.

synthesizing her data "to provide a kind of insiders' oral history" of a scene.[22] The other

two studies are examples of participant observation methods that rely heavily on

qualitative, anecdotal information and, most importantly, being a member of the scene.

Shank, more so than Thornton, who attempted to keep some distance between herself and

her subjects, would be considered an insider researcher because of his complete

embeddedness in the scene. There exists, in effect, a continuum between insider/outsider,

and the two extremes are represented by Shank and Ortner, respectively. All three studies

provide non-invasive ways to experience the phenomena and to have discussions and

build relationships with participants that are more organic than a researcher conducting a

survey or focus group. That said, I did use an interview format for scene organizers,

venue owners and other key participants, who were happy to discuss the alternative film

scene in Montreal, as well as more discrete methods for gleaning information from

peripheral participants. In addition to speaking with individuals at the sites, I attended

panel discussions and Q&A sessions about alternative film exhibition (at South By

Southwest [SXSW] 2012)[23] and Montreal's cultural scenes (at POP Symposium 2011),[24]

which, much like Ortner's interface ethnography, is a "natural" and mostly passive

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[22] Ortner, 25-27, 31.

[23] *"Alternative Film Events: Site Specific & Beyond"* panel members included: (Moderator) Mike Plante, Film Programmer/Distributor, Sundance/Cinemad; Delicia Harvey, Executive Director, Aurora Picture Show; Mary Magsamen, Curator, Aurora Picture Show; Mark Elijah Rosenberg, Founder and Artistic Director, Rooftop Films; Henri Mazza, Chief Creative Officer, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. It took place at the Austin Convention Center in Austin, TX on March 10, 2012 as part of the SXSW Film Symposium. I video recorded this panel discussion, and the audio is available on the SXSW website: http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event_FP9310.

[24] The **"Cultural Scenes/Scènes culturelles"** panel took place on McGill campus on 21 September 2011 as part of POP Symposium and included: Dr. Will Straw (Professor, McGill University, Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada); Peter Burton (Organizer, Suoni del Popolo festival); Charity Chan (free jazz Musician); Tina Piper (Professor, Faculty of Law, McGill). POP Symposium is part of the larger POP Montreal multi-media festival. POP Montreal International Music Festival launched in 2002 and has since expanded to include other media and special interest events: Film POP, Puces POP, POP Symposium, Art POP, Kids POP and Espace POP.

method of collecting data.[25] I used Thornton's approach for mining through participant conversation and Ortner's discourse analysis of public conversations as models for analyzing the body of my research data collected in these informal ways.

Paul Hodkinson, who argues for the advantages of insider research, describes it as "ethnographic situations characterised by significant levels of initial proximity between researcher and researched."[26] Some of the main benefits of insider status are: easy access to your subjects; a shared language, demeanor, etc. appropriate to the scene; and the trust elicited as a committed and authentic participant in the scene—all of which are crucial to gathering valuable data. On the flip side, there can be disadvantages to this approach as being an insider may preclude the researcher from understanding and being able to accurately represent the outsider perspective (though the same would be true for an outsider trying to give an account of the insider experience). One problem with the insider/outsider binary is it assumes an individual is either one or the other, when it may be possible to occupy various subject positions within a scene or during the course of the study. For example, I began as an outsider at Blue Sunshine and slowly became more of an insider allowing me to observe the scene from more than one perspective, which also addresses an important criticism launched at insider researchers: their lack of distance from the object of study, or scene, and the assumptions that may bring that could impede their reading of the phenomena.

Regarding Montreal's bilingual status, I did not delineate the scope of my study based on language. I sought out all examples of alternative film exhibition and microcinema in the city and found that many events offered translations or made attempts

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[25] Unlike Ortner, I did ask questions as opposed to simply observing.
[26] Paul Hodkinson, "'Insider Research' in the Study of Youth Cultures," *Journal of Youth Studies* 8.2 (June 2005): 132.

to address audiences in French and English, but the majority of sites were either predominantly anglophone or francophone, depending on the language of the organizer(s).[27] In the descriptions of the sites I visited, in chapter five, I identify the primary language of each. I chose an anglophone site, Blue Sunshine, for my case study because it was the best example of a microcinema in Montreal, and because English is my first language it allowed me full access to all discussions at the site and to the organizers and regulars, most of whom only spoke English.

In sum, I have collected the stories and impressions of the spaces and events from individual participants, observers, journalists, programmers and owners/managers, which are considered along with my own experiences and analyses of the phenomena, using the ethnographic methods of observation and participation. Some information was gathered as a result of informal and formal conversations in the public sphere, whereas other modes of inquiry, such as traditional interviews, were employed with key individuals in the scene. This network of information, gathered from going to the sites and attending events, in conjunction with data gleaned from public discourse, has provided me enough material to describe and analyze microcinema phenomena in terms of their socio-cultural significance locally and, to a lesser degree, more broadly. Scholars should remain open and receptive to the stories and realities, spoken and unspoken, that emerge from their studies. With this in mind, this research project draws conclusions about the nature of nontheatrical film venues and corresponding scenes, what they mean to participants and their significance in the film and culture spheres.

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[27] The language of the films screened varied according to the event and were not limited to French and English.

In addition to offering a methodological model for examining transient and "speeded up" cultural phenomena, this dissertation does what I would argue is one of the most important functions of cultural studies scholars: to document cultural sites and practices for future generations. Without the records of these sites and scenes, and that includes the nontheatrical exhibition work that has come before, the history of film exhibition remains skewed toward theatrical exhibition and does not represent the larger picture of film practice. Analysis is, of course, equally important. Revealing and critiquing the underlying power structures is a critical step. The thick descriptions I provide about my objects of study serve both to record them and illuminate for discussion their relationships to one another and to mainstream exhibition, allowing for a fuller understanding of microcinema's role in the cultural field of film exhibition and of possibly overlooked factors such as urban economy and cultural policy.

In the following chapter, I begin with a review of the seminal literature that theorizes subcultural phenomena and then recall several significant ethnographic studies that have galvanized the cultural studies field and provided the groundwork for the last two decades of research in this area. I also offer an explanation of my choice of terminology for describing film scenes as such and synthesize the theoretical work that frames my argument. The focus is upon the relationship between notions of the mainstream and the alternative, the roles of participants within film cultures—cultural intermediaries, subcultural entrepreneurs, cinephiles and paracinephiles—and conceptualizations of the urban locales where alternative film practices happen, creative cities and bohemias.

Chapter three provides an overview of the historical exhibition and

consumption activities that are precursors to current trends in nontheatrical film practice. I look back to the early days of film exhibition and programming and to the nontheatrical spaces that hosted events before movie palaces and multiplexes emerged as dominant sites of exhibition. This account of past cinematic exhibition demonstrates the continual dialogue among film industry players about central and marginal practices. In chapter four, I explore the question "what is microcinema?" and forward a set of characteristics common to most operations. This chapter also offers a survey of the microcinema movement in the US and Canada, connecting the earliest versions of microcinema to its contemporary iterations. Chapter five documents the history of Montreal's alternative film venues, past and present that have paved the way for the city's present-day microcinemas. Here I examine the relationship between contemporary practices and cultural policy in this urban environment, including the trend of screening films in loft and warehouse spaces, and I discuss the sites that have existed in Montreal from 2007 to 2013.

A case study of Blue Sunshine Psychotronic Film Centre is the focus of chapter six, where I document and study the operation of a microcinema space in Montreal, as well as the cinema's cultivation of (para)cinephilia and 'multibrow' taste among its audience members. Self-described as a film center and later as a microcinema, Blue Sunshine was a small-scale DIY venue that lasted from 2010 to 2012. Run out of the organizers' loft, it also sponsored a school focused on the study of horror film—The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies—that continues to this day. In the last chapter, I summarize my findings and conclusions about the DIY cinema environment in Montreal. Having observed that the success of microcinemas is based on a combination of factors

that include, but may not be limited to, space or site, organizers/programmers and the urban locale (community, individuals, cultural policy, physical environment, economy, etc.), I speculate on the future status of microcinemas in Montreal and more broadly.

The objective of this study is to document the transient but persistent microcinema scene in one city and to understand how microcinema scenes operate in the field of cultural production for alternative film exhibition. The analysis elaborates upon the roles sites and communities play in the local and global cultural arenas. This study provides a much-needed historical cataloging of alternative film exhibition venues and microcinemas. These significant yet ephemeral phenomena have been historically neglected and under-documented in film history, and this thesis begins to rectify that oversight. I seek to identify the primary features and significant conditions that are common across the phenomena observed and that allow these spaces to exist and to nurture under-valued taste formations. In the process, I begin to understand that pivotal people—cultural intermediaries and subcultural entrepreneurs—with highly valued taste and depth of knowledge, interact with the ambiance and ideology of space and the cultural, economic, and social specificities of location to create film communities, or smaller and more transient scenes. Perhaps my most important goal, however, is to map the intersection of venue, programmer, and geographic locale, which in this case is urban, and to provide insight into the sets of social relations that build around microcinema sites, particularly those that are established amongst regular members and between programmers and participants.

As with any study, there exist limitations. Because my choice of sites is restricted to the US and Canada, primarily to Montreal, the elements of the scenes I observe may

not translate to locales in other parts of the world. Despite the possibility that my findings may not be universally applied, this project demonstrates one approach to understanding and contextualizing a localized urban film practice.

I was very much attentive to my own role in the microcinema community, in which I was a short-term Blue Sunshine volunteer. I became friendly with the regulars and owners, and therefore had to be more engaged to maintain an impartial perspective. As I stated earlier, just as it may offer privileged access to phenomena, insider status in a group can be, at times, a disadvantage. The concern about lack of critical distance from one's subject matter is commonly directed at fan studies, especially when the writer/scholar is also a fan. I have remained vigilant of this potential danger. Though I attempted to avoid the pitfalls that have arisen in earlier fan scholarship, it is difficult to remain emotionally detached from a subject that is dear to one's heart. That said, I have made every effort to present my observations and conclusions as scientifically as possible within an ethnographic framework. And thus, I contribute to a neglected area within the field of exhibition studies: microcinema sites, modes, and sociologies of film practice.

Chapter II: Taste Defines the Scene

To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class.'[28]

<div align="center">Pierre Bourdieu</div>

You are *your tastes…*[29]

<div align="center">Anonymous indie film producer</div>

Perhaps due to the economic dominance of the theatrical venue within the arena of film exhibition, there has been a focus on theatrical exhibition and consumption within the field of film and media studies, or more accurately in the sub-area of exhibition studies. The aim of this research domain, Charles Acland writes, is "to document the historical making and remaking of cinema's exhibition contexts."[30] And certainly extensive and significant work has been done on traditional movie theater audiences and commercial venues.[31] It wasn't until the last decade, however, that media and film scholars have taken a keen interest in the area of nontheatrical film reception, including work on at-home/television/video viewing,[32] museum and gallery screenings,[33] film festivals[34] and

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[28] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1-2.

[29] Quoted in Ortner, 156.

[30] Charles Acland, "Theatrical Exhibition: Accelerated Cinema," in The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry, ed. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (London: Blackwell Press, 2008), 87-88.

[31] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Friedberg, *Window Shopping*; Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003); Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Acland, "'Opening Everywhere': Multiplexes, E-Cinema and the Speed of Cinema Culture," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Movie-going*, ed. Robert Allen et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), 364-382 and 462-467; Acland, "Theatrical Exhibition."

[32] Joan Hawkins, *Cutting edge: art-horror and the horrific avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Haidee Wasson, "The Reel of the Month Club: 16mm Projectors, Home Theaters and Film Libraries in the 1920s," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Cinema*, ed. Robert Allen et al. (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2008), 217-234;

online viewing communities.[35] Scholars also have begun to research traditionally

unrecognized audiences such as refugees, children and minority groups[36] as well as

historic practices of moving image viewing in schools, libraries, prisons and industrial

sites.[37] Within nontheatrical exhibition research, though, there exist few examples of DIY

film practices in makeshift spaces. Most writing in this area, specifically that on

microcinema that I cover in chapter four, has been authored by participants in the

scene—filmmakers, programmers, collectors—rather than academics.[38]

    In an effort to add to the emerging scholarship in nontheatrical exhibition and

wishing to extend the depth and breadth of our understanding of cinema's social function

by looking at "nondedicated locales,"[39] this project responds to Barbara Klinger's call to

study nontheatrical sites and to a host of scholars' encouragement to pursue topics that

Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2009); Caetlin Benson-Allott, *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[33] Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Alison Griffiths, *Shivers* Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[34] Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007); Liz Czach, "Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (Winter 2010): 139-145; Diane Burgess, "Bridging the Gap: Film Festival Governance, Public Partners and the "Vexing" Problem of Film Distribution," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21.1 (2012): 2-20.

[35] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (rev. ed., NYU Press, 2008); Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

[36] Robert Allen, Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, eds., *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Movie-going* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008); Jacqueline Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[37] Charles Acland, "Classrooms, Clubs, and Community Circuits: Reconstructing Cultural Authority and The Film Council Movement, 1946-1957," in Inventing Film Studies, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 149-181; and Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008).

[38] Examples of such work are Andrea Grover and Ed Halter, eds., *A Microcinema Primer: A History of Experimental Film Exhibition in the United States* (Houston: Aurora Picture Show, 2010) and *Incite: Exhibition Guide* 4 (November 2013).

[39] Klinger, 4. Undedicated and nondedicated are generally used for spaces that have other uses that take priority over film activities (eg. bars, coffee shops). There are still other sites, while not theaters, where exhibition is one of the primary missions of the space, in which case it is not technically nondedicated. Nontheatrical and mixed-purpose seem to encompass all the variations.

expand the notion of "screen practice"[40] and widen the "focus of social and psychic accounts of cinematic spectatorship."[41] Whereas Anne Friedberg opts for tracing the "cultural contexts of … commodified forms of looking," I choose to identify and understand film practices that appear, or wish to appear, non-commodified.[42] The focus of this project, then, is the alternative venues and film cultures that emerge within urban locales, and more specifically, the sites and experiences that exist outside of and alongside the commercial movie theater space in Montreal, Quebec.

There is a solid body of literature that connects cinema to the city in film and media studies.[43] The texts that discuss cinema in terms of a specifically and idiosyncratically urban context primarily do so as textual readings of films offering representations of specific urban societies and phenomena, where cities are considered as subject matter of films rather than as sites of exhibition and reception.[44] In their anthology, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice facilitate an interdisciplinary connection of film studies and sociology (among other fields), focusing on the intersection of culture and society or "the relationship between cinema and the city as *lived social realities.*"[45] Responding to historic attempts at cross-pollination and wishing to bring the discipline more in line with communications studies, the concerns of the book's authors are: globalization, urban development, spatiality and geography. But despite the editors' desire to move away from

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[40] Hansen, Friedberg and Acland *Screen Traffic*.
[41] Friedberg, 7.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Hansen, Waller, Jancovich and Faire, Stewart, Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[44] Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, eds., *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001); François Penz and Andong Lu, eds., *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image (*Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2011).
[45] Shiel and Fitzmaurice*,* 2.

film studies' longstanding obsession with the text, these issues are addressed predominantly within the context of textual representations. While it's necessary to consider the role of content, or category of texts, within the microcinema phenomena, it is one of many factors that inform the cultural studies approach of my research.

This body of work is vitally important, though the neglect of non-urban sites has left a rather large hole in the area of film exhibition, one that should be addressed. There have been some studies of rural and other non-urban sites of exhibition; however, a more prevalent project of film history and cultural studies theorists has been to understand cinema practices within the urban environment.[46] This project will not depart, in this respect, from the well-established, albeit fairly recent, literature linking cinema to the city. What this project will do, however, is bring together elements of cinema studies— (para)cinephilia, urban context and nontheatrical exhibition—with those of cultural studies—subcultural scenes/entrepreneurs and creative industries—to forge new ground in the under-investigated area of alternative exhibition practices and film consumption outside of the theater setting. Before expanding on the features of microcinema venues and the cultural practices that take place in these spaces, I turn to the theoretical groundwork for subcultural scenes and counter-hegemonic activity.

Subcultures, Scenes and Subcultural Scenes

For cultural studies scholars, the school of British Cultural Studies (BCS)—and its most influential manifestation at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural

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[46] Eric Schaefer, "*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Gregory Waller, "Free Talking Picture - Every Farmer is Welcome: Non-theatrical Film and Everyday Life in Rural America during the 1930s," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Cinema*, ed. Robert Allen et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), 248; Peter Lester, "'Sweet Sixteen' Goes to War: Hollywood, the NAAF and 16mm Film Exhibition in Canada During World War II," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 19.1(Spring 2010): 2-19; Ronald Walter Greene "Pastoral Exhibition," in *Useful Cinema*, 205-229.

Studies (CCCS)—marks the beginning of a coherent body of literature concerning subcultural formations. The work of several key BCS theorists—Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige—as well as Pierre Bourdieu's research in the decades following, provide the foundational theories, vocabulary and texts for the field of cultural studies, and subcultures especially. The major contribution of the BCS scholars was to recognize culture as being both politicized and the patterns of organization underlying all social practices, requiring one to consider the intersecting articulations that influence and are influenced by a cultural phenomenon.[47] This translates to my research as the study of the economic, social and cultural aspects of nontheatrical film exhibition, as well as the manner in which local and non-local scenes interrelate.

Following from their interventions into cultural theory, BCS scholars examined the interrelationship between class and culture. Finding that youth cultures are always sites of power struggles, one of their goals as subcultural theorists was to "reconstruct" the concept of subcultures in relation to their parent culture and moreover "to the struggle between dominant and subordinate cultures."[48] The dominant class attempts to contain the subordinate class in the realm of culture (which is necessarily connected to economic and other forms of power); and in response, the subordinate class resists through the development of coherent group strategies.[49] Hegemonic and resistant activity takes place between these two poles by the dominant and subordinate classes, and popular culture is "the arena of consent and resistance."[50] Because subcultures are responses by particular

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[47] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[48] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures, and Class: A Theoretical Overview," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson ([1977] London: Routledge, 2006), 9.
[49] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-240.
[50] Ibid., 238-39.

groups of marginalized young people within the hegemonic power structure, their

attitudes and practices are sometimes considered counter-hegemonic.[51] Their resistance to

the parent culture and, superficially, to the dominant culture often manifests itself in style

and posture and could be understood through the study of homologies among the various

markers of subcultural style, which include dress, argot, music, attitude and behavior.[52]

While BCS researchers concentrated almost exclusively on male working class

youth, their ways of conceiving the relationship and struggles between empowered and

marginalized groups can be applied to what might be called mainstream and alternative

film cultures. In this mainstream vs. alternative dichotomy, age may be less important,

but to some degree, the struggle remains within the realm of class, as the dominant or

parent culture of the Hollywood studios has exponentially bigger budgets for production,

distribution and exhibition than subordinate non-Hollywood, or independent, film

cultures. Important to note, though, is that discursively the mainstream is a construct of

alternative or sub- cultures. "Thus mainstream cinema is itself as much a product of

expecting certain kinds of experience at the multiplex and making certain kinds of sense

of Hollywood movies as it is anchored in textual practices."[53]

All cultural groups whether they are dominant, marginal, subordinate, or

otherwise are in some way complicit in the hegemonic structure. Continuing from this

premise of symbiosis, Sarah Thornton maintains that the notion of authenticity is crucial

to subcultural ideology, and media and businesses are "integral to the authentication of

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[51] Hall et al. point out, subcultures, as opposed to counter-cultures, are not ideological in the sense that they are attempting to transform the existing power structure (i.e. overturn the dominant culture) but instead have ideological dimensions that are concerned more directly with distinguishing themselves from the parent culture (238-239).
[52] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
[53] Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

cultural practice."[54] This observation is particularly useful when considering the

alternativeness of film scenes, which often is based on an assumed authenticity and

shared values that differ from the mainstream. The example of indie film culture

illustrates this precise ambiguity. Two recent studies on indie film culture have examined

the tension between the notions of commodified vs. non-commodified, commercial vs.

art, mainstream vs. alternative, Hollywood vs. not Hollywood (i.e. independent), and

there exist some important links between the discourses circulating through indie film

scenes and those of microcinema.[55] As Michael Z. Newman suggests in *Indie: An*

American Film Culture, indie identity relies heavily on being oppositional (anti-

commercial, authentic, autonomous, creative) and, most importantly, not Hollywood.

Indie film's identity is wholly grounded within comparisons to other film practices, as

well as to other indie cinema (creating degrees of indieness, and thus authenticity).

However, indie status is mutable and susceptible to the discourse that develops around a

work—a discourse that is in part constructed by the producers and distributors

themselves.[56] This analysis may be applied to microcinema practitioners whose position

in the cultural field is often constructed as oppositional.

BCS theories are somewhat problematic to contemporary cultural theorists

because society has changed—the middle class has since grown and shrunken again and

working class groups are not as cohesive as they were in the mid- to late 1900s—and

because we are now interested in more than white, male youth cultures.[57] Though the role

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[54] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 9.
[55] See Newman, *Indie* and Ortner, *Not Hollywood*.
[56] Newman.
[57] Angela McRobbie is one of the few BCS scholars to look at cultural phenomena among young women. See, *Jackie*: *An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* (University of Birmingham, 1978); *"Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity,"* MA Thesis (University of Birmingham, 1977); Angela McRobbie

class plays in current subcultures has diminished significantly, as well as the clear

boundaries between cultural groups suggested by BCS, there exist among their

discussions of cultural group dynamics, empowerment and agency, many concepts

pertinent to my analysis of contemporary film scenes, especially that of hegemonic

culture.

Although Bourdieu's work was discovered decades later, he touched upon some

of the same problems as the subcultural theorists, specifically the relationship between

the hegemonic class and taste, and in such a way as to better universalize these

observations. Above all, his theoretical framework regarding the role of taste in class

distinction, as well as his key concepts—most importantly cultural capital—underlie

most subsequent analyses of subcultural scenes. The concept of cultural capital describes

the social and economic benefits of investing in certain cultural practices and possessing

non-monetary assets and symbolic goods. Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital, and

its corresponding social and symbolic capitals, occurs almost completely within the realm

of class and in relation to economic capital. Moreover, he found that cultural distinctions

and tastes tend to signify an authoritative voice that presumes the inferiority of the

other.[58] Put another way, legitimate culture maintains its dominant position by creating a

canon of good taste based on objects it reveres that are more or less inaccessible to the

subordinate class. Such is the case with cinephiles and paracinephiles who tend to

position themselves, according to their film taste, in opposition to an appointed other—

one that is perceived to be unified in its taste preferences, as they may perceive their own

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and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson ([1977] London: Routledge, 2006), 209-222.

[58] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*: *Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

taste culture to be. In Bourdieuian terms, cinephiles, who value art film, would be the legitimate culture because paracinephiles cherish the lowest of film texts. I return to a fuller discussion of cinephilia and paracinephilia below.

Thornton has named the currency valued by niche fan communities, or subcultures, subcultural capital. The more subcultural capital you possess the more hip you appear and the more distance exists between you and the non-hip mainstream. Again, this underscores the symbiotic relationship between subcultures and the mainstream, demonstrating a sense of opposition to the mainstream is necessary to secure a belief in subcultural authenticity.[59]

Cultural theorists who have turned away from the term subculture have done so believing that contemporary subcultures are not limited to working class youth resistance through style nor do they have a coherent dominant class against which to rebel and, following this, may not demonstrate forms of transgression or resistance. In 1997, David Muggleton begins questioning the stability and cohesiveness of contemporary subcultures when he writes, "Post-subculturalists no longer have any sense of subcultural authenticity where inception is rooted in particular sociotemporal contexts and tied to underlying structural relations."[60] He expands on this idea several years later with Rupert Weinzierl in their introduction to *The Post-Subcultures Reader* noting:

> The era seems long gone of working-class youth subcultures 'heroically' resisting subordination through 'semiotic guerilla warfare'. … [The presuppositions of the

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[59] Thornton describes three distinctions leading to the cultural hierarchization of the rave dance club scene in Britain: "the authentic versus the phoney, the 'hip' versus the 'mainstream,' and the 'underground' versus 'the media'" (3-4).

[60] David Muggleton, "The Post-Subculturalist" in *The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies*, ed. Steve Redhead, Derek Wynne and Justin O'Connor (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 198.

work done in conjunction with the CCCS] no longer appear to reflect the political, cultural and economic realities of the twenty-first century.[61]

While it's now accepted that subcultures are no longer strictly a function of working class youth rebelling against their parent and ruling classes, due to the overbearing influence of Hollywood —and American production in general—there still exists a dominant force against which to resist in the field of cultural production that is the film industry. Some scenes have formed a fairly cohesive opposition to dominant forces within the film industry despite Muggleton's position that "post-subcultural ideology values the individual over the collective" and "elevates difference and heterogeneity over collectivism and conformity."[62] Sherry B. Ortner argues the indie film scene is one such example of a collective space of resistance, but we should keep in mind that her scene is multi-generational, which proves problematic to original subcultural theory. Furthermore, as film subcultures become co-opted by Hollywood, it becomes increasingly difficult to know from what source an independent filmmaker or producer gets funding for a particular project, or if an indie film is a product of a subsidiary of the mainstream media that alternative or subcultural communities tend to demonize. All this is to say, the post-subcultural intervention raises serious challenges to the formerly predominant understanding of subcultures, their relationship to parent and dominant cultures and, consequently, their link to power and cultural struggle, and therefore remains an instructive perspective in the ongoing discussion of youth culture and subculture.

A "scene" is another way to describe a group of enthusiasts who coalesce around certain cultural texts and/or practices, usually in a particular locale or network of similar

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[61] David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, eds., *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (New York: Berg, 2003), 4-5.
[62] David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 49.

spaces. Scholars have recently begun using this term in discussions of film cultures, referring to an amorphous collection of individuals sharing a taste preference and set of values pertaining to the cinematic field of cultural production. In writing about independent film culture, Ortner describes it "as precisely a scene" being "a trans-local 'community of taste' (Straw 2002: 6) that has constructed itself against the aesthetics and economics of 'Hollywood'" much like the microcinema movement has done.[63]

Though scene has only just begun to be applied to film cultures, it has been taken up more extensively in the social sciences, in ethnographic research on cultural formations, and in the cultural studies of media practices, predominantly in the music industry. The journal *Public* devoted an entire issue (*Cities/Scenes* 22/23) to the exploration of the scene in its various iterations, which only demonstrates the breadth of its application. In his introduction to the issue and to the concept of the scene, Alan Blum reminds us that it is a somewhat enigmatic term whose definition is difficult to articulate. To summarize Blum, the scene makes a space a place and in doing so makes the place a site of a creative project to which individuals are drawn in varying degrees of commitment from the "idle onlooker" or "parasite" to the fully engaged.[64] Evident in this value-laden language is the hierarchy of which Bourdieu writes that works to rank participants within a particular cultural formation. While Ortner points to the complementary relationship between scene and Bourdieu's field of cultural production, she maintains that the film scene is more collective in nature than the field of cultural production where the struggle amongst artists seeking recognition plays out: "the idea of

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[63] Ortner, 91.
[64] Alan Blum, "Scenes," *Cities/Scenes: Pubic* 22-23 (2001): 7-35.

the scene is the idea of a positively shared social and cultural world."[65] It is important to

highlight that the scene is indeed an *idea*, a collective idea about the community of taste

in question, but naturally the idea is somewhat fluid from participant to participant,

meaning the members of the community may not all share the same idea about the scene.

Ortner herself identifies the variations and struggles among players within the same indie

scene. More broadly, the scene is the stage for voyeurism and exhibitionism (and the

conscious acts of seeing and being seen) and an ongoing tension of authenticity played

out by insider and outsider that are necessary for the life and validation of the scene. But

generally speaking, scene members bond around a shared axis.

In his article in the same *Public* issue, Will Straw asks a key question: Are scenes

the spaces, the people, the activities or the movement amongst sites? Scenes are all these

factors working in collaboration. It seems the problem with scene is also its appeal: its

anti-essentializing, all-encompassing flexibility, which allows its application to include

"the effervescence of our favourite bar and the sum total of all global phenomena

surrounding a subgenre of Heavy Metal music."[66] However, at the POP Symposium

"Cultural Scenes/Scènes culturelles" panel organized solely to discuss the notion of

cultural scenes, it was the consensus of the speakers that in relation to the term

community, scene represents a small, cohesive but transient unit.

As with Blum, Marchessault's scene is necessarily urban.[67] She suggests the

appeal of scenes is that they are unique and local, but this rareness is always relative to

scenes going on in other places. Consequently, the drive toward singularity imbues the

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[65] Ortner, 91-92.
[66] Will Straw, "Scenes and Sensibilities," *Cities/Scenes: Pubic* 22-23 (2001): 6.
[67] Janine Marchessault, "Film Scenes: Paris, New York, Toronto," *Cities/Scenes: Pubic* 22-23 (2001): 64.

scene with an ephemerality that "makes them difficult to track and analyze."[68] This

underscores both the significance of taste and distinction among scene participants and

the importance of research projects that seek to document these transitory phenomena.

And this is what makes the term appropriate for what I have observed to be the persistent

transience of microcinema.

In brief, neither term in isolation is perfect to describe microcinema practitioners

and their activities. While scene remains broad enough to reconcile the youthful, male,

class-based conceptualization of subculture with the multi-faceted and ubiquitous cultural

phenomena of our current society, its flexibility makes it imprecise. And because a scene

is not inherently subcultural or counter-hegemonic, the term requires a qualifying

antecedent. I suggest, then, subcultural scene as the most accurate term for describing the

microcinema phenomenon. That said, scene can stand alone once the film culture in

question has been described. Therefore, I use scene with the understanding that those I

discuss are subcultural in nature.

Microcinema scenes form for a variety of reasons, but underlying all such projects

is a passion and love for cinema. This love takes many forms and names, as well as a

diversity of cherished objects, which I will discuss in more detail below; it would be

helpful to first explain the original concept. So, I begin with the literature on perhaps the

single most important motivation for microcinema: cinephilia.

Cinephilia

Cinephilia existed long before cinephiles began writing about film, that is to say prior to

the French having coined a term for it. In fact, Janet Staiger argues that the first lovers of

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[68] Ibid., 68.

cinema were the adolescent female fans of the 1920s, but that cinephilia, as scholars

discuss it, did not develop until the 1940s when an account exists of young men reciting

lines from *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) during repertory screenings. She remarks:

"It is at this point that film fandom begins to imply the study of authorship… and the

intellectual male typifies this sort of cinephilia, replacing the young female as the

dominant representation of an aficionado."[69] Thus, began the hierarchy of cinephilia. It is

logical that cinephiles were born at the inception of the moving image and certainly by

the time the highly absorptive powers of narrative took precedence in the classical

cinema, yet film scholars and critics seem to want to mark its beginning with the first

writing on Hollywood films by the authors of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and declare

its death and/or metamorphosis in the early 1970s. The most notable and consequential

pronouncement occurred in Susan Sontag's "The Decay of Cinema," in which she avers

"If cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead too… no matter how many movies, even very

good ones, go on being made."[70] If cinephilia is a feeling, a highly specific affective

response to the moving image, how can one possibly mark its beginning and end?

     Some have philosophized about the meaning of cinephilia based on personal

experiences, making assumptions about how other individuals experience it. In Sontag's

highly subjective overview of cinema's decline, she equates cinephilia with a love of

films from the past and protests that the only way the future of cinema can be saved is

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[69] Janet Staiger, "Matters of Taste, Subtexts of Rank," *Framework* 45.2 (Fall 2004): 77.
[70] Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times* website, 25 February 1996,
http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-cinema.html. Since then, and in response, other
scholars have followed suit, some elaborating further on its beginning in France. See, for example, Thomas
Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love And Memory*, ed.
Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005)*,* 27-43; and de
Valck and Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia? And Other Videosyncratic Pleasures,"
in *Cinephilia*, 11-24. Still others, in Europe, anticipated the cinephilia discussion in North America, like
Antoine De Baecque and Thierry Frémaux, "La Cinéphile ou l'Invention d'une Culture," *Vingtième Siècle*
46 (1995): 133-142, who approached it as an historic subcultural phenomena that ended in 1968.

"through the birth of a new kind of cine-love"—something necessarily different than the

historic and now elusive cinephilia she has had the pleasure of experiencing.[71] In

response, Catherine Russell states, "Cinephilia is a term riddled with contradictions and

ambiguity, conflating expertise with subjective pleasures."[72] Scholars have also ascribed

to it other, often negative, feelings such as regret, anxiety, disenchantment and

nostalgia.[73] Rather than give cinephilia its own set of attributes, there is a tendency to

compare it to a variety of other modes of viewing and consumption—*flânerie*, panoramic

perception—which can only hint at what cinephilic viewing is since they are not in and of

themselves cinephilic viewing.[74] Even more concerning, a few have referred to

cinephiles, their behavior and their state of being with hyperbolic language—"fetish,"[75]

"eccentric,"[76] "obsessive"[77] "irrational,"[78] and "cinemania"[79]—seemingly oblivious to the

pitfalls of early fan scholarship, in which fans were often ascribed as exhibiting

pathological behavior.

In the new wave of cinephilia scholarship, scholars discuss cinephilia in terms of

two taxonomic categories: period of time and the mode/technology/locale of

consumption. Those who conceptualize it in terms of chronology distinguish between an

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[71] Sontag.

[72] Catherine Russell, "Cinephilia and the travel film: Gambling, Gods and LSD," *Jump Cut* 48 (Winter 2006), http://ejumpcut.org/jc48.2006/GodsLSD/index.html.

[73] See, for example, Sontag and Elsaesser.

[74] Christian Keathley, "The Cinephiliac Moment," *Framework* 42, (Summer 2000) www.frameworkonline.com.

[75] See Roger Cardinal, "Pausing Over Peripheral Detail," *Framework* 30-31 (1986): 119; Paul Willeman, *Looks and Frictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 227; and David Schwartz as quoted in Richard Porton, "The Politics of American Cinephilia: From the Popular Front to the Age of Video," *Cineaste* 27.4 (Fall 2002): 4.

[76] Porton, 4.

[77] Keathley; Adrian Martin, "No Flowers for the Cinephile: The Fates of Cultural Populism 1960-1988," in *Island in the Stream,* ed. Paul Foss (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), 117-138.

[78] Porton, 10.

[79] This label was given to cinephiles' behavior in the film of the same name *Cinemania* (Stephen Kijak and Angela Christlieb, 2002) and was, in some cases, tied to real pathologies such as hoarding.

earlier and contemporary form of cinephilia, marking the two eras by different sets of

practices and technology.[80] Responding to Thomas Elsaesser's description of the

successive mutations of cinephilia, Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener suggest a

digitally-dependent third wave:

> Whereas the first generation of cinephilia was marked by local trajectories and
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> one's favorite seat in a specific cinema, the second wave was marked by
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> international trajectories toward specific festivals and retrospectives, while
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> contemporary cinephilia relies on the dispersed and virtual geography of the link
>
> and the directory.[81]

This periodization of cinephilia, however, fails to consider the fact that first and second

wave cinephilia, if such a distinction can be made, still exist at venues like microcinemas,

where the focus is not on the virtual but on the tangible and the communal, along with

nostalgia for retro modes of projection. Habitués are drawn to these alternative sites in

large part to continue to view celluloid film projection and to keep the traditional modes

of exhibition alive, as well as to access films they cannot see elsewhere (also the draw of

the festival venue). This pleasure of a singular and "authentic" experience is activated by

the social environment of the microcinema, of viewing among individuals with similar

taste. For these reasons, I find the chronological approach to cinephilia to be problematic

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[80] Elsaesser alone uses multiple terms to describe the two cinephilias—"first," "post lapsarian," "fan cult," "post-auteur, post-theory," "ready-made," "take one," "take two," "new"—in "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment." Other qualifying language includes: "first-generation, pretelevisual" (Czach, 140); "classical" (Czach, 141; Jenna Ng, "The Myth of Total Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 [Winter 2010]: 147, de Valck, "Drowning in Popcorn at the International Film Festival Rotterdam: The Festival as a Multiplex of Cinephilia," in *Cinephilia*, 106); "contemporary mass market" (Vinzenz Hediger, "*Politique des archives*: European Cinema and the Invention of Tradition in the Digital Age," *Rouge 12* [November 2008], http://www.rouge.com.au/hediger.html); "festival," "traditional" (de Valck, 101, 106); and "Twenty-first-century," "contemporary" (Mark Betz, ed. "Introduction," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 [Winter 2010]: 131).
[81] Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, "Cinephilia in Transition," in *Mind the Screen: Media Concepts According to Thomas Elsaesser*, ed. Jaap Kooijman al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 23.

when considering film practices that engage with all manner of film technology and content in all manner of makeshift social spaces.

While scholars have examined the second taxonomic category from various perspectives including cinephilia in the era of digital technology and telephilia (a love of television texts), the literature that most informs this project is that concerned with cinephilia and the mode and/or site of exhibition. One of the key criteria for Sontag's death knell is the fact that film viewing no longer takes place in movie theaters, as they alone could provide the necessary conditions for the cinephile to be "kidnapped" and "transported" by the moving image: "No amount of mourning will revive the vanished rituals—erotic, ruminative—of the darkened theater."[82] As Joan Hawkins points out, "Sontag's fetishization of traditional modes of exhibition and theatrical space" serves to "essentialize" media and reinforce a high/low culture discrimination based on site and medium, "where a certain value inheres in the medium itself."[83]

Regarding the scholarship on site-specific cinephilia, Russell, along with Liz Czach, Elsaesser, de Valck and Hagener, posits that contemporary cine-love can now be found at film festivals. Czach, however, describes a problem inherent in the more commercial festival venues namely that many of the larger festivals have turned their focus to celebrity star power and away from the filmmakers and films themselves. The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), her prime example, is struggling with the dilemma of growing the festival and attracting more A-list stars while maintaining their reputation as a festival that delivers a cinephilic audience. With an historic focus on and promotion of the audience as film savvy, making Toronto a welcoming locale for

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[82] Sontag.
[83] Hawkins, 40.

industry folks looking for viewers with diverse and refined tastes, TIFF finds itself in a compromised position as the media attention, event organization and programming have turned toward red carpet affairs. The concern this shift in focus raises is that cinephilia is being replaced by stargazing and that festival participants, and some organizers, have lost sight of the primary purpose of festivals: the enjoyment of film viewing. Czach refers to a TIFF guide in a 2006 edition of *Toronto Life* that identified five festival types: die hard, festival staffer, cineaste, stargazer and scenester.[84] According to this taxonomy, the cineaste is the only one with a true love of cinema whereas two—the scenesters and stargazers—attend for completely non-cinephilic reasons. For these individuals, the attraction of parties, after-hours scenes and celebrities completely obscures an appreciation of the art of film. Perceiving the PR party events as a misguided focus, festival organizers, who want to keep the focus on the films, have grown anxious, leading the programmers at Sundance to initiate a "focus on film" campaign to combat the threat posed by star-crazed participants. Not only does this call into question what are the appropriate motivations for attending festivals, what are genuine cinephilic modes of film appreciation and who gets to decide, but the examples above and their corresponding discourse represents a Bourdieuian power struggle. The cultural capital possessed by cinephiles—that is text-based knowledge and appreciation—is imbued with higher value than the cultural capital of fans of stars, with the exception perhaps of a canonical "celebrity" auteur, such as Sofia Coppola or Jim Jarmusch. Thus, the cinephiles believe they are positioned at the top of the hierarchy, while the stargazers reside at the bottom.

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[84] See *Toronto Life* website, http://www.torontolife.com/insiders-guide-film-festival/tiff-types. Cited in Czach, 141. De Valck has also developed a taxonomy of festival participants based on the Rotterdam festival, although she insists that all six types represent cinephiles: The Lone List-Maker, The Highlight Seeker, The Specialist, The Leisure Visitor, The Social Tourist and The Volunteer ("Drowning in Popcorn," 103-105).

Notwithstanding these scholars' misstep in contextualizing cinephilia solely within large-scale commercial festivals like TIFF, they have accurately located one site of contemporary cinephilia to be the festival environment, which continues to some degree to offer big screen celluloid projection. Within this literature, however, microcinema, or alternative exhibition more broadly, has been completely overlooked as a contemporary site of cinephilia. While it is often lamented that the decline of the art house cinema, among other factors, has compromised cinephilia, it is clear that it has resurfaced, or was always present in some iteration, in alternative film spaces. Microcinemas, like Aurora Picture Show and Blue Sunshine, are started by individuals with an incredibly deep passion and insatiable appetite for film. In fact, these spaces could not survive without the presence of cinephiles, in their various forms, who continue to seek out the rare, the old, the cutting edge, the forgotten, the dismissed and above all, the celluloid.

The materiality of film and conditions of exhibition are aspects that the cinephilia debates reference. Both are not only key concerns to the majority of microcinemas, but also areas of film exhibition where they can distinguish themselves. The visceral and material experience of small gauge (8mm and 16mm) film viewing has over the decades been replaced in commercial theaters by screen size, deafening surround sound and the "hyper-realness" of 3D. Even if the microcinema cannot reproduce the same quality and grandeur of art house or film festival projection, the organizers are keenly aware of the importance of these issues to audience members and do the best with the resources they have. Because they often operate on a shoestring budget, they must be creative when addressing cinephilic concerns. Sometimes exhibition quality is compromised but the

ambience and intimacy of the space and the knowledge and passion of the programmers make up for it. Considering my case study Blue Sunshine, not only were the organizers committed to showing films on 16mm, but they spent the majority of their startup money to create a sophisticated viewing experience, with custom-ordered curtains and a projection booth designed to maximize their space.

As de Valck points out, cinephilia is an appropriate concept to anchor one's investigation of a cultural film practice in transition: "It is precisely its ability to move between positions that privileges cinephilia as a preferred conceptual starting point for so many constituencies in their discussions of contemporary transformations."[85] And it is this concept, among others, that informs the scholarship on paracinephilia—one such transformation or mutation of cinephilia.

Paracinephiles as Counter-hegemonic Taste Culture

One trajectory that cinephilia has taken is that of counter-cinephilia, populated by those who are passionate about film, much in the same way as cinephiles, but who revere a wholly different taste aesthetic and canon. Jeffrey Sconce has theorized this cultural formation as paracinephiles and describes paracinema as follows:

> As a most elastic textual category, paracinema would include entries from such seemingly disparate subgenres as 'badfilm', splatterpunk, 'mondo' films, sword and sandal epics, Elvis flicks, government hygiene films, Japanese monster movies, beach party musicals, and just about every other historical manifestation

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[85] Ibid., 139.

of exploitation cinema from juvenile delinquency documentaries to soft-core pornography.[86]

The literature on paracinema illustrates well the sometimes appropriate and other times false dichotomy between high and low art. Both Joan Hawkins and Sconce incorporate elements from Bourdieu's and Thornton's work on distinction via taste and (sub)cultural capital in their examinations of these borders within the realms of paracinematic and cult fandoms.

In "'Trashing' the Academy," Sconce argues that paracinephiles are a highly educated cinematic subculture "organized around what are among the most critically disreputable films in cinematic history," but more important than the texts is the approach to watching and reading the texts. In other words, paracinema is "a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus," making paracinephiles an interpretive community of sorts, one that is politically motivated against the academy.[87] By embracing objects that the cultural elite (academics, critics, aesthetes) deem unworthy of study and praise, trash enthusiasts seek to challenge the prevailing discourses about film by subverting the legitimate canon.[88] "The paracinematic audience likes to see itself as a disruptive force in the cultural and intellectual marketplace."[89] In their cultivation of a counter-cinema, they position themselves in opposition not only to the academy but also to Hollywood and mainstream US culture in

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[86] Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* 36 (1996): 372.
[87] Ibid., 372, 374.
[88] Trash cinema encompasses all film that is considered to be in bad taste, much like paracinema. It may also be referred to as B film, exploitation and psychotronic. John Waters is one of the earliest filmmakers to define the trash aesthetic, claiming it was a celebration of everything that was not "family entertainment." Likely, the most infamous scene within the bad taste genre is the one of Divine eating real dog excrement in *Pink Flamingoes* (John Waters, 1972).
[89] Ibid., 372.

general. An insatiable curiosity and passion exists among champions of the unrecognized and alternative to find value in cultural objects that have been rejected by the mainstream, or popular culture, and the academy. Consequently, Sconce suggests paracinema to be a "'politicized' cinema to the extent that it demonstrates the limitations and interests of dominant cinematic style by providing a striking counter-example of deviation."[90]

Whereas Bourdieu discusses popular taste in opposition to or as result of its subordination by official high culture, in the case of paracinephiles and other marginal film fan cultures, a contingent of fans embrace texts, exhibition sites and viewing experiences counter to, and even in resistance against, popular mainstream culture. Some fan groups frequent events based on screenings of locally produced works, or trash cinema and campy pop culture texts, and purposefully reject the middlebrow fare and commercialism of the local megaplex. However, it is important to note that in some cases Hollywood produced the lowbrow films that have since been embraced by paracinephiles. The low cultural status of the films they enjoy—exploitation, B films, trash—were initially institutionalized as second-rate products within the film industry as early as the thirties.[91] While B films are thought to be an inferior product mostly due to their production value, their status was actually "determined much more complexly within the system of distribution and exhibition" that was managed by studio executives.[92] That said, classical Hollywood cinema may have "worked to perpetuate cultural hierarchies," but it was the marketplace that ultimately decided the value of a

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[90] Ibid., 392.
[91] Lea Jacobs, "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction," in *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Thomas Schatz (London: Routledge, 2003), 147.
[92] Ibid. 148.

film.[93] These types of incongruencies within taste cultures complicate the temptation to draw clear boundaries between groups and their objects and exemplify the instability of taste cultures. Today's alternative canon may be commodified and absorbed into popular culture tomorrow; similarly, past and contemporary mainstream cultural objects could very well be adopted and read ironically by future subcultural groups. What is important is that it is the currently agreed upon mainstream that allows paracinephilic, indie and microcinema scenes to exist.

In response to Sconce's work, Hawkins argues that paracinephiles may not be as stratified according to high/low culture lines as Sconce claims. Noting that the sacralization of culture, which is responsible for modern divisions between high and low cultural forms, is a mid-nineteenth century development, she proposes that paracinema and specialty mail-order catalogs, as well as horror and cult film fanzines, have created "unsacralized cultural spaces" where "high art and low/fringe cultural products are grouped together" in the same way performative culture was prior to its sacralization.[94] She understands this cross culture marketing as evidence that paracinema fans are not as exclusive in their film tastes as Sconce posits: "the companies' listing practices erase the difference between what is considered 'trash' and what is considered 'art,' through a deliberate leveling of hierarchies and recasting of categories."[95] While it is unclear that this is indeed the politicized intention of video companies working in a capitalist economic framework, rather than them merely trying to reach a broader clientele, it is even less convincing that the way catalogs are organized would influence the taste of fan cultures; it is more credible that film fans' tastes do not fall neatly along generic

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[93] Ibid., 157-58.
[94] Hawkins, 9.
[95] Ibid., 16.

guidelines set by scholars, producers and distributors. The rift between Sconce's and

Hawkin's conceptualizations of paracinematic culture may in part be due to the fact that

Hawkins employs a different meaning of lowbrow cinema than does Sconce, as she

considers *Cahiers du cinéma* a paracinematic text that celebrates low art—meaning

Alfred Hitchcock films and other commercialized Hollywood cinema—while at the same

time identifying a bootleg black market paracinematic video culture.[96]

Beyond a difference in taste, or what is valued, Sconce suggests paracinephiles

distinguish themselves from cinephiles through their ironic reading strategy and manner

of spectacular engagement. Bourdieu describes popular culture as the subordinate class's

response to being excluded from the dominant class's institutionalized canon of high art

activities and *objets d'arts*. A major difference between these two taste cultures is the

way in which each group engages with their preferred objects and stars: lovers of popular

(and low art) culture tend toward a more affective, conspicuous, and often irreverent

response while those who appreciate high art embody a bourgeois aesthetic—reserved,

respectful and emotionally disinterested.[97] Thus, in turn, some paracinematic fans adopt

completely outlandish modes of consumption (eg. dressing in costume or singing along

with a film) in order to set themselves apart.[98] Yet by looking through the texts at

production values/methods and biographical information about directors and actors,

reading these works ironically and having a sophisticated knowledge of high as well as

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[96] Ibid., 20, 49.
[97] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 32-34.
[98] I have observed call and response and other types of interactive behavior at a variety of alternative exhibition sites (independent theaters, genre film festivals, warehouse/loft spaces, outdoor screenings), where the conventional rules of conduct for viewing are purposely rejected.

low art forms, paracinephiles turn low-brow cultural forms into inscrutable texts in much the same way aesthetes do with avant-garde works.[99]

The literature concerning paracinephiles hints at the type of cultural and power struggles that exist among fan groups, who often consider themselves to be other or are designated as such by academics. Scholars such as Joli Jenson and Matt Hills speak of levels of fandom or a continuum, from the more casual participant to the very involved.[100] Cultural theorists classify and create taxonomies, but fans, too, construct hierarchies among themselves, constantly seeking to make distinctions between themselves and other fan groups or the mainstream and positioning themselves as good/authentic, while other types of fans or mass consumers are bad/inauthentic. In his discussion of cult fandom, Mark Jancovich describes this effort as emerging "from a need to produce and protect a sense of rarity and exclusivity."[101] He refers to Thornton's assessment that "subcultural capital is defined against the supposed obscene accessibility of mass culture."[102]

Ethnographers who participate in the phenomena about which they write typify the community of scholar-fans about whom Jenson and Hills write, namely intellectuals within the academy who participate in fan culture. Hills speaks at length about the tense and precarious relationship between scholars and fans, "academia as a system of value" and the imagined subjectivity of its participants, while Jenson argues that historically fans have been pathologized or described consistently as being too emotionally involved with

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[99] Sconce, 388.
[100] Joli Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9-29; Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[101] Mark Jancovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions," *Cultural Studies* 16(2002): 309.
[102] Thornton, 121.

their objects of affection—borderline crazies who need to "get a life"—while intellectuals maintain a far more acceptable and detached distance from their objects of study, a bourgeois aesthetic.[103] As Jensen indicates, class and taste cultures are unavoidable factors when discussing fandom:

> The objects of an aficionado's desire are usually deemed high culture: Eliot (George or T.S.) not Elvis; paintings not posters; the *New York Review of Books* not the *National Enquirer.* Apparently, if the object of desire is popular with the lower or middle class, relatively inexpensive and widely available, it is fandom (or a harmless hobby); if it is popular with the wealthy and well educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise.[104]

This speaks to the link between knowledge and power and what type of knowledge is legitimated and by what systems. Jensen argues, as does Bourdieu, that certain cultural forms are considered more legitimate objects of study as determined by existing power regimes. Likewise, Williams points out, "privileged institutions… can be seen as indispensable instruments of production of the ideas and practices of an authoritative order, and have often to be seen as such even when, as an internal condition of their long-term authority, they include minority elements of dissent or opposition."[105]

Sconce's work also reveals a field of struggle between academia and fans. Noting that humanities graduate students, like paracinephiles, are stuck between high and low art, they, "as the most disempowered faction within the academy itself, both [fans and students] look to trash culture as a site of 'refuge and revenge.'"[106] Sconce points to the

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[103] Hills, 3.
[104] Jensen, 19.
[105] Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 225.
[106] Sconce, 379.

difficulty this presents to graduate students who simultaneously find themselves positioned as a fan within the realm of popular and/or trash culture, where they have accumulated cultural capital, and that of the legitimate class of academia into which they wish to integrate and eventually parley their cultural capital into economic capital.[107] He suggests those who engage in autodidactic study of paracinematic texts constitute what Bourdieu would consider a "counterculture." It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to articulate the difference between fan-scholars and scholar-fans as more graduate students delve into fan-related subjects pertaining to communities in which they have been participating for some time. Since the early naughts, the study of fan cultures and subcultures has, for the most part, become accepted within the university institution, and conferences exist specifically on popular culture texts and fandom that always include subcultural topics.[108] Consequently, the study of paracinematic texts can no longer be considered countercultural, which again exposes the notion of alternative as constantly in flux in relation to that which it opposes.

Conceptualizing Creativity in the Urban Context

The examples above demonstrate there exist political and economic elements to film scenes, whether overt or hidden. The political economy of subcultural film scenes, then, must be considered. On the micro-economic level, the economy of a scene may be determined by the site itself, especially if it is an already-established business (eg. the sale of food and drink), and sometimes by organizers (eg. admission and membership fees) or participants in the scene (eg. artist/filmmaker stipends or guest speaker fees). An

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[107] Ibid., 377-378.
[108] The Popular Culture Association of Canada held its 3rd annual conference in Niagara Falls in April 2013 where paper topics ranged from Slash Fangirls to "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo" (TLC 2012-present).

urban film scene is also affected on the macro level by external influences or threats, such as gentrification, cultural policies and ordinances. Ortner raises the complex issue of the intersection of art and economy when she describes Sundance as the encapsulation of "the tension between art and commerce that animates all creative work in capitalist society. But this tension is perhaps felt in unique and exquisitely self-conscious ways in an artistic world that thinks of itself as 'independent.'"[109] Newman identifies the same irony pointing out that the success of Sundance, as the most important festival for raising and maintaining the status of indie films as a cultural and artistic endeavor, was solidified by Hollywood's sanctioning of it as a place to pick up mini-major products. After their premieres at festivals, indie products find homes in contemporary art house theaters or "indieplexes," which Newman explains is the second-wave of art houses. In this way, not only is the notion of indie complicated, but the relationship between art and commerce solidified.

Urban cultural studies—inclusive of geography, sociology, anthropology and economics—represents an area of study where art and commerce have been identified as necessarily inextricable vectors, especially the theories concerning creative centers, a creative class/economy and cultural industries. This move to describe cities and economies as creative and to identify a new category of creative workers has been provoked most ardently by Richard Florida's controversial theory of the creative class in which he claims the ability to predict the economic potential of urban centers based on certain indices.[110] Individuals whose work function is to "create meaningful new forms"

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[109] Ortner, 2.
[110] One such index is the Bohemian index. Here, the notion of bohemia is employed as a way of measuring a city's cultural cache, or hipness, via its sustainability of a bohemian lifestyle. Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class,* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

constitute the rising sector of the population he calls the "creative class."[111] His

conceptualizations make a very direct connection between economic and cultural capital.

At the same time, some scholars have suggested that creativity has been sucked

out of the culture industries and creative worlds in an effort to standardize, individualize

and commercialize them to conform to a neoliberal structure.[112] One could conclude then

that an industry, practice or endeavor can either be creative or economically successful

but not both, as capitalist tendencies taint the artistic spirit. This follows the work of

cultural studies scholars, especially those associated with BCS, who have argued that all

alternative scenes and subcultures are eventually co-opted, usually through

commodification, by the dominant culture, in this case capitalist interests. Or

alternatively, artists who earn lots of money do so because they are sell-outs.

One conventional way in which a fluid urban art scene has been characterized is

as a "bohemia." Bohemia, the geographical region, has a long history dating back to the

second century BC; bohemia, as an abstract construct, has a far less precise provenance

initiated in Europe, elements of which were imported to North America.[113] Early

American bohemia, beginning in the 1850s at watering holes such as Charles Pfaff's beer

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[111] Ibid., 34. Creative-class members work in "science and engineering, research and development, and the technology-based industries, in the arts, music, culture, and aesthetic and design work, or in the knowledge-based professions of health care, finance, and law" (3).

[112] See Toby Miller, "From Creative to Cultural Industries: Not All Industries are Cultural, and No Industries are Creative," *Cultural Studies* 23.1 (2009): 88-99; Jamie Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29.4(2005): 740-770; Angela McRobbie, "Clubs to companies: notes on the decline of political culture in a speeded up creative world," *Cultural Studies* 16.4(2002): 516-31; McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, forthcoming).

[113] The terms "bohemia" and "bohemian" have been applied to various places and groups over the course of numerous decades. While bohemia, a place presumably where bohemians reside and/or socialize, is fluid and discursively defined, bohemian has a specific reference point: poor artists and those who rebelled against traditional lifestyles—first as marginalized Gypsy vagabonds in Eastern Europe, then as café habitués of 19th century Paris, which included curious and eccentric members of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Christine Stansell, *American Moderns*: *Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 16-18.

cellar in New York, were fashioned haphazardly after European prototypes. While the initial sites were frequented mostly by the middle and upper classes, toward the turn of the century a transformation took place that aligned the US cafes more closely with the poor men's clubs of Paris, "taking its cues from cheap fiction about an older, mid-nineteenth century Paris than from the actual bohemia (of Verlaine and Jarry) flourishing there or from the bohemias of Vienna, Barcelona, Berlin, and London at the time."[114] It is important to note here that from the beginning, "bohemia" was almost entirely discursive in nature, based on the imaginations of writers and artists. The curious and progressive educated middleclass men and women sought bohemian sites as liminal spaces of rebellion where they could question and even distance themselves from their traditional middle class and gendered fates. "Only in the milieus of marginality haunted by students and bohemians, by definition outside of full bourgeois respectability, did the classes mix."[115] Together, they galvanized around their mutual repudiation for the entrenched ideology and values of bourgeois culture. And these interactions, "mediated, naturally, by the consumption of food and drink," mostly transpired in neighborhood cafes.[116] Bourdieu has written about 19th century Parisian literary bohemia, naming the participants the "proletaroid intelligenstia."[117] For Bourdieu, these bohemians represented an educated class of creative individuals who rejected the economic structure of the dominant economy, instead opting to cultivate a field of production and cultural capital founded upon the arts. Observing the socio-economic ramifications of such a lifestyle, he

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[114] Ibid., 14.
[115] W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789–1914* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 158.
[116] Ibid., 3.
[117] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 55.

wrote that a "society of artists is not merely a laboratory where this singular art of living that is the style of an artist's life is being invented as a fundamental dimension of the enterprise of artistic creation. One of its major functions...is to be its own market."[118] Historian Christine Stansell argues, however, that the relationship between the two spheres of bohemia and the bourgeoisie is not as separate as one might believe:

> Bohemia's self-designated types always existed in symbiotic relation to bourgeois culture rather than in opposition to it. While bohemians signaled dissent from the profiteering of the cultural marketplace, they also provided their affiliates— beginning with Murger, who dined out on "bohemia" the rest of his life—the means to parley that dissent into careers.[119]

The ideas of bohemia and the bohemian survive today and have in fact been employed by urban, cultural studies and economic theorists alike to describe a variety of subcultural practices in urban centers. The criteria for inclusion in the categories have seemingly not changed much over the last two centuries, with the exception of specifically mid-twentieth-century phenomena such as suburbanization, as is evident in Geoff Stahl's description of Montreal's bohemian world:[120]

> It gains its social and semiotic shape by virtue of its disparate and diverse population: dissenting members of the middle-class, disgruntled intellectuals, disenchanted adolescents seeking to shuffle off a suburban malaise, the many disaffected students, drifters and 'starving' artists. Its spatial character is

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[118] Ibid., 58.
[119] Stansell, 18.
[120] Stahl has written extensively on the notion of Montreal as an "urban bohemia" and specifically on the anglo-music scene. See Geoff Stahl, "Tracing out an Anglo-bohemia: Musicmaking and myth in Montreal," *Public* 20/21 (2001): 99-121; and "Mile-End Hipsters and the Unmasking of Montreal's Proletaroid Intelligentsia; or How a Bohemia Becomes Boho," http://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/wpcontent/uploads/2010/04/adamartgallery_ vuwsalecture_geoffstahl.pdf.

confirmed by the sites these groups share, gathering in informal settings which

allow and encourage forms of individual and collective expression (i.e. cafés,

lofts, and abandoned warehouses).[121]

It is no coincidence that these are the very same spaces where alternative film exhibition

occurs, as it is precisely marginalized groups of artists and programmers who engage in

microcinema practices, often as subcultural entrepreneurs—a concept to which I will

return shortly. The economic vitality of the city plays a key role in the establishment of

bohemian culture and therefore in the potentiality of microcinema. "Bohemia" requires

observable class differences, depressed urban neighborhoods and a significant number of

the disenfranchised and the establishments they frequent. Accordingly, Russell Jacoby

notes "fragile urban habitats of busy streets, cheap eateries, reasonable rents, and decent

environs foster bohemias."[122] Fragile because these are precisely the aspects of a

neighborhood that disappear when gentrification begins; they are replaced by high rent

condos and chichi boutiques to serve the new class of young creatives.[123] In an article

about the changing neighborhoods of the Plateau and Mile-End in Montreal, one reporter

captures the transient essence of bohemia and its direct relationship to gentrification:

> For years, Mile End was one of Montreal's best-kept secrets. A sleepy, multi-
>
> ethnic residential neighbourhood, it didn't even have a name in the 1970s and '80s,
>
> when artists, hippies and students were discovering "The Plateau." By the 1990s,
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> gentrification invaded the Victorian-era grid of streets stretching out from Carré

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[121] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 101.

[122] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic books, 1987), 28. Quoted in Stahl, "Tracing Out," 101.

[123] Urban sociologists like McRobbie use this term to describe a sector of the middleclass work population whose careers are in the creative domain and who contribute to the creative economy. I discuss this body of work below.

St. Louis, and bohemia was forced to move on, crossing Mont Royal Ave. and into the 40-square-block neighbourhood that a century ago was the village of St. Louis de Mile End.[124]

Delving more deeply into the bohemian aspect of cultural economy and gentrification, Richard Lloyd writes about neo- or postmodern bohemia and the artistic communities and careers that make up the creative urban environment. Focusing on one specific area of Chicago, Wicker Park, he argues that contemporary bohemian lifestyles and districts (spatial and social locations that work together to make up bohemia) are dependent and driven by the cultural marketplace of the city (i.e. the creative economy).[125] Ultimately, Lloyd proposes a hybrid state for the postmodern bohemia, one incorporating elements of traditional bohemia and the older mainstream, the participants of which have been named bourgeois bohemians, or Bobos by conservative pundit David Brooks.[126] Stahl has also suggested that the once bohemian members of Montreal's subcultural scenes, at least in the discursive imaginary, "have since settled into Mile-End as store-owners, running bars and cafes, have become parents, professionals, etc."[127] In other words, they have become part of the bourgeois business class, or creative class—that is a much different portrait than he described in the above quote; bohemians who once were at the center of the music scene have traded in their cultural capital for monetary capital in other fields and for more traditional ways of life.

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[124] Marianne Ackerman, "Here comes the neighbourhood," *The Gazette*, 17 November 2007, http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/story.html?id=7385f0ff-19ee-4b6e-9aeb-b47051c89721.

[125] Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

[126] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). Several scholars referenced so far—Florida, Brooks, Lloyd, Stahl—have identified and named this group in different ways. Some refer to them as the creative class and others middle class bohemians, but they are generally speaking about the same demographic, who seem to be the target audience for those cities that are refashioning themselves as creative centers.

[127] Geoff Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters."

Discursively, bohemias are understood to be liminal zones within the city, a place where some live and some merely pass through. When the bohemian sense of a scene dies in one city, or part of a city, it is reborn in another, thus it is transient and ephemeral.[128] Blum suggests each (alternative) scene begins as a charismatic space, with the promise of bohemia, but they each in turn are threatened by habituation and commodification: "In the city Bohemias are created…and then not merely (or only) transformed into opportunities for consumption ('commodified bohemians' in Derek Wynne's words), but often domesticated and made over into mainstream activities."[129] This identifies the problematic dialectic between mainstream and alternative, but it also raises the issue of urban renewal and gentrification, and the self-imposed pressures these bring to subcultural scenes (and to a creative city) to remain relevant and hip in an ever-changing and developing urban, cultural landscape.[130] Bohemians tend to perceive their lifestyle as oppositional as described by Stahl in the following passage:

> Cultural rebels, 'plucky diehards,' artists, and café habitués populate a shadow cultural economy, an economy that motivates a world established and cultivated through an underground ideology, one effectively articulated through aesthetic and social codes and embodied in the behaviours, attitudes and signifying practices which define a bohemian lifestyle. Formed through specific symbolic and material practices, all oriented in such a way that they privilege the virtues of cultural productivity and creative labour over economic or commercial success, Montréal's Anglo-bohemia can thus be defined by its members as a social space

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[128] Stansell, 16-18.

[129] Blum, 26.

[130] This move to describe cities as creative, as in the work of Blum and Stahl, is likely a response to Charles Landry's and/or Richard Florida's work on creative cities/centers.

with its own moral economy, a world relatively independent from what they perceive to be the 'mainstream' or dominant culture, one intimately linked with their understanding and experience of Montréal.[131]

But a bohemian "social space" is not wholly independent from the dominant or mainstream culture as Stansell, Thornton and Williams demonstrate. In fact, to describe the differently prioritized nature of this sphere Stahl invokes John Fiske's concept of the shadow cultural economy—a phenomenon that occurs between fans of popular culture (and I would include paracinephiles as well) and aficionados of highbrow culture.[132] It suggests that though fans operate in opposition to the dominant class, they share many of the same features and criteria of discrimination—such as authenticity and aesthetic qualities—that are used to create hierarchies of fandom much like those within official culture. Bohemians may value creativity over commercial success, but hierarchies are formed within that creative spectrum nonetheless. Those at the top are often the richest in cultural capital, which is gained through acquired knowledge about that which the group venerates. Likewise, (para)cinephiles form similar value structures within the film realm and are constantly negotiating the terms of their position in relation to these ideological distinctions. Naturally, key people arise in each sphere of cultural production as arbiters of taste; they guide and cultivate the taste of the audience or scene members and work to shape the canon of revered objects; they are producers in the indie film scene and programmers in microcinema. Bourdieu has named this role "cultural intermediary," a concept to which I will return in a later chapter.

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[131] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 101.
[132] John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 30.

Not only does the above quote by Stahl touch upon the symbiotic relationship of subcultures with the mainstream, but inherent in that dynamic is the question of authenticity as discussed by Thornton, as well as Bourdieu's heteronomous and autonomous principles of hierarchization.[133] These ideas embody the practice of classification and distinction in economic terms, of rejecting a group/texts considered to be disingenuous (or uncool, nondiscriminating, etc.) and too successful and defining one's own group/texts as 'not' that, not a sell out. Thornton explains that for club culture members, knowing what is legitimate is what makes one hip. The mainstream and the media are monolithic tropes from which young clubbers and ravers distance themselves. And Stahl points out that a form of "heroic anti-heroism" is esteemed within subcultural shadow economies. Such attitudes "help to articulate a sense of belonging for members of the scene, mapping out a highly charged social milieu marked as much by its inclusivity as by its exclusivity."[134] The anti-mass culture sentiment described by Thornton and Stahl, which admires innovative artists but denigrates "overrated media-sluts," is similar to the distinctions noted by Bourdieu in the art world.[135] Here, authenticity, in terms of the market, is a key factor in the two economies of the artistic field. The goal of the heteronomous hierarchy is success, judged quantitatively by money made and people reached; the blockbuster is a prime example within the film arena. Ortner describes the blockbuster strategy as: "looking for lowest-common-denominator films that will please the largest possible numbers of people and offend, if possible, no one… looking for formulas, 'franchises,' the idea that if something is a hit the first time, then the best thing

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[133] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 38-39.
[134] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 104.
[135] Thornton, 5.

is to do it again."[136] Alternatively, those supportive of the autonomous hierarchy view mass success as selling out and value a non-commercial and non-academic system of evaluation in which artists produce for other artists and where value is produced through taste. This distinction between the authentic and the mass produced is effectively a veiled judgment of good and bad deployed by members of subcultural scenes; put another way, the taste that defines a scene is greatly influenced by economic factors.

While there has undoubtedly been a shift away from service and manufacturing industries to creative professions in creative cities, the "creative" category is far too nebulous, which only serves to distort and undermine the bohemian quality of fringe, possibly resistant, populations. A neighborhood populated by highly paid video game designers, programmers, and venture capitalists, though trendy and hip, cannot continue to be considered a bohemia. That is to say some conceptualizations of bohemia have been conflated with the upwardly mobile young creatives, or hipsters, when in actuality the ideologies of these populations, while centered on taste, lifestyle and creativity, are in contradiction to one another.

Having researched the cultural industries in the UK from the production side for many years, Angela McRobbie observes there have been two waves of creative economy workers. The first wave beginning in the mid-90s she names subcultural entrepreneurs. This group of cultural producers evolved out of the DIY, post-punk era creating self-employment after years of unemployment due to a declining economy. These workers opened second-hand stores, started small record labels, promoted events, deejayed, designed small-scale fashion lines and created micromedia—zines, flyers, websites. Basically generating homegrown labor markets, they existed between the unrecognized

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[136] Ortner, 93.

informal and the more legitimate, but as of then unnamed, creative economies. McRobbie

finds these "micro-economies" were unsustainable due to a lack of access to capital and

municipal or federal resources and the high cost of middlemen. The DIY enterprises she

studied lasted about four to five years—the lifespan of a moderately successful

microcinema—in areas where rents were low, but it was impossible for them to become

"full-blown businesses" as they were not operating using a business model; they were

something else—"a portent of free-lance work." I would argue this trend happened in

Canada and the US in the late 80s/early 90s and coincided precisely with the

microcinema movement and that microcinema organizers would be considered

subcultural entrepreneurs within McRobbie's estimation. In fact, as I will demonstrate,

most microcinema organizers have encountered one or all of the pitfalls she lists above.

Despite the downsides to subcultural entrepreneurship, there exist rare success

stories. In an earlier study, I discuss the entrepreneurs', Tim and Karrie League's, lack of

a business model in the early years of the Alamo Drafthouse Theater in Austin.[137]

Interestingly, though, they have since fine-tuned their business plan and have franchised

their restaurant cinema concept so that Alamo Drafthouse cinemas exist coast to coast—

an incredulous feat in today's struggling film exhibition industry, let alone independent

exhibition. More importantly, the Leagues have inspired other subcultural entrepreneurs

to create similar independent businesses based on their business model.[138] By some

accounts, the Leagues' decision to commodify an originally subcultural phenomenon

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[137] Donna de Ville, "Cultivating the Cult Experience at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema," *Scope* 20 (June 2011).
[138] Nitehawk Cinema owner, Matthew Viragh, attended university in Austin and decided to open a similar cinema in Williamsburg after relocating. To do so, he successfully petitioned the city of New York to change a law that prohibited serving alcoholic beverages in movie theaters. The Alamo Drafthouse has since taken advantage of his hard-won battle and opened three locations in New York (Yonkers, Manhattan, Brooklyn).

would be considered selling out. At the same time, it demonstrates that "authentic breaks" or departures from the status quo can develop into more substantial influences on it. The success of the Alamo suggests that despite pervasive home movie viewing and more accessibility to media than ever before people still think of cinema as a social activity and continue to long for communal viewing opportunities.

McRobbie describes the second and more contemporary wave of the creative cultural economy by the collapsing of production and consumption, the two becoming barely distinguishable as cultural workers no longer have clear boundaries between their work and leisure lives. The second wave is represented by positions such as bloggers. Also self-created jobs, they require multi-tasking skills to compete in the "speeded up" cultural economy and long hours of socializing and self-promotion; McRobbie identifies this trend, now pervasive throughout the culture industries, as "network sociality," borrowing the term from Scott Lash.[139] The "precariat" has veiled itself within "a self-justifying discourse replete with an irony which inured the sector against the need to engage with questions such as self-exploitation, burnout, possibility of failure and the downside of capitalism and individualism."[140] Furthermore, McRobbie suggests that cool has become a "socially acceptable form of disdainful elitism" resulting in new forms of urban hierarchy with trendy hipsters, predominantly white males, occupying an elevated echelon. I must take a moment here to address the conceptual figure of the hipster.

Hipster has become a discursively ambivalent descriptor for a particular contemporary youth subculture. Increasingly more is written and discussed about the

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[139] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies: Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded up Creative Worlds," *Cultural Studies* 16.4 (July 2002): 516-531.

[140] The precariat is the population of youth with precarious work (i.e. no job security, benefits, etc.). Angela McRobbie, "Be Creative: Making a Living in the Urban Culture Industries," Keynote address, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, 8 February 2012.

hipster epithet academically, journalistically, and by the broader public online, including a plethora of hipster hate blogs.[141] In the early 2000s, the hipster was perceived to be a subculture defined by style first and lifestyle second. Interestingly, by the late naughts, hipster had become a pejorative term used for others, but no one would refer to themselves as a hipster. American Apparel skinny-leg jeans, 80s vintage clothing and accompanying markers of style, including accessories like thick-rimmed eyeglasses, almost solely identified this group. Some still see hipsters in this light; they may eschew Starbucks and big box stores, but otherwise they are apolitical.[142] As with many subcultures, the hipster look was commodified by companies like Urban Outfitters and sold back to mainstream middle class youth. McRobbie argues the hipsters themselves are part of the marketing ploy in that they work for big brands, packaging and selling 'authentic' knowledge, or subcultural capital, gained in the art school curriculum, but under the guise of being independent.[143] In his article, "Mile-End Hipsters," Stahl illustrates the "Hipster Fashion Cycle" beginning with "Outsider" moving through "Mainstream" and "Ironic" to "Conservative," and characterizes the hipster "in terms of the absorption of cultural capital."144

Other economists, journalists and cultural studies scholars have also begun to examine the socio-economic and political ramifications of the hipster population. On one

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[141] See, for example, Geoff Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters"; Angela McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy: Hipsters as the Flaneurs of Neoliberal Times," Invited lecture, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, 31 October 2013; Adam Davidson, "Don't Mock the Artisanal-Pickle Makers," *The New York Times*, 15 February 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/magazine/adam-davidson-craft-business.html?_r=1&; Zoë Pollock and Molly Finnegan, "The Hipster in the Age of Online Ridicule," *PBS NewsHour*, 15 June 2010, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2010/06/the-hipster-in-the-age-of-online-ridicule.html; and Diehipseter.com, blog, http://diehipster.wordpress.com/.

[142] Julia Plevin, "Who's a Hipster?," *Huffington Post*, 8 August 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/julia-plevin/whos-a-hipster_b_117383.html.

[143] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy."

[144] Geoff Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters," 5.

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side are those redeeming the term, who believe hipsters are creating new and interesting ways of surviving in a post-recession environment, through specialization and the rejection of high-volume, low-margin commodity business. This type of work is what economists like Erik Hurst call "happiness economics"[145] and McRobbie "passionate work," leading to an expansion of the middle class through creative labor.[146] These are the hipsters with "the facial hair of 19th-century weightlifters" (i.e. Rollie Fingers mustaches or bifurcated beards), looking back further than the 80s to preindustrial times, who "ride 'fixie' bikes with no brakes,… keep their own beehives and make their own beers." They are also the purveyors of all things artisanal, making everything from handcrafted, all-natural beef jerky to salt-rind pickles: "the entrepreneurs of an amazing resilient city economy."[147] Some of these businesses that started small have become multi-million dollar operations. It's not just food and beverage companies like Brooklyn Brewery achieving economic success, but also tech startups such as "Tumblr, Foursquare and Kickstarter," birthing the name "betaniks" for those hipsters who are the innovators and early adopters of new technologies.[148] In a *New York Times* article "Don't Mock the Artisanal-Pickle Makers," Adam Davidson writes, "It's tempting to look at craft businesses as simply a rejection of modern industrial capitalism. But the craft approach is actually something new — a happy refinement of the excesses of our industrial era plus a return to the vision laid out by capitalism's godfather, Adam Smith."[149] These are all fairly positive takes on the effects hipsters are having on new micro-economies. On the

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[145] Davidson.
[146] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy."
[147] James Panero, "Hail to the hipsters: Love them or hate them, they are essential to our economy," *New York Daily News*, 24 June 2012, http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/hail-hipsters-article-1.1100963#ixzz2nmwdkht1.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Davidson.

other side of the debate are those who portray a "caricature of the hipster as threat"…"as symptomatic of the changing face of the city." The hipster, as "urban folk devil," has become a scapegoat for scholars who see the subculture's detrimental role in the gentrification of cities, like Montreal, focused on "the power of culture as a driver of the new symbolic economies."[150] Seeing the positive and negative of the issue, McRobbie argues these cottage industries have made redundant leftist socialist concerns to protect against nepotism and corruption, making them fields exclusive to marginalized populations. Moreover, the collaboration between cultural entrepreneurs and venture capitalists heralds "a transition to a full blown neoliberalization of the creative sector" leading to depoliticized "zones of work."[151] However, the professionalization of creative work coexists with and informs work previously considered "day jobs," like shop clerks and baristas, resulting in the "upgrading of the service sector." The local boutique and café begin "to take on the qualities of the knowledge economy" with employees "acting as experts and guides on the products available for purchase."[152]

A typical trend within creative centers is that bohemian scenes arise in poor, working class or less desirable industrial areas, attracting interest from a wider population; this increases traffic flow to those parts of town, which in turn brings tourists and economic capital, causing them to become the more coveted (and more expensive) neighborhoods of the city, eventually driving out the very individuals who recognized the potential of the area. As a result, scholars have become accustomed to associating urban change and gentrification with the presence of young, cultural artistic kinds of people in

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[150] Geoff Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters," 5.
[151] McRobbie, "Be Creative."
[152] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy."

almost every city in the last fifteen to twenty years.[153] Economists like Florida have

capitalized on this pattern by selling it as a prescriptive approach to solve post-industrial

city economic dilemmas, and civic leaders from Montreal to Berlin have followed suit. In

contrast, urban geographer Jamie Peck has demonized young creatives as middle class

gentrifiers, unable to see them as anything but harmful and "complicit in the overarching

terms of urban development."[154] Moreover, Peck suggests that not only have individual

neighborhoods succumbed, but entire cities have subscribed to these new "hipsterisation

strategies of urban governance."[155] Blaming Florida and his Creativity Group for single-

handedly transforming "less-exotic" cities across the globe into "hipstervilles," Peck

derides city officials for creating the perfect platform for Florida's rhetoric by appearing,

along with "local creative entrepreneurs and arts activists," before an audience of "as

many people with purple hair as gray… invariably in appropriately bohemian

locations."[156] Positioned somewhere between these extremes, McRobbie recognizes that

Florida's accessible "can do"/"how to" plan, promising "visible results," for the

implementation of capitalizing on creativity is attractive to municipalities with

ungentrified areas, thus spawning art walks and historic tours of dodgy urban fringe

areas.[157] She expands the significance of creativity in the work domain to it being "the

mechanism for labor reform… by turning culture into an instrument of labor discipline"

and encouraging self-actualization.[158] As such, she does not buy into the discourse of

young creatives as dangerous vultures who exploit depressed neighborhoods.

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[153] McRobbie, "Be Creative."
[154] Ibid.
[155] Peck, 747.
[156] Ibid.
[157] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy" and "Be Creative."
[158] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy."

In light of this literature connecting urban art scenes to an urban utopian ideal, the elusive notion of bohemia is an instructive way to describe an ephemeral, and possibly imaginary, community—a lifestyle that certain individuals are trying to experience or gain access to (perhaps even "buy" into)—one that contributes to what Stahl describes as the "city-as-sign," and in turn, "the city-as-scene."[159] It also serves to describe the relationship between economic and cultural capital within and among scene members. The term has surfaced repeatedly in the work on subcultural phenomena and in the literature on the social life of cafés and coffeehouses. Like Blum, I see the connection of the promise of a bohemia to the creation and life of scenes. Furthermore, certain scenes may capitalize on the construct of bohemianism, investing heavily in the cache of this enigmatic concept.

To conclude this chapter, microcinema spaces are fertile ground for investigating multiple interests at the nexus of film and cultural studies: issues of taste and distinction as expressed through cinephilia and paracinephilia; the role of hipsters, subcultural entrepreneurs and cultural intermediaries; the political and creative economies and cultural policies of urban locales (conceptualized here through the concept of bohemia). Throughout this thesis, I will examine these issues in terms of key themes that arise in the discourse surrounding microcinema, such as gentrification, alternativeness and authenticity, that work to position the movement in contrast to perceived mainstream and Hollywood practices. As I move forward through my discussion of historical examples of nontheatrical exhibition that prepared the path for a microcinema movement, the ways in which microcinema practices have been taken up and understood since their early years in the mid-80s, the characteristics of a city that can sustain such alternative practices, and

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[159] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 101.

finally, the trials and tribulations of two subcultural entrepreneurs who attempted to create a microcinema venue in Montreal, I will return to these core concepts as the framework by which to understand the connection between alternative film exhibition/reception and subcultural scenes—a relationship born at the moment in film history when it became clear there existed a dominating force to oppose.

Chapter III: Historical Antecedents to Microcinema

Yes, Underground Films do exist, and as we who have been suppressed by the indifference of the bastards in the clouds are well aware, there have always been alternatives to the bubble-gum of the mind peddled by Hollywood and Europe for our consumption...[160]

        Nick Zedd, filmmaker

While the strategies of the art houses seem focused on bringing more people to their cinemas, the microcinema exhibitor has a different concern—the need for a subculture, for an alternative to the alternative.[161]

        Rebecca Alvin, microcinema organizer

Before theatrical exhibition became the most common form of public film exhibition,

there existed in both the United States and Canada a tradition of nontheatrical exhibition.

In fact, film exhibition prior to the rise of the dedicated spaces of permanent

nickelodeons in 1904 occurred at nontheatrical venues, and until the popularity of movie

palaces peaked in the 1920s film exhibition was largely experimental and DIY in nature.

Moving pictures were screened under tents at amusement parks and fairs, in open air at

airdomes and inside at opera houses, storefronts, churches and other community

buildings. Almost anywhere a makeshift screen could be erected, films were projected.

This was possible due to increasingly more transportable projection technology. Perhaps

the most influential format on nontheatrical exhibition from the 1920s forward was

16mm. Compared to the cumbersome apparatus that preceded it, 16mm projectors

allowed for more flexibility insofar as where film could be projected. Increased mobility,

then, made possible the practice of traveling film screenings that brought film to

nontheatrical destinations throughout the US and Canada, and beyond, during the

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[160] From his autobiography, *Bleed* (New York: Hanuman Books, 1992), 58.

[161] Rebecca M. Alvin, "A Night at the Movies: From Art House to 'Microcinema,'" *Cineaste* (Summer 2007): 7.

twentieth century. And via microcinema, the use of 16mm for DIY and traveling cinema continues today.

During the periods of movie palaces, movie theaters, art house and repertory theaters, cineplexes, multiplexes, megaplexes and IMAX theaters there have always been alternatives to theatrical exhibition whether at popular locales like drive-ins or underground spots like music clubs. However, the documentation of alternative practices and underground venues is at best sketchy. Indeed, these events are so ephemeral and off the radar of most scholars (and moviegoers) that providing an historical account is a challenge. Holes exist in this historiographic collection of exhibition practices that offered adventurous cinephiles alternative experiences, contexts, and content to what could be more easily accessed at Main Street, mainstream and megaplex facilities. This chapter works toward filling in some of these gaps as well as provides evidence of the importance of these persistently transient practices in nontheatrical history. As Barbara Klinger argues in her discussion of historiography and reception studies, "exhaustiveness, while impossible to achieve, is necessary as an ideal goal for historical research."[162] Moving toward this goal, I trace the social history of US and Canadian movie audiences and nontheatrical venues from the early days of cinema, and draw attention to these spaces and their programming as antecedents to today's microcinema movement. The rewards at stake in this pursuit are great, as the knowledge gained "becomes part of the social fabric" and a contributing factor in understanding the role of past practices in contemporary culture as well as their political implications.[163]

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[162] Barbara Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable; Recovering the Past in Reception Studies," *Screen* 38.2 (Summer 1997): 108.
[163] Ibid. 128.

In the interest of compiling a survey of nontheatrical exhibition as a way of connecting early exhibition to current practices and for providing an historical context for contemporary microcinema practices, I forgo in depth histories of the various exhibition modes for a more skeletal but extensive outline. Other scholars have already given or are now researching many of these specialized practices, such as itinerant traveling shows, vaudeville theaters and film festivals, viewing at museums, as well as in classrooms and the home. For more detailed discussions of these particular histories, one can turn to the work of this congeries of exhibition scholars: Liz Czach, Paul Moore and Peter Lester for Canadian itinerant, theatorium and military exhibition; Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson for North American home, industrial, classroom and museum viewing; Klinger for a range of nontheatrical viewing, including the home and refugee camps; Allison Griffiths for institutional viewing, specifically museums and prisons; Douglas Gomery and Eric Schaefer for itinerant US history; Gregory Waller and Kathryn Fuller for early 1900s rural and small-town consumption; and Bill Nichols, Julian Stringer, Thomas Elsaesser and Marijke de Valck for studies of film festivals. Additionally, anthologies have been assembled addressing some of the broader categories, such as trash, educational and nontheatrical films. *Learning with the Lights Off* and *Useful Cinema* are two such examples. I wish, here, to make a distinction between voluntary, leisure time reception and involuntary, often instructional and industrial, reception.[164] My research falls into the first category, while that of most scholars of "useful cinema" falls into the latter. As such, I devote more attention to recreational nontheatrical filmgoing.

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[164] Here industrial refers not to the film industry but to instructional films shown to company workers, for example at a car manufacturing plant.

Because the historiography of nontheatrical exhibition is vast and not the primary goal of this project, I will focus on those sites and practices that I see as the direct predecessors to the microcinema movement—phenomena that share some quality or mode of programming, venue ambiance and audience engagement found in the modern day microcinema. That is to say, important nontheatrical practices, such as military, home and institutional (prisons, museums, etc.) screenings, will be either cursorily mentioned or elided altogether. Additionally, I do not wish to get bogged down here in providing a chronological outline of exhibition practices, as the dates of first occurrences are debatable and frankly not crucial to understanding the connections between early nontheatrical exhibition practices and contemporary practices. That said, I have collated this information in a timeline format in Appendix E. When possible below, I provide both Canadian and US examples, though as Moore points out in his survey of early exhibition history in Toronto, Canada was often treated as an extension of the US market during this time (and still is today). In some cases, Canadian cities, like Toronto, reacted in direct response to regulation practices in New York and Chicago.[165] Moreover, much of the history of exhibition development unfolded simultaneously north and south of the border, despite there being far more written on US film history.

Pre-Nickelodeon Exhibition

Before the nickelodeon became the primary setting for film viewing in roughly 1905, moving pictures were seen primarily in one of two manners: in a Kinetoscope or peep show parlor or as part of a traveling program with other entertainment, typically live

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[165] Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Movie-going and the Regulation of Fun (Toronto 1906-1918)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 5.

theatrical and musical acts. Peep shows opened in urban centers at a variety of sites—

penny arcades, hotel lobbies and phonograph parlors. Viewers watched the short films,

which lasted about thirty seconds, on individual peep-hole machines each exhibiting one

loop of film.[166] Content included recordings of variety show performances, such as circus

acts and comics. Within a couple of years of the first Kinetoscope parlor, the Vitascope

projector made mass audience viewing possible, moving films to the screen and

introducing mobility to exhibition practice.[167]

Itinerant exhibitors traveled with their programs from cities to small towns.

During this period, slight differences existed between urban and small-town audiences.

For example, urban areas already had established theaters for vaudeville, opera and other

types of entertainment, so screenings often took place there, whereas in smaller towns

without theaters, exhibitors projected in a variety of spaces— tents, storefronts, town

halls and other community buildings.[168] Additionally, Fuller observes, the tastes of rural

and small-town audiences in regards to subject matter tended to be more conservative.[169]

The earliest screenings were mostly concerned with introducing the public to the

various technological inventions and so attempted to create an aura of awe and mystery

around the unveiling of the apparatus's capabilities, as described by Tom Gunning in

"The Cinema of Attraction(s)."[170] Because the projection apparatus was evolving rapidly

in the early years, there were several waves of exposition beginning with the Eidolscope

and Phantoscope in 1895 and then, in quick succession, the Vitascope, Cinématographe,

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[166] Charles Musser. "Introducing Cinema to the American Public: The Vitascope in the United States, 1896-7," *Moviegoing in America*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 13, 19.
[167] Gomery, 5, 7.
[168] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), preface.
[169] Ibid., 3-4.
[170] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectators and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986): 63-70.

Biograph and 35mm, four-perforation format. For a period, the various technologies coexisted in different venues. For example, the Biograph's large-format system was favored at premier locales, while 35mm projection was taken up by traveling showmen at the low to moderate end of the market before 16mm replaced it.[171] Portability was a key feature of the equipment, as permanent theaters with projection booths were still several years in the future. As the war over the apparatus played out in the vast terrain of North American exhibition locales, the other areas of competition became venues and content.

Films were incorporated into vaudeville shows, projected after operas, or between acts of plays. In order to play up the mysterious quality of cinema, as Simone Natale tells us, films were also exhibited in conjunction with supernatural spectacles led by hypnotists, magicians and spiritualists and shown alongside scientific inventions, such as X-ray machines.[172] In some instances, they shared the space with other forms of entertainment, like slot machines and phonographs. The venues were just as varied: vaudeville theaters, opera houses, dramatic theaters, state expositions, summer parks and resorts, fairs, electrical casinos, boardwalks, storefronts, town halls, hotels, churches, granges, school gymnasiums, YMCAs, funeral parlors, barrooms and livery stables. The variety of entertainment with which early cinema was associated aroused the curiosity of audiences of diverse backgrounds and sometimes bridged high-low cultural distinctions.[173]

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[171] Musser, 24-25.
[172] Ibid., 20; Simone Natale, "The Invisible Made Visible: X-Rays as Attraction and Visual Medium at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Media History* 17.4 (2011): 345-358; "The Spectacular Supernatural: Spiritualism, Entertainment, and the Invention of Cinema" PhD Diss. (Università degli Studi di Torino, 2010).
[173] Musser, 21.

Middleclass audiences and their approval were especially crucial during the period when exhibitors were building mass appeal for films. In more rural areas, endorsement from a church or local club was imperative to draw the "respectable" townsfolk to moving picture entertainment. Many exhibitors went out of their way to present their shows as clean, high-class entertainment.[174] It was at this early stage in film history that the bridging of low and high art began, with traveling exhibitors' desire to appeal to a broader audience thereby selling more tickets. They wished to continue to attract those who gathered for other sorts of traveling shows that were geared toward the lower classes, such as circuses and medicine shows, but they also wanted to bring in more educated and higher class customers, i.e. the bourgeoisie. Thus, the content of the films became more important, and also a site of struggle as preferences fluctuated from place to place.

The heterogeneity of early traveling film programs was based on organizers' assumptions that the audience's attention span was short—while portions of the programs were constant from town to town, some content was highly localized, in order to appeal to the small-town sensibility and to avoid alienating or infuriating residents with controversial or risqué subject matter.[175] Exhibitors also had to offer new programs continually, as novelty was deemed an important criterion for drawing crowds. This practice was not unique to travelling shows and was continued by nickelodeon operators who changed programs semi-weekly and even daily in some cases.[176]

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[174] Fuller, 14-15.
[175] Ibid., 12-13.
[176] Ibid., 23.

Nickelodeon Era

Nickelodeon theaters began to gain in popularity and increase in number between 1905 and 1910 in mid-sized towns and cities. They first appeared in working-class neighborhoods and quickly took hold as the first form of mass entertainment. Middleclass patrons, however, did not participate in the cultural phenomenon until several years later.[177] In less populated areas of the US, particularly the South and the West, there was a dearth of nickelodeons, so alternate film exhibition and other cultural entertainment forms persisted. Itinerant shows continued in these areas for longer than in other parts of the country, like the Northeast. Films were met with differing responses depending on the area. For the most part, though, 1910s audiences were ready to embrace moviegoing as a frequent leisure time activity. At least one report exists of friends gathering at the local five-cent theater for "movie parties," then retiring to the hostess's house for drinks and games.[178]

Before being widely accepted, nickelodeons provoked a moral panic among middleclass citizens and conservative groups. Gomery describes the nickelodeon as "a small and uncomfortable makeshift theater"—as one might describe a microcinema today—"usually a converted cigar store, pawnshop, or skating rink, made over to look like a vaudeville theater."[179] Patrons sat on wooden chairs or benches, ranging in number from fifty to three hundred, to view the nine-by-twelve-foot screen.[180] Their dark interiors made them good spots for romantic outings. And both women and children attended without escorts or supervision leading to rumors that nefarious activity took place inside.

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[177] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975), 4.
[178] Fuller, 26.
[179] Gomery, 18.
[180] Ibid., 19.

As such, the guardians of public morality considered them an insidious danger and targeted them as a cause for reform.[181] The often crowded and unventilated spaces also posed safety hazards. Perhaps in response to this, roofless, outdoor nickelodeons, or airdomes, became popular during the summer months. Airdomes were fairly easy and quick to construct, with temporary walls, folding chairs or benches, a piano and a white sheet were assembled in any number of locales: rooftops, empty lots, fairgrounds. These took place in many of the same sites where travelling showmen would exhibit. Some were more elaborate than others but all were subject to the weather and freeloaders, who would watch from nearby buildings or treetops.[182]

Interestingly, during the 1910s and 20s church shows provided the biggest competition to traveling and local small-town theaters in an attempt to bring parishioners back to church and to expand upon the narrow content offered by film producers. In fact, in 1913, an entrepreneur founded the Community Motion Picture Bureau (CMPB), which acted as "an independent film distributor for the nontheatrical exhibition market."[183] CMPB's packaged service provided preselected and pre-censored material for middleclass family audiences. This worked well for a while, as churched and church-sponsored events proved to be a big draw for small-town audiences looking for clean, respectable entertainment. But theater owners soon realized they could demand higher admission, as did the vaudeville theater owners, and redirected their sights to more affluent middleclass patrons.[184] Between that, the restructuring of film production and distribution by film studios in the 1920s, and a move toward vertical integration with

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[181] Sklar, 19.
[182] Fuller, 63-64.
[183] Fuller, 91.
[184] Gomery, 29-30.

heavy investment in movie theaters, alternative venues and distributors soon went out of

business. Concurrently, the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America declared that

nontheatrical exhibition was unfair competition and by 1925 had closed their

nontheatrical sales divisions.[185] Middleclass audiences also moved their support to movie

theaters and their big-city counterparts, movie palaces.

Alternatives to Movie Palaces

After movie palaces and Hollywood studios began to monopolize film exhibition in

North America few alternatives existed, notwithstanding the highly specialized traveling

shows that continued through the 1940s. A group of itinerant showmen took a different

approach to earlier "high class" programs and drew audiences by promising titillating

content one would not find at the picture palace. This was the era of the exploiteer. And

these screenings were not particularly respectable. It is important to look to this history to

understand one of the earliest examples of the marginalization of certain types or genres

of films—the very same genres favored by some microcinemas.[186] From this point on,

there continued to exist film and exhibition modes at the fringe of mainstream reception.

In Eric Schaefer's history of exploitation films, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*,

he identifies the lifespan of exploitation film as occurring from 1919 to 1959, at which

time they began to morph into sexploitation films. The birth of progressivism, the initial

impetus for exploitation films, and the subsequent increase in censorship leading to

Hollywood's adoption of the Production Code in 1930, worked together to banish these

films to the periphery of the industry and establish them as a distinct class of motion

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[185] Fuller, 94.
[186] The subject matter of exploitation films defines the subcategories of the genre, which are "sex hygiene, drug, nudist, vice, and burlesque films." Schaefer, 6.

picture. One exploitation producer comments on the subject matter of exploitation films as they existed from the 1920s through the 1950s: "The essence of exploitation was any subject that was forbidden: miscegenation, abortion, unwed motherhood, venereal disease… All those subjects were fair game for the exploiteer – as long as it was in bad taste!"[187] In the previous chapter, I suggested taste is influential in film exhibition and reception and the scenes that emerge around these practices. As Sconce observes, there is a hierarchy inherent within paracinephilia, and taste remains a crucial factor despite the text being "bad."[188] Several microcinemas I visited screen exploitation films, a type of trash film, capitalizing on their allure and their relative affordability to purchase or rent because of their low status in the film industry.

In the 1920s, as the US shifted its economic focus from production to consumption, anxieties about sex and modern social ills stemming from a growing urban industrialized population led to increased efforts to exert control over perceived vices. For this reason, exposé and education—"the hallmarks of progressivism"—became central to exploitation films.[189] However, the films did not reach a broad audience; the audience for exploitation films was typically the clientele of grindhouse theaters and seedier independent and Poverty Row theaters in the skid row sections of urban environments.[190] In other words, not mainstream America. The marginal position of these cinemas in the less desirable parts of a city could describe the situation of the New York Underground scene in the 1960s and 70s and of microcinemas in cities today. These sites

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[187] Ibid., 3.
[188] Chapter six will expand upon this issue.
[189] Ibid., 39.
[190] Grindhouse describes both a category of theater and the type of films shown there. The term is believed to be derived from the slang for a brothel, "grinding-house," as some of the earlier theaters were former burlesque venues. Kevin Esch, "'The lesser of the attractions': *Grindhouse* and theatrical nostalgia," *Jump Cut* 54 (fall 2012), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/EschGrindhouse/text.html.

often crop up on the edges or in the midst of downtrodden neighborhoods because that is

where large rental spaces are affordable. Additionally, the filmmakers and audience

members often live near or within these same low-rent or transitional districts.

Much like DIY alternative exhibition today, instances also existed when

makeshift screening environments were created for small towns without opera houses or

movie theaters—these were often outside, which created a carnival-like scene to which

the whole town was drawn. This scenario was more prevalent in the earlier years of

exploitation and when combined with the practice of roadshowing lent itself to the

exploitation of customers. This was not the custom of career-oriented producers like

Dave Friedman and Dan Sonney, but of fly-by-night exhibitors, who, after promising the

spectator unique and titillating content and not delivering, would leave a city under the

cloak of night. Thus, they managed to avoid local authorities and the repercussions of

negative word of mouth by irate customers, earning them the name exploiteer.[191]

Roadshowing, one of the main distribution mechanisms for exploitation films,

was rooted in earlier traveling entertainment industries, such as carnivals, medicine

shows, and vaudeville. Itinerant showmen adapted this practice and traveled around the

country bringing entertainment to the people by exhibiting films in areas without

permanent picture shows. Though nickelodeons and the eventual adoption of vertical

integration by the major studios put most traveling exhibitors out of work, roadshowing

continued to be used by major studios for prestige pictures and in a very different manner

by exploiteers for their low-budget films. The former type of roadshow often took place

at an elegant movie house or palace, required reserved seating, and was accompanied by

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[191] Ibid., 96-97. Not all exploiteers were underhanded, but as a group, the first generation of exploiteers
were called the "Forty Thieves" for their unorthodox approach to the business, which sometimes led to
crowds of dissatisfied customers (326).

a symphony and printed programs, while the latter screened adult-only titillating films in predominantly low-end theaters that were leased by exploiteers, a practice referred to as four-walling.[192] Today, some microcinemas have traveling components, while others offer solely "pop-up cinema" events.[193]

Producers and distributors of exploitation often packaged films with other sideshow activities and included complementary materials, in the form of newsreels, square-up reels, informational pamphlets, advertising, and lobby displays.[194] In 1932, Dwaine Esper acquired a human cadaver and toured "Elmer the Dope Fiend" with his drug film, *Narcotic*.[195] The exploiteers' wives, friends, and children often created the pamphlets and other materials offered for sale. This ad hoc and showman-like approach to the business of film exhibition led to the spectacular quality of exploitation screenings. Microcinema organizers use a similar approach to exhibition, building anticipation for the feature film through ancillary activities and prescreening trailers or shorts. In the following chapters, I provide specific examples of such activity found at microcinemas, like Trash Palace and Blue Sunshine, and demonstrate that a similar DIY approach informs contemporary, alternative exhibition.

Contrasting the carnivalesque, lower-class grindhouse theaters were the venues of the Little Cinema Movement (LCM) of the late-1920s, which also offered audiences a different experience than the popular picture palaces. As the name suggests, it seems to be one of the clearest antecedents to the contemporary microcinema. Initiated in 1926 by

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[192] Ibid., 101.
[193] The Aurora Picture Show in Houston, TX was one such pop-up cinema. I will provide more detail about this trend in microcinema in the next chapter.
[194] Schaefer, 101.
[195] Jack Stevenson, *Land of a Thousand Balconies*: *Discoveries and Confessions of a B-movie Archeologist* (Manchester: Headpress, 2003), 22.

Symon Gould as the Screen Guild at the Cameo Theater in New York and targeting upper

class and intellectual audiences, the LCM was a network of small theaters that embodied

the spirit of European cine clubs.[196] Screening strictly silent and foreign films, Gould

required members to subscribe for weeklong programs and later for seats on a weekly

basis. He eventually packaged, or curated, film programs for segmented audiences much

like the traveling and nickelodeon showmen of the previous era. Due to the less

accessible nature of the films shown, context was needed. As Anne Morey points out,

"the most important artists of the little cinema movement, America's first art cinema,

were in fact the exhibitors rather than the filmmakers," which was similar to the role

exhibitors played in the cinema of attractions and exploitation eras in introducing,

contextualizing and building anticipation for the films.[197] Though there exists several

types of microcinema governance—those operated by cinephiles and collectors, those

organized by filmmakers, and those run by collectives—a contextualization of the texts

screened is consistent across all microcinema formats. It is rare in the current

microcinema environment that the programmer, organizer, or filmmaker does not

introduce the film and offer the audience some background for what they are about to see.

The LCM was a direct response to and refusal of everything the movie palaces

represented: grandiose and ornate architecture, large middleclass audiences, censorship

and mainstream Hollywood fare. This was epitomized in the Film Guild Cinema,

commissioned by Symon Gould to be the "first purpose-built little cinema in New York"

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[196] Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 25.

[197] Anne Morey, "Early Art Cinema in the U.S.: Symon Gould and the Little Cinema Movement of the 1920s," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Movie-going*, ed. Robert Allen et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), 247.

and a temple to the art of film.[198] All the distractions of the palaces were stripped away to present the viewer with a pure and direct engagement with the moving image. The discourse of the day suggested a desire on the part of little cinema owners to "take back from the chain retailer not only the film narrative, but also the film theater itself."[199]

Though Gould's focus was on foreign film, particularly German productions, he did show American films considered to be either unusual or having artistic merit. In this sense, he created a space, and an audience, for the type of films that were later collected by museums such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). The highly specialized films promoted by the LCM effectively continued in a somewhat elitist fashion the taste distinctions that began between small-town, conservative audiences and urban filmgoers. After the LCM, this distinction between film as art and film as entertainment was carried on by institutions, such as university film departments and museums with film libraries, as well as by the next generation of cine clubs and film societies.

Programmers who joined the LCM movement recognized niche markets of underserved audiences, cinephiles and children among them, and actively created environments and provided content to suit their tastes. Though these audiences seem at wildly different extremes of the audience spectrum, programmers were quite successful at meeting the needs of both groups. Their efforts represented "a socially significant manifestation of public revolt against mainstream filmmaking."[200] It rejected Hollywood on both textual and institutional grounds by critiquing domestic products, as well as the modes of distribution and exhibition. Promoting informality and neighborliness, little cinemas were intimate spaces often with lounges where people could smoke and drink

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[198] Ibid., 241.
[199] Ibid., 244.
[200] Ibid., 236.

while engaging in passionate discussions about film.[201] New York was the epicenter of the movement, but within four years, little cinemas had spread to the west coast. However, their novelty and allure soon wore off as the market became oversaturated and the Great Depression affected leisure time consumption, but the ethos of the theaters was later taken up by art house cinemas of the post WWII era and eventually by the contemporary microcinema.

As 16mm projection changed consumers' habits in urban and suburban areas and allowed for more accessible viewing in nontheatrical venues like the home, it also made its way to rural areas and allowed nontheatrical exhibition to continue in niche markets, such as the farming community. Interestingly, as Wasson sites the end of "the utopian home-life of 16mm" by the introduction of 8mm in 1932, that is the precise year that Waller describes the release of a 16mm film library for agriculturalists.[202] In much the same way that affluent urban and suburban households were targeted for the new electrical gadgets, so too were farmhouses envisioned by the nontheatrical film industry as a new site for domestic 16mm projection. The push for domestic penetration into rural areas was preceded and later buttressed by the industrial practice of "free shows."

The portability of the equipment was as important to the efforts of these exhibitors as to the traveling showmen who preceded them. Sometimes a film program was consistent with only live performances adding a local flavor, other times films were specifically suited to the farmers of that region. Industrial film producers typically made films about farm life in general, in an effort to promote a sense of community among

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[201] Ibid., 243.
[202] Haidee Wasson, "The Reel of the Month Club: 16mm Projectors, Home Theaters and Film Libraries in the 1920s," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Cinema*, ed. Robert Allen et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), 226; Waller, 248.

diverse groups of farmers, or that addressed specific audiences and their needs (eg. cattle farmers, African-American farmers, drought conditions or insect infestations). This "strategy of addressing and serving multiple audiences" or "pragmatically targeted filmmaking" was indeed a departure from the Hollywood practice of the era, and, as Waller claims, a significant attribute of the 1930s nontheatrical film industry.[203] Again, these features of early nontheatrical cinema—the importance of portability and the notion of tailoring a program for a specific audience—have carried over into today's nontheatrical exhibition programming.[204] In addition to agriculturally focused shows, there existed during this time period a thriving circuit of workers' organizations that screened and distributed working class and Soviet revolutionary films. These not only reached farmers in the Midwest but also blue-collar workers in cities like Detroit and Flint.[205]

Yet another alternative to movie palaces was viewing in educational settings. Institutional screenings began in the 1930s at museums, schools, community clubs and libraries. Wasson, in discussing the impact of MoMA's Film Library on nontheatrical exhibition, observes that early alternative efforts were a conscious resistance to "Hollywood's imperial reach."

> Alternative models for film culture, predicated on the idea that film making and
>
> film viewing might be free from the imperatives of profit and consumerism,

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[203] Ibid., 248.

[204] This may be less important for microcinema than for the even more recent pop-up cinema.

[205] See endnote 12. Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 31.

participant in artistic, agitational, or minority formations, survived only on the
margins of film culture.[206]

MoMA collected mostly narrative film: art, silent, classic Hollywood, and international
films. They in turn shared their collection with universities, cinematheques and other
clubs with an educational mandate. MoMA and its Film Library, established in 1935,
were particularly influential in engendering an appreciation for the artistic and
educational merits of film. Though I should point out this is twenty years after Vachel
Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture*, almost ten years after the Fogg Museum's
short-lived film library and the University of Southern California's cinematograph
museum, and one year after Sawyer Falk's cinema appreciation course at Syracuse
University.

While seeking to foster discrimination in film viewing, they, at the same time,
showed everything from silent foreign to popular commercial films. In doing so, MoMA
sanctioned a particular canon of films, namely developing the notions of scholarly study
and a particular mode of watching. Their philosophy was that certain films "*should be
seen* requiring a form of distribution and exhibition of films outside of commercial movie
theaters."[207] Besides cementing film's status as an art form and an object-based practice
to be studied and appreciated, MoMA also sought to reconfigure the manner in which
people received films, which at that time was predominantly in huge commercial theaters
filled with boisterous audience members. With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation,

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[206] Haidee Wasson, "Hollywood Bypass: MoMA, the Rockefeller Foundation, and New Circuits of
Cinema," in *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy's Transformation of Culture, Communication
and the Humanities in the 20th Century*, ed. William Buxton (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 101.
[207] Haidee Wasson, "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing
Object," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University
Press, 2008), 122-23.

the museum arranged circulating programs and eventually established a rental system in the early 1940s to allow film societies, universities and other educational organizations to screen films themselves. The Foundation also contributed to the growing number of Canadian film societies.[208] Consequently, noncommercial film circuits grew steadily during this period and then exploded after WWII.

MoMA staff had clear expectations for how visitors should view films. Initial audiences at the museum acted as though they were watching films in a public theater— shouting, throwing objects, etc. This behavior was met with continual reprimands from the first curator Iris Barry who would threaten to end the program if the rowdy behavior continued.[209] She regularly monitored audience behavior in the early years of the screening program, persuading audiences to watch films seriously and drop habits formed at earlier exhibition venues and movie houses. Rockefeller officers likewise sought to refine viewing behavior and engender "discrimination" among viewers. It was thought that this "would provide a defense against the deleterious influences of so-called mass media and a corrective to the damaging effects of propaganda."[210] Here, we can see more progress toward the formation of the cinema taste hierarchy, where museum audiences occupy the top level and the mass public of mainstream theaters the bottom. The civilized decorum for museum film viewing carried over into the art house environment and was standardized eventually across most modes of film consumption. However, microcinemas differ in their approach to audience etiquette; some encourage counterpoint dialogue, some prohibit talking during the film, and others guide spectator behavior based on the event.

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[208] Ibid., 139.
[209] Ibid., 126-27.
[210] Wasson, "Hollywood Bypass," 108.

Another organization instrumental in supporting nontheatrical exhibition and

building audiences at a variety of community venues was the Film Council of America

(FCA). With its roots in the Office of War Information, an organization that formed as a

way to disseminate war-related programming during WWII, the FCA continued to serve

citizens after the war by promoting "film as a catalyst to community action and

instruction."[211] It, along with the Ford Foundation's Fund for Adult Education that

experimented with discussion-based learning, put education at the center of its mission

using film as the tool. These two organizations developed important models for how to

engage people through mass media, and in conjunction with the Rockefeller Foundation

opened up the possibilities of educating with film. Using the medium of 16mm, these

philanthropic entities, Acland notes, worked toward normalizing "the place and

operations of nontheatrical film on a mass basis" by coordinating exhibition and

distribution in the post-WWII era.[212] The practice of post-film discussions would later be

taken up by microcinema programmers as a means to offer viewers more meaningful and

communal experiences.

As MoMA and the FCA established distribution circuits for film in the US, a

network of film societies began to form in Canada, the first being the National Film

Society of Canada in 1935. Led by enthusiastic individuals tenacious in their search for

films to show, societies popped up in cities across the country—Edmonton, Vancouver,

Toronto. With a membership of two thousand, the Vancouver Film Society was one of

the more popular groups. Though their activities ceased during the war, film societies

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[211] Charles Acland, "Screen Technology, Mobilization, and Adult Education in the 1950s," in *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy's Transformation of Culture, Communication and the Humanities in the 20th Century*, ed. William Buxton (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 265.
[212] Ibid., 262.

continued to flourish in Canada after the war ended.[213] Society members seem to have

been most interested in "good documentary and serious modern films," as well as a

"strong and consistent interest in the silent film," while the most rabid enthusiasts were

enjoying more highly specialized programs.[214] According to a contributor to *Film Culture*

at the time: "It appears that the large generalized film society can only be successful for a

limited amount of time in the typical Canadian community; seeing better films develops

the discernment of the audience to such an extent that they demand more and more

specialized films."[215] Not only does this underscore the transience of alternative

practices, it also provides a sense of the role film societies played in both the

entertainment and educational development of society members. It, furthermore,

describes the grooming of a particular cinematic taste by offering special content to more

passionate individuals, not unlike microcinema. A similar occurrence was taking place in

US film societies, as we will now see.

Post-WWII Cinema

Two examples of the post-war escalation in noncommercial venues in the US are Amos

Vogel's Cinema 16 in New York City (1947-1963) and Frank Stauffacher's Art in

Cinema in the San Francisco Bay area (1946-1954), both based on the European model of

cine clubs and film societies of the 1920s and 30s. Emerging almost simultaneously in

the mid- to late 1940s and performing similar roles on opposites sides of the country,

these projects were two of the leading alternative film programs in the US and were

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[213] General interest film groups, however, did continue during this period, and the National Film Society of Canada was instrumental in providing the films. Germain Clinton, "Film Societies," *Film Culture* 1.2 (Mar-Apr 1955): 49.
[214] Ibid., 50.
[215] Ibid.

instrumental in cultivating an audience for alternative cinema and offering viable

exhibition modes and viewing experiences. Scott MacDonald has compiled two of the

most comprehensive texts on these parallel projects.[216]

For Art in Cinema, based at the San Francisco Museum of Art, Stauffacher

programmed from ten to thirteen events a year. He had perceived an unmet interest

among film enthusiasts for something other than the commercial fare at popular movie

houses—a desire for an alternative. Attracting audiences of five hundred to his

screenings, he demonstrated an appetite existed for experimental film. He was

"committed not only to a thoroughly professional presentation of events to an audience

with a serious interest in the arts, but to the ongoing education of this audience and to the

development of the potential of what he tended to call 'experimental' film."[217] To this

end, he typically programmed a classic silent feature along with avant-garde shorts,

animations and/or documentaries. In an announcement for the first film series,

Stauffacher and then partner Robert Foster, outlined their programming philosophy,

which included stimulating "interest in the film as a creative art medium in itself,

requiring more of an effort of participation on the part of the audience than the

Hollywood fantasies, before which an audience sits passively and uncreatively."[218] They

also sought to provide a distribution channel for contemporary filmmakers. The first two

goals were further articulated in Art in Cinema's catalogue for the first event titled *Art in*

Cinema: A Symposium on the Avantgarde Film, considered the first attempt in the US to

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[216] Scott MacDonald, ed., *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) and *Cinema 16*.
[217] MacDonald, *Art in Cinema*, 2.
[218] Ibid.

"assess the history of alternative cinema."[219] That Stauffacher was interested in "developing a sophisticated audience" was evident in both the selections he chose, which often pushed viewers to their limits, and in the manner in which he provoked them to approach film viewing more critically. An example of this is when he screened independent, experimental shorts in the first half of the program and then asked the audience to consider the Hollywood film in the second part through the lens of the avant-garde techniques seen earlier.[220] Not only did he challenge the audience as viewers, he also asked for their feedback via questionnaires. Though this did not identify who the audience was, as Vogel's questionnaires did, he was able to learn about their impressions of the films screened. Others involved in the scene, like Stauffacher's wife Barbara, did record fairly descriptive accounts of audience members:

> Berkeley professors with tweed jackets and frumpy wives…Architects and their dates, high styled with expensive haircuts, dressed in black-and-white, or grey, or black-and-grey…Young lawyers arrived in three-piece suits with ladies in pearls and little black dresses. The Woman's Board of the Museum, socialites, and rich blondes devoted to the arts, and Frank, wore cashmere sweaters, Pre-Columbian jewelry, and pageboys, and walked as if they owned the place and their gay escorts. Pretty young women, recently graduated from Art Appreciation 101…Artists on the GI Bill…jazz musicians, and poets arrived late, wore black turtlenecks and Levis, and slinked into the remaining seats or slumped against walls.[221]

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[219] Ibid., 3.
[220] Ibid., 6.
[221] Excerpted from Barbara Stauffacher's autobiography draft, qtd. in MacDonald, *Art in Cinema*, 7.

This portrayal provides a sense of the range of characters that attended Art in Cinema screenings, and notably the diversity of classes from the poorer students and emerging artists to the well-heeled professionals and art world elites. One would find similar demographics at a modern day cinematheque or museum screening, but probably not at a microcinema or underground film event. The latter tend to draw the middleclass, and appeal less to wealthy patrons of the arts.

Meanwhile, Cinema 16's questionnaires collected more specific demographic information, such as age, profession and level of education, as well as feedback about the film programs. Vogel allegedly used these responses to organize occasional programs of members' favorites. The fact that Cinema 16 required a membership fee, which started at $10 a year and gradually escalated to $16.50, excluded a segment of the population who could not afford to pay, even though the price per screening was less than the quarter it cost to attend the commercial movie theater.[222] Members had to relinquish control over what they were going to see, submitting to the vision of Vogel and his colleagues. Apparently this was not a deterrent as Cinema 16 had one of the largest film society memberships in American history—seven thousand members at its height. Screenings took place at a sixteen-hundred-seat auditorium twice nightly with special monthly screenings at smaller five-hundred-seat theaters.

While the size and venues of these events do not compare to those of the contemporary microcinema, the programming content and philosophy do. Seeing the role of cinema as more educational than entertaining, Vogel presented the audience with a variety of film forms, chosen to critique conventional cinema and to challenge expectations surrounding commercial exhibition "but also to invigorate the potential of

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[222] MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 13.

citizenship in a democracy and to cultivate a sense of global responsibility."[223] The latter and perhaps loftier goal was accomplished, I imagine, through the screening of documentaries that confronted the social issues of the day. In short, he offered audiences content unavailable for viewing in any other venue. Though documentaries (along with scientific and educational films) were Vogel's main interest, Cinema 16 was better known for its controversial and "forbidden" avant-garde content, which sometimes shocked even its most passionate fans. The evasion of censorship laws was the original impetus for it becoming a members-only organization. There was a certain rebellion enacted through the program content, giving Cinema 16 "an aura of a circus sideshow," which sustained members' interest.[224] Even though Vogel did not view his project as marginal and expressed an interest in reaching as broad an audience as possible, he absolutely aimed to demonstrate "an alternative to industry-made cinema" existed and that Cinema 16 provided that alternative.[225] As one attendee, and well-known Frankfurt School theorist, Siegfried Kracauer described: "Through your activities many young people who confused films with Hollywood films and perhaps were fed up with them, have for the first time realized the inherent potentialities of the medium."[226] And in Vogel's Statement of Purpose for Cinema 16, he explicitly railed against the "empty tinsel of Hollywood."[227]

Like Stauffacher, Vogel invited members "to test the limits of their taste and their understanding" in a public but communal forum.[228] Sometimes this meant they were

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[223] Ibid., 1.
[224] MacDonald, *Art in Cinema*, 7.
[225] MacDonald, *Cinema 16,* 9.
[226] Excerpted from a letter to Vogel from Kracauer, qtd. in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 24.
[227] Ibid., 52.
[228] Ibid., 14.

titillated, bored or even offended, but they almost always returned for more. Screenings were reported to be lively affairs where vociferous audience members felt free to vocalize their pleasure and disapproval during the screening, recalling the boisterous climate at grindhouse theaters and exploitation screenings. One filmmaker remembers the Cinema 16 audience as volatile, booing, cheering and sometimes walking out of the film altogether. This was a markedly different demeanor than might have been found at the MoMA, or even the commercial movie theaters where a polite etiquette and bourgeois aesthetic were then being cultivated. During its time, Cinema 16 was the center of the New York alternative film scene. They collaborated with nearby schools, offering screenings at the New School and New York University. And not only did they become a model for film societies that followed, they also provided the films. Because avant-garde films were so difficult to obtain, they became a distributor for emerging experimental filmmakers. Many of the filmmakers who went on to form the New American Cinema Group and later the Film-makers' Cooperative, as well as the Beats, cut their teeth at Cinema 16.[229] Cinema 16's reign lasted until 1963; at which time, it was no longer financially viable.

The waning popularity of film societies in the 1960s coincided with a new exhibition practice that took place in a variety of public and private spaces, from music club basements to studio/domestic lofts. Filmmakers and cinephiles alike, who were greatly influenced by what they had seen at Vogel's and Stauffacher's screenings, gathered in makeshift exhibition environments to spark active underground scenes in

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[229] Jonas Mekas, a regular at Cinema 16, was instrumental in forming both of these organizations; and though their philosophies were aligned with Vogel's—anti-Hollywood, anti-commercial, pro-avant-garde—the groups excluded him and went in their own directions, causing a rift between these two men (Ibid., 52).

several cities, most importantly in New York and San Francisco (where the two film societies were located). These activities eventually led to movements, like No Wave Cinema and the Cinema of Transgression.[230] Though the notion of DIY was yet to be fully established as a concept, the modes of production, distribution and exhibition of the experimental and underground films from the 60s forward embodied the fiercely independent, rebellious, low-budget and creative nature associated with the DIY ethos.

One of the more infamous underground scenes of this era was at Warhol's factory in Manhattan. His events brought together art, music, performance and underground film practitioners and scenesters in large industrial loft spaces; the first factory was infamously decorated floor to ceiling with silver. These happenings have been referred to as expanded cinema because they were often multi-media affairs—films were projected alongside of or as backdrops to musical and other performances. Expanded cinema was a concept embraced by impoverished filmmakers who experimented with "the contexts of viewing the film" and the presentation style (multiple screen projections), often challenging the "traditional cinematic audience/film relationship."[231]

Of the era's alternative film scenes, for which there is some documentation, the New York Underground, emerging alongside the punk and No Wave music scenes, was quite possibly the most explicit in its rejection of everything commercial and extended their disdain to the "established avant-garde," as embodied by Cinema 16.[232] Their

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[230] Its members also referred to the Cinema of Transgression as "Invisible Cinema" due to its lack of visibility at local venues and "Other Cinema" to highlight its "outsider-ness." Jack Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Cinema of Transgression* (London: Creation Books, 1995), 27.
[231] Ibid., 28-29.
[232] The Cinema of Transgression clearly articulated its aesthetic of resistance in the publication *The Underground Film Bulletin*. Sargeant, 7.

position toward Hollywood and the status quo, also articulated in Nick Zedd's epigraph above, is evident in their combative language and subversive message:

> [We] must never forget we're at war with everything Hollywood and the established avant-garde stands for and it must now be obvious the latter will never forgive us for being a success outside the realm of their limited structures. Fuck them. As filmmakers, we should be commended for not giving up in the face of such total hatred from everyone in power.[233]

> There will be blood, shame, pain and ecstasy, the likes of which no one has yet imagined. None shall emerge unscathed.[234]

The transgressive filmmakers also took issue with the organized "alternative" and "accepted avant-garde" screening spaces because they generally would not show their work—artists such as Jack Smith, Richard Kern, Nick Zedd, Beth B, George and Mike Kuchar and even early John Waters—or the films would be shut down and/or confiscated by the police. Because only a few venues existed that would exhibit these types of films, they generally circulated as video copies, usually of degraded quality.

Not only did the filmmakers of this era transgress the formal qualities of mainstream films, often using shock and bad taste to push the boundaries of subject matter, but they also resisted exhibiting their work in traditional theaters, opting for "environments not marked as cinema spaces."[235] According to Jack Sargeant, films were often screened in rock clubs, like Max's Kansas City, leading to or resulting from the film scene being closely intertwined with the music scenes of the era, especially punk,

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[233] Zedd, 61.
[234] Orion Jeriko (a.k.a. Nick Zedd), "The Cinema of Transgression Manifesto," *The Underground Film Bulletin*, 1985. http://feastofhateandfear.com/archives/zedd.html. Quoted in Sargeant, 33.
[235] Sargeant, 35.

Death Rock and, later, noise rock bands like Sonic Youth. Less often, films were screened in galleries, art house cinemas and early versions of microcinemas, such as O.P. Screen and the New Cinema, a fifty-seat storefront space on St. Mark's Place that focused on Super-8.[236] Most of the nightclubs and cinema spaces that screened underground films were located in Manhattan's Lower East Side, where rents were dirt-cheap. As I will explain later in this thesis, the socio-economic variables of the city—the availability of low-cost spaces, the rate of gentrification and accessibility to other cultural phenomena—all contribute to the birth of subcultural scenes. And here, in the ideology of the New York Underground scene, which was a response to and influenced by all that had transpired before, we see the clear antecedent to the microcinema spaces of the 90s in their DIY approach, their marginal status in the cultural landscape of the urban environment and in their challenge to mainstream theatrical screening.

One of the earliest cited examples of a DIY cinema that emerged from the underground movement and from the dark, underground spaces of the city is Canyon Cinema. Initiated in 1961 by Bruce Baille, an experimental filmmaker, screenings began in his backyard in Canyon, California as a way of exhibiting local filmmakers. He projected films from his kitchen window onto an army surplus screen. Guests enjoyed free wine and popcorn as they watched mostly artist-made, avant-garde shorts. Eventually screenings "floated" to other sites in Berkeley and San Francisco making it the first known "floating cinematheque." Canyon Cinema later merged with Chick Strand's journal *Canyon CinemaNews* and a group of experimental filmmakers, including Bruce Connor, to become Canyon Cinema, Inc., a cooperative distribution company

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[236] Ibid., 14. Other important forums for these works were the underground film festivals that began to emerge internationally in cities such as Ann Arbor, Chicago, Sydney and Toronto. Ibid., endnote 37, 40.

supporting independent filmmakers. Finally, in 2012, Canyon Cinema, Inc. transferred its assets to The Canyon Cinema Foundation and dissolved in 2013.[237]

Microcinema as Post-Art House Alternative Venue

While underground film scenes have persisted through to today, they have been largely undocumented since the Cinema of Transgression. On the contrary, the more established and organized art house and independent cinemas, which have also provided an alternative to mainstream theaters in the last few decades, have garnered academic attention.[238] One of the questions asked by Barbara Wilinsky in her study of post-WWII art house cinema is: "Can an industry afford to remain alternative or does it feel the need to become part of the mainstream in order to maximize profits?"[239] This is a critical question for any practice that positions itself in opposition to the mainstream. We know what eventually became of the art house theater; if it didn't franchise, it didn't fare well in the multiplex boom.[240] Those that were not forced out of business have had to adapt, often turning toward nonprofit status and relying heavily on grants and donations or mixing their programming to include first-run mainstream features to offset losses from the smaller films. Following a different but still unsustainable course, Michael Z. Newman describes the evolution of indie film culture from its most visible time in the Sundance-Miramax era, having moved beyond a "minority practice" to a "viable system" that existed successfully alongside Hollywood, to its eventual incorporation by the

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[237] Canyon Cinema, website, http://canyoncinema.com/about/history/.
[238] See, for example, Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema (Commerce and Mass Culture)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
[239] Wilinsky, 3.
[240] The Landmark Theatres chain in the US is a notable example of the art house theater attempting to adapt by following the model of large, mainstream theater franchises. But some of the theaters that were bought by Landmark still had to close their doors.

studios. Despite their ultimate failure to be truly independent practices, Wilinsky and Newman argue that these film subcultures, and the paratexts and discourses they generated, successfully distinguished themselves from mainstream culture, through their taste and accumulated cultural capital, as more serious, artistic and legitimate. Microcinema continues this subcultural discourse of legitimacy but through mode of exhibition as well as textual form, and in more nuanced and creative ways that I will describe in the following chapter.

In *Sure Seaters*, Wilinsky investigates the early years of the art house exhibition business, focusing on the methods owners employed to create a dichotomy between their spaces and the popular movie theaters of the day by positioning themselves as the more uspcale alternative to the middlebrow mainstream. Their motto, as suggested by Gomery, was: "sell the art films to the rich and well educated and a sizable group of the middle class might follow."[241] They achieved this by creating a more luxurious ambiance through décor and concession offerings but mostly by offering customers eclectic programming, i.e. art and foreign films. These factors—ambiance and content—are also two key ways in which microcinemas differ from contemporary mainstream exhibition. And while the elitist aspirations of art house owners may be suggested in microcinema organizers' commitment to quality programming and in showing only celluloid, there remain important differences: the former were driven primarily by profit, or the exploitation of a niche market, and less so by the desire to create a space for underserved films and filmmakers; and microcinemas do not strive for the plush bourgeois environment of the art house. In fact, because of their alliance with DIY culture, they often offer a less comfortable, though arguably more interesting, setting.

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[241] Gomery, 185.

In her article "A Night at the Movies: From Art House to "Microcinema,"

Rebecca Alvin laments that one can no longer find true art houses because of the

crossover of art and indie films into the mainstream. She posits this has diminished the

quality and distinction of art film.[242] The eclectic offerings that once imbued the art house

cinema with a sophisticated aura no longer exist as the few that remain have eliminated

riskier programming in a struggle to stay open: "something has been lost from the art

house experience. The sense of adventure and discovery has been diluted as films of

broader appeal attract audiences less interested in the art of film and more interested in

the trendiness of art cinema."[243] Alvin cites several issues that have hobbled the industry:

"financial circumstances… continuing growth of home-entertainment systems… and the

intertwining of mainstream and art-house audiences."[244] In addition to Newman and

Ortner, I have discussed the first two factors in relation to the closing of independent and

repertory theaters,[245] and a number of scholars have addressed the various reasons,

including those above, for the waning of the art house phenomenon.[246] Alvin

demonstrates particular distress at the mixing of taste cultures, suggesting it to be the

"most troubling in hastening the disintegration of the art-house subculture."[247] That is to

say, one of the important features of the art house venue that distinguished it from the rest

and secured its position in the industry—the prestige and distinction of attracting a

cultured, highbrow audience—was eventually diluted by mainstream infiltration and

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[242] Rebecca M. Alvin, "A Night at the Movies: From Art House to "Microcinema," *Cineaste* (Summer 2007), 4.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid., 4-5.
[245] Donna de Ville, *The Alamo Drafthouse Cinema: Cultivating the Cult Experience*, MA Thesis (University of Texas, Austin, 2007), 38-86.
[246] For example, see Gomery's *Shared Pleasures* and Balio's *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens*.
[247] Alvin, 5.

acceptance.[248] As Sconce and Thornton, both informed by Bourdieu, have suggested, the elitism and hierarchy inherent in taste cultures adapts to what the subculture perceives as its oppositional entities. Furthermore, the cultural capital one amasses within a taste formation is only valuable if it is deemed rare and exclusive, but also recognizable. There is always a "fringe to the fringe;" once the former fringe is co-opted by the mainstream, a new one emerges.[249]

As expressed by Alvin in the chapter's epigraph, microcinema is currently one such fringe. She suggests microcinemas have taken up this role as the single screen art house gets gobbled up into multi-screened indieplexes (eg. IFC Center at the former Waverly Theater in Greenwich Village), boarded up and left to sit vacant or demolished completely.[250] She sees microcinema as occupying the hierarchical position left by the demise of art house cinema. This then raises the question of whether the microcinema can be considered the twenty-first century art house? Alvin describes three ways the emergence of microcinema has replaced art house cinema: it can provide riskier, underground programming due to an economic model that requires less capital; it has rearticulated the sense of community that distinguishes alternative exhibition from home viewing; and it has extended and ignited cinephilia within communities outside of urban centers.[251]

Microcinemas are, indeed, a response to the perception that there needs to exist alternatives to the mainstream, and to the sanctioned alternative. While they may employ

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[248] Wilinsky discusses the art house audience in detail in *Sure Seaters*, 93-94.
[249] Alvin, 6.
[250] The term indieplex describes a multiplex theater that specialize in art, foreign and indie film; Newman describes these theaters as the second-wave of art houses and cites the Angelika Theater in Manhattan as the quintessential example. Newman, 77.
[251] Ibid., 5.

strategies and/or formats of earlier alternative exhibition, as *The New York Times*

journalist Dennis Lim suggests, they are responding to contemporary needs and tastes:

> Throwbacks to the folding-chair cinematheques of yesteryear, many
>
> microcinemas—to use a term often applied to these intimate spaces—are also
>
> very much of this long-tail moment, content to stay small and specialized, and
>
> quick to respond to an artistic landscape that is changing with ever greater
>
> speed.[252]

Michael Johnson opened Orgone Cinema in Pittsburgh because he felt microcinemas "are

the best hope for a meaningful cultural exchange" and that cultural institutions were no

longer addressing the needs of or providing a forum for micro filmmaking.[253] Skizz

Cyzyk opened the Mansion Theater as a response to the lack of venues for small format

filmmakers, partially a result of the waning of institutional support for

experimental/avant-garde film,[254] and wanting to "show the films that nobody else was

showing."[255] This motivation for starting new spaces is echoed by founders throughout

the various accounts of microcinema beginnings. As MacDonald explains, the move

away from 16mm to digital projection by institutions has made microcinemas the last

place for this mode of exhibition where filmmakers working in small gauges can find a

support system for their work:

> Given the fact that so much of alternative cinema history has been produced in
>
> 16mm, specifically for 16mm exhibition, this abrogation of responsibility on the

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[252] Dennis Lim, "Choosing Cinematheque Over Cineplex" *The New York Times* 2 September 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/movies/microcinemas-pack-a-special-mission-in-a-small-space.html?_r=3&hpw.

[253] Quoted in Joseph Christopher Schaub, "Microcinemania: The Mansion Theater and Underground Movie-making in Baltimore, Maryland, USA," *Link* (Summer 1997): 109.

[254] Schaub attributes the cooling of institutional sites towards more experimental works to cutbacks in public funding, which in turn forced "institutional spaces to operate as commercial ventures," 113.

[255] Ibid., 111.

part of so many academics has the potential to do long-term damage to our sense

of film history. Fortunately, the current network of microcinemas, run and

attended by true lovers of alternative cinema, is helping to keep the full range of

film-historical achievement alive.[256]

Still others, like Keif Henley of Basement Films, have presented their motivation

as a direct reaction to the corporatization of the film industry and maintain that

microcinema brings "film back into the realm of folk art, rather than accepting it as a big

business venture."[257] Ed Halter, founder and director of Light Industry in Brooklyn, New

York, also discusses the fact that microcinemas tend to be "corollary and counterpoint

….to commercial systems."[258] Continuing from these premises, I argue the modi operandi

of microcinemas is altogether different than those of art houses or indieplexes, following

more in the tradition of underground cinema. Where art and indie films of the last half of

the twentieth century were commercially viable products, so much so that most

Hollywood studios created new subsidiary production companies, the mini-majors, to

exploit the market, microcinema programming is neither popular nor profitable. Therein

lies the most significant difference of the latter to its predecessors.

In distinguishing microcinema from not only art house cinema but also former

underground film practices, Craig Baldwin of Other Cinema (San Francisco, California)

claims "It's really more a platform to represent the huge explosion in personal cinema,

do-it-yourself cinema, low-budget cinema, low-tech cinema. I don't want to call it a

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[256] Scott MacDonald, "The American Microcinema Movement in Historical Context," in *A Microcinema Primer: A History of Experimental Film Exhibition in the United States,* ed. Andrea Grover and Ed Halter (Houston: Aurora Picture Show, 2010), 27.
[257] Quoted in Schaub, 109.
[258] Ed Halter, "Head Space: Notes on the Recent History of a Self-Sustained Exhibition Scene for American Experimental Cinema," in *A Microcinema Primer,* 5.

revolution, but a renaissance, certainly."[259] For Baldwin, it is clearly the content and

economic structure that defines microcinema. He elaborates the distinction between

spaces like Other Cinema and more institutional venues like San Francisco Cinematheque

by explaining that as underground cinema became more academic, it left room for a new

model, and thus, the microcinema movement coalesced. This new mode of exhibition is,

according to him:

> more electronic folk culture… more neighborhood, more street, more
>
> underground, more contemporary, more a community kind of thing and not so
>
> much just the avant-garde sort of thing… with international stars and funding
>
> from above, and writing grants in order to survive.[260]

Despite references to older movements, it seems Baldwin is trying to position

microcinema as a new form. Baldwin's own status as an innovator in found footage film,

earning him celebrity status within that scene, may have made possible the distinction

between microcinema and other modes of alternative exhibition, effectively creating a

new taste formation as Baille and Strand had done for the experimental filmmakers of the

60s and 70s. While not contradicting Baldwin's view, Halter suggests the microcinema is

an outgrowth of or response to a certain mode of avant-garde art filmmaking. He

proposes it as a category of space "distinctly suited" to Gunning's "minor cinema,"[261] a

cinema arising in the 80s out of the revolutionary avant-garde of the 60s and 70s that

embracing outdated technology like Super 8, and by working within the confines of a

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[259] Quoted in Alvin, 6.
[260] Alvin, 6.
[261] Tom Gunning, "Towards a Minor Cinema: Fonoroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Lapore, Klahr and Solomon," *Motion Picture* 3.1-2 (Winter 1989-90): 2-5.

small budget. As Halter puts it, "The growth of a minor cinema begat the microcinema."[262]

Joseph Christopher Schaub proposes microcinemas came about as a result of both producers/organizers and consumers yearning for a more direct connection. Stating that organizers were not satisfied with a unilateral flow and implying viewers likewise want to be more than passive recipients of media, "Microcinema restores dialogue, giving voice to the audience as well as to the artist."[263] He quotes the mission of Basement films as hoping "the venue will not only screen films but will become a vehicle for interaction between film viewers, artists of varying media and filmmakers."[264] Kier-la Janisse explains Blue Sunshine purposefully did not offer filmmakers and guest speakers a green room, or private space, so that they had to mingle with attendees. In this way, the space and relationships therein become more democratic than the formal spaces of the museum or university auditoria.

Conclusion

As is evident from the literature on nontheatrical exhibition history, it is difficult to identify when one practice replaces or mutates into another, where one ends and another begins. There exists a long history of alternative spaces for film viewing that extends back as far as early film history. In fact, as I explained earlier in this chapter, film exhibition as a whole began as a makeshift, do-it-yourself, alternative practice. That said, once commercial theatrical screenings dominated exhibition practice in the 1920s, there were clear departures from it, and practices developed in reaction against it. Some

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[262] Halter, 5.
[263] Schaub,108.
[264] Ibid., 109.

nontheatrical scholars have pointed out the potential problems with constructing this area of study in opposition to the theatrical, establishing a binary of mainstream verses alternative, theatrical verses nontheatrical. At the same time, Waller asserts the people who established and maintained the nontheatrical film business worked hard to create this oppositional identity from the beginning—in promotional and educational materials about nontheatrical film—and Wasson has indicated manufacturers of home theater equipment used similar discourse, claiming what they were selling was not the Hollywood, movie palace experience. Reducing the industry to these binaries is indeed simplistic; however, a linguistic framework is needed for discussing the types of cinema that cropped up as options to the popular consumption of film through the decades. And as I have demonstrated, the artists, organizers and business people involved purposely adopted a language of resistance when promoting their mission, which served to challenge the mainstream mode of film viewing and its content. The trick for us as cultural historians is to discuss the alternatives as vital areas in and of themselves, minimizing the reductive nature of the discourse, without ignoring the material evidence or discounting altogether the relationship of one to the other and their respective and intertwined histories. Though no one can say with certainty, it is likely the nontheatrical alternatives would not have developed with the purposefulness and variety as they have without having had the mainstream and Hollywood against which to position themselves.

Chapter IV: What is Microcinema?

Conceived and operated with a creative spirit—and provisional economics—that parallels that of the artists they showcase, this loose congeries of exhibitors emerged as a corollary and counterpoint not only to commercial systems, but also the established set of nonprofit institutions that traditionally supported experimental works.[265]

Ed Halter

In the thirty years since the high point of New American Cinema, underground filmmakers have been slipping further and further from the forefront of cultural production; the microcinema movement in venues like the Mansion Theater represents an attempt to make the "best in contemporary cinema" visible again.[266]

Joseph Christopher Schaub

Generally speaking, microcinemas blossomed in the 1990s as a result of many art house theaters closing, museums' and other arts institutions' waning support of underground films and (local) experimental filmmakers due to "cutbacks in public funding," the availability of cheap rent in response to economic depression in some urban areas, and increased access to older film technologies, projectors and films, as people and institutions made way for video, then digital technologies.[267] These factors, which more or less came about concurrently in the mid- to late-eighties, created an atmosphere in the alternative film exhibition landscape that was well suited for small-scale DIY venues, a movement that peaked in the nineties. To understand the concept and meaning of microcinema I posed the following questions: So what exactly is microcinema? How does it differ from other modes of alternative exhibition? And to what was the microcinema movement responding?

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[265] Halter, 5. Halter speaks of these practices in the past tense because he is referring to the height of the movement in the nineties, but many of the traits and motivations are still present in today's iteration of the microcinema.

[266] Schaub, 118.

[267] Schaub notes the economic environment of the 80s forced "institutional spaces to operate as commercial ventures." Ibid., 111, 113.

Academic texts on microcinema are non-existent, aside from the work of Andrea

Grover, founder of Aurora Picture Show in Houston, Texas, and Ed Halter, which could

be the first book on the subject.[268] As an initial attempt to concretize the history and

concept of microcinema, this manuscript has proved valuable, though it is focused only

on sites in the US. Otherwise, the texts that exist are the websites of some former and

current cinemas/series, as well as newspaper articles that either discuss the microcinema

movement or focus on a specific US venue. I have mined these sources for historical

information as well as the discourse about the particular site, sometimes offered in

mission statements, other times in nostalgic farewells.[269] Beyond the scant literature on

the topic, I have gained a deep and nuanced understanding of microcinema through

numerous site visits and interviews, in addition to volunteering at Blue Sunshine for the

last two months of its operation. My research has revealed seven fundamental factors that

work in conjunction with one another to constitute the practice of microcinema

exhibition: DIY approach, modest venue size, shoestring budget, passionate

organizers/programmers, community-oriented mission, shared cinephilia and rare

content. However, one thing to keep in mind throughout this discussion of microcinema

is that a sense of alternativeness informs all of the defining features. For the members and

key agents working in microcinema organizations, a sense of the alternative is

foundational. In the stories told and experiences remembered, microcinema represents to

those involved an alternative to mainstream exhibition practices, and to a lesser degree

institutional and quasi-alternative exhibition practices.

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[268] I have had the opportunity to read the pre-publication draft of *A Microcinema Primer* with the generous
permission of Andrea Grover and the cooperation of Aurora Picture Show.
[269] Appendix F provides a timeline of the spaces discussed in this chapter.

What Constitutes a Microcinema

"Microcinema" has been used to describe both a mode of alternative film exhibition or venue and, less commonly, the type of art film that might be screened at an alternative venue. Since Total Mobile Home microCINEMA (TMH) founders Rebecca Barten and David Sherman coined the term in 1993, it has "come to be a catchall phrase for both 'independent' and quasi-independent practices;" in other words, it has broader connotations than their initial conception of the term.[270] Applied to film, the term references those that are hand-made, small-gauge, experimental, generally short in length, low budget and almost always local. Even used in this sense, the type of exhibition venue is presumed to be an alternative site, as the films referenced would not be shown at a commercial theater and are rarely shown at museums or galleries. For this reason, the content and venue are inextricably linked. However, microcinema describes more than a type of avant-garde film or a local small-scale venue that only shows such content. My research has revealed microcinema spaces specializing in repertory or B films that once screened at a commercial or institutional venue or on television but have since fallen to the bottom of the cinema hierarchy or have been forgotten altogether. While there are some who consider the experimental, hand-made content and the presence of the filmmaker to be imperative for microcinema, as does Aurora Picture Show and Other Cinema, I argue it is the size and ambiance of the venue and a DIY mode of exhibition that are the key elements in creating a microcinema environment. Expanding the widely-

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[270] Total Mobile Home microCINEMA, website, http://www.totalmobilehome.com/tmh_history.htm. There is conflicting information on the start date of TMH and thus the coining of the term. In "Head Space," Halter cites 1994, an article written by the organizers states 1993 (Rebecca Barten and David Sherman, "Total Mobile Home Revisited," in *A Microcinema Primer*), and *Wired* magazine claims 1991, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.10/microcinema.html?pg=1. I'm using the organizers' start date even though other information in texts generated by them does not match up, like seating capacity (see note 329) and dimensions of the space.

held understanding of microcinema as a permanent space that shows short, experimental, low-budget art films to include outdoor screening series, roving screening series, screenings in bars, breweries and cafes, churches, arts centers, storefronts and domestic loft spaces, it shifts the focus away from content to the exhibition mode and venue.[271] Broadening the microcinema category in this way invites a multidimensional cultural studies analysis allowing for a nuanced study of the many permutations of microcinema.

Typically, microcinemas are intimate, four-walled, DIY exhibition spaces where a category of alternative film (i.e. noncommercial, nonmainstream and not available anywhere else) is shown. However, some that began as static microcinemas have transformed into "pop-up" cinemas—meaning they do not have a permanent space but screen at different sites—and still others have transitioned from pop-up to permanent.[272] For those pop-up organizers with whom I spoke, their mobility was more a result of being in an in-between phase as opposed to a purposeful choice.[273] That said, Flicker Film Festival in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Movies with Live Soundtracks in Providence, Rhode Island are examples of microcinema series that never sought stable locales, and Basement Films in Albuquerque, New Mexico has a space but is mostly a site-specific microcinema. Keif Henley of Basement Films describes the idiosyncratic experience of screening in nontheatrical, especially outdoor spaces, as follows:

> … when you go to a movie theater, the movie theater always looks the same… the chairs are aligned in a certain way, the screen's where you expect it to be and for

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[271] Experimental, avant-garde short films are the primary content of most of the microcinemas discussed in *A Microcinema Primer*.

[272] Halter refers to this roving cinema as peripatetic (7). Pop-up is also used within the retail and restaurant businesses for short-term leases or one-of events.

[273] Aurora Picture Show, which found a new stable home as of July 2012, and Le Cinéclub in Montreal, QC, transient for over a decade but landing a permanent site at Concordia University's theaters as of December 2012, are two examples of pop-up cinemas that were only temporarily peripatetic.

a site-specific kind of thing there's noise involved there's distractions involved, the sound's a little bit crazy, it's not ideal to maybe your typical film purist, but that's what makes it interesting to me.[274]

Henley clearly embraces the serendipity involved in site-specific exhibition, but the notion of impermanence presents a problem for others when conceptualizing microcinema.

Delicia Harvey, former Executive Director of Aurora Picture Show, helped crystallize why venue is important to the microcinema concept, and at the same time shed light on the struggle organizers and administrators experience when conceptualizing and growing their spaces. The move from a permanent site to a nomadic approach caused Aurora staff to rethink their identification as a microcinema, even though the content did not change. Harvey explained that when Aurora first began in the church, it was clearly a microcinema, "We were in this alternative space and were showing alternative content. Audiences had to seek us out a little bit more, so microcinema made a bit more sense in the true definition."[275] But what did it mean once they were without a venue? Were they now a media arts center? A pop-up cinema? She is not alone in her connection between microcinema and a permanent, physical space. Tess Takahashi, in an article about microcinema in Providence, writes, "In some ways, while Magic Lantern has more of the qualities one associates with the term 'microcinema,' in that it was a curated show with a stable exhibition site, it was anomalous within the Providence underground scene."[276] And in Roger Beebe's description of Flicker, he says, "Flicker was never a proper

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[274] Brian Frye, "Interview with Keif Henley and Brian Konefsky of Basement Films," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 69.
[275] Delicia Harvey, interview, 2 March 2012.
[276] Tess Takahashi, "Providence Microcinema: Movies With Live Soundtracks and Magic Lantern," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 109-116.

microcinema, if by that we mean a permanent venue for presenting films."[277] Despite the

more narrow understanding of microcinema expressed by these organizers and scholars,

many instances I examined show a more flexible relationship to permanence. In addition

to the issue of permanence versus mobility, another interesting dilemma with which a few

microcinemas have grappled is what happens in those instances when an enterprise has

some degree of success and opts to expand. Harvey suggests that as a nonprofit trying to

achieve financial stability "the more you grow… the more you get away from the

beginning stages" that defined you as an alternative underground space.[278] Once a project

has a paid staff of more than two or three people, and is receiving grants and corporate

sponsorship, is it an arts organization rather than a microcinema?

With the exception of one article in *Wired* magazine dealing with microcinema as

a film product and distribution approach (i.e. as desktop digital moviemaking and

commercial streaming sites), the term is most often used to refer to a venue and its

corresponding noncommercial fare.[279] Author Rob Kenner introduces microcinema as "a

new way of creating, distributing, and screening movies," focusing on the production and

distribution facets, and discussing it as an effect of digital technology. Claiming the term

describes "an intimate, low-budget style of movie shot on relatively cheap formats like

Hi-8 video, DV and (less often) older do-it-yourself stock like 16-mm film," he goes on

to say, "A classic microcinema offering is a film that probably would not exist if new

technology hadn't allowed its creators to cut costs or inspired them to try something

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[277] Roger Beebe, "Flicker," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 134.
[278] Harvey.
[279] Halter mentions this in footnote 14 (11).

different."[280] This is a vastly different reading than that of Halter and Baldwin, for example, who see microcinema as harkening back to old technology, or what Acland refers to as "residual media."[281] For Kenner, the advantage of digital technologies and the Internet is the ease with which the microcinema format allows directors to distribute their own films and have direct contact with the audience. Writing about microcinema in Austin, Marc Savlov focuses on exhibition, but like Kenner, he highlights how this new DIY approach allows for more interaction between audience and filmmaker; in this case, though, it's in the form of a post-screening discussion and not as a business transaction.[282] In his article about the Mansion Theater in Baltimore, Maryland, Schaub echoes the importance of "the immediacy of the direct link between the producers of alternative media and the consumers in the audience"[283] and points out that for underground film, microcinema closes the gap between production and exhibition.[284] Though Kenner uses words like "funky," "underground" and "stubborn subculture" when describing the scene, his angle is capitalistic: "while some microcinema practitioners express an adversarial attitude toward the mainstream," there exist several companies and individuals who are successfully partnering with multinational companies and profiting from the trend, Honkworm and AtomFilms to name a couple.[285] Furthermore, filmmaker/entrepreneurs like Joel Bachar believe it to be the future of the film industry. On the other end of the spectrum, Halter among others relates the microcinema

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[280] Rob Kenner, "My Hollywood! So you wanna be in pictures? Pick up your tools and shoot," *Wired* 7.10 (October 1999): 1, www.wired.com.
[281] Charles Acland, ed., "Introduction: Residual Media," in *Residual Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvii.
[282] Marc Savlov, "Microcinema Mania: Bimonthly series Cinema41 highlights the underseen and underrated," *The Austin Chronicle*, 22 July 2011, http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2011-07-22/microcinema-mania/.
[283] Schaub, 118.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Kenner.

distribution model to that of the punk rock music scene.[286] Kenner's article is alone in its

connection of microcinema practice to profit-making, new technology and the future of

film distribution.

Kenner's commercial orientation aside, for most practitioners, microcinema is

about a return to old, now discarded, technology and orphaned films, so that it is, in a

way, an archaeological site of residual media; along with this sensibility goes an

appreciation for the celluloid medium's materiality. In an interview between Halter and

Bradley Eros and Brian Frye of the former Robert Beck Memorial Cinema in New York,

they broach this subject of awareness of the apparatus.

> Eros: I really actually like the fact very much—and this is actually what would be
>
> a limitation in other spaces… that the projection is in the room. There's a kind of
>
> presence of where the film comes from, of its mechanics, of its materiality...
>
> Halter: But it's good also for those ephemeral films, I mean, it has a sense of
>
> home movie or movie club atmosphere that is something I can only imagine, I
>
> never experienced that firsthand.[287]

These comments highlight the nostalgia of those cinephiles who prefer the tangible

medium of film to digital or video formats. Halter argues that the embrace of second-

hand or junk material culture as a means to combat the slickness of the high-tech

commodified marketplace, was a response to limited access and resources. It was also

about the opportunity in the 90s to acquire small-gauge recording and projection

equipment being sold off at yard sales or institutional clearinghouses to make way for

new video technology, while tapping into a concurrent nostalgia for old school A/V

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[286] Halter, 11.

[287] Ed Halter, "Interview with Bradley Eros and Brian Frye of Robert Beck Memorial Cinema," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 78.

technology.[288] This "recycling of the garbage of the past," which manifests itself in the

technology used to screen films and in the appropriation and collage of found footage,

worked well for microcinemas that operated with small to no budgets and wished to

avoid the trappings of market capitalism.[289] Not only does this recycling have an

economic benefit, but it also bestows cultural capital upon the user of outdated

technology, as "the low-tech clunkiness of vintage forms… achieves an unexpected fan

status."[290] The treasures found in second-hand stores were the building blocks for a "self-

made culture"—one that intersects with the DIY modus operandi of Angela McRobbie's

subcultural entrepreneurs, who make their own creative professions often from recycled

objects and/or material—and provided the "cinematic accoutrements" necessary to

partake in what Halter describes as "generational drag."[291]

> When tinkering with a choppity plastic Super-8 projector that likely graced the
>
> living-room of an Aquarian-age middle-class suburban family, or wrestling with a
>
> dusty institutional-blue Bell and Howell 16mm projector that had no doubt spent
>
> countless hours unspooling soporific educational shorts before wing-collared
>
> schoolgoers of the Carter administration, one could not but help imagining that
>
> the operation of antique technologies meant engaging in a kind of historical,
>
> revivalist pursuit, giving new life to near-obsolete modes.[292]

Halter is not the only one to observe that microcinemas are archaeological sites for

residual media. Scott Trotter of X-film in Chicago, Illinois has suggested the

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[288] Halter, "Head Space," 11.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Acland, "Introduction: Residual Media," xvii. Acland recalls Bourdieu's observation that a marker of cultural capital is the ability to imbue a seemingly valueless object with value. See Bourdieu's *Distinction*, 5. Ibid., xv.
[291] Halter, "Head Space," 11.
[292] Ibid.

microcinema community is one that has coalesced around "archaic formats like Super-8."[293] Baldwin uses the archaeological reference when describing the fare screened at Other Cinema: "marginalized genres like 'orphan' industrial films, home movies, ethnography, and exploitation, as media-archeological core-samples."[294] And Beebe has referred to the added quality brought about by the presence of the medium as "event-ness":

> While the video revolution is great in many regards… the mode of apprehension of a YouTube video… has none of the fragile preciousness, none of the "event-ness" of watching a unique super 8 film unspool in a darkened room full of strangers and friends. Even the failures of film projection—scratched or burned prints, malfunctioning auto-load projectors, etc.—add to the charm of celluloid projection.[295]

A profound love of the materiality of film at the visceral level comes through in the above descriptions of celluloid viewing.

During an era in which mainstream movie theaters are caught up in a continual effort to remain technologically current, Toronto's CineCycle has also committed itself to a practice of "resistant obsolescence," which in Janine Marchessault's conception is a "commitment to low-end technologies, do-it-yourself culture, and all variety of film and video formats."[296] She remarks this embracing and even prioritizing of obsolete formats, historical footage and DIY technologies is common among alternative film practices and argues it encourages "an alternative cultural economy." Not only did Martin Heath,

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[293] Schaub, 109.
[294] Other Cinema.
[295] Beebe, 138.
[296] Janine Marchessault, "Of Bicycles and Films: The Case of *CineCycle*," *Public: Art/Culture/Ideas* 40 (Fall 2009): 91.

CineCycle organizer, collect and recycle found footage, he went as far as to build a bicycle-powered 8mm projector.

Most literature on this topic conceptualizes microcinema as both about space and content. Filmmaker and film series coordinator Angela Alston writes, "Microcinemas come to define a broad range of small screening spaces specializing in moving image media that hovers out of range of national distributors, air conditioned art houses, and sleek museums."[297] Positioning it alongside other film movements, Schaub describes the concept as both genre of film art and type of venue:

> The term "microcinema" is as doubtful as most of the other terms that have characterized alternative film art in the United States in this century. "Avant-garde," "underground," "experimental," "New American," and "personal" have all been applied to specific movements, genres and schools of filmmaking, but each has in turn also been used to characterize more generally a non-mainstream approach to making movies. The same can probably be said for the term "microcinema," which applies both to the film stock preferred by alternative filmmakers (generally Super-8 or 16mm), as well as to the screening venue itself, which can be anything from a basement or back room to a warehouse space or loft. [298]

MacDonald thinks more broadly of a network of cinemas in his definition, and from the consumer rather than producer's perspective, but still considers both venue and content:

> As "microcinema" suggests, this network of exhibition venues now spread across the country is made up of very small, intimate, communities of women and men

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[297] Angela Alston, "Cave Paintings, Churches, and Rooftops: Microcinemas come of age," *The Independent Film & Video Monthly* (September 2002), 28.
[298] Schaub, 107.

who gather to enjoy forms of cinema that have virtually no chance of being seen

in first- or second-run theaters, on television or even within many educational

institutions.[299]

An homologous link between physical space and the films shown is significant. As

discussed later in this chapter, a disconnect can occur for producer and consumer when

the venue is not appropriate to the content (for example, showing a subversive film in a

state-sanctioned institution can detract from its impact). And connoisseurs of the scene

generally do not question the appropriateness of the non-dedicated, makeshift,

microcinema space as setting for alternative film projection.

Critics and participants alike claim microcinema is also about changing the

perceived complacency of today's movie-viewing audience by adding something new to

the experience. Baldwin discusses it in terms of ideas:

That's where I want to take it now: towards ideas. It's more about creating a

platform for ideas, which can be worked through in many different ways. If you

go to some cushy theatre and just sit there for two hours, that's fine. But it doesn't

have the same currency, the same dialog.[300]

Positioning the microcinema as the "thinking man's theater," Baldwin suggests it draws a

more active viewer. Attendees are attracted to the more dynamic programming offered at

alternative spaces, where organizers are rethinking traditional media from a

contemporary perspective. They rarely just show old films or emerging works, but

embellish these with extra-filmic components—presentations, music, poetry,

conversation and so on. Harvey also mentioned that in order to compete with other

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[299] MacDonald, 21.
[300] Polta, 64.

underground film screenings going on in Houston, mostly cafes and bars illegally showing DVDs, Aurora has to offer something more to its audience, thus the live music performances, direct access to filmmakers and artists, and the novelty of the changing locale. Many microcinemas have included music, performance and/or visual art components to enhance screenings, such as those at TMH, The Secret Cinema[301] and Movies With Live Soundtracks;[302] these are called convergence events—the result of collaborations among artists, often friends and/or peers. The Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Austin also uses a strategy of augmenting the cinematic experience to combat the complacency of contemporary mainstream viewing practices, and it is one of the primary reasons for their success as an independent theater.[303]

Despite the varying understandings of microcinema, certain qualities emerge as crucial to the concept. They appear repeatedly in the discourse among practitioners, participants and observers: a do-it-yourself approach to exhibition; a small-scale, makeshift space; a low operation budget; an enterprise run by dedicated, passionate and present organizers or programmers (often filmmakers); a sense of community and/or intimacy; a love for cinema, on the parts of both the programmers and audience members; and a selection of content that is not readily available at other theaters, video rental sites, or online. Rebecca Alvin, who ran a screening series on Cape Cod for several years in the early 2000s, outlines several features of the microcinema in her article "A Night at the Movies: From Art House to 'Microcinema'": nontraditional makeshift

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[301] Jay Schwartz of The Secret Cinema began screening shorts from his collection before performances of the rock band he managed; his interest in the mix of film and music continued into his full film programs with music themes screened at indie rock nightclubs. Elena Gorfinkel, "A Short History of Jay Schwartz's The Secret Cinema," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 117-120.

[302] For a fuller description of these events, see Tess Takahashi, "Providence Microcinema," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 109-116.

[303] de Ville, "Cultivating the Cult Experience."

spaces, low overhead, small budget, noncommercial, nonurban areas, films without

distributors (straight from filmmakers), risk-taking content (art films), likeminded

cinephile audiences and the fostering of a communal feeling.[304] Bachar of Microcinema

International adds to this that "they often are run by one or two committed individuals"

and don't last long, typically due to the organizers burning out or running out of money,

or both.[305] While Alvin's descriptive criteria for microcinema are generally sound, my

research has shown microcinemas do not screen films strictly by living filmmakers, nor

in exclusively non-urban locales. All the characteristics I name work together to establish

a discourse of the subversive with respect to the film industry, one that is purposefully

counter to the mainstream in almost every way—philosophy, budget, venue, audience,

size, management and content. Participants in the microcinema scene have been, for the

most part, in "pursuit of sub-commercial cinematic forms" in an aesthetic sense, but also

in the sense of creating spaces that are socio-culturally differentiated from the

"mainstream entertainment-saturated society," and even consciously in resistance to it.[306]

A reporter writing about the closing of the Blinding Light!! Cinema (BL!!) describes the

dichotomy less diplomatically:

> In a society that is largely comprised of drones who are devoid of imagination,
>
> who fear true creativity and who appreciate almost no art unless it is mass-
>
> marketed to them, the Blinding Light has been a home for many who simply do
>
> not (and do not want to) fit in with the Ken and Barbie crowd.[307]

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[304] Alvin, 5.
[305] Quoted in Alvin, 6.
[306] Halter, "Head Space," 10.
[307] Brian Salmi, "Switched Off: Blinding Light!! Closes Doors in July," *Terminal City*, 18 April 2003, http://www.blindinglight.com/p_tc.htm.

Many microcinema organizers refer to what they do as defiant and direct responses to perceived mainstream exhibition practices. Barten and Sherman claim the use of the word TOTAL in their name and the names of many of their programs was due to the "built-in rebellion factor."[308] But at the same time, Barten also sees little difference in people organizing screenings in museums versus out of their homes and that much can be learned from institutional practices, "It just doesn't pay to regard institutions, which may appear very old and entrenched in the system, as being 'the establishment.' There's just too much to learn from these people."[309] Barton's views are in the minority as many practitioners have sited the lack of institutional support as a reason for starting their own spaces.

As discussed earlier, the mainstream, whether or not a construct as scholars like Thornton have theorized, exists as a discursive counterpoint to alternative film projects. Those in the microcinema scene reject the commercial theatrical exhibition that has dominated that sector of the industry, and in turn have made spaces where they can view the films they wish to see. These renegade venues, as Halter and Schaub rightly suggest, are more appropriate than multiplexes or even museums for screening underground and experimental films. Halter claims, "The rogue, unsanctioned nature of a microcinema provided the requisite aura of countercultural authenticity."[310] And, in explaining how the exhibition space can affect the reception of the work screened there, Schaub notes,

> If a work by Brakhage, Anger, or Jack Smith receives the imprimatur of a
>
> museum, public library, or university, whatever subversive potential exists in the

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[308] TMH.
[309] Quoted in Schaub, 110.
[310] Halter, "Head Space," 7.

content of the piece is irrevocably compromised by the official endorsement it

receives from the "state institution" hosting it.[311]

In this example, the alternative is classic, avant-garde/experimental work of filmmakers

who peaked in the 1960s; whereas for others, it is exploitation or trash cinema and

sometimes foreign/independent art house films. Though what constitutes the alternative

may vary, that which advocates say they oppose appears to be consistent: commercial

mainstream movies and theaters. Moreover, microcinemas also position themselves as an

alternative to state-sanctioned institutions, such as museums. Because an appropriate

ambiance is vital to the overall success of a screening space, the austerity of an

institutional site generally does not work.

Ambiance is not always addressed directly as an important feature of these

alternative spaces, perhaps due to its intangibility, yet it is often suggested in the context.

For example, Elena Gorfinkel speaks in terms of atmosphere when describing Schwartz's

The Secret Cinema, with its "dilapidated sofas," "paper screen" and "black plastic from

Home Depot" covering the windows. In Schwartz's words, it was situated somewhere

between a "Museum of Modern Art screening and a dormitory TV lounge.'"[312] Rather

than ambiance, Marchessault discusses the "aura of place," using Erving Goffman's

insights on the theatricality or structures of drama of everyday life. Speaking of

CineCycle, she suggests it "inserts a space of experience" into the life of the city.[313]

Stephen Hunter, *Balitmore Sun* film critic, provides another example of the significance

of ambiance when explaining the ultimate failure of the Baltimore Film Forum to sustain

its position as a "bastion of independent filmmaking":

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[311] Schaub, 113.
[312] Gorfinkel, 118.
[313] Marchessault, 97.

I think what kind of hurt [the BFF] was it used to be in the Charles [Theater], and

the Charles has a kind of special, outlaw, bohemian quality to it that's very much

a part of the movie-watching process. The ambiance of the place sort of

contributes to the ambiance of the film. There's a sort of symbiosis between place

and movie… and the BMA is very institutionally squeaky clean and subdued and

refined. It sort of took away from that sense of outlaw.[314]

Along the same lines, Schaub discusses the inability of museums, universities, etc. to

foster an environment that allows for fruitful engagement between artists and viewers

because "the architecture itself is against them."[315] Institutional spaces are inherently

austere, which thwarts the feeling of intimacy that a small DIY space can engender:

"Large halls designed to accommodate quotas of paying customers are far more

conducive to monologues than dialogues. Subversive art really requires a subversive

setting."[316] Microcinemas, according to this line of thinking, are the ideal setting; in the

end, they are spaces that thrive on subcultural identity.

Though I discuss the characteristics of a microcinema below by separate

subheading, it is difficult to address these features in isolation. Both the epigraph by

Halter and the following quote by Barten and Sherman suggest this linkage:

… what we craved as filmmakers was an intimate, discussion-based, salon-style

experience, where the play between artist/film and audience might be activated

and transformed. Since experimental filmmakers often make films at home,

homemade cinema need not be reliant upon the consensus of institutional space

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[314] Quoted in Schaub, 112-113. Originally quoted in Max Weiss, "Screen Test: The BFF Faces Up to the Challenges of Non-Commercial Film," *Baltimore City Paper* (23 March 1990).
[315] Schaub, 117.
[316] Ibid.

for its presentation. Little films often get lost in auditoriums; the scale of TMH

provided personal film with an environment where people could remain in

conversation, drinking and smoking well after the show, engulfed in the evening's

afterimage.[317]

This statement touches upon several of the key concerns of microcinemas (size and

ambiance of space, intimacy, community, and institutional vs. underground agendas) and

nicely summarizes the notion of wanting to create a different experience that would

appeal to likeminded cinema enthusiasts, one that fosters thoughtful consideration of the

texts by producer and consumer alike. The following is a synthesis of microcinema

discourse as described by organizers, audience members, filmmakers, critics and the

media.

DIY Approach

The most persistent and defining feature throughout the discourse on microcinema is the

requisite do-it-yourself quality of the enterprise. Clearly, microcinema spaces are

makeshift in nature. They are spaces that were or are still used for purposes other than

exhibition. Often, this necessitates continual setting up and breaking down of equipment,

seating, etc. The DIY-ness of spaces is often either a direct or indirect refusal of

mainstream exhibition practices and content. Halter links microcinemas and DIY culture,

as it exists "mythically" outside market-driven culture stating, "this new microcinema

scene retrofitted the legacy of Amos Vogel's Cinema 16, Jonas Mekas's Filmmaker's

Cinematheque and Andy Warhol's Factory into something coextensive with indie rock's

neo-punk do-it-yourself pragmatism."[318]

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[317] Barten and Sherman, 44.
[318] Halter, "Head Space," 7.

Filmmakers and cinephiles alike are laying claim to a sector of film exhibition

and distribution that is largely ignored by their commercial counterparts, likely due to the

minimal amount of money that can be gained from this niche market. Little capital and

the lack of access to funding are motivating forces as to the form these spaces have taken.

In the following quote by the TMH founders, they describe how their limited funds

necessitated a DIY approach to the creation of the space, advertising and exhibition:

> Our operating budget was extremely low—we used discarded, donated, and
>
> rebuilt equipment, made our own seats, designed our own posters and calendars,
>
> and did publicity "word-of-mouth" and through the local free papers. Our
>
> standards for any particular show were extremely high—even at our tiny scale, we
>
> believe that we competed favorably with the corporate megaplexes in the quality
>
> of our film prints, sound system, and amenities.[319]

On this subject, Halter points out that DIY is not just an aesthetic but a lifestyle, one that

has a strong anti-consumerist philosophy concerning financial matters. He refers to

Andrew Mall's thesis about independent music cultures to describe the economy of DIY

culture: "As an economic system, DIY works much like a remote local village: capital

circulates among the members of the scene, providing a common economic base and

support system that is necessary to keep the scene economically viable."[320] The DIY

paradigm, however, is a flexible one and is not standard across venues or scenes for that

matter. "The anti-mainstream, anti-corporate ethos of DIY functioned as an operative or

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[319] TMH.

[320] Andrew Hall, "Building nothing out of something: Constructing trans-local community through independent music subcultures" MA Thesis (University of Chicago, 2003). Quoted in Halter, "Head Space," 10.

provisional ideal, with each individual or group making decisions and setting boundaries seen as coherent with this ideal."[321]

Stacey Case, founder and programmer of Trash Palace in Toronto, foregrounds his project by stating that it is not about art for him but about his entrepreneurial interests; he approaches programming from a much different perspective than the die-hard avant-garde filmmakers. Though he does also make films, he earns his living as a commercial artist. He began by collecting a few shorts and showing them in his studio space; this eventually grew into the regular screening venue Trash Palace. His attitude toward running a DIY cinema is not necessarily representative but indicates the individualistic vision that has brought him success: "Because we really don't care; it's fun here."[322] What he means is that he and the other programmers don't worry about the condition of the prints or whether they'll have a good turnout. He's perfectly content that the film simply runs through the projector, even if he is the only one watching it. Other organizers may "care" more, but as a whole, they are prepared for failures and events with low turnouts; this risk is part of the territory when programming more obscure films. As Dennis Lim contends, "The DIY ethos of microcinema also encourages more risks and idiosyncrasies than institutional settings might allow."[323]

A percentage of these risks and idiosyncrasies is due to the fact that, as Alvin, a former microcinema organizer, explains, these "makeshift theaters" have popped up in nontraditional or "alternative spaces like tractor trailers, cafes and bars, church basements, and even health clubs."[324] In describing the makeshift nature of Light

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[321] Halter, "Head Space," 11.
[322] Stacey Case, interview, 1 June 2012.
[323] Lim.
[324] Alvin, 5.

Industry, which first opened in the industrial Sunset Park area of Brooklyn,[325] Halter comments, "The concept is that the cinema is basically something that can be constituted in the moment… It's a venue that's taken up and put down, so the cinema is literally built anew every week."[326] The precariousness of the sites and whims of the building owners (and their relationships with organizers) all contribute to the life of the microcinema, which is often ephemeral. In this way, microcinema organizers make up a sector of the precariat work population of which McRobbie speaks. In addition to a DIY ethos, another extremely significant feature of the microcinema is the scale of the enterprise and the venue itself.

Venue Size

TMH has the historical significance of being the first microcinema enterprise named as such by its organizers. The TMH website defines the term by three points:

microCINEMA

-A WORD OF OUR OWN INVENTION

-A SMALL SPACE FOR THE PROJECTION OF FILM

-A CATEGORY OF ACTION[327]

From the beginning, microcinema referred to the size of the space. On another page of the site is written: "David Sherman and Rebecca Barten invented the term and concept of 'microcinema' that started a worldwide underground movement in small exhibition of cinematic works of art."[328] Thus, microcinema has been about venue size from the start,

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[325] The light industrial neighborhood of Sunset Park is the result of the garment industry moving its production abroad, leaving many empty factories. Mo-Yain Tham, "Sunset Park's Garment Industry: The Costs of Making it in NY," *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics and, Culture*, http://www.brooklynrail.org/2004/02/local/sunset.
[326] Lim.
[327] TMH.
[328] Ibid., http://www.totalmobilehome.com/tmh.htm.

despite the term later being appropriated to describe experimental, small-gauge cinema. TMH embodied this notion of a small-scale venue with twenty-five to thirty seats.[329]

Generally, microcinemas have a maximum seating capacity of fifty. Having been to numerous spaces, I have observed that those that best epitomize the microcinema ethos accommodate approximately that number of people, though often, empty seats remain. Exceptions exist, as the oldest and still extant microcinema in the US, Other Cinema, accommodates eighty patrons, while another long running and well-known microcinema, Aurora Picture Show, had a seating capacity of one hundred at its original church site, and the Mansion in Baltimore had "seventy-odd folding chairs."[330] Blue Sunshine, Trash Palace and CineCycle each had a capacity of about fifty people.

Sometimes microcinemas start small, then expand into either a larger microcinema or out of the category altogether. Trash Palace began in a small eight-hundred square foot space that accommodated twenty-five people. It then moved into a bigger space in the same building, which doubled its seating capacity. Case got the inspiration for Trash Palace after attending a screening at the Alamo Drafthouse. The Alamo is an example of an independent theater with a microcinema mentality that started small, though still larger than most microcinemas with a capacity of two hundred, and then grew into a franchise. Rooftop Films also began as a microcinema concept, again with a larger than typical audience, hosting sporadic screenings on the rooftops in New York and has since grown into a year-round outdoor/indoor nation-wide screening series.

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[329] Again, there is a discrepancy among different TMH sources on the number of seats. The article "Total Mobile Home Revisited" (43) states twenty-five, while Barten's "infantglory" (TMH, http://www.totalmobilehome.com/infantglory.htm) and another piece by Barten and Sherman, "Small is Beautiful," in *A Microcinema Primer* (122), claims up to thirty-five, but this was considered a packed house with people standing and sitting on the floor.
[330] Schaub, 106.

They now have many corporate and nonprofit sponsors for their multiple events per week that can draw audiences as large as fifteen hundred people. In general, however, microcinemas do not morph into larger projects and tend to expire within five years of initiation.

Budget

Running out of money is one of the main reasons microcinema projects are terminated. The economic situation of a cinema works to determine its position as a microcinema; the lack of external financial support and a small budget dictate how the theater is run and what will be shown there. Because it is not competing with the mainstream theaters to show first run films, the microcinema does not and cannot pay the fees involved in that level of exhibition. Instead they may pay a nominal fee to the filmmaker whose work they are showing or a minimal copyright fee to a small distributor dealing in underground cinema. The organizers sometimes opt to forgo funding from outside sources so no limitations are placed on what they screen. The point of the venue is to expand viewing options and so the "ultra-low-budget economic structure" allows organizers flexibility in programming or as Halter points out, "considerable room for artistic risk when there are no institutional overseers to please, grant applications to shape your vision, long-lead PR campaigns to plan for, or full-time salaries to raise."[331] On this point, Baldwin comments that he would not refuse a grant, but at the same time, he does not want to be beholden to, in other words restricted by, a funder.[332] And Heath insists on his spaces being self-

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[331] Halter, "Head Space," 6.
[332] Alston, 29.

sustainable having seen many projects fail as a result of their dependence on government subsidies that eventually dried up.[333]

Many microcinemas are in spaces that have other uses, be they domestic or commercial, and are therefore less expensive to run as part-time cinemas. Low overhead allows for flexibility and eccentricity in programming and relieves some of the pressure of having to make a certain amount of profit. An example of economics directly affecting the content is the manner in which Case collects films. He only purchases films that can be acquired for forty dollars. That is his cut-off, and he's been able to amass a collection of fifty-four feature films having started in 1999. He then used some of the proceeds from his screenings to finance the purchase of more films. Case admits that though he planned to charge admission from the inception of Trash Palace, the project was never about the money. It is about being a collector who wants to show his films: "the profits we get are just icing on the cake."[334]

Some venues, like Cinema41 in Austin take advantage of new modes of online fundraising as exemplified by Kickstarter. Between a successful Kickstarter campaign, donations, and hours of unpaid work by its all-volunteer staff, this small budget microcinema covers its operating costs.[335] Rooftop Films also uses Kickstarter to fund the production of films in order to support emerging filmmakers. And Aurora paid for the transition to their new home via a Kickstarter fundraiser. Lim, in an article about three New York microcinemas—Light Industry, UnionDocs and Maysles Cinema—describes their financial structures as follows:

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[333] Marchessault, 96.
[334] Case.
[335] Savlov.

All three cinemas are nonprofits, financed by ticket sales, grants and the odd

Kickstarter campaign, and generally rely less on press coverage than on e-mail

lists and social media. And all are acutely aware of existing within a larger and

growing ecosystem that often thrives on collaboration.[336]

Collaboration is a crucial aspect to the survival of many microcinemas precisely because

of their precarious financial status. There exists much cross-pollination among venues

and programmers, which will be addressed in the next section.

I have yet to find a microcinema whose goal is to make a profit. Typically, they

are barely sustainable. Though I have not collected detailed financial information from

the spaces I visited, other than Blue Sunshine, it is clear these spaces are not profitable

endeavors and many are run as non-profits. Other Cinema, for example, nets $50 a night

from its $5 admission, and Blue Sunshine lost money on a regular basis, charging $8 a

night.[337] Reg Hartt of Cineforum now asks for a $20 donation (up from $10) but remains

in financial distress causing him to sell off his film collection. Moviehouse, a non-profit

in Brooklyn, doubled their admission from $5 to $10 in addition to receiving fiscal

sponsorship from Fractured Atlas. The Mansion Theater asked for a $2 donation during

their run.[338] Rooftop Films began by asking for a "strongly suggested" donation of $6,

but is now a non-profit organization operating on a required $12 admission, as well as

private donations, grants from sources as reputable as the National Endowment of the

Arts and Ford Foundation, and money from big name sponsors, like AT&T, *The Village

Voice* and Burt's Bees.[339] Aurora, also a non-profit, originally operated on about $10,000

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[336] Lim.
[337] Alston, 29.
[338] Schaub, 106.
[339] Alston, 30.

that was raised at the door and relied heavily on unpaid staff.[340] It since transitioned to a

paid staff of six and a $400,000 operating budget—the majority coming from grants,

about $20,000 from membership fees, plus some private donations. Alex MacKenzie,

founder and organizer of BL!!, remarks that he was never able to pay himself a salary;

BL!! "received funding, but never nearly enough to support the theatre, our full-time

programming and even one salary."[341] He survived by living "an inexpensive lifestyle"

and doing freelance work, like many organizers with whom I spoke, who are

screenprinters, bike mechanics, film zine editors/contributors, and employed in a myriad

of other professions.

While the financial structures of microcinemas differ from one to another, the

admission fees charged are usually less than the price of regular admission at a multiplex

theater. For some reason, organizers believe they cannot or should not charge as much as

first run feature films, but what they offer could be perceived as more valuable and

sometimes better quality, albeit on smaller screens. The extra-filmic elements, the

opportunity for communal dialogue and interaction, and the access to celluloid films,

unavailable anywhere else, should really result in higher admission fees. This tendency

for organizers to undervalue what they do factors into microcinema's financial instability

and subsequently in their impermanence.

Organizers/Programmers

Filmmakers looking to create a space for their work and the work of other local,

alternative filmmakers is the most common motivation for creating a microcinema. This

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[340] Ibid., 29.

[341] Hal Niedzviecki, "'Exhausted and infuriated' Toronto's Lola Magazine and Vancouver's Blinding Light Cinema were two of Canada's richest cultural voices. Their demise says a lot about cultural burnout," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 August 2003, http://www.blindinglight.com/p_gm.htm.

is the case for Barten and Shepherd of TMH, Grover of Aurora Picture Show and Cyzyk of The Mansion Theater, to name a few. Baldwin began making found footage films after collecting orphan films and then created a space in which to show them. Often, too, the organizers are film collectors or archivists wanting to screen their collections. Heath of CineCycle and Philippe Spurrell of Le Cinéclub (Montreal) fall into this category of collectors who run microcinema spaces or series. If what you seek does not exist, you build it—this is the DIY mantra. Trash Palace began with Case's collection. As he told me, he never had grand aspirations: "The Trash Palace was never meant to be anything more than a film collector showing his films."[342] Because programmers are cinephiles and known in the scene, they often find themselves in the position of accepting found or soon to be discarded film reels or buying collections from others who can no longer take care of them. Eric Veillette, a cultural journalist and film programmer based in Toronto, became the steward of a collection of 1300 films disposed of by the Toronto Public Library. As this deaccessioning of institutional film collections becomes more widespread, individual cinephiles and collectors will increasingly find themselves responsible for archiving and preserving our celluloid artifacts.

On rare occasions, what begins as a filmmaker doing a small-scale screening of his and his friends' work grows into a more substantial enterprise. Canyon Cinema transitioned from backyard screenings into a foundation. This pattern also describes the trajectory of Rooftop Films, yet another example of filmmakers taking exhibition into their own hands in order to have a venue for locally made films. In the case of the latter, it turned into a widely popular ongoing series attracting substantial grants and sponsorship.

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[342] Case.

The fact that alternative venues are run by filmmakers may also explain why microcinemas have adopted not only creative exhibition practices but also unconventional economic structures and DIY modes of operation. Halter suggests "a homology between the way microcinemas were run and the manner in which underground filmmakers conducted their own lives."[343] That is to say, neither fit the conventional practices of the day; both tend toward a self-designated nontraditional, antiestablishment manner of existing in society. And the easily accessible DIY model of exhibition is conducive to being driven by the passion and energy of individual programmers with artistic sensibilities. In addition to filmmakers, microcinemas are also run by collectors and individuals who simply seek a "venue to screen their favorite, often-forgotten, always interesting cinematic gems."[344]

Not unlike initial itinerant exhibitors of the early 1900s, filmmakers and programmers in the microcinema scene may travel from site to site screening their works and those of other artists.[345] Because the network of microcinemas in the nineties and early naughts across the US, and to some extent Canada, was substantial, programmers and filmmakers were able to arrange tours that brought underrepresented films to all corners of the country, generating interest in and appreciation for alternative filmmaking. In the nineties, Cyzyk took his films on the road and used it as an opportunity to spread the word about his microcinema, The Mansion.

Similarly, Bill Daniel, a filmmaker who began touring his films with rock bands like Butthole Surfers, later became a master of roving alternative film distribution or what

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[343] Halter, "Head Space," 6.
[344] Savlov.
[345] For some examples of these itinerant filmmakers of the 90s, especially Johnny Eschelman and his Traveling Cinema—a 10'x10' microcinema that seated three people, see Halter, "Head Space," 11-13.

he calls "film tramping."[346] He positions the practice historically as follows: "With roots

in circus, vaudeville, and gypsy culture, and historical precedents like the Russian Kino

Train, and the cinema trucks of rural Latin America, the practice of touring with a film

show in search of audiences is perhaps the most direct and basic form of distribution."[347]

While these are different itinerant practices, they all involve mobile entertainment

combined with a DIY approach to entrepreneurship. In 2004, Daniel toured the US

extensively with his film "Who is Bozo Texino?," screening in spaces as diverse as

roadhouse honkytonks, punk club/vegan restaurants and hipster galleries, but most often

in indie rock clubs, again underscoring the convergence of the film, music and art worlds.

Independent programmer

Astria Superak toured her programs throughout North America and abroad, via

various forms of transportation, from 2000 to 2006, rolling her suitcase filled with films

and equipment from venue to venue.[348] She asserts, "Touring is vital to audience-building

and information-sharing. On the road I became a messenger of news between places, with

the facility to collect and disseminate strategies and tactics in a concentrated period of

time."[349]

And this DIY method of promotion, exhibition and distribution continues today; a

more recent example is French filmmaker and indie band documentarian Vincent Moon.

His nomadic approach to film exhibition and distribution is described in a review of a

screening of his film *An Island* (2010), which took place at Laïka in Montreal in February

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[346] Bill Daniel, "Duct Tape Traces: Film Tramping in America," in *A Microcinema Primer,* 126-130.
[347] Ibid., 126.
[348] For more about Superak's touring experience, see Brett Kashmere, "Individual Group Experiences and Unusual Acts of Kindness: An Interview with Astria Superak, on Touring," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 101-107.
[349] Ibid., 107.

2011.[350] The small annex to this café/lounge was crowded with about twenty-five people,

sitting at small café tables drinking beers, and others standing outside the room trying to

sneak a peek. On the film's website, one can find information on how to host a private-

public screening of the film, a DIY mode of exhibition/distribution attributed to Moon

and Efterklang, the Danish band that is the subject of the film. There is one simple rule:

"Anyone can host a screening but it needs to be public, have a minimum capacity of 5

people and free entrance."[351] Halter compares this mode of film exhibition to the DIY

ethos of punk bands and early indie musicians who managed their own tours, and notes

there was a substantial enough network of alternative spaces that filmmaker Danny

Plotnick wrote a how-to article for filmmakers touring North America "with prints in

hand, rock-band style."[352]

Networking and collaboration doesn't just happen on the road. Some cinemas,

such as Trash Palace, 40 Frames in Portland, Oregon and the Robert Beck Memorial

Cinema, operate as collectives, so that programming responsibilities are spread out and

diversified and may even be drawn from members' archives. In the case of Trash Palace,

six member/collectors specialize in different areas of film. Another Toronto-based

cinema, CineCycle, now only shows films programmed by other organizations and

curatorial collectives, such as Pleasure Dome, despite Heath having his own collection.

One journalist described Cinema41 as a "passionate film exhibition collective" of five.[353]

And then there exist institutions that allow filmmaker collectives to program the space on

a regular basis. For example, DoubleNegative, a filmmaker collective in Montreal,

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[350] Meg Hewings, "A Trip to the Moon," *The Hour,* 3 February 2011, 8.
[351] *An Island*, website, http://anisland.cc/home/about/.
[352] Halter, "Head Space," 11. The article in question is "Kings of the Road: Danny Plotnick on Alternative Film Distribution," *Filmmaker Magazine* 5 (Summer 1997): 25-7.
[353] Savlov.

programs Cinema Space, located at the Segal Centre. Microcinemas do not adhere to one organizational model, but typically, either one or two individuals or a small collective run them.

Though organizers' profiles vary from venue to venue, two characteristics link them all: their passion and their presence. That they are on site to meet and greet audience members, enthusiastically introduce films and even provide entertainment between reels, immediately sets them apart from any commercial movie theater, where one is sometimes hard-pressed to find an employee if something is amiss. A reporter mentions this very occurrence in an article about TMH: "In these days of corporate cinema ownership, it's not often one finds the proprietors greeting patrons at the door… and shaking their hands on the way out. Or putting on a performance after the main attraction."[354] The same reporter also mentions the "operator's exuberance," which compensates for the occasional programming flub. Upon his visit to TMH, filmmaker George Kuchar said of the organizers: "I even made a little video about David and Rebecca because they're such fun characters on the scene."[355] It is not uncommon that the organizers are part of the allure of the space; after all, it is their programming decisions, that is to say their painstakenly cultivated taste, to which the audience is drawn. In this way, they act as arbiters of taste for a particular scene, participating in what Bourdieu names "the cycle of consecration."[356] However, Bourdieu would argue that this taste formation is not their own, but rather a product of a variety of features

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[354] Daniel Mangin, "Underground Cinema: Total Mobile Home puts avant-garde film where it belongs–in the basement" *SF Weekly* website, 1 November 1995, www.sfweekly.com.
[355] Mangin.
[356] Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production," 77.

(cultural capital, social capital, etc.). Put simply, it's an expression of social and class position.

Within Bourdieu's discussion of the role of the cultural intermediary, he suggests a dealer's authority to consecrate a work of art complicates the "charismatic ideology"—"the ultimate basis of belief in the value of a work of art" and critical to "the circle of belief"—by shifting the agency from the artist to the agent (or more accurately, the structures that imbued the agent with power).[357] He theorizes that, more than the creator of the work, it is the art agent or go-between who determines if a work has value and how much. Of course, the dealer himself must have accumulated enough cultural capital for his taste or judgment to have weight:

> …the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work.[358]

Furthermore, the consecrator also validates the author's value, implicating him in the "cycle of consecration," by investing his "prestige" and "acting as a 'symbolic banker' who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated."[359] Film programmer Karina Mariano identifies a version of this circle when explaining her experience working for Rendez-vous, an experimental shorts program, at Cinémathèque québécoise and two of the bigger film festivals in Montreal where she had to accept films due to

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[357] Ibid., 76-78.
[358] Ibid., 76-77.
[359] Ibid., 77.

pressure from corporate sponsors. "It made me so angry as a filmmaker to see this work that was so valuable, interesting and different and precious be tossed aside because it didn't please the structure that was in place that has the money that creates the [value]… it's just *un cercle vicieux* of crap." She realized the recognition of these institutions, symbolic capital for the filmmakers, is what allows filmmakers to continue making work or maybe have a career in the film industry, but selection (i.e. ascribed symbolic value) wasn't based necessarily on the quality of the work.[360]

Bourdieu's concept applies differently to programmers who specialize in repertory and paracinema as opposed to new, potentially marketable, works. Festival programmers, for example, predominantly trade in films that either seek or already have distribution and therefore have a more direct economic interest in the cycle of consecration, though the programmers themselves gain mostly symbolic capital for their discoveries. Paracinema programmers, however, usually deal with films that have either had an industry life long ago or are in bad taste with no hope for commercial success. Therefore, their relationships to investment and reward are more complicated. Generally, they want to exhibit what they find appealing—their cinematic taste—to individuals with similar taste, which is often a minority population with limited capital. For many programmers, their work does not result in much capital gain of any sort, economic or symbolic. However, the successful purveyors of paracinema can sometimes sustain a career. One of the ways in which a programmer becomes a consecrated cultural intermediary is by demonstrating a deep knowledge of her subject area and advocating a specific aesthetic that is gained through the discovery process described above, that is mining the not yet known or long forgotten. The information and taste she acquires is

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[360] Karina Mariano/Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, joint interview, 12 February 2012.

then used as a form of currency in her circle. If her passion and dedication pay off, she

amasses a group of loyal fans that follow her articles, blog posts, film events, etc.,

validating her taste in film. This may allow her to sell her books on the subject, earn her a

coveted film festival, museum or faculty position, win her invitations to speak at

conferences and educational institutions, and/or run a small exhibition space. It is these

types of programmers who form microcinemas and their corresponding scenes. Of the

subjects interviewed, both David Bertrand, of Blue Sunshine, and Tim Kelly, of

Cinequanon, parlayed their microcinema efforts into paid work with festivals (Fantasia

International Film Festival [Fantasia] and Film POP respectively).[361] Kier-la Janisse had

already had a professional affiliation with Fantasia from her publishing and programming

work prior to Blue Sunshine, but after Blue Sunshine, Film POP offered her a

programming position.

My research makes apparent that microcinema organizers, be they filmmakers,

collectors or simply film enthusiasts, share a common role within the alternative

exhibition scene, one of subcultural entrepreneur who acts as a tastemaker, or, more

accurately, as a taste developer. They create their own profession, which, as McRobbie

has observed, is an outgrowth of the DIY art and music cultures of the early 90s as well

as the concurrent economic downturn that left many college graduates without gainful

employment.[362] Microcinema organizers are motivated by the desire to bring the

cinematic works they value to an audience they cultivate by doing what they love to do:

screening films. MacKenzie claims, "I began the Blinding Light as a way to get the work

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[361] Fantasia is an annual genre festival specializing in sci-fi, horror and Asian films.
[362] McRobbie.

I was excited about out there."[363] And Chris Popkoff of Cinema41 tells Savlov that he and the other programmers "love film and love showing these films to people." Co-programmer Zac Sprauge cites their joy in exposing people to the niche films they love as the primary motivating force for starting their series:

It's almost like what you get in a college film course… I mean, we're not doing superacademic film screenings here, but we're exposing you to niche films and Skyping in the director or stars to discuss the film afterward, which is something you don't get too much outside of either festival situations or film theory classes.[364]

Education and exposure are often primary goals of programmers, even if not expressly stated as such. And the programmers' sphere of influence extends beyond audience members to other programmers as well. Organizers possess highly individualized taste and a strong motivation to share that with others; they perceive themselves as fulfilling a need or filling a gap in the exhibition scene of a particular locale. When speaking of whether a new cinema would arise from the ashes of the BL!!, Kier-la Janisse, founder and programmer of Blue Sunshine, commented that, while she thought there would be a void for a while, other programmers would continue to program sporadic events, but that it would depend "on the personal tastes of the independent exhibitors."[365]

This passion and individual vision can and does inspire participants to start cinema projects of their own. Whereas Baldwin was a motivational force on the West coast, Schaub and Barten site filmmaker Stan Vanderbeek as "the patron saint of

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[363] Niedzviecki.

[364] Savlov.

[365] John Lucas, "Extinguishing the Light!! After Five Years as Manager of the Gaston Experimental-Film Venue, Alex MacKenzie Switches of the Blinding Light!!," *The Georgia Straight,* 17 July 2003, http://www.blindinglight.com/p_gs.htm.

microcinema" for the Baltimore area due to the influence he had via the film and video department of the University of Maryland.[366] And some of the microcinema organizers to whom I've spoken have cited other cinema projects as influences to their own efforts, as was the case with the Alamo for Trash Palace's founder. Another example is the effect Blue Sunshine had on its core group of regulars. One of its most dedicated volunteers started his own series within months of Blue Sunshine's closing. Because of their passion, organizers are able to make it happen with few resources in the most unlikely of environments—and that is what makes microcinema so individualistic and so vital, and often, so ephemeral. But because it's also a communal and shared passion, it is reinvested in and continues at other sites, contributing to the sel-perpetuaing flow that shapes the scene—persistent transience.

Community

Cultivating an audience for a particular genre or mode of exhibition is what passionate programmers do, whether or not it's a conscious goal, and they need a community of individuals with a similar aesthetic taste in order for the venue or program to continue. One reporter described MacKenzie's work as thus: "he has fostered an audience for offbeat film work and nurtured those with creative leanings by providing a venue."[367] MacKenzie, like so many organizers, is also a filmmaker who saw the value in building audiences for the type of work he created and enjoyed. The fact that filmmakers have been the initiators of so many microcinemas is important when considering who is the audience for microcinema venues and how a feeling of community is engendered. Halter notes that a majority of microcinema scenes, in the 90s at least, consisted of producers or

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[366] Schaub, 111.
[367] Lucas.

filmmakers, which differed from the pure spectator audiences of the parallel music scene.[368] A quote from Brian Konefsky—programmer, filmmaker and professor at University of New Mexico—offers some insight into the audience at his microcinema, which supports Halter's claim:

> And I think the members of Basement Films, you know, we're not normal filmmakers, we're sort of oddballs and we found each other though [sic] that oddballness, through the sort of need for community and just being outsiders in the art world, outsiders of the film world… nobody really respects us. And we found each other, but there is a community, an international community of experimentalist [sic] who find each other.[369]

While Halter's assertion may be true to an extent, and is certainly the case for Basement Films, the microcinema has also always been a site where filmmakers and film enthusiasts could mingle. Harvey believes that the micro in the term suggests the intimate exchange between audience and artist. And Schaub writes, "Many of the audience members are filmmakers who come to see what's being produced at the micro level, but there is also an audience of viewers who frequent the Mansion strictly for some diversion from the all-too-predictable mainstream offerings." He goes on to say that it is this interactivity between producers and "consumers of film art"—a feature that is mentioned repeatedly as a benefit of microcinema—that connects the individual theater to "a larger phenomenon."[370] And when a microcinema focuses too much on the local and does not connect to the broader movement, it can suffer, as Beebe describes happened at Flicker:

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[368] Halter, "Head Space," 10.
[369] Frye, 74.
[370] Schaub, 107.

One of the great virtues of Flicker, but also perhaps one of its limitations, was (historically at least) its focus on the local… This focus on the local fostered a sense of community that dovetailed with the sense that people had that Chapel Hill was a center of a certain indie rock scene, a place where something important was happening, and that created an additional excitement about these local films. That said, the flip side of the focus on the local was that the festival and the community around it ended up being relatively insular with little sense of a connection to either other filmmaking communities around the country or to (avant-garde) film history.[371]

The notion of the individual microcinema having a connection to both the local and the national, or global, is still important. In accounts of microcinemas, the raison d'être for these spaces is to provide a venue for local artists, which in turn cultivates a feeling of community; however, most organizers realize they could not operate in a vacuum. As a result, there exists a network of microcinema organizers who communicate with one another, share traveling programs and invite one another to guest curate. Not only is this one of the ways in which programmers and filmmakers bypass the traditional distribution model—oftentimes, they will deliver the film in person and stay for a post-screening discussion—but it fosters a national and sometimes international community of people that is interested in noncommercial films being screened in nontheatrical venues. This recalls Marchessault's and Straw's concept of the scene as being necessarily local and global, at once universal and differentiated, and of having an appeal for both its "unique local character" and one that is defined relative to other cities' scenes.[372] Trotter

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[371] Beebe, 134.
[372] Marchessault, 97.

claimed doing traveling shows helped him find and connect with the "rich community of like-minded artists out there."[373] And beginning in the nineties, a microcinema network formed across the US and parts of Canada, so that filmmakers or programmers touring with their films could schedule screenings at multiple sites. Konefsky describes this practice in the following statement:

> …because we're right along Interstate 40, right between Texas and California, a lot of filmmakers who might be traveling their work through say Aurora Picture Show in Houston come through on their way to say Other Cinema or to the Cinematheque in San Francisco or Red Cat, down in Los Angeles…. So we're sort of… on the tour route.[374]

Collaboration and crossover amongst organizers and filmmakers (and their microcinemas) occur regularly. Producers frequent microcinemas as both presenters and supporters, but a motivated audience of pure spectators continues to turn out in support of this mode of exhibition and type of content, that is, individuals looking for an experience other than what's provided at mainstream commercial theaters. It's important to highlight here that one of the commonalities that coheres these communities both locally and universally is their perception of being alternative or anti-mainstream.

In her description of Aurora Picture Show, Alston explains that, "this screening space has not only formed a community of its own as microcinema, but has taken a place in the larger community."[375] She continues to explain that Grover worked actively to expand the venue's audience through marketing and mail list exchanges and beyond the "traditional microcinema demographic" through targeted programming. The community

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[373] Schaub, 109.
[374] Frye, 73.
[375] Alston, 29.

even reaches past Houston's boarders through traveling programs and a national advisory board. But the primary focus is the local community, and Grover insists that the ambiance of the space, formerly a church, creates a feeling of congregation that invites "'rich, meaningful, intimate exchange' with the audience."[376]

The founders of Rooftop Films took a similar approach to audience expansion. They, too, actively promoted themselves through flyers and email list sharing. It took several years, but what started as a smaller, word-of-mouth scene has transitioned into a widely received program. As Rosenberg explains, "It almost doesn't matter what we show!" indicating that a venue can have a cult following.[377] Though in the case of Rooftop, it has since moved well beyond its original cultish, underground status to become a large outfit with a far more popular reach. Various tourist attractions lists like nycgo.com, blogs like Indiewire and publications like *Time Out* New York mention it as a must-do activity. Though its focus continues to be on underground films and supporting the work of emerging filmmakers, this larger appeal now precludes it from microcinema status, as Rooftop events can now draw well over one thousand people. However, community remains an important facet and is referred to throughout the website, most effectively on the support page where new members and donations are actively sought. The notion of community in this case has simply taken on a much larger connotation than for most other microcinema projects.

Community building is important to Baldwin as well; at the time he started Other Cinema, he was a political activist and consequently used the cinema as a forum for educating people on global issues and current events of the day. More than that, it

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[376] Ibid., 29.
[377] I have described this phenomenon at the Alamo Drafthouse. de Ville, "Cultivating the Cult Experience."

became a space for filmmakers and community members to congregate about not only socio-political issues but also aesthetic ones, as he fostered a practice of found footage and collage filmmaking from orphan films.[378] As he puts it, the microcinema experience is not about kicking back and passively receiving the program but getting directly involved in dialogue about issues and ideas and "setting up a dynamic relationship" between audience and presenter, be it an artist or interpreter. Not only is this idea of creating more direct links between audience and filmmaker/programmer repeatedly mentioned in the written material, but it has been raised in my discussions with the organizers in Montreal. Janisse and David Bertrand of Blue Sunshine, for example, refused to provide visiting 'celebrities' (B-list actors, directors, musicians, etc.) a green room so that they mingled with the audience before and after the screening and during the intermission (while the projectionist changed the 16mm reel).

In discussing the predecessors to microcinema, itinerant showmen of the early 1900s, Alvin suggests they made up for the lack of glamour by placing an emphasis on community building, "with movies serving as a casual social event that set the stage for today's microcinema phenomenon."[379]And it is true, for the most part, the microcinema environment is far more conducive to socializing than commercial venues; organizers foster interaction by serving food and drinks (alcoholic) and by providing an intermission time for audience members to circulate and chat.

On the subject of community, Xander Marro speaks of his microcinema project, Movies with Live Soundtracks, in these terms:

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[378] He first started with a sampler reel he purchased from Blackhawk film distributor. Steve Polta, "Masochism at the Margins: An Interview with Craig Baldwin," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 57-58.
[379] Alvin, 6.

> It was also a community-building project… Two aims from the start were to try to expand the visibility of a subculture that I was part of (and that meant a lot to me) without compromising it, and to try to expand that subculture and make it more inclusive.[380]

This sentiment is indicative of an underlying ambivalence in the microcinema subculture, one with which many programmers struggle, of being inclusive enough to survive and yet different enough from the mainstream or institutional exhibition offerings to maintain subcultural authenticity. Organizers are often balancing a need to bring in bodies, by screening something with a broader or more populist appeal, and showing the more challenging content in which they are interested and to which they want to expose others. At the root of this labor, however, is the issue of taste and a passion for cinema, cinephilia. These two deeply connected forces, along with a desire to share them with others, are what drive most programmers while at the same time fostering the atmosphere of the likeminded community.

Cinephilia

The term cinephile has been used to describe both the organizers and audience members of microcinemas. Though scholars, like Susan Sontag, have argued that cinephilia is an individual feeling, it can be realized in a community setting, such as a film festival. But it is important to recognize that the cinephilia manifested at film festivals or art houses is not necessarily the same as that at microcinemas. As I discussed in chapter two, cinephilia and paracinephilia, while both describing a passion for film, are quite different in the way they are experienced, acted upon and conceived of by the respective individuals. What complicates the microcinema scene is that the audience may consist of

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[380] Takahashi, 110.

cinephiles and paracinephiles, as well as those individuals who love the canon and content of both groups. Naturally, the type of microcinema—avant-garde/experimental or repertory/B film—determines the constitution of the audience.

The term cinephilia appears, or is alluded to, repeatedly in reviews of microcinemas and in the literature about the movement. Scholars like Marchessault have used cinephile to describe the individuals who work to create alternative film scenes— "cinephiles who helped to create events, screenings, personal film collections and archives outside of public institutions"[381]—and journalists use cinephilia to describe the passion for cinema that is evident in both the organization of and reception at screenings. In one reporter's farewell to the BL!!, she writes, "I am forever grateful to the artists, film-makers, cinephiles—and Alex—for making it happen."[382] Occasionally the term itself is not employed, instead reporters might use "film aficionados,"[383] "fanatics/cineastes" or "rabid film lovers,"[384] but the notion of cinephilia is implied. And the organizers themselves evoke cinephilia, as does Executive Director Ryan Darbonne when describing Cinema41: "This is definitely a passion project for us."[385] These references to cinephilia, though, are not describing one mode of cine-love. Microcinema cinephilia is one that is simultaneously traditional, often valuing older small-gauge celluloid formats over digital where the artiness of cinema is highly regarded but not the art institution/world or film industry, and paracinephilic, in that it values poor quality formats like degraded bootleg video and low genres, eschewing the preciousness of art

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[381] Marcessault, 91.
[382] Monk.
[383] Lucas.
[384] Savlov.
[385] Ibid.

cinema.[386] Consequently, when speaking of microcinema cinephilia, one must understand that it could mean either one of or a combination of these expressions of cinephilia.

The public sites of cinephilia have changed as the sites for alternative film exhibition have transformed. The cinematheques and cine-clubs of Europe are often pointed to as early sites of cinephilia, then film societies, art houses, underground events, film festivals and now microcinemas. Mostly, the literature on cinephilia does not cite mainstream, commercial theaters as places where cinephilia is fostered or experienced. That is not to say that cinephiles do not frequent commercial theaters, but that, discursively, the sites that cultivate a deep passion for the art of cinema are those that specialize in now rare celluloid content—films that focus more on artistic qualities, be them low or high, narrative or visual, than on costly special effects or Hollywood stars. Barabara Wilinsky has discussed this discourse polarizing mainstream and alternative cinemas in terms of art house theaters distinguishing themselves from mainstream theaters and both Michael Newman and Sherry Ortner have observed it in their studies of indie culture. In my conversations with microcinema scene members, a similar alternative-versus-mainstream discourse was evident. For example, when I asked subjects what was Blue Sunshine doing differently than other cinemas, responses almost always reflected better quality films and presentation of films. To be clear, microcinema participants may share some taste preferences with commercial moviegoers and these audiences can overlap, but whereas mainstream practices are viewed as mostly informed by profit, microcinema practices are viewed as mostly informed by a passion for film.

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[386] For extensive studies of bootleg video and fandom, see Hawkins' *Cutting Edge* and Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

Halter proffers that the "spectator-based cinephile culture of the 1960s and 70s" was one made up of writers and academics—film critics and theorists—while the cinephile culture of the 90s was driven by filmmakers, and it is this cinephilia that could be found at the microcinemas of the decade.[387] While his claim is not completely accurate, especially when considering the New York Underground scene, whose audiences consisted of many filmmakers, actors and performance artists, the fact that cinephilia is a driving motivation for alternative projects remains true.

For Alvin, microcinema is the "glimmer of hope for those who wish to rekindle the magic of discovering small films on big screens among likeminded cinephiles"—makeshift exhibition spaces that "bring with them the promise of a communal cinema experience."[388] Cinephilia, and the opportunity to share that with others, is the key agent that binds together audience members and organizers as well as being the reason microcinemas exist. Programmers desire to share their objects of affection with others who also appreciate those objects in a semi-public environment. Chapter six addresses in greater detail the relevance of cinephilia and paracinephilia to the microcinema's sense of community, specifically as it played out at Blue Sunshine. Now I turn to the content or type of films shown, which is where cinephilic taste is expressed and cultivated.

Content

The types of films screened at microcinemas vary from place to place. Some focus on artist-made works—or as the epigraph to this chapter stages, "the best in contemporary film"—others on old, under-appreciated genres, like exploitation and trash films. Many venues screen only celluloid, while some work with multiple formats. It generally follows

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[387] Halter, "Head Space," 10.
[388] Alvin, 5.

that spaces specializing in repertory or retro cinema screen mostly16mm, while those whose mission it is to show new and emerging artists' work screen small-gauge (16mm, 8mm, Super 8) and/or digital works. These spaces are "as much about continuing and reviving prior esthetics" as they are "about forging new ones."[389]

Spaces like Other Cinema distinguish themselves by accommodating multiple formats, especially those considered dead or outdated and screen an array of content described on their website as "fine-art filmmaking, as well as engaged essay and documentary forms. But OC also embraces marginalized genres…and blows against consensus reality and the sterility of museum culture."[390] In the same vein, CineCycle's mandate is to "maintain a screening space for obsolete formats like 8mm" and "technologies like Fisher Price's pixel vision;"[391] it accommodates "35mm, 16mm, regular and super 8 film projection, as well as VHS/3/4" video."[392] Because microcinema spaces emerged as alternatives to mainstream viewing, they all screen content that is believed to be different than what can be found at mainstream multiplex theaters, and, as Baldwin's quote indicates, in this way differentiate themselves from institutional venues. It is clear Baldwin not only wishes to position his project as marginal to the mainstream center but also to that of sanctioned cultural spaces, like museums.

Organizers, as well as the media, work toward positioning microcinemas and their content as alternative. In an ad for the monthly Grindhouse Wednesdays in Montreal, the author appeals to "movie geeks" by describing the event as something sensational and offering an other-than-mainstream experience for those with paracinephilic taste:

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[389] Halter, "Head Space," 7.
[390] Other Cinema, website, http://www.othercinema.com/archive/mainframe.html.
[391] Marchessault, 98.
[392] Ibid., 96.

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Movie geeks can rejoice once more. The brilliant and short-lived Grindhouse

Wednesdays event is returning in April with more mayhem, exploitation and gore

than ever before… grindhouse films are cheaply made films with a penchant for

extreme horror, erotica and the bizarre. Such films, like blaxploitation movies,

martial arts movies, extremely violent horror or softcore pornography, would

never be considered for mainstream theatres.[393]

In an ironic twist, explained in Sconce's work on paracinephiles as a subculture's

imitation of the hierarchy and canonization of legitimate culture, the author goes on to

explain how grindhouse films are making a comeback. He attempts to legitimize the

genre by describing its commercial success and invoking the names of two well-known

auteurs:

Recently, the appeal of the grindhouse, and its midnight screenings and cheap

gimmicks, has created somewhat of a comeback. Grindhouse films have been

seeing respectable releases on DVDs, new prints have been making the rounds in

repertory theatres, and Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez released their

Grindhouse inspired double feature a couple years back, an experience that

included fake grindhouse trailers.[394]

Endowing something that is low art with the elevated status of legitimate culture is how

Sconce describes the paracinephile's pleasure in valuing their objects of adoration, which

include the grindhouse genre described above. Likewise, Hawkins' description of

paracinephilic video collectors coincides with this tendency, as they view the distressed

state of the video as both "a signifier of the tape's outlaw status and a guarantor of its

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[393] Telemachus Vlachakis, "Grindhouse Wednesdays return next month," *Examiner*, website, 1 April 2010,
http://www.examiner.com/article/grindhouse-wednesdays-return-next-month.
[394] Ibid.

authenticity." According to Hawkins, the value for the paracinephilic video fan is based on the access to hard-to-find and rare material and not in the "quality or intrinsic value" of the videotape.[395] Just as those who frequented grindhouse theaters in the mid- to late 1900s were patently aware their tastes were marginalized by mainstream culture, "when you watch or listen to a bootleg, you can't help but be aware that you're partaking of a kind of capitalist *samizdat*, indulging in a medium forbidden by the state."[396] Similarly, those microcinema organizers and supporters who screen and view films illegally feel somewhat rebellious in that they are putting one over on the studio industry, or in the case of Blue Sunshine, sidestepping provincial censorship laws.

Invoking Sconce's and Hawkins's work, but at the same time poking fun, Case ironically elevates the low culture of his space in the slogan for Trash Palace: "Toronto's Classiest Cinema." In an article reviewing an evening at Trash Palace, Corey Mintz refers to a self-satisfying, lowbrow experience claiming, "It lives up to its seamy potential."[397] He continues by comparing the experience to a TIFF screening, precisely what Trash Palace is not trying to emulate:

> Trash Palace is the antithesis of the Toronto International Film Festival… No one is complaining of sold-out screenings for 'High Ballin,' a Canadian trucker movie made as a tax shelter. That could be because it's terrible. But that's the appeal. The chairs are uncomfortable. The fun is pure, untainted by cynicism, high expectations, or irony.[398]

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[395] Hawkins, 47.
[396] Richard Kadrey, "Director's Cuts," *World Art 3* (1996): 66. Quoted in Hawkins, 49.
[397] Corey Mintz, "Can you keep a secret?; For food or film, private clubs offer a taste of a homespun subculture," *Toronto Star*, 5 September 2008, L1.
[398] Ibid.

I must take exception to the author's claim of a lack of irony. During my evening at Trash Palace, audience members engaged in counterpoint dialogue, interjections and joke cracking throughout the program suggesting a particular type of viewing strategy—one that is ironic and tongue-in-cheek. They certainly did not enjoy it at face value but took pleasure in "seeing through" the films to the production processes[399]—the stilted or goofy scripts, stiff or exaggerated acting, unconvincing effects or props and illogical plot devices and narratives—all of which align with Sconce's description of the manner in which paracinephiles enjoy their texts.

> By concentrating so intently on 'non-diegetic' elements in these films, be they unconvincing special effects, blatant anachronisms, or histrionic acting, the paracinematic reading attempts to activate the "whole 'film' existing alongside the narrative film we tend to think of ourselves as watching."[400]

One's enjoyment of a "trash" film generally necessitates this manner of viewing. And the pleasure derived from this reading strategy is, again, tied to the idea of elevating a work that is rejected by the academy and the mainstream. Here we are reminded of Bourdieu's observation that aesthetic criticism is a matter of taste, and taste "is a social construct with profoundly political implications."[401]

It is only, however, a minority of microcinemas that specialize in trash film; many more focus on local and avant-garde artists. Schaub describes the mission of microcinemas in general as screening alternative films by underground artists, and the

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[399] John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24.

[400] Sconce, 387. Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 132-33. Quoted in Sconce, 387.

[401] Ibid., 392.

content at the Mansion Theater, specifically, as "anything from locally produced film and video shorts to the favorite works of well-known pioneers of the microcinema circuit."[402] And Trotter describes his content as "films with no commercial viability."[403] Others have shown anything considered to be "obscure films that 'fell through the cracks,'"[404] including "home movies, travel films, sponsored films, educational shorts 50s, 60s, and 70s B movies and counterculture films, TV episodes, Scopitones, vintage stag films, lost silent classics, and themed shows such as… exotica music films, vintage cartoons, and even a 'boring films' program."[405] There exists a wide spectrum of what is shown at microcinemas from avant-garde and artistic films to found footage, home movies and trash films. Sometimes this breaks down along the line of filmmaker, tending to show the experimental contemporary work, versus collector, tending to show retro fare. The programmers' taste, individual filmmaking practice and/or personal archives often dictate the programming content.

Notwithstanding the differences in content, the above characteristics are evident in all the microcinemas I have visited from Houston to Toronto and are what differentiate microcinemas from other modes of alternative exhibition. Before going more deeply into my observations of contemporary microcinemas, I will first contextualize the emergence of the movement by offering an historic overview of the cultural practice as epitomized by five significant venues.

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[402] Schaub, 106.
[403] Ibid, 109.
[404] Gorfinkel, 118.
[405] Ibid., 117.

A Brief Survey of Five Illustrative Microcinemas

Many microcinemas have come and gone, mostly undocumented. In the absence of a

comprehensive history, I provide a portrait of the microcinema movement, one that

moves us closer to a full accounting of the influence microcinema has had in the

alternative exhibition arena over the last three decades. It is helpful to recall, here, that

microcinema arises at a point in film history when critics ominously begin to prophesize

the "end of moviegoing," coinciding with the rise of the megaplex, the decline of the art

house and the era of VHS, and just prior to the next wave of dire predictions forewarning

the "death of cinema" as a result of digital intervention. Moreover, they appear

concurrently to the coming of age of Generation X, which played a part in the emergence

of indie film culture, and the economic downturn and subsequent grim employment

landscape of the early 90s, creating an environment ripe for the DIY ethos and

subcultural entrepreneurs. Situating the beginning of microcinema in this

industrial/cultural/economic moment demonstrates the crucial role they played and

continue to play in conceptualizations of hierarchies of taste in cinema.

Below I highlight some of the most important examples to have operated in the

US and Canada, providing a rough sketch of the historical impact and importance of

these spaces. I then move to the contemporary venues that I visited that are also important

to the history of microcinema.

As I mentioned, Canyon Cinema is the earliest known example of a contemporary

project that embodied the microcinema ethos, and I would argue it is the "evolutionary

link" between the underground film practices of the 60s and 70s and the microcinema

movement that began two decades later. Many likeminded projects have come and gone

since Canyon Cinema that have incorporated microcinema traits. Dennis Nyback, for example, began running small-scale theaters as early as the late-seventies, and some of them would have been called microcinemas had the term existed then.[406] However, none of his venues exist today; most had short lives of a year or three. And while, a later cinema was the first to call itself a microcinema, the long-running Other Cinema still exists and represents a significant landmark in microcinema history.

Found footage filmmaker Craig Baldwin initiated Other Cinema in the mid-eighties at Artists' Television Access in San Francisco.[407] It remains the longest running microcinema to date and is frequently cited as the original.[408] Baldwin, who began as the sole curator but now shares programming responsibilities with a collective, has since adopted the term for the venue and is a longtime advocate for microcinema practices. Thus, they screen experimental and avant-garde works, mostly by living artists, in a variety of formats—"Reg8mm, Super8mm, 16mm, 35mm slides and filmstrips, audiocassette PXLVision, VHS, Hi8 video, Betacam, mini-DV, DV, DVD, QuickTime, PowerPoint, and we have even 'Streamed' from the internet."[409] They specialize in short works that are generally anti-establishment in theme and/or form: "Whether avant-garde

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[406] For a more detailed overview of Nyback's various cinema projects, see Jack Stevenson, "The Nyback Chronicles," in *A Microcinema Primer*, 46-55.

[407] "I would place the beginning of Other Cinema (though I was running other microcinemas in other venues under even other names) in 1986 when the media-arts collective ATA re-started its programming in its new SF Mission District location. It was first known as 'Anti-Films' ('The Rad, The Mad, and the Bad'), and a year later, 'Eyes of Hell.' But to be picky about it, the OC moniker did not come in until 1988." Craig Baldwin, email, 11 June 2012.

[408] Halter, for example, distinguishes Other Cinema from the other alternative spaces at the time, like the San Francisco Cinematheque, because its programming "played faster and looser" than the "established names and avant-garde tradition" of the older venues, as well as its self-supporting "low-budget economic structure." These features made it a new model for alternative exhibition. Halter, "Head Space," 6.

[409] Baldwin.

or engagé, our emphasis is on the radical subjectivities and sub-cultural sensibilities that find expression in what used to be called 'underground cinema.'"[410]

Beyond film screenings, Other Cinema also hosts performances, which, as Baldwin states, are now a regular part of their programming; as a result, it has also incorporated other media forms such as vinyl records and shadow puppetry.[411] Like other microcinemas, Other Cinema embraces and champions outdated technology: "One of the pillars of the OC 'underground edifice' (think Atlantis) is media-archeology/dead media."[412] Though they are rooted in the same Valencia Street space they have occupied for the last twenty-five years, they consider themselves a roving, open-concept cinema:

> OC is not married to this space... we consider it a floating project… it includes a DVD publishing arm, and an online presence (in fact soon to be hosted in a "cloud"), which not only includes a web-zine, but streaming movie clips. We also do shows on the road.[413]

Other Cinema's modus operandi is informed by a self-described desire and commitment to breaking new ground in exhibition. Oftentimes that comes from reworking traditional modes of viewing media. Other Cinema continues to offer unusual and creative programming to this day.

In an interview with Steve Polta, Baldwin describes his programming process as driven by ideas and "being in the contemporary moment."[414] He is drawn to creative, layered programming in which something new is added to something old. For example, he refers to curator Konrad Steiner's Neo-Benshee events, for which writers and poets

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[410] Other Cinema.
[411] Baldwin.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Polta, 63.

create new text to present while an already existing film text is shown, as brilliant and cutting edge.[415] And he lauds Greta Snider's 3-D slide show where she offered subjective commentary on current events depicted in the images—claiming its discursive nature offered "more direct responsibility, accountability, and presence."[416] I am reminded of Acland's discussion of the Trachtenburg Family Slideshow Players, a band that employed found slides of unknown families as a visual component in their performances. As Acland comments, this band's appeal was reliant upon its nostalgic reference to a long-ago decade—the pleasure derived from "the rediscovery of vintage artifacts and styles." He goes on to observe: "The nostalgia for the vintage and the underappreciated cannot be seen apart from the very nature of material objects in consumer society."[417] And I would expand upon this to say that because we live in a time of heightened mass production, technological innovation and consumption, and in an era of planned obsolescence—where products are intentionally made to quickly deteriorate or become obsolete—the well-made goods of the mid-nineteenth century that have not only lasted but are still operable remind us of a time when material objects were more precious. Microcinemas celebrate the preciousness and rarity of film projectors and celluloid.

In 1993, about seven years after the birth of Other Cinema, came the first self-named microcinema, Total Mobile Home microCINEMA (TMH), a "socially based concept project" resulting in a cinema located in the basement of the founders' apartment building in San Francisco.[418] The space was approximately eight-foot wide and viewers sat on benches. Inspired by Other Cinema, Canyon Cinema and key individuals in the

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[415] Ibid., 65.
[416] Ibid., 64.
[417] Acland, *Residual Media*, xiv.
[418] TMH was located at 51 McCoppin Street in the center of San Francisco. Barten and Sherman, "Total Mobile Home Revisited," 43.

experimental film world, TMH organizers Barten and Sherman showed works on various formats—16mm, super-8, regular-8, VHS and 8mm tape—and hosted open screen nights when filmmakers could show their own work. Both Barten and Sherman are filmmakers and both had experience with other alternative film exhibition projects.[419] Requesting a five-dollar donation, they offered weekly Friday night screenings on a seasonal schedule, occasionally inviting guest programmers to curate an evening's event. Specializing in experimental films by both emerging and established artists, the filmmaker was often in attendance. Important underground artists, such as George Kuchar, presented his films at TMH. In addition to avant-garde content, older films were screened, ranging from classic silent to industrial films. Barten and Sherman also brought their show on the road, organizing multi-state tours of film and video. That the organizers intended to create a different experience, one that departed from the expectations of a regular movie theater, is apparent from their website. The description for one film warns: "Expect possible human interaction with the film forms to enhance traditional viewing procedures."[420] Like many of these alternative DIY projects, TMH was short-lived—its final program taking place in the spring of 1997.[421]

Meanwhile, in Baltimore, screenings were occurring on a monthly basis at The Mansion, a funeral home turned artist group residence and music rehearsal/performance space. Cyzyk, a resident experimental filmmaker, took over the H.O.M.E. (Horse Opera Meanderthal Encounter) Group's independent open film and video screenings that

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[419] Barten had founded H.O.M.E. Group in Baltimore and Sherman was involved in Canyon Cinema Filmmakers Cooperative, covered in the previous chapter. Ibid.
[420] TMH, http://www.hi-beam.net/org/TMH/tmh.html.
[421] Ibid.

showcased local artists when Barten, a co-founder, left for San Francisco.[422] One way he spread the word about The Mansion was by taking shows on the road and networking at festivals. Cyzyk also hosted out-of-town filmmakers and live music shows for seven years before moving out.[423] The Mansion had a very unusual ambience as the screening room was in the former viewing room where bodies were laid for wakes, and coffins and other tools of the trade were still lying around. Cyzyk played up the morose surroundings by adding cobwebs and similarly clichéd spooky décor because part of the allure of its underground status was the fact that it was a former funeral home. As Alvin observes, "each microcinema has its own particular vibe" depending on the audience and the organizers, but also on the ambience of the space itself.[424] This last point often gets overlooked, but I believe the venue's environment is critical to creating the singularity of the experience and greatly affects the reception of the texts shown. After all, if the rest of the variables remained the same, watching a program outside on a rooftop of an urban industrial building will create a very different mood than watching the same program in a funeral parlor or from a pew in an old, wooden church.

Pews are exactly what visitors to the original site of Aurora Picture Show sat on while viewing short, handmade works on a bi-monthly basis in a 1924 church building in the Sunset Heights neighborhood of Houston. The intimate space, founded in June 1998 by filmmaker and curator Andrea Grover, who also lived on site, began by showing "Extremely Shorts" programs of films less than three minutes in length.[425] Grover had noticed a dearth of venues showcasing local filmmakers or showing short experimental

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[422] Schaub, 111.
[423] Microcinefest, website, www.microcinefest.org.
[424] Alvin, 6.
[425] Independent Exposure, website, http://www.independentexposure.com/venue/565/Aurora_Picture_Show.html.

and avant-garde film and decided to buy and convert the church into a microcinema in order to show her work and the work of fellow artists, whom she brought to the site to discuss their films. According to Harvey, the programming covers five tracks: historical, emerging contemporary artists, kids/family-friendly, Texas focused (made in Texas or by a Texan artist) and documentary. However, after Aurora left the church space at 800 Aurora Street in 2009, another non-profit microcinema moved in, 14 Pews, whose focus is documentary film. Aurora subsequently dropped that from their programming in order to avoid competition and brand confusion, distinguishing itself from the old address.[426] From 2007 to 2012, the Aurora offices were located near the Menil Collection in the Museum District and events took place at different locales. The staff called this new mode of site-specific exhibition "pop-up" cinema. In my interview with Harvey, she described the pros and cons of being a cinema without a space. The advantages of mobility are the ability to take programming to parts of the city that had never had access to such film events and to more centrally located sites,[427] and it also forced them to collaborate more with other organizations; both of these aspects have introduced them to new audiences. The disadvantage is the drain on the staff, setting up and tearing down for each screening, and the wear and tear on the equipment (i.e. exposure to the elements, like rain). With the help of Kickstarter funding, Aurora relocated to a new building in 2012 that houses the administration offices, screening room, video library and education room.

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[426] Harvey.

[427] The church was located in a transitional neighborhood that deterred many people, especially Board Members.

Aurora Picture Show pop-up event

To varying degrees, education is a facet of the mission for many microcinemas, whether via specialized programs or simply in the desire to educate people about experimental noncommercial film, and Aurora is no exception. For one, it is a primary way nonprofit organizations raise grant money. The funding available for educational programs is far greater than for strictly art and film creation or exhibition projects, which is why almost all nonprofits offer educational programming. In the case of Aurora, they have a fairly broad educational component that includes workshops and salons with a focus on media literacy, a video library, an internship program, educator opportunities and Popcorn Kids. The Popcorn Kids program is by far the most extensive with free family-friendly film screenings, the Mobile Media Literacy initiative that travels to different neighborhoods, and summer filmmaking boot camps that provide experimental film instruction to teens and youth.[428] Another benefit of educational outreach is the sense of community it fosters, while building an audience for the cinema and creating a feeling of goodwill toward the organization. This can also result in attracting corporate sponsorship and private donations.

The last venue I will address in this section is The Blinding Light!! Cinema (BL!!) that operated from 1998 to 2003 in Vancouver, BC. On its archived website, it refers to itself as North America's only full-time underground cinema; they were open six

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[428] Aurora Picture Show, website, http://aurorapictureshow.org/pages/home.asp.

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days a week.[429] Though on the larger side of micro, with a one hundred ten-seat theater, its programming, business structure and ambiance situate it squarely within the microcinema movement.

The articles published around the time of its closing reveal a great deal about how the cinema, programming and its audience were viewed by the media and the public. Both the programmers and the filmmakers whose work was screened, reporters wrote, had esoteric tastes—a vision for "cross-pollinating artistic practices" and "new modes of expression."[430] According to one article, "Blinding Light showed films that challenged the convention because it was an institution that celebrated the individual - not the populist vision"; the same reporter went on to say that the theater reminded her "that for all the formulaic emptiness unspooling at the multiplex, there were people who made moves for the sheer pleasure of it."[431] Another reporter describes the audience as cinephiles and "local film afficionados with a taste for the offbeat, the ephemeral, and the experimental."[432]

Believing the city and its population to be a receptive place for new and alternative art and film forms, the founder and programmer Alex MacKenzie had signed a five-year lease on the space in the Gastown district of downtown Vancouver.[433] The cinema shared the space with a café and gallery wall for art exhibits.[434] BL!! also produced an in-house zine and organized the yearly Vancouver Underground Film Festival. As a nonprofit organization, it received government support, in the form of

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[429] This is debatable, as Reg Hartt has been operating Cineforum in Toronto on a full-time schedule since 1992, albeit in a more casual and haphazard manner.
[430] Alex MacKenzie quoted in Salmi.
[431] Katherine Monk, Movies section, *Vancouver Sun, Queue Magazine*, 17 July 2003, http://www.blindinglight.com/p_sun.htm.
[432] Lucas.
[433] Ibid.
[434] The Blinding Light!! Cinema, website, http://www.blindinglight.com.

operating grants, some private sponsorship and had a membership program of over four

thousand members, who each paid a three-dollar-a-year fee that guaranteed discounted

admission.

BL!!'s programming was eclectic. In addition to a monthly BYO8 night during

which attendees could show ten minutes of their film or video on VHS, DVD, Super 8

and 16mm, the programming selection included documentaries, music videos, TV

Carnage media collages, new and older experimental work, video art and classic

underground fare.[435] One reporter described the programming as, "screenings of long

forgotten Cold War propaganda reels and bleeding-edge documentaries to live events

blurring the boundaries between cinema and performance."[436] On occasion, BL!! also

hosted live theater and music events. It closed at the end of its lease because MacKenzie

was fatigued and desired to focus on his own filmmaking.

Contemporary Microcinema Scenes

For the most part, microcinemas operate as part of an extensive network of alternative

exhibition and distribution. Therefore, it is useful to compare and contrast microcinema

scenes in various locales. Because my main focus is Montreal, a city of 1,649,519 or, if

you count the census metropolitan area, 3,824,221, the other locales with which I draw

comparison are also cities, rather than suburban or rural areas. Montreal is the second

largest Canadian metropolitan area to Toronto with a population of 5,583,064.[437] In the

United States, I look at New York City (population 8,175,133) and Austin (population

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[435] Ibid.

[436] Lucas.

[437] Population statistics of Canada are based on Statistics Canada's 2011 census. Statistics Canada, website, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html.

790,390).[438] This offers a range of city sizes for comparison. More importantly, these

cities all have vibrant film communities with numerous festivals, organizations and

schools to support a high level of film activity. Because Toronto is perhaps the most

similar, in size and nationality, and likely has the closest connection to and influence on

Montreal's film scene, I give it the most attention, and it is with Toronto I begin.

Toronto

The alternative film exhibition scene in Toronto is far more extensive and vibrant than in

Montreal, with several distinct microcinema spaces. Marchessault claims Toronto has one

of the most dynamic alternative film scenes in North America, and this is occurring

despite the fact that many of the permanent commercial structures for filmviewing (i.e.

movie theaters) have been demolished. Suggesting that marginal filmgoing is more

dependent on "cultural scenes and networks rather than specific spaces," she nevertheless

argues that subcultural scenes do, in fact, need material places.[439] And these spaces

provide the relatively young city of Toronto access to a cultural history that is

borderless—one that is the accumulation of "a network of histories, places, events,

artworks, and characters**"** that reach beyond the city limits.[440]

In May/June 2012, I visited three venues—Cineforum, Trash Palace, CineCycle—

all of which meet the afore-mentioned criteria for microcinema. Since 1992, Cineforum

has been situated at 463 Bathurst in the living room of Reg Hartt, a long-time member of

Toronto's alternative film community. Offering programming on a daily basis, excluding

Fridays, visitors are treated to a wide variety of content, usually from Hartt's own DVD

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[438] US population data is based on the US Census Bureau's 2010 census. U.S. Census Bureau, website, http://2010.census.gov/2010census/index.php.
[439] Marchessault, 91.
[440] Ibid., 97, 96.

collection.[441] Hartt vehemently espouses screening films on DVD rather than film, a rather unusual stance for a microcinema organizer.[442] He runs the Cineforum in an ad hoc manner. The night I attended I expected a screening at the time listed on the Cineforum website. However, when I arrived he informed me that screening was cancelled as there had been no interest in it, but he invited me into a screening already in progress, and not listed on the calendar. The venue is a double room, so that the screen and half the chairs are in one room and the rest of the chairs, projector and Hartt are in the other. About twenty-five well-worn office swivel chairs are arranged in rows, only two of which were occupied by patrons, in addition to Hartt and myself. The place has the odor of cat urine, and Hartt's boarders come and go in the corridor beside the viewing room. It has a very casual heir to it.

The Cineforum's exterior

Content ranges from documentaries to 3-D films shown on what he describes as a "state of the art system," which he claims is the best 3-D technology in Toronto.[443] Arguing that most microcinema programmers undermine the practice by not charging

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[441] I am fairly certain he is not paying screening fees to show the films; he claims he has a right to show those for which he once owned the 16mm version. Reg Hartt, interview, 31 May 2012.
[442] Another interviewee confided that Hartt had to sell off his celluloid collection to pay back taxes, which may be why he has turned to digital projection. Hartt told me it was because film is too difficult to store.
[443] Hartt.

enough for screenings, he now requests a twenty-dollar suggested donation. While insisting he is no businessman, Hartt explained to me that people do not value something that is priced too low. In the Cineforum's Reg Hartt is a good example of a programmer who has a divisive, and sometimes distancing, effect on people. Possessing a mercurial personality, he has been known to ask people to leave his theater if they ask the wrong question—that is a question that indicates they are not open or flexible to alternative film exhibition (or if they criticize his space or technology). People seem to love him or hate him—one member of the Toronto film scene suggested that he is his own worst enemy. Despite his potentially alienating personality, many Torontonian film folks admit he has had a significant influence on the film scene there.

Another important character in the Toronto scene is Stacey Case, founder of Trash Palace. While Case is the key organizer, the approach to programming is more like that of a film collective; he works with five other collectors to host weekly Friday night screenings always on 16mm. The name of the cinema refers, for him, to three aspects of the word trash: the décor of the space; the genre or category of film (biker movies, grindhouse, exploitation, etc.); and the fact that "we existentially find films in the trash. They are films that people don't want and we buy them real cheap."[444] Specializing in trash films, of course, they often supplement the evening's feature with cartoons, newsreels and orphan films. Case's collection is guided by what he can buy on Ebay or from other collectors for forty dollars a film.[445] His main collaborator, Jonathan Culp, whose collection focuses on Canadian tax shelter, educational/classroom and industrial

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[444] Case.
[445] Ibid.

films, takes the programming on the road—Trash on Wheels—to venues in other cities, including Blue Sunshine and Casa del Popolo in Montreal.

Since its first screening in 2007, Trash Palace has experienced a fairly healthy run for an alternative space—nearly two years in the first space before moving to the current one. Case contributes this to the fact that he has created an ambiance that is inviting, offbeat and fun; moreover, there is nothing else like it in Toronto. With seating for fifty people, the average turn out is twenty-two—about fifteen the night I attended—and about sixty percent are regulars, who attend no matter what the film.[446] The other forty percent turn out for specific films, and there are always first-timers at each screening. Occasionally, no one shows, but Case will still run the film because often he has not yet seen the print himself. The evening I visited, the audience was quite vociferous, yelling out silly comments about the film or engaging in witty counterpoint dialogue to the extent that it was often difficult to hear the film. Because they have only one projector there is always an intermission for a reel change when people mingle and discuss the film.

Trash Palace's interior

Getting to Trash Palace was a bit of an adventure in itself. It used to be that if it was your first time, you didn't know the address of the cinema until you bought a ticket at another location—a video store or film-related retail store. But now the address is

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[446] In my article on the Alamo, I argue there can exist a cult fandom for venues as well as texts. I suspect this type of fan attachment is what Case is suggesting here. de Ville, "Cultivating the Cult Experience."

listed on the website and patrons buy tickets at the theater. Still, it is located in the basement of a multi-purpose building near the train tracks in the southwest corner of the city. Small signs lead you through a tunnel and down some stairs into a dark, red-lit space whose walls are plastered with movie memorabilia and posters (mostly for music shows), hand-made by Case. By day, Case is a screenprinter and the space his print shop; this is evident in the meticulous attention to design of all Trash Palace paraphernalia. The "popped corn" bags, postcard schedules and movie punch cards are all printed on site in the red and yellow theme colors of the theater, and the T-shirts are also adorned with a stylish image. Along with the typical movie theater refreshments, Case will usually cook up a special dish for the night, sometimes to tie in with the film; he had made a slow-cooked Hungarian Paprikash the night I went.

Like many microcinemas, Trash Palace operates under the radar of the authorities, despite being mentioned in a front-page article in the *Toronto Star* Life section, asking the question: "Can you keep a secret?"[447] In this article, the writer lauds the ambiance and singularity of urban underground leisure venues. One of the reasons Trash Palace maintains a low profile is that Case does not have the proper permits to use the space as a cinema, nor does he pay for the rights to show the films; so the schedule is only available online and via Facebook posts. But he jokes he's doing Toronto a community service by keeping undesirables off the streets: "Have all the loonies come here; we love them at Trash Palace."[448] To the diverse array of individuals that do go, he serves refreshments for which he also does not have a license. For these reasons, you would think he would be concerned about his precarious position, but he is very confident he will continue

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[447] Mintz.
[448] Case.

running Trash Palace for many more years. Even with imminent eviction for 2015, so that the building can be turned into condominiums, Case is already planning for the next home for his microcinema.

CineCycle's alley way entrance

The third microcinema I visited was CineCycle, located in Heath's bike repair shop and living space, in a back alley of the bustling Queen and Spadina area of town. Again, the signage was not particularly conspicuous, and I stood outside for a while before following someone else through an unmarked door. Marchessault suggests this secret address, for which people "need to be 'in the know,'" lends the space a marginality that adds to "its appeal as an underground space."[449] Housed in an old carriage house, like Trash Palace, the venue has an alternate commercial use by day, creating an "idiosyncratic blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure."[450] In existence since 1991, CineCycle's first home was an eighty-seat theater/bike repair shop also on Spadina Avenue, before Heath relocated to the current space about sixteen years ago. All of Heath's permanent cinema spaces have incorporated three key elements: "a bicycle repair shop, a small cinema, and an espresso machine."[451] For screenings, which occur about once or twice a month, Heath moves all of his tools and equipment to another locale in

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[449] Marchessault, 96. For a more complete history of Heath's cinema projects and a nuanced discussion of CineCycle, see Marchessault's "Of Bicycles and Films."
[450] Ibid., 97.
[451] Ibid., 95.

order to accommodate the fifty folding chairs that transform it into a cinema. Because

Heath rebuilds the space for each screening, it "produces a sense of collapsible, mutable

space" much like Blue Sunshine, Rooftop Films, Light Industry and numerous other

microcinemas that result in the transformation of a nondedicated space. And like Blue

Sunshine and the original Aurora, CineCycle is also a domestic space, though there are

no signs of this. Marchessault proposes the multipurposeness of the site as work, leisure

and living quarters is what produces "a feeling of both exclusivity and belonging."[452]
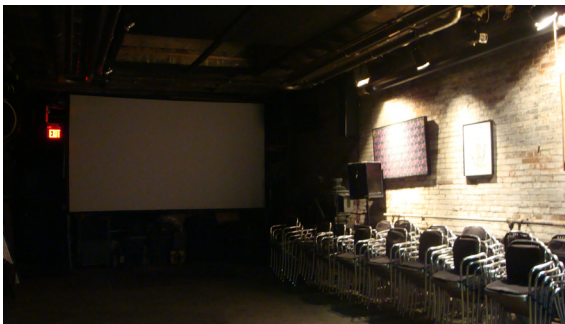
CineCycle's interior

CineCycle feels historic with its dirt floors, elaborate antique glass skylights and

brick walls, but the bicycles and their parts hung on the walls remind one of the space's

primary purpose. Heath has not been programming events himself in recent years, but he

rents out the space for private affairs and has established long-time relationships with

film collectives and arts organizations that regularly hold their screenings at his venue.

Pleasure Dome, a programming collective established in 1989, sponsored the event the

evening I visited.[453] They have been collaborating with Heath for about twenty-two years

and are responsible for about 75% of the screenings that take place there.[454] They curate

programs of experimental and avant-garde short films and small format work, and usually

at least one of the showcased filmmakers is in attendance. CineCycle is one of the few

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[452] Ibid., 97.
[453] Pleasure Dome, website, http://pdome.org/about/.
[454] Marchessault, 96.

microcinema spaces that are equipped with a 35mm projector, but it's mostly 16mm and digital film that is screened there these days. Having been in the film industry before opening his shop, Heath amassed a sizable collection of celluloid, which he is currently selling off because he can no longer afford the rent to store the reels.[455] For a while, he worked as a projectionist for various Toronto film festivals, but since they have mostly all transitioned to digital projection, he has little supplemental income.

As with Trash Palace and Cineforum, Heath is also operating his venue without the proper permits. One of his former spaces was shut down after a large party due to residential zoning regulations. In his current locale, he has received a warning from city officials that he is in violation of various ordinances, but to this day, no one has shut him down. And, like some of the others, he is also selling alcoholic beverages. Granted, when he rents out the space for private events, the organization or individual hosting the affair does secure the proper permit and provides their own licensed bartenders. That said, the common mode of operation for these small-scale DIY cinemas is marginally illegal, and this speaks directly to not only the inability of a city's cultural space policies to accommodate them but also to a certain renegade spirit of the organizers. Whether they have tried to secure permits and failed or never bothered, they seem to share a similar attitude of wanting to make it happen despite the obstacles of bureaucracy.

In addition to the cinemas I visited, the following venues were brought to my attention by those involved in the Toronto scene: Camera Bar (created and owned by Atom Egoyan), Projection Booth, Double Double Land and a small screening room at the

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[455] Philippe Spurrell of Montreal's Le Cinéclub has bought about one hundred of his prints.

Rue Morgue offices.[456] A review of Camera Bar includes a quote by Egoyan describing his motivation for opening the space:

> The only thing we were trying to combat here, was with the local multiplexes… This space was a dream of ours for over ten years—a place in which to show films that might not be shown anywhere else. And create a social atmosphere to hopefully promote discussion on the film they just watched.[457]

As expressed, this goal addresses several microcinema features: a place positioned in distinction to the mainstream multiplex, films that cannot be found elsewhere and a certain type of ambiance that encourages social interaction. Regarding the first point, the author of the article concludes by emphasizing the cinema's alternative-ness, "The pairing of the little experimental theatre with a little bar—this is not a mainstream venue. Visceral, demanding and tiny, yes—but mainstream, hell no."[458]

In addition to the above spaces, some alternative sites worth mentioning that can not be considered microcinemas based on their level of organization or budget, size and/or content are: The Toronto Underground, The Revue Cinema, Bloor Hot Docs Cinema and TIFF Bell Lightbox. The Revue is an interesting case of local community members banding together to save an historic theater by raising money to buy it and then running it on a volunteer basis, similar to Cinéma Beaubien in Montreal. In addition to these more permanent venues, one can also find semi-regular events, such as Early Monthly Segments, a monthly series featuring "historical and contemporary avant-garde 16mm films in a salon-like setting" at the historic Victorian-turned-Art Gladstone Hotel; screening in a relaxed environment and offering refreshments, they "hope to encourage a

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[456] *Rue Morgue*, established in 1997, is a horror culture and entertainment publication.
[457] Club Zone, website, http://www.clubzone.com/c/14921/camera-bar-toronto.
[458] Ibid.

convivial atmosphere for engaged viewing and post-screening dialogue."[459] Phantascope,

a less regular and extremely private event, with invites sent only to an exclusive list of

cinephiles, happens once every two to three months at various sites and is organized by

Eric Veillette, a cultural journalist who writes for various publications including *The

Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star.* Veillette recently inherited a collection of almost

1300 films from the Toronto Public Library, which he stores in the basement of a

furniture store.[460] More often, private cinephiles are becoming the archivists for our

collective celluloid history as institutions decide to de-accession their collections due to

lack of space and funds to properly store and conserve film.[461]

Veillette with his celluloid collection

This network of alternative viewing sites provides one with a sense of the current

scene in Toronto. Within this network, microcinemas in particular, are representative of

"a collective dream that is activated by the utopian aspirations" of their organizers—one

that exists despite their location "in a city committed largely to big corporate

spectacles."[462] In this way, they are not so different than the organizers in Montreal or

any city in which individuals are up against the cultural machinations of a city focused on

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[459] Early Monthly Segments, website, http://earlymonthlysegments.org/#about.
[460] Eric Veillette, interview, 1 June 2012.
[461] This is a result of the move toward digital media, and the deep cuts to arts and culture funding currently happening nationwide.
[462] Marchessault, 97.

the profits of tourism and less interested in supporting smaller, noncommercial and less popular endeavors.

New York City

New York has many alternative film venues and series, and a large enough population of the culturally curious, along with a thriving tourist industry, to sustain them. As Thomas Beard, founder of Light Industry in Brooklyn puts it, "There's an embarrassment of riches in New York, but the scenes are fragmented."[463] Notwithstanding the collaboration among organizers, the audiences who make up the disparate scenes tend not to overlap; this may be due in part to the resistance of New Yorkers to travel from one borough to another. That said, there still exist many options throughout the boroughs and especially in Brooklyn.

In a *New York Times* article from September 2011, Lim describes several of the city's microcinema offerings, positioning them as the successors of ciné clubs like Cinémathèque Française and Cinema 16 and in opposition to the contemporary cineplex and art house. As Lim explains, "New Yorkers have never gone wanting for movie screens, but what has been notable in recent years is the emergence—or perhaps re-emergence—of small, scrappy sites, many with distinct ambitions and identities, located in most cases far beyond the art-house precincts of downtown Manhattan and the Upper West Side." [464] Two of the three venues he reviews are located in Brooklyn and the third in Harlem; all are situated in transitioning neighborhoods. This exemplifies my observation that urban microcinemas often begin in areas that have not yet been developed or gentrified, and as a result of individuals having access to inexpensive and

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[463] Quoted in Lim.
[464] Lim.

larger commercial or industrial rental properties. Lim describes the three venues—Light Industry, UnionDocs and Maysles Cinema—as having "different sensibilities" but sharing "a utopian vision of cinema as a space of social possibilities."[465] Like other microcinemas, these three screen films not shown elsewhere, each specializing in different categories or genres and adding extra-filmic components to enhance the experience. Light Industry's focus is the films that embody the convergence of art and film, while UnionDocs and Maysles Cinema, each with about fifty seats, concentrate on documentary films, but take a very broad view of the term and category. The Maysles Cinema places a strong emphasis on community, offering educational programs for both children and adults. Reflected in the mission of many microcinemas located in gentrifying neighborhoods is an organized effort to reach out to and serve the surrounding communities, including practicing artists.

One of the most popular alternative film happenings in New York, also having a prominent educational mandate, is the Rooftop Films Series. As the name suggests, screenings take place mostly on the rooftops of various buildings throughout the five boroughs. And while it has outgrown in its size and scope its original microcinema beginnings, atop a tenement building in Manhattan's East Village, it remains an important figure in the alternative film exhibition scene. Having started with locally-made avant-garde short films, it now screens what organizers describe as "some of the best new underground work being shown anywhere," which includes international submissions of independent features, documentaries and shorts; they even produce films with grant money and Kickstarter campaigns.[466] One of their goals is to support emerging

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[465] Ibid.
[466] Rooftop Films, website, www.rooftopfilms.com/2012/info/about_history.

filmmakers but also to connect to the communities in the locales in which they screen. The following describes their role in the transformation of a currently gentrifying area of Brooklyn: "Rooftop was a vital part of the emergence of Bushwick as a home for young filmmakers, artists and musicians, but we also worked hard to help the nascent artistic community partner with the families and communities that had been living in Bushwick for years."[467]

Rooftop Films screening

The ambiance at screenings has been described as laid back, more like a party than a formal screening because they often include extra-filmic entertainment, like live music performance or DJs. On the night I attended in June 2012, the film took place on the roof of Open Road, a former high school in the lower east side that now houses multiple charter schools. Before the screening, a singer-songwriter, who also starred in the film, played a set, and she and the director stayed for a post-screening Q&A. This is a common format for microcinema events. Offering a nice eighth-story view of lower Manhattan and a lovely breeze, the partially enclosed rooftop was expansive, decorated with colorful graffiti, and even accommodated a skate park—a dream hangout for adolescents and moviegoers alike. About one hundred fifty people turned out for this event, though they were prepared for several hundred. Despite their size, they still set up and break down equipment and folding chairs for each show.

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[467] Ibid.

Moviehouse VJ & lobby gathering

On a much smaller scale, Moviehouse is a monthly microcinema series that takes place predominantly in Brooklyn, with added outside screenings in the summer months. It is based at 3rd Ward—a multi-purpose arts and cultural community center in the now gentrifying industrial outskirts of Bushwick, which is the area just east of the already overdeveloped Williamsburg. In fact, it is one of the community arts spaces that Rooftop claims to have helped establish. Events are organized by a group of individuals, with Chris Henderson as the primary programmer. When I visited in October 2011, it took about an hour to get there from Manhattan, but that was mostly due to public transit interruptions. Though its location is somewhat remote, approximately forty people turned out for the event. Moviehouse's screening room can accommodate up to sixty viewers in folding chairs that are erected for each screening. Upon entering the building and paying a ten dollar admission, one arrives in the lobby, arranged as a social gathering space with a bar serving local beers, a table where guests can purchase food (every screening incorporates a local chef's culinary delights) and a VJ projecting graphics onto the walls and ceilings. People chatted, ate and drank before entering the screening room. The film shown that evening was a documentary *American Meat* (Graham Meriwether, 2013) about the small, pasture-based farming movement. The director, producer and local farmers were on hand for a Q&A after the film. This format is typical for Moviehouse

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screenings, as it specializes in documentary and short, experimental works, with a focus on serving the local community.

Though there exist an abundance of film viewing options in the larger New York metro area, the small makeshift spaces share some advantages over the more established and commercial indieplexes like IFC Center and Angelika: collaboration and "agility." As Beard explains to Lim, "there's a real agility that comes with being a venue this size"[468] in that "events can often come together in a matter of days."[469]

Austin

I've already spoken at length about Aurora in Houston, the largest city in Texas, and one with an avid art culture, both institutional (museums and schools) and commercial (galleries).[470] There, however, is not much of an alternative scene present in Houston, unlike in Austin, with less than half the population. This may be a reason why Aurora has moved in the direction of becoming a non-profit arts organization rather than an underground cinema space.

High on Richard Florida's list of creative cities, Austin is a magnet for not only the high tech and film industries, academics and international students, but also musicians, artists—Florida's bohemians—and most significant for my discussion, cinephiles and filmmakers. For such a small city, Austin is saturated with independent movie theaters and alternative film exhibition. As early as the 1990s, there have been a variety of options for noncommercial and nonmainstream film viewing, which was

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[468] Beard quoted in Lim.
[469] Lim.
[470] According to the US 2010 Census, the population of Houston is 2,099,451, ahead of San Antonio, Dallas and Austin (in order). U.S. Census Bureau.

complemented by the then small and indie-focused SXSW.[471] Per the SXSW website: "The prolific and passionate Austin film community was a solid foundation for SXSW Film, and it continues to nourish the Festival and Conference today." Now, though, the festival plays a role in drawing film enthusiasts to the city.

In the 2000s, almost every coffeehouse, of which there were many, had its own weekly DVD screening night—none of which were legal. One of these coffeehouses has grown into a sprawling café, outdoor patio and performance venue. The once nightly screenings at Spider House Café and Ballroom, situated in the neighborhood just north of the University of Texas campus, provided viewers an opportunity to watch films outdoors seven days a week while engaging in other activities such as eating, drinking and chatting. It was not a carefully curated program: films ranged from classics like *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953) to popular blockbusters like *Con Air* (Simon West, 1997), with the occasional obscure or offbeat film, such as *Space Truckers* (Stuart Gordon, 1996). However, the cafe continues to partner with the video store next door, I Luv Video, to provide weekly Humpday Video Club, a more thoughtfully programmed event. Spider House also hosts one-of film programs of "original film works."[472] Because of its proximity to one of the largest universities in the US, the clientele is largely comprised of students. And due to its central location, extensive outdoor seating area and welcoming attitude, vagrants (Austin's 'gutter punks') also take advantage of the free movies. Spider House is just one of numerous cafes that have hosted film events over the years, others being Progress Coffee and Café Mundi in East Austin, The Green Muse, Bouldin Creek

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[471] The film portion of SXSW began in 1994, seven years after the music festival was launched. Its original focus was alternative films by emerging filmmakers, and while it does still showcase a large number of indie films, it has in the last decade turned toward more red carpet spectacles much like the trajectory of TIFF. South by Southwest Film Conference & Festival, website, http://sxsw.com/film/about/history.
[472] Spiderhouse Café and Ballroom, website, spiderhousecafe.com.

Café, and Jo's Coffee in South Austin and The Hideout Theater, a coffeehouse, performance venue and screening room in the center of downtown. Beyond café/coffeehouse exhibition, there exists an ongoing practice of outdoor screenings, such as The Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-in, which takes advantage of the temperate Texas climate.

An extensive film audience, as well as an established filmmaking practice currently supported by production companies like Robert Rogriguez's Troublemaker Studios, make Austin a hospitable locale for subcultural entrepreneurs of cinema. Nowadays, Austin is home to a host of festivals, successful independent theaters, and more recently, microcinema series. As Savlov expressed in his *Austin Chronicle* article, "Microcinema series in Austin seem to be suddenly springing up like psychedelic mushrooms after a hard Bastrop rain of late… and now more than ever, there's no shortage of passionate film exhibition collectives vying for your attention on any given night."[473]

Some of the current microcinemas and series currently operating in Austin are the aforementioned Cinema41, which does not have its own space but hosts screenings at various sites throughout the city.[474] Cinema41 began with a Craigslist ad and has garnered a fair amount of interest. Like other microcinemas, they augment the event with guest speakers, sometimes via Skype, and post-film discussions.[475] For many visitors, these series provide experiences akin to college film classes, with an educational component, but outside the institution and often with drinks and food in hand. Some of

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[473] Savlov.
[474] Cinema41 has screened at The Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-in, The Hideout, Austin Film Society (Marchese Theater) and Austin Studios, but now predominantly screens at Salvage Vanguard Theater. Cinema41, website, http://www.cinema41.com/.
[475] Savlov.

the other series competing in the same alternative arena are Smut City, Cinema East and Nowhere Fast, not to mention the long-running Austin Film Society screenings and Alamo Drafthouse's diverse smorgasbord of programming—Terror Tuesdays, Weird Wednesdays, Hecklevision, Celluloid Handbag and Cinema Club, to name a few.

Conclusion

Microcinemas face some large obstacles in an effort to offer filmgoers a truly one-of-a-kind experience while remaining economically viable. The short lives of microcinemas are often due to either one or a combination of the following factors— "poor organization, declining audience interest, dwindling financial resources" and organizer burnout.[476] Running an alternative film venue usually requires long hours and very little or no pay. The passion that motivates in the beginning is often worn down after several years of a relentless schedule and having to maintain a currency with both local and global scenes. As one reporter describes, "Principal founders hit the wall following years of pouring staggering amounts of energy into cultural projects that offered poverty-level financial returns."[477] In talking with Janisse, she shares now that Blue Sunshine is closed, she yearns for a normal, stable job with a regular paycheck. Both she and Bertrand lament that during the two years of running the theater they couldn't afford to buy as much as a pair of socks. Still a cinephile to the core, she confesses she wants out of the film exhibition world for a while.

An interesting phenomenon about microcinema is that one space can generate the creation of other microcinemas or series, especially upon the closing of a particularly

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[476] Niedzviecki.
[477] Ibid.

influential space by a well-loved and respected programmer. As an example, an interesting domino effect has taken place in Canada. Janisse, founder of Blue Sunshine was living in Vancouver during the time of the BL!! Cinema and in fact held Cinemuerte, one of her initial programming projects, at BL!!. She has commented on how encouraging MacKenzie was to new curators with unusual taste showing risky and challenging material. While she feared it was unlikely a new space would emerge in Vancouver to take the place of BL!!,[478] she eventually landed in Montreal, after a stint at the Alamo Drafthouse (which inspired Trash Palace's Case), to create a microcinema of her own. And after Blue Sunshine closed, one of the volunteers and regulars at her space, Frank Fingers, started a new microcinema series at a friperie in the Mile End neighborhood of Montreal. This encapsulates the idea of persistent transience.

MacKenzie remarked that alternative cinema scenes will persist with screenings taking place in makeshift and marginal places; there will continue to be venues for individuals with "nonmainstream tastes."[479] However, organizers are not always in the best position to either prepare people to take over an already established space or mentor new programmers with their projects:

> The difficulty of passing on the baton is almost as worrisome as the speed of burnout itself. After four or five years, many organizers are only beginning to master the tricks of the trade. And yet their exhaustion leaves them with little will or opportunity to mentor successors or cultivate an exit plan that will ensure their groundbreaking projects continue.[480]

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[478] Lucas.
[479] Ibid.
[480] Niedzviecki.

This speaks to why microcinemas are often short-lived. But as old spaces close new ones open as long as there are passionate individuals and a community of likeminded filmgoers or, more aptly, those with similar taste, to support them.

The microcinema concept has evolved and transformed since Barten and Sherman coined the term in 1993 during a brainstorming session at their kitchen table. In fact, they have commented that the word has taken on a life of its own, "We never imagined that one day the word would be commercialized, that there would be college courses taught on the subject and that other people would assign their own specific meanings to the term." What began as "a deep search for meaning and experience" eventually became "a catalyst for creating an adventure in community."[481] And without these communities or scenes, the movement would not have taken root. Microcinema remains a vital and significant subcategory of alternative film exhibition. To get an idea of the degree to which the phenomenon exists today, I have included, in Appendix G, a list of contemporary North American microcinemas (47 as of 2010) compiled by Cinema Speakeasy, an American microcinema. The list, however, omits many of the Canadian sites about which I've written in this chapter, likely because they remain unknown— again underscoring the importance of my research in expanding upon the current understanding and history of microcinema and documenting contemporary spaces for future reference.

In sum, microcinemas are fertile ground for entrepreneurship, education, experimentation, cine-love, residual media appreciation, community building and so much more. Because of this they are sites that reveal issues of taste and distinction as expressed through cinephilia and paracinephilia, models of subcultural entrepreneurship

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[481] Barten and Sherman, "Total Mobile Home Revisited," 45.

and DIY organization, the binaries of mainstream vs. alternative, and the influences of

cultural economies and policies of urban locales, which in the case of Montreal are often

experienced as obstacles by alternative exhibition venues. In the next chapter, I will

discuss the microcinema movement in Montreal, analyzing the city's cultural policies, the

manner in which the city and its various bureaucratic agencies have affected the

development of an alternative film exhibition network and the sustainability of individual

efforts.

Chapter V: Microcinema in a "Cultural Metropolis"

Montreal remains a true haven for humans not entirely thrilled with 'the system.' The city is awash in cheap atmospheric real estate, delicious food, and tolerant vibes.[482]

Douglas Coupland

For all this reputation that Montreal supposedly has about joie de vivre—*we're passionate consumers of art and culture and so on—I'd say that a city like Toronto has us beat in terms of people… who vote for culture with their dollar. It's always a struggle here.*[483]

Philippe Spurrell

Montreal is the New Brooklyn.[484]

Lucy Jones

Alternative practices require certain factors to be present in order to thrive in an urban environment. One necessity is that practitioners have access to relatively inexpensive spaces in which to gather, create and exhibit, which typically occur in sections of the city that have not yet been fully gentrified. Low rent industrial or dilapidated spaces on the edges of a city seem to be recurring themes in the inception histories of alternative and DIY projects. It is imperative that these types of venues be available to independent artists, filmmakers, programmers and entrepreneurs with very little monetary capital. As I will explain in this chapter, and alluded to in the above quote from Douglas Coupland, Montreal is known as a city that offers this promise of possibility because it has had a relatively low cost of living. Additionally, it has been somewhat lax regarding the policing of public and private spaces. However, by the time of my research period 2007-2013, this had begun to change. The romantic vision of Montreal as a bohemian haven is under siege by the forces of capitalism.

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[482] Douglas Coupland in the introduction to Richard Linklater's *Slacker* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), 2. Quoted in Stahl, "Tracing Out," 99.
[483] Philippe Spurrell, interview, 28 September 2011.
[484] Lucy Jones, "SXSW 2012: Montreal is the New Brooklyn," *The Telegraph*, 17 March 2012, http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/lucyjones/100061603/sxsw-2012-montreal-is-the-new-brooklyn/.

Recalling Sherry B. Ortner's cultural ethnography through discourse, this chapter employs her method for examining texts relevant to the microcinema scene in Montreal. I apply it to a variety of texts including my interviews with Montreal scene members, web sites, and articles or blog posts written about Montreal's cultural phenomena. This type of analysis synthesizes data to approximate an insider's perspective, providing insight into the way members (and policy makers) think about (sub)cultural scenes. By treating conversations, or "natural encounters," with the same analytical register as cultural policy documents, the researcher is able to piece together the narrative of a scene.[485] I will begin with my analysis of the two key policy documents that have shaped the development of Montreal's cultural sector over the past decade.

Cultural Policy and Development

The city of Montreal in branding itself a cultural metropolis has committed to making cultural growth a priority starting with the 2005-2015 Cultural Development Policy of the Ville de Montreal and then adding the 2007-2017 Action Plan two years later. The Ville de Montreal website states:

> Arts and culture constitute a key development driver for cities in the 21st century.
> With the business environment, knowledge and innovation, quality of life, and
> openness to the world, culture constitutes one of the five positioning areas of the
> 2005-2010 Strategy for Economic Development of the Ville de Montréal.[486]

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[485] Ortner, 27.
[486] Ville de Montreal, website,
http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=4517,7008922&_dad=portal&
_schema=PORTAL.

As outlined in the Cultural Development Policy, the mission is to "establish Montreal as a world-class cultural metropolis." In order to accomplish this, they identified three objectives with corresponding "target positionings"—"cultural democratization: city of knowledge and culture, support for the arts and culture: cultural metropolis of creation, and cultural quality of the living environment: city distinguished by the quality of its cultural intervention."[487]

According to the 2005-2006 report, the policy was "the outcome of three years of cooperation with all segments of the population," and after its public launch in October 2005, the policy is "now everyone's business—a collective project."[488] The language of the following year's report is basically the same, and no subsequent reports were made available. Within both of these reports (the first being 48 pages and the second 25), there is minimal space devoted to cinema and even less to alternative exhibition venues; together these constitute less than one page. The discussion of film-related strategies, limited to a few sentences regarding production with no consideration of exhibition, is incorporated in the section "Cultural Enterprises—The Audiovisual Industry," which gives more weight to audio than video.

This foregrounding of music is repeated on the Tourisme Montreal site. The "Cutting Edge Montreal" page focuses on Piknic Électronik, a weekly outdoor electronic music event that takes place every summer. An event that draws a diverse crowd, ranging from squeegee punks to families with young children, and a reported weekly attendance of more than 4,000 people contradicts the notion of cutting edge. This large-scale cultural

[487] Ibid., 2005-2015 Cultural Development Policy of the Ville de Montreal.
[488] Ibid., 2005-2006 Report, 3, http://www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/culture_fr/media/documents/ Report_2006_Montreal_english.pdf.

activity is far from the underground and alternative nature of a microcinema. Not only is Tourisme Montreal's idea of cutting edge more widely popular than a small-scale exhibition venue, almost all the events and venues listed in this section are specifically related to electronic music, and the rest to the digital arts in general. However, the language used on this page means to call attention to Montreal's subcultural hipness claiming:

> You don't have to be plugged in to the music scene to know that Montréal's emerging music's star is shooting through the firmament. It's kind of in keeping with the city's character—a creative, catalytic and cutting-edge sensibility that seems to spawn new trends by the minute.

And it concludes:

> Montréal's scene is this—and then some. Because maybe while you're wandering about, your ears will prick up to great new sounds emanating from some obscure building. That's the beauty of the Montréal music style. Emerging where and when you least expect it.[489]

While this may still be true, it is in spite of city policy and gentrification, not as a result of it. Moreover, there is no mention on the Cutting Edge page of anything pertaining to cinema. Despite Montreal having at least eleven annual film festivals, not one film festival is listed under the "Festivals" section.

The "Alternative Culture" section—the only part of the policy report that mentions venues—occupies one and a half paragraphs, with the focus on "bars and small stages," in other words music. This may be because music venue owners have been more

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[489] Tourisme-Montreal, website, http://www.tourisme-montreal.org/Discover-montreal/Montreal-by-theme/cutting-edge-montreal.

outspoken over the years about the negative effect of noise and postering ordinances on their businesses. Without specifically mentioning film, both years' policy reports briefly acknowledge Montreal's alternative art cultures, using the identical paragraph:

> During the round of public consultations, several organizations brought to the city's attention the precarious situation of a number of venues of alternative culture, such as bars and small stages. Their concerns include rent hikes produced by real-estate development, representation in the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles, and billboards. Montréal is already looking into some cases, but would like to build a more stable and productive partnership with this sector and will support the creation of an association that will include all these venues.[490]

This participatory partnership was to be done through the Association des petits lieux d'art et de spectacles (APLAS), whose mandate is "to bring together the small art and performance venues, their artists and prospective supporters, in order to foster the consultation process and interventions of the players concerned." Jannick Langlais, then president of APLAS, acknowledged in the report that "small art and performance venues are an integral part of this base and should be helped in their mission to assist young and emerging artists."[491] It then lists the efforts that had been completed or begun, which seem to target specific groups and narrowly focused tasks. Notably, there are no plans to protect small venues from their most dangerous predator: gentrification. The only broad steps are "an 'alternative' culture poster project in the Quartier des spectacles" and "city support for an APLAS project involving a map of Montréal's small art and performance

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[490] 2005-2006 Report Implementation of Montréal, Cultural Metropolis, Cultural Development Policy of Ville de Montréal 2005-2015, http://www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/culture_fr/media/documents/ Report_2006_Montreal_english.pdf, 16.
[491] Ibid.

venues."[492] In relation to the other grand-scale projects outlined in the report, like the billion-dollar transformation of the Quartier des spectacles, these are minimal gestures likely made to appease the minority voices at the table, but not offering any substantial support. The people involved in three long-running small- and mid-scale alternative music venues (Casa del Popolo, La Sala Rossa, Il Motore) were not asked to participate, despite their efforts to have a dialogue with policymakers, nor have they seen any changes in policy or implementations that have helped them in the wake of the massive property development in their neighborhoods (Plateau/Mile End, Little Italy/Mile-Ex). Likewise, alternative film venue organizers, like those at Blue Sunshine, were also excluded. One microcinema organizer, Pablo Toledo Gouin, reports the city is not interested in smaller cultural projects but in "flashy events like F1" or in the Quartier where spectacular lights advertise to international tourists: "We're here; there's culture here!"[493] Yet, the rhetoric of the policymakers remains inclusive, as they reassure Montrealers their city is fast becoming a cultural tourist destination.

Montreal's position on the place of culture in the economic life of the city is also reflected in the Montreal 2025 initiative, whose slogan is "Montreal: A Creative City, A Prosperous City."[494] On the "Mot Du Maire" page, Gérald Tremblay states:

> Notre plan s'articule autour de moyens pour renforcer notre capital créatif et rendre nos milieux de vie plus agréables, comme savent le faire les grandes métropoles de savoir et de culture. Grâce à Montréal 2025, les entrepreneurs visionnaires, à la recherche de talents audacieux, trouveront à Montréal plus que

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[492] Ibid.
[493] F1 or Formula One is an upscale auto-racing event that attracts wealthy participants and patrons. Tim Kelly/Pablo Toledo Gouin, joint interview, 24 November 2011.
[494] Montreal 2025, website, http://www.montreal2025.com/?lang=en&id=.

nulle part ailleurs, un environnement d'affaires qui stimule la créativité et favorise

la réussite… À Montréal, les travailleurs du savoir et les «créatifs» disposent de

toute la latitude et de tout le soutien pour sortir des sentiers battus et laisser libre

cours à leur imagination.[495]

Additionally, words like "diversity" and "open-mindedness" are incorporated throughout

to demonstrate that Montreal is a cosmopolitan (i.e. tolerant) city. As Joel McKim notes,

Montreal's municipal authorities have adopted, or rather enthusiastically embraced, the

language and ideas put forth by urban planner Charles Landry and urban

theorist/economist Richard Florida.[496] The concept of the "creative city," coined by the

former but made a buzz word by the latter, has been taken up by many cities looking to

revive their cultural industries and in turn their tourism industries.

Montreal has likewise bought into the "creative" discourse.[497] Under the "Choisir

Montréal" menu of the Montreal 2025 website, one finds the section "Montréal, ville

créative" where the creative city lingo appears throughout:

Montréal est une capitale culturelle. Cosmopolite. Et qui sait faire la fête! En

témoignent notamment ses nombreux festivals, ses fêtes de quartiers et ses

institutions culturelles de qualité.

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[495] "Our plan is built around ways of strengthening our creative capital and making our city a more pleasant place to live—like other world-renowned centres of knowledge and culture. Thanks to Montréal 2025, visionary entrepreneurs seeking daring talents will find a business environment in Montréal that stimulates creativity and encourages success like nowhere else... Here in Montréal, knowledge workers and creative types have all the freedom they need to get off the beaten path and give their imaginations free rein." Montreal 2025, http://www.montreal2025.com/mot_du_maire.php?lang=fr&id=.

[496] Joel McKim, "Spectacular Infrastructure: The Mediatic Space of Montreal's 'Quartier des spectacles,'" *Public* 45 (June 2012): 133.

[497] McKim, 130.

Montréal a fait de la créativité sa marque de commerce. C'est d'ici que des artistes comme Céline Dion et Oscar Peterson ont pris leur envol, et c'est ici que le Cirque du Soleil a pris racine.

Toujours ouverte sur le monde, Montréal est devenue une plaque tournante en mode, design d'intérieur, création d'œuvres numériques et tournage de films, et elle excelle aussi en aérospatiale, sciences de la vie, technologies de l'information et des communications. Montréal est même la capitale de la R et D au Canada![498]

The examples of creative talent associated with the city are once again popular (and financially successful).[499] And the choice of the word "trademark" (*la marque de commerce*) reveals the subtext that creativity is at the heart of the economic vitality of the city. Both Landry and Florida elaborate on this very notion that creativity can be harnessed for financial gain.[500] Landry writes, "Cultural resources are the raw materials of the city and its value base… Creativity is the method of exploiting these resources and helping them grow."[501] Similarly, Florida's "creative class" theory emphasizes the importance of creative people in powering economic growth.[502] Moreover, these creative

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[498] "Montréal is a cultural capital. Cosmopolitan. And a real party town, too, alive with all kinds of festivals, neighbourhood celebrations and top-quality cultural institutions. Montréal has made creativity its trademark. After all, it was here that artists like Céline Dion and Oscar Peterson got their start and the Cirque du Soleil put down roots. Always open to the world, Montréal has become a hub of fashion, interior design, digital creation and film, and it also excels in aerospace, life sciences and information and communication technologies. In fact, it is the R&D capital of Canada!" (Montreal 2025).

[499] Interestingly, the Montreal Film and TV Commission also cites Celine Dion and Cirque de Soleil, amidst statistics of the number of jobs existing in the culture and knowledge (i.e. creative) industries, in its "Montreal: Briefly" graphics display lauding the creativity of the city. Montreal Film and TV Commission, http://www.montrealfilm.com/.

[500] See Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (New Stroud: Comedia, 2008) and Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) and *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[501] Landry, 7. Quoted in McKim, 133.

[502] Florida's theory claims to predict the economic potential of creative centers based on certain indices, like the Bohemian index. Individuals whose work function is to "create meaningful new forms" constitute the rising sector of the population he calls the "creative class" (Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*, 34). Creative-class members work in "science and engineering, research and development, and the technology-

people are drawn to innovative, diverse, and tolerant cities that allow them "the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people."[503] A city that wants to become or remain a creative center must focus on attracting and retaining creative talent. This language is echoed in the "Vision and Values" section of Montreal's Stratégie de développement économique 2011-2017:

> Montréal is open to *creativity and different viewpoints*, providing a warm welcome for talented, bold individuals who are driven by a desire for success. Thanks to its *diversified*, friendly ambiance, the city affords a setting that encourages excellence. To maintain these inspiring qualities, Montréal has set its sights on *attracting, embracing and retaining talent*.[504]

Here, as in the above quotes, much weight is given to the connection between creative talent and economic success. As the creative class grows, according to Florida's predictions, enterprises and leisure time spaces that cater to their needs will also expand and become even more essential to the creative economy of cities. McKim explains the "ambivalence that surrounds these theories of 'creative cities'": proponents are enthusiastic about "the idea of urban regeneration and the prioritization of cultural work" while opponents have a sense of "unease with the depiction of human creativity as an economic resource to be managed and exploited."[505] To complicate this even further, creative class members, rich in cultural capital, implicate themselves in various fields of

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based industries, in the arts, music, culture, and aesthetic and design work, or in the knowledge-based professions of health care, finance, and law" (Ibid., 3).

[503] Ibid., 36.

[504] Stratégie de développement économique 2011-2017, website, http://www.sdemontreal.com/en/strategic-framework/vision-and-values. Italics mine.

[505] McKim, 133.

cultural production by acquiring and employing the cultural skills necessary for social

and economic upward mobility. This cycle perpetuates gentrification.

While there exists much criticism of Florida's theory, Montreal is betting heavily

on the tenets of the "creative center" by allocating large sums of money to developing

certain cultural industries within the city.[506] One of the three "knowledge and tech-

oriented sectors" on which the city focuses is information and communication

technologies.[507] Within this area, both the city and provincial governments have been

instrumental in attracting and maintaining multimedia firms, especially creative economy

companies like video game developer Ubisoft, by offering financial incentives in the

form of tax breaks, government loans and venture capital.[508] "Knowledge-based

industries" have grown and been cultivated in the city since the late 1980s.[509] "The

Montreal region, with four large universities, has become a major continental centre for

high technology and for research and development in certain fields."[510] These jobs have

been created within the inner city in order to entice "new urban professionals," which

coincides with one of the necessary conditions for gentrification. Additionally,

Montreal's public policies work toward the "social upgrading" of the downtown core. Put

another way, housing and neighborhood policies, specifically, have been put into place

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[506] For critiques of Florida's work, see, Edward L. Glaeser, "Review of Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class,*" http://www.creativeclass.com/rfcgdb/articles/GlaeserReview.pdf; Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, "From Creative Economy to Creative Society," www.trfund.com/resource/downloads/creativity/Economy.pdf; Michele Hoyman and Christopher Faricy, "It Takes a Village: A Test of the Creative Class, Social Capital, and Human Capital Theories," *Urban Affairs Review (*January 2009), http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1313563.

[507] The other two areas are aerospace and life sciences. McKim, 135.

[508] Ibid. For more detail about the incentives offered to Ubisoft, see Marco Bélair-Cirino, "Le Québec sera encore plus généreux avec les entreprises du multimedia," *Le Devoir*, 1 October 2013, http://www.ledevoir.com/economie/actualites-economiques/388820/le-quebec-sera-encore-plus-genereux-avec-les-entreprises-du-multimedia and Sophie Cousineau, "How far will Quebec go to nurture its video game industry?" *The Globe and Mail*, 1 October 2013, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/how-far-will-quebec-go-to-nurture-its-video-game-industry/article14645301/.

[509] Germain and Rose, 4, 197.

[510] Ibid., 4.

that encourage knowledge-based workers with compatible values to reside in the downtown core near their places of employment.[511] Not only has this development of creative economy/knowledge-based jobs affected the downtown areas around Concordia University, McGill University and the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM), but it's now creeping northward to drastically change the real estate landscape of what has been considered the last fairly central, low rent neighborhood of Parc-Extenstion.[512] The Université de Montréal (UdeM) purchased a large triangle of land between Outrement and Parc-Extension that has effectively wiped out swaths of affordable loft spaces. Consequently, the Outrement campus development has raised concerns of Parc-Ex residents: "Concerns include the gentrification that might come with the estimated 10,000 students who would be moving into the area and the possibility of rising rent prices."[513]

An area central to the development plan is Montreal's downtown cultural corridor or Quartier des Spectacles, which includes the Places des Arts and Places des Festivals. Initiated in the 1990s, festival culture has become quite important to Montreal's position as an international tourist destination. Due to the intense winters, spending time outdoors is very important to the city's residents, providing a solid foundation of support for the festival season, which runs non-stop from June to August. In addition to beautiful summer weather, "The successful promotion of festival and convention-based tourism has undoubtedly been due to organizers capitalizing on the city's unique cultural cachet," a mix of North American and European elements.[514] In addition to the tourism industry, the festivals exploit the city's "*Europeanness*" in their promotional materials. Dipti Gupta

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[511] Germain and Rose, 198.
[512] Simon Liem, "UdeM Development Approved Community Group Opposes…," *The Link*, 28 February 2011, http://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/1050.
[513] Ibid.
[514] Germain and Rose, 9.

and Janine Marchessault point out that the Festival des films du monde (FFM), for example, promotes Montreal as the clichéd "poetic and historical city with European (i.e. French) sophistication," suggesting the intended audience for FFM is the cultural elite, the cinephile and not the paracinephile.[515] Perhaps signifying the prominence of festivals to Montreal's tourism industry, the Places des Festivals was prioritized to be the first area renovated within the first phase of development.[516]

At a projected total budget of $1.9 billion, the primary cultural initiative of Montreal 2025—the Quartier des spectacles project—receives one of the most generous allocations.[517] Reinforcing the emphasis on culture, the "Vision" section of the Quartier website begins: "To establish overarching orientations for the development of this lively part of downtown, the members of the Partnership have collaborated to create a vision based on the enhancement of the neighbourhood's cultural assets."[518] McKim remarks the plan for the Quartier has "generated an ambivalent reaction within Montreal's artistic community."[519] He observes that some are optimistic about the central position the arts occupy in the city's development plan, while others query who is included in and excluded from the discussions. Cynical citizens have reservations about the relatively recent liaison between creativity and economy: "Many wonder how wide a spectrum of the city's creative output will be welcomed within the boundaries of the Quartier and how much of the city's limited resources will remain for those left on the periphery."[520] And beyond what the Quartier is to become, many have called attention to what Quartier

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[515] Dipti Gupta and Janine Marchessault, "Film Festivals as Urban Encounter and Cultural Traffic," in *Urban Enigmas: Montreal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities*, ed. Johanne Sloan (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007), 240.
[516] McKim, 133.
[517] Montreal 2025.
[518] Quartier des spectacles Montréal, website, http://www.quartierdesspectacles.com/en/about/vision/.
[519] McKim, 130.
[520] Ibid.

development expunges—a common criticism of gentrification: "One of the most vocal oppositions to the Quartier des spectacles development has arisen in reaction to the project's deliberate efforts to cleanse the neighborhood of its less seemly activities and businesses, sometimes through forced expropriation."[521] One of the historic areas to be drastically affected by "spectacle-fication" is the red light district, which has been reduced to a few sex industry businesses at the intersection of St. Catherine and St. Laurent.

Montreal as Urban Setting for Alternative Cultural Practices

In addition to its commercial creative industries, Montreal has a reputation as both a destination for 'sinful' pleasures and as a city with a strong DIY culture, especially in the music realm. These facets of the city support Florida's framework for a creative center, namely the tolerance and bohemian indices. Geoff Stahl has been researching the Anglo-music and hipster scenes in Montreal for over a decade; his observations regarding scene formation and mutation, as well as the DIY nature of these subcultures, reveal that not only are the scenes themselves transient but the places where they form shift, adapting to changes in the economic status of the area.[522] Most importantly, his discussion of the notion of Montreal as "the ideal site for an Anglo-bohemia to flourish" identifies some of the factors that determine the likelihood of a city accommodating a bohemian subculture and its ability to sustain such alternative scenes.[523] As was the case for the microcinema scenes described by Ed Halter and others, Montreal's music, film and art scenes often

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[521] McKim, 136-37.
[522] See Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters," "Tracing Out," and "Musicmaking and the City: Making Sense of the Montreal Scene," *Beiträge zur Popularmusikforschung: Sound and the City – Populäre Musik im urbanen Kontext* 35 (2007): 141-159.
[523] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 100.

overlap. Individuals and groups working within a DIY framework collaborate with one another or occupy roles as both musician and filmmaker, a point to which I will return in the next section.

Certain neighborhoods of Montreal are more prone to hosting underground events, mostly due to the availability of cheap space and the presence of a critical mass of likeminded individuals. Boulevard St. Laurent, also known as "The Main," was once a hotbed for such activities. One of Montreal's most visited and often written about streets, it is the dividing line between West and East, and historically, the anglophone and francophone sectors of the city. The notion of the "two solitudes" of Montreal—the separate existence of the anglophones and francophones—was popular in the mid-twentieth century when authors and sociologists, like Hugh MacLennan and Everett Hughes, reinforced the popular narrative of the city as "shaped by a spatial divide, roughly corresponding to St. Lawrence Boulevard."[524] St. Laurent is no longer a dividing line between the two populations; Quebec language policies have restructured both the socio-economic realties and cultural geographies of the two groups, as well as those of recent immigrants.

Montreal has had a long-standing reputation for being the city in Canada to satisfy one's diverse, illegal and deviant recreational pursuits, earning itself the name "Sin City" during the Prohibition era when American tourists traveled over the border to indulge their vices. Stahl describes mid-century Montreal as:

> …a vibrant cosmopolitan city, one where the worlds of sex, sin, and leisure met up with the literary, music, film and art scenes to produce, in many estimations, a North American version of *la vie bohème.* If it were possible to map the nation's

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[524] Germain and Rose, 213-14.

moral geography at the time, the result for many would have confirmed an image

of Montreal as Canada's Sin City.[525]

The activity and commerce on St. Laurent has been instrumental in forming this

reputation, with its variety of strip clubs, peep shows, prostitution and drug dealing. As

both Stahl and Will Straw note, this era of "seedy glamour" has been mythologized in a

variety of films and books about Montreal, a city that "still resonates with a mythic

aura."[526] Today, though, The Main is mostly the site of dance clubs, restaurants and

friperies. A few surviving debauchers remain on lower St. Laurent south of St. Catherine

Street, the former red light district, but most are now found along the very commercial St.

Catherine Street.[527] A number of writers have expounded on St. Laurent's role as a hub of

commerce and leisure activities in Montreal's cultural life.[528] Aline Gubbay describes the

cultural crossroads of The Main as follows:

> St-Laurent Boulevard is … a street unique in Montreal and rare in the world. It is
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> not a spectacular thoroughfare. There are no great monuments or outstanding
>
> buildings to see. What it offers, along with the continuity of its long history, is a
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> parade of city life, humanity in scale, diverse in its background, which, through
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> recurring cycles of change, poverty and prosperity, has retained a sense of

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[525] Stahl, "Tracing Out," 99.

[526] Ibid., 100, 101; and Will Straw, "Montreal Confidential: Notes on an Imagined City," *CinéAction* 28 (Spring 1992): 58-64.

[527] Montreal's red light district used to be quite extensive "bordered by Sherbrooke to the north, St-Denis to the east, de Bleury to the west and the Old Montreal to the south." Montreal Business Kit, website, http://www.montreal-business-kit.com/montreal-red-light.html.

[528] For example, see Martin Allor, "Locating Cultural Activity: The 'Main' as Chronotope and Heterotopia," *Topia* 1 (1997): 42-54; Pierre Anctil, *Saint-Laurent: la Main de Montréal* (Sillery: Les Éditions de Septention, 2002); André-G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main": Cents ans de spectacles sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent (1891 1991)* (Montreal: VLB editeur, 1993); Aline Gubbay, *A Street Called The Main: The Story of Montreal's Boulevard Saint Laurent* (Montreal: Meridian Press, 1989); and Julie A. Podmore, "St. Lawrence Blvd. as 'Third City': Place, Gender and Difference Along Montreal's 'Main'" PhD Thesis (McGill University, 1999).

neighbourhood, stubbornly rooted in people.[529]

It's true a sense of neighborhood still exits in the quarters that abut the Main. However, the rents on St. Laurent are quite high so that only certain types of new businesses can afford to open. And wealthier newcomers have slowly replaced the most recent group of immigrants to the area, the Portuguese, who had settled in the Plateau neighborhood just to the east of St. Laurent.

Also important to Montreal's history is its DIY culture. As Stahl has suggested, Montreal's Anglo-bohemian music scene, centered in Mile End in the 1990s and 2000s, was predominantly a network of do-it-yourself projects, including bands, performance venues, recording studios and record labels.[530] In other words, the musicians themselves, or novice entrepreneurs, shouldered the work of production, distribution and performance.[531] During this period, Montreal experienced an economic downturn, or stagnancy at best; the musicians and artists of the period benefitted from inexpensive rents (apartments, lofts and warehouse spaces) in the Plateau and Mile End and the openness of the market. This led to an influx of musicians from other parts of Canada and the US and fueled the reputation of the city as having a vibrant bohemian culture. Stahl suggests that a 2005 *Spin* magazine article by Rodrigo Perez titled "The Next Big Scene: Montréal" was partly responsible for bringing international attention to Montreal's music scene and with that a flood of eager musicians who wanted to be a part of it.[532] Some examples of DIY projects at the center of this cultural zeitgeist are the internationally

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[529] Gubbay, 11.
[530] It is no coincidence that this period parallels the rise of microcinema culture in Montreal and other cities across North America. Because of their imbricated practices, alternative music and film cultures tend to follow complimentary trajectories.
[531] Stahl, "Musicmaking and the City."
[532] Stahl, "Mile-End Hipsters," 5.

renowned indie bands Arcade Fire and Godspeed You! Black Emperor; the record labels Constellation Records, Grenadine Records, Alien8 Recordings and derivative records; living/performing/recording spaces Hotel2Tango, mandatory moustache, 100 sided die and la Brique; and music venues Casa del Popolo and La Sala Rossa.

Another example of a DIY arts venture that began in 2001 and continues today is Distroboto, a collection of cigarette machines turned art dispensers scattered throughout the city. Louis Rastelli, who is also the founder of Expozine, an annual small press comic and zine fair in Montreal, started the project with the support of a group of artist friends and the owners of Casa del Popolo, where the first machine was installed. In a *Montreal Mirror* article, Rastelli explains that at the time there was no available distribution for small, independent artists. The independent bookstores were closing, and so Rastelli, a self-described "DIY champion," took matters into his own hands. Taking advantage of the "changing of the indie culture guard" that saw a shift from the Plateau area to Mile End, he tapped into his circle of talented acquaintances and gathered an inventory of small and inexpensive original works of art, ranging from zines to mini-CDs, to fill his $2 a piece machines.[533] Distroboto became successful enough to expand to about ten machines in Montreal and two in France. However, Archive Montreal, the organization that oversees both Distroboto and Expozine, still struggles financially. Rastelli remains frustrated by the lack of support from the city of Montreal for these types of grassroots, community projects. Blaming it on the "narrow-minded Quebec culture-crats," he states: "The Quebec bureaucracy is really old-school… They look at it and go, 'Is it literature? Is it visual arts? Why don't you put it up in a gallery?' So [funding-wise], it falls between

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[533] Patrick Lejtenyi, "Long live cheap art!: Distroboto celebrates a decade of distributing DIY music, booklets, films and more at $2 a pop," *Montreal Mirror*, 27 January – 2 February 2011, 8.

the cracks."[534] Interestingly, the Blue Sunshine founders received similar questions when trying to explain what a microcinema is to the Régie that oversees theater permits. Though sometimes short-lived, these subcultural practices persist despite the tidal wave of policy, ordinances and bureaucracy that seems to work against them.

The music and DIY scenes have contributed to Montreal's status as a hipster haven. As was declared by music journalist Lucy Jones after 2012's SXSW and cited in the epigraph to this chapter: "Montreal is the New Brooklyn." Comparing Montreal to Brooklyn, long-revered (Williamsburg especially) as the bellwether for all that is hip, indicates to those in the know that Montreal is the place to be. For many Montrealers and those in the music scene, this has been common knowledge since the peak in post-rock, indie and experimental music in the early 2000s, and certainly since the 2005 *Spin* article. And this proclamation did not go unnoticed by local cool hunters, as *Midnight Poutine* blogger Stacy deployed this analogy when reporting on a show of Brooklyn and Montreal artists:

> In the never-ending universally hipster search for the next Brooklyn, the *Telegraph*'s Lucy Jones boldly pronounced in March, "Montreal is the new Brooklyn"… See what happens to hipsterdom when new-Brooklyn and old-Brooklyn collide.[535]

According to the 2012 Regroupement des Événements pluridisciplinaires indépendants de Montréal, organized with the help of Straw, "Montreal's preeminence in such fields as post-rock experimental music, digital performance design and musical or theatrical

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[534] Ibid.
[535] Stacy, "Nu-Montreal Sound: A K U A, HUA LI, PEGASUS WARNING," *Midnight Poutine*, 13 July 2012, http://www.midnightpoutine.ca/music/2012/07/nu-montreal_sound_a_k_u_a_hua_li_pegasus_warning/.

improvisation" has been internationally recognized by surveys.[536] The report cites a 2002 *le Monde* article that refers to Montreal as one of the North American hubs for electronic music, comparing it here to Berlin, another bohemian hotbed, rather than Brooklyn:

> Montréal est devenu l'une des plaques tournantes de la scène électronique en Amérique du Nord… il existait dans la deuxième ville du Canada un terreau favorable… qui font de Montréal l'équivalent d'un petit Berlin américain.[537]

Perhaps a bit too late, Tourisme Montreal attempts to exploit the buzz citing Mile End as one of Montreal's cutting-edge neighborhoods; the site claims the quarter to be "newly recognized as the centre of the independent Anglophone music scene."[538]

Besides being home to bohemians, Mile End was the chosen site for the establishment of Ubisoft, "the third independent publisher of video games worldwide," in 1997.[539] Ubisoft is widely recognized as being at the vanguard of the creative economy wave that swept the quarter, employing over 2,600 people, averaging twenty-nine years old with a mean income of $72,000.[540] As of 2007, half of its employees lived within five kilometers of work.[541] In a 2007 *Gazette* article, the reporter cites both Florida and David Brooks, referring to Ubisoft game designers as the epitome of the creative class and quoting architect Éric Gauthier's description of Mile End inhabitants as "bobo anglos." Gauthier continues to say that francophones no longer have a bohemian scene:

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[536] "The Regroupement des Événements pluridisciplinaires indépendants de Montréal took shape through a series of meetings between representatives of Montreal-based cultural festivals which specialize in emerging forms of cultural expression." Will Straw kindly shared the unpublished report with me for the purpose of my research.

[537] Stéphane Davet, "Montréal, plaque tournante de la scène électronique en Amérique du Nord," *Le Monde*, 3 January 2002, 17. Cited in Regroupement report.

[538] Tourisme Montreal.

[539] Ubisoft, website, https://www.ubisoftgroup.com/en-US/about_ubisoft/facts_and_figures.aspx; Cousineau.

[540] Peter Nowak, "Respawned: How video games revitalize cities," *CBC News*, 14 September 2012, http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/story/2010/09/09/f-videogames-economic-impact.html#ixzz0zX4WWLQc.

[541] Ackerman.

"Everything is much more dispersed. My son will never go through this bohemian phase." However, the reporter notes that creative workers tend to flock together in the same community, and "They want what Florida calls 'cool amenities in the built environment' and can be lured to places that have them."[542] Mile End is full of boutiques, cafes and small-scale independent businesses, or cottage industries, created by what Angela McRobbie would call subcultural entrepreneurs.

The media attention along with the establishment of key businesses and venues has caused Mile End to gentrify rapidly since the early 2000s, as prophesied in the *Gazette* article:

> If the well-documented urban trend holds, this might be Mile End's moment in the sun. Henceforth, sky-high rents and property values will drive out creative types. Stores and restaurants will become slick and outrageously expensive until nobody can afford to live here or will even want to, "nobody" being the very people who made it colourful and charming in the first place.[543]

This "urban trend," which I describe in detail in chapter two, is precisely what McRobbie refers to when she speaks of sociologists and urban geographers who view the presence of young creatives as middleclass gentrifiers and the city policies that attract them, like Quebec's subsidies to Ubisoft, as "hipsterization strategies."[544] Many Montrealers view the transformation of Mile End in this very light. Urban historian Susan Bronson notes, "living in Mile End is becoming an increasingly expensive proposition, as a tenant or owner. With the arrival of its newer residents—young affluent professionals—property

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[542] Ibid.
[543] Ibid.
[544] McRobbie, "Be Creative."

values have skyrocketed in just a few years."[545] Just as Brooklyn's fringe has transitioned

away from Williamsburg to less expensive outlying areas, such as Bushwick, leaving it a

bourgeois version of its former self, Montreal's creative, once bohemian zone of Mile

End is in the process of losing its edge as development runs rampant and rent prices

become prohibitively expensive to the middle and lower classes. In fact, Montreal tour

guides take tourists through Mile End, stopping at hip and "authentic" sites to

"discover… where… all the ironic hipsters go eat and drink."[546] As Tim Kelly, founder

and organizer of Cinequanon, summarizes: "An artists' purpose, apart from creating art,

is to make shitty areas better so assholes with money can move in, and these areas that

were once in poverty get out of that poverty. And then the artists move out, and then

change happens in a city." He observes the bohemian population is migrating north to

Parc-Ex, "one of the poorest areas in the city," currently inhabited by the most recent

wave of immigrants from India, Pakistan and a variety of Arabic countries. For better or

worse, this is the urban gentrification trend.

Montreal's Alternative Film Exhibition Spaces

In his article "Haunted Places: Montreal's Rue Ste Catherine and its Cinema Spaces,"

Charles Acland investigates "zones of cinemagoing" within the urban environment,

specifically along St. Catherine Street in Montreal, and the residue these spaces leave

behind. Most of the sites he discusses no longer exist. In fact, the cinema zone has been

all but erased, except for a few remaining chain theaters: Cineplex Forum (formerly the

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[545] Philip Fine, "Montreal's Mile End threatened by gentrification: Susan Bronson studies the social history of this rapidly changing neighbourhood," *Forum* 40.7 (11 October 2005), http://www.umontreal.ca/english/news_digest/2005-2006/20051011/mile_end.html.
[546] Local Montreal Tours, website, http://localmontrealtours.com/walking-tour/mile-end-montreal-food-tour/.

AMC Pepsi Forum), Scotia Bank Cinema (formerly the Paramount) and Cineplex Odeon

Quartier Latin. Despite the effect that commercial development has had on this stretch of

the city and the fact that such gentrification has eliminated most zones of cinemagoing (in

most urban centers), individual cinemas still invite "cultural participation" in an

experiential activity that blends the social with the economic:

> Cinemas and zones of cinematic life produce, and are the product of, traces of
> historical and economic forces. As sites that invite people into a vector of cultural
> participation, they are mnemonic devices, begging for stories to be told and for
> recollections to be conjured. In this way, they mix personal and communal
> experience with the broader operations of capital.[547]

As this passage suggests, the cultural histories of places reside in people's memories.

Consequently, the key to understanding site-based phenomena, like microcinema, is the

individuals who inhabit these spaces.

In piecing together a history of Montreal's alternative film exhibition venues, I

spoke to a number of individuals who have been organizing and attending film events in

the city; some are more recent arrivals to the city while others have lived in Montreal

their entire lives and whose filmgoing experience spans the past two or more decades.

The primary source for this oral history Rick Trembles—cartoonist, musician, filmmaker,

visual artist—was instrumental in providing the most extensive memories of Montreal's

alternative film practices.[548] During his early music career, Trembles began making short

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[547] Charles Acland, "Haunted Places," 134.

[548] In the 1980s, Trembles began creating "Motion Picture Purgatory," a comic strip movie review in *The Montreal Mirror*. The paper fired him toward the end of the decade for covering too many slasher films and indirectly accused him of supporting the genre's misogyny by acknowledging its existence. Ten years later, in 1998, the *Mirror* underwent a change in editors and invited him back. Trembles stayed on staff until June 2012 when the paper published its last print copy. He continues to make the cartoon for other venues (Rick Trembles, interview, 30 June 2012). He is also an important figure in Montreal's underground music

films to project during his band The American Devices' performances, which took place at various transient storefront, loft and warehouse venues before more stable venues like Les Foufounes Électriques appeared in 1983.[549] As he explains, there was and still is much cross-pollination among the music, art and film scenes in Montreal.

In an interview, he recounted his lifetime relationship to Montreal's film exhibition spaces beginning with the "kiddie matinees" at his local theater in Montreal's suburban South Shore.[550] He recalls young children being dropped off by their parents for entire afternoons to watch stop-motion animation monster movies, trashy sci-fi and horror films. These childhood experiences, like his first encounter with Ray Harryhausen films, are what Trembles attributes to sparking his passion for paracinema. His counter-cinema tastes eventually led him to the numerous grindhouse cinemas that existed in Montreal at the time (mid-70s to mid-80s). He remembers fondly the notorious (Crystal) Palace Theatre (1908-1984), located at 1223 Blvd. St. Laurent in the old red light district.[551] During the final period of the theater's history, it was a twenty-four hour cinema. Each week they screened three movies one after the other–always a disturbing slasher/splatter horror movie, an intrigue or action movie (spy, detective, [topless] kung-fu), and a porno movie. According to Trembles, it was one of the only places to see truly subversive content; the other repertory cinemas were focusing on midnight movie staples (like *Eraserhead* [David Lynch, 1977]). The price of admission was $3 and you could stay all day; in fact, you could sleep there if you wanted, and "the bums" did. Trembles

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scene. After playing in one of Montreal's earliest punk bands in the late 70's, The Electric Vomit, he formed the first iteration of the band The American Devices (then called The D-Vices) with the guitarist from the The Normals (Montreal's first punk band) in 1980. A version of The American Devices, including Trembles, is still active in Montreal. Snubdom, website and blog, www.snubdom.com.

[549] Les Foufounes Électriques, website, http://www.foufounes.qc.ca.

[550] Unless otherwise noted, all information in this section comes from my interview with Trembles.

[551] CinemaTour: Cinema History around the World, website, http://www.cinematour.com/theatres/ca/QC/3.html.

recollects, "It stank, the seats were ripped, and you had to check the seats for cum."[552]

But you could bring your own booze and buy hot dogs right inside the theater, so you

could basically live there. Some of the other venues he frequented are Cinema V,

previously the Empress Theatre (1928-1992) at 5560 rue Sherbrooke West, The Seville

(1929-1984) at 2155 rue St. Catherine West and Cinema de Paris (1968-1995) at 896 rue

St. Catherine West.[553] Not only did these cinemas show midnight movie fare but also

"first run independent, avant-garde and yes, even blue movies."[554]

Another interviewee, Cégep and Miskatonic Institute instructor and underground

filmmaker Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, recalls attending midnight screenings of cult films

like George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) at The Seville, an old movie

palace that has since become condominiums. He describes the scene as a film community

that was as "obsessed" with these types of films as he; the scene transitioned to Cinema V

once The Seville closed. Like Trembles, he also frequented the Palace Theatre, which

was a grandiose movie palace in the 50s where his grandfather went to see westerns

butvduring the 70s and 80s operated as a grindhouse theater showing "horror and

grindhouse fare… stuff outside of the mainstream." DeGiglio-Bellemare remembers

feeling he "was part of a mini underground movement that was seeing all kinds of trashy

films" and supports Trembles assessment that it was one of the few places to see

"transgressive" cinema.[555]

One of the earliest examples of a microcinema in Montreal, Cinéma Parallèle,

began in 1978 in a room at the back of Café Méli**è**s on Blvd. St. Laurent in the Plateau

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[552] Trembles.
[553] CinemaTour.
[554] Peggy Curran, "All Hail the Empress! Will city finally save Cinema V?" *The Gazette*, 15 August 2011, http://blogs.montrealgazette.com/2011/08/15/all-hail-the-empress-will-city-finally-save-cinema-v/.
[555] Mariano/DeGiglio-Bellemare.

(not too far from the present day iterations of both, now part of the Cinéma Excentris complex).[556] Beginning as The Underground Film Centre when it was established by Dimitri Eipides and Dimitri Spentzos in 1967, it was renamed Cinéma Parallèle in 1970 after Claude Chamberlan joined. As Chamberlan recalls: "Everything started in a loft at the corner of Bordeaux and Ontario, close to the clubhouse of the Rock Machine,[557] I was 17-years-old. The idea of joining cinema with events was already there. I added the madness…"[558] Many of my interviewees cited this venue as standing out to them amidst the alternative exhibition spaces; programming favored arty and experimental work rather than repertory films. Accounts differ as to whether it showed 16mm and 35mm or just the former, as well as the number of people it accommodated, which ranges from thirty to eighty. Philippe Spurrell, filmmaker and founder and programmer of Le Cinéclub/The Film Society, remembers it as a gathering of intellectuals and describes the cinema as having a "nice, intimate slightly bohemian Greenwich Village feel to it." But when it moved into the high tech space of Excentris, it lost the "conviviality and warmth of the former space."[559] Montreal Underground Film Festival (MUFF) founder and filmmaker Karina Mariano uses the word "chaleureux" when recalling the venue, offering a detailed account of the space:

> …it was much nicer back then because it was small and it had the same feeling as
> here [Peut-être Vintage]. There was a little café with white painted bricks… it was
> a nice place to have discussions, meet people and watch films and talk about

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[556] Café Méliès was founded in 1978 by Claude Chamberlan and relocated, along with Cinéma Parallèle, to the Excentris site in 1999, then owned by Daniel Langlois. Café Méliès, website, http://www.cafemelies.com/main_fr.html. Daniel Langlois Foundation, website, http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=302.
[557] The Rock Machine formed in Montreal in the mid-1980s as an outlaw motorcycle club that rivaled the Hells Angels.
[558] Cinéma Excentris, website, http://cinemaexcentris.com/Background.
[559] Spurrell.

them… The seats were really big, heavy velvet and comfortable… I remember seeing a lot of really fun film or videos, like Annie Sprinkle, and stuff you don't see in a regular cinema.[560]

Mariano has fond memories of the old Cinéma Parallèle as "an amazing, beautiful, fun place" but like Spurrell finds the new space cold and unwelcoming and no longer attends films there. She refers to the current clientele as "jet set," meaning people who do not know or really care about film, but go for the status (i.e. cultural capital). Fellow MUFF programmer DeGiglio-Bellemare agrees with her about the new facility but identifies the clientele as "the art house crowd," distinguishing them as a specific population within the moviegoing mainstream. Mike Rollo, experimental filmmaker and former faculty member at Concordia University, recounts that he stumbled upon Cinéma Parallèle when he first visited Montreal in 1998: "They were playing Brakhage at this café. I just went in to get a coffee and thought, oh, isn't that cute, Café Méliès, but then I looked at the program list and saw what they were actually playing there. I decided to take in a movie there later that night." Rollo admits this groundbreaking microcinema was one of the reasons he decided to relocate to Montreal for his graduate studies. However, by the time he moved in 2000, it had already integrated with Excentris. Lamenting its new home is a "very Fascist type of building… cold, depersonalized," he feels the administration has turned the focus too much toward technology and new media, so that it now lacks "the human factor."[561] One reporter describes the present-day decor as "garish, Buck-Rogers-meets-Cirque-du-Soleil" and notes the "oddball flourishes, like the ticket-takers who appear not in person, but on video-screens shaped like the portals in Captain Nemo's

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[560] Mariano/DeGiglio-Bellemare.
[561] Mike Rollo, interview, 22 October 2011.

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submarine."[562] These "flourishes" replacing person-to-person interaction with a mediated

humanoid transaction exemplify my interviewees' observations. Yet this move toward a

more multimedia environment was in fact the goal of Excentris founder Daniel Langlois,

who in 2010 decided that Excentris needed "to carve a new niche for itself as a multi

media showcase for emerging talent" and consequently converted two screening rooms

into multimedia exhibition halls.[563] And the distinct atmospheric café became a chichi

lounge "une nouvelle incarnation ultra moderne et rafinée," indistinguishable from the

rest along the Main.[564] In a strange and very rare microcinema-purchases-multiplex twist,

Cinéma Parallèle now owns Excentris (with the help of the Daniel Langlois

Foundation).[565] They maintain they are still committed to defending "a certain vision of

cinema and video marked by daring and original experiences" but mistakenly claim "to

offer the only alternative to Montreal's network of commercial distribution."[566] It is

significant that those in the microcinema scene view Excentris as part of the mainstream,

whereas they view themselves as an alternative to it, again underscoring the mutability of

the mainstream vs. alternative dichotomy.

Over the same several decades outlined above, the Rialto Theatre in Mile End has

changed ownership and had various iterations as has the Imperial Theatre in downtown

Montreal. The Rialto continues to host a number of ongoing film series, such as Kino

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[562] Adam Sternbergh, "The last quiet movie theatre: I hate talking in movies. I hate people who talk in movies. And the talking is so bad I almost hate going to movies at all. So, how do we get them to shut up?," *National Post*, 22 March 2003, http://business.highbeam.com/435424/article-1G1-100045573/last-quiet-movie-theatre-hate-talking-movies-hate-people.
[563] Alan Hustak, "EX-CENTRIS RE-BRANDS: The Temple to Cinema on The Main becomes an Alternative Arts Centre," *The Métropolitain* website, 7 January 2010, http://themetropolitain.ca/articles/view/760.
[564] Café Méli**è**s.
[565] Melora Koepke, "The fate of rep cinema in Montreal: Reel controversy," *The Hour*, 16 February 2006, http://hour.ca/2006/02/16/reel-controversy/.
[566] Cinéma Excentris.

Montreal and Grindhouse Wednesdays, as well as one-of events and non-film spectacles. And the Imperial Theatre, sold to the FFM in 1995 by Famous Players, was once the home of Fantasia. It now hosts screenings for the Festival du nouveau cinéma (FNC), Cinemania and the FFM.

Intermittently, during the 1980s and 90s, independent collectors would come to town with their own programs of films to screen at the old theaters. Trembles was impressed by Reg Harrt's sex and violence cartoon festival where he saw Tex Avery's "Red Hot Riding Hood" (1943) for the first time. This was before video or before it was easy to get this type of content on video. Recalling Joan Hawkins' observation that a "logic of estrangement or exoticism" underlies paracinematic collection culture, Trembles describes his relationship to video and how it changed his viewing habits:[567]

> Once it started showing up on video, we went nuts, everybody was dubbing
> everything, all these horrible, like bad quality copies. The Russ Meyer movies,
> once they started circulating on video, we were just losing it. The first time seeing
> all that stuff was just amazing.[568]

His sentiments epitomize paracinephile culture revealing the pleasure in being able to access bootleg tapes: "the very rawness of the image becomes both a signifier of the tape's outlaw status and a guarantor of its authenticity."[569]

Many of the abovementioned cinemas closed during the decade when video was at its height (mid-80s to mid-90s). DeGiglio-Bellemare, like Trembles, attributes the closing of these cinemas to the "VHS revolution;" "the only ones that were staying open

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[567] Hawkins, 45.
[568] Trembles.
[569] Hawkins, 47.

were the porn houses."[570] Trembles doesn't recall other alternative venues taking their place. He and his friends turned to their lofts or homes for movie viewing, first on VHS then on DVD. When I questioned Mariano whether other intimate sites emerged once Cinéma Parallèle moved, she told me she was involved with a peripatetic underground music and film project Cabaret Kérosène that organized monthly events at small bars and underground music venues (eg. Les Foufounes Électriques and L'X). She screened the work of friends and local independent filmmakers, including fellow students from her film production program at Concordia University.

Despite the availability of video, and eventually DVD, technology, one venue that focused on showing celluloid continued to attract a clientele of paracinephiles. Cinéma du Parc experienced a paracinematic zenith from the late-90s through 2006 during which Mitch Davis (co-founder of Fantasia) and Don Lobel (previous owner) programmed 16mm underground and cult movies. Trembles recollects the passion of Davis for unearthing obscure films that were previously impossible to access; one such film he remembers fondly is *Last House on Dead End Street* (Roger Watkins, 1977). In addition to two Blue Sunshine regulars, Adam Le Borene and Daniel Yates, Trembles and Rollo have similar positive memories of this period at Cinéma du Parc and report attending screenings religiously every Friday and Saturday night.[571] Davis and Lobel both left in February of 2006 after Excentris gained ownership. Lobel was reportedly dismissed without notice or explanation and Davis resigned in solidarity.[572] Trembles claims another reason Davis left was because he was disappointed in attendance levels "for films he was busting his ass to get… rare, real gems." He was upset that people didn't

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[570] Mariano/DeGiglio-Bellemare.
[571] Adam Le Borene, interview, 19 April 2011. Daniel Yates, interview, 5 April 2012.
[572] Koepke.

appreciate viewing projected films "as they were meant to be seen."[573] Upon leaving,

Davis told the press that Excentris management expressed an interest in maintaining the

cutting edge programming that he and Lobel worked tirelessly to promote, and Davis

added: "different sensibilities will bring in different movies… To [program] this kind of

stuff, you really have to have an obsessiveness and dedication that takes time, energy and

ingenuity. Not everyone's going to bother."[574]

The thrill of discovering obscure objects and then presenting them to the public or

a niche audience is often what drives programmers to pursue their work. Several

programmers with whom I spoke articulated a similar motivation as guiding their

programming choices; they want to share their discovered treasures. As I discussed

earlier, programmers act as key agents in what Bourdieu identifies as the cycle of

consecration, bestowing value on rare, undiscovered or forgotten texts. While the

question of how programmers affect the circulation of films and audiences' reception of

them depends on the specific scenario, the fact that programmers are crucial to the

formation and life of film scenes is certain.

Montreal's Microcinemas and Other Alternative Exhibition Practices

Perhaps as a result of the limitations of Montreal's cultural policy for small alternative

venues and the outdated laws and narrow view the city takes on cultural spaces, few

microcinema projects have endured. The ones that have lasted tend to be those without

fixed sites, the peripatetic or pop-up cinemas that rely on established or outdoor venues.

Since 2007, I have seen several venues come and go, demonstrating the persistent

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[573] Trembles.
[574] Koepke.

transience of these spaces. I now turn to my documentation of the Montreal microcinema scene from 2007-2013, reiterating the importance of in-depth description to serve as both a record and analysis of significant cultural phenomena that broadens our understanding of film exhibition history. The majority of the following spaces and events were either anglophone or bilingual, mostly the latter, because there exist few strictly francophone spaces.

Lab Synthèse

Abutting the railroad tracks and surrounded by warehouses and industrial buildings (i.e. no residential dwellings within noise complaint distance) on the outer edges of Outremont and Mile End, Loft 200 was positioned in an ideal section of Montreal for art happenings. The organizers, the Cowan brothers, resided in the large, open space that served as a makeshift music, cinema and all around art venue easily accessible to the inhabitants of Mile End, Parc-Extension (Parc-Ex), Outremont, Rosemont, Little Italy, and Villeray. The site, near other art-related buildings (eg. recording studios, clowning schools, artist studios), was isolated enough to give the scenester the feeling s/he was venturing to a liminal place where activity occurs only in the dark hours of the night—connecting it to what Richard Lloyd has referred to as the symbolic economy and nocturnal capital of the urban environment.[575] Started December 14, 2007 by "out-of-towners from Vancouver," Lab Synthèse fostered a noble concept—one of synthesizing, meshing and dialoguing among different art media and creative pursuits. In addition to the event space, Lab Synthèse also launched a publication entitled *Beaubien Magazine* that was available online via their website and at independent graphic novel store Drawn & Quarterly (as well as at two locations in Vancouver and one in Toronto).

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[575] Lloyd, 179, 181.

Unlike the elitism that can accompany some avant-garde spaces, Lab Synthèse at Loft 200 was a welcoming and homey environment furnished with plush couches, coffee tables and ashtrays (to satisfy the disgruntled smokers in the wake of a newly smoke-free Montreal nightlife). They also invited guests to bring their own alcohol, which appealed to bohemians on a budget.

I visited the space twice, once for a music event (consisting of three bands) and once for a film screening, which happened once a week. The former was in the warmer months of late summer and was packed with teens and twenty to thirty-something hipsters (and a few older folks). Due to its remote location, Loft 200 was a venue that people made a conscious effort to visit; it was not on a highly trafficked pedestrian route, eliminating the possible entry of an accidental tourist. My second visit for a film screening, a projected DVD, occurred on one of the coldest nights of the winter, likely causing the meager fifteen-person turnout. Though it did not feel like much of a scene per se, I got the sense if the weather had been milder, attendance would have been better. Despite it being off the beaten track, the space closed within a year of opening due to problems related to their illegal status. Kelly informed me they had a couple of successful parties that attracted the police and were eventually shut down. However, the art community it coalesced formed a fairly successful record label, Arbitus Records, which Kelly believes is "arguably the most exciting record label to come out of the city."[576]

Sky Blue Door

Another artist/entrepreneurial residence that served as an independent screening venue, gallery, concert space, and all around art happening locale, Sky Blue Door sat on the

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[576] Kelly/Gouin. He quickly qualified this statement to say they were in a different category than Constellation Records and its subsidiary Alien 8.

eastern most edge of Mile End. With no web presence, the space seemed to be in its very early stages of becoming when I attended. Its inhabitant and host of underground art events, Thomas, thought of himself as a "jack-of-all-art-trades." From our brief conversation, I learned he was involved in design work, promotion, public relations, curating and collecting. He also mentioned a reality program would take place on site.

When I arrived at this space (December 2008) for a screening of *Patti Smith: Dream of Life* (Steven Sebring, 2008) preceded by short films of a local filmmaker, I was surprised by the scant attendance, maybe thirty people, for such a well-positioned locale. It was located on St. Laurent just south of St. Viateur (and the Ubisoft building) on a mostly commercial block. Perhaps more business savvy than the Loft 200 founders, Thomas was selling beer, wine, and desserts for a nominal fee. This space seems to have closed within a year of opening.[577]

Cinéma Abattoir

A predominantly francophone venue lasting from 2005 to 2011, Pierre-Luc Vaillancourt, the filmmaker and founder, also collaborated on projects at various local sites, including The Pines Recording Studio, in the US at spaces such as Other Cinema and abroad in alternative venues throughout Europe. Screenings were irregularly scheduled and included the following: Projection-Banquet Underground: Programme Transgressif, Érotique et Transcendental; Petites morts: Projection d'orgasmes et de sang; and Rip in Pieces USA: Sexualités/Frontières.[578] As these titles indicate, Vaillancourt believes a certain type of cinema, one that depicts the sordid, or what others might call paracinema,

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[577] The last event I locate at this site was on 13 November 2009—an opening party for Expozine 2009. Expozine, website, http://www.expozine.ca/en/2009-3/.
[578] Cinéma Abattoir, website, http://cinema-abattoir.com/.

can have a transformative, even transcendent, experience for the viewer. Like Baldwin, he wants to implicate the spectator in the event to evoke a visceral response. One of Abattoir's last programs, organized in conjunction with Double Negative film collective, was 2010's All Tomorrow's Parties, for which Godspeed You! Black Emperor curated the music performances.

Cinequanon

On June 17, 2011, I attended my first screening at Cinequanon—a free outdoor movie screening that took place every Friday night in the Plateau (4562 St. Dominique)—then in its third and final year. I arrived at the address only to find two lit candles on the doorstep. Somewhat confused, I timidly opened the door to a typical Plateau apartment and walked through the kitchen, still not knowing if I was in the correct place. In a huge, tree covered yard behind this six-plex apartment building, approximately eighty-five people were gathered to watch *Le temps du loup* ([*Time of the Wolf*] Michael Hanneke, 2003)—the third screening of the season. By no means an easy film to view, the organizers clearly wanted to show "important independent, foreign and art films."[579] The first film of the 2011 season was *Blood Simple* (Coen Brothers, 1984), then *Hausu* (Nobuhiko Ôbayashi, 1977), initiating an eclectic line-up that also included *Fish Tank* (Andrea Arnold, 2009), *The Happiness of the Katakuris* (Takashi Miike, 2001) and *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé, 2009).

On the cinema's Facebook page, the organizers Kelly and Gouin identified themselves as "Kubrick lovechild" and "Jodorowsky lovechild" respectively, aligning themselves with established and revered auteur filmmakers and indicating their cultish

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[579] Cinequanon, Facebook page, http://www.facebook.com/groups/88611716204/.

taste in programming choices.[580] Kelly grew up and attended film school in Melbourne, Australia before relocating to Montreal and Gouin has spent his entire life in Montreal. They were both twenty-two when they started Cinequanon.

Before each feature, they played a thirty minute curated montage from television, advertising and film. On this particular night, they screened excerpts from *Iron Chef* and then *Plastic Bag* (2009), an eco-short about the life of a plastic bag directed by Ramin Bahrani and narrated by Werner Herzog. It was the organizers' original intention for it to be a place for local filmmakers to meet, watch and discuss film. To this end, they invited submissions to screen during the pre-show: "Canadian shorts, video art and stupid viral clips will also be screened before every film. CALLING FOR SUBMISSIONS. Local filmmakers' work wanted for pre-feature entertainment."[581] Kelly explains, however, they did not receive a substantial number of submissions that met their standards.

While their selection of films may have been predominantly art house, the clips shown beforehand came from popular culture (taken from television and the internet). And the beer they sold to help pay off the projector and sound equipment was decidedly lowbrow: Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR)—"the hipster beer of choice."[582] And hipsters made up a substantial percentage of the audience. The mean age of the crowd appeared to be low to mid-twenties, predominantly white, and mixed linguistically. Kelly assesses the majority of their regular audience was students under twenty-five. The announcements were in English, the shorts were in both languages and the feature films were in various

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[580] Ibid.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Leon Kitain, "Beer: How and why did Pabst Blue Ribbon come to be the hipster beer of choice?" Quora, website, http://www.quora.com/Beer/How-and-why-did-Pabst-Blue-Ribbon-come-to-be-the-hipster-beer-of-choice.

languages. Audience members smoked cigarettes incessantly and passed around marijuana joints. In fact, Cinequanon's Facebook page specifically indicated "420 friendly," though BYOB was prohibited.

Another time I attended, on September 2, 2011, about sixty-five people were present. The crowd was fairly quiet and respectful during screenings. Even so, Kelly and Gouin had several visits from the police each summer, mainly due to one neighbor in the apartment complex next door who sometimes called before the screening even began. They learned quickly that noise complaints could be made any time of day; so, a neighbor could feasibly call and complain about a backyard b-b-q in the middle of the afternoon. Ironically, Kelly referred to Cinequanon as an "illegal cinema," as opposed to a microcinema, because they screened films without paying copyright fees, but the police were not interested in *what* they were showing. They never received a fine, but the police often asked them to turn down the volume. Cinequanon held their last screening on September 9, 2011, during which they burned the homemade screen in a final spectacular gesture. They had raised several hundred dollars for Doctors Without Borders through donations collected at the door.

Kelly igniting screen after Cinequanon's final screening

The Noah

As of my departure from Montreal in May 2013, The Noah was the most recently started microcinema series. The Noah, begun in August 2012 by Frank Fingers, former volunteer, bartender and guest programmer at Blue Sunshine, would likely never had been started had Blue Sunshine not existed. The Noah took place in a small room at the back of Peut-être Vintage (6209A Parc Avenue), a used clothing store in Mile End owned by a welcoming, bohemian couple from Poland. The store is equipped with a screen, projector and sound system and can seat up to fifty people on an assortment of old couches, chairs and bar stools (pictured below in the Underground Festival section). Janisse uses the same friperie to hold special Blue Sunshine screenings, like the annual Christmas video marathon that continues despite the closing of the microcinema. The Noah screenings were unfortunately under-attended, and the series only lasted about eight months, exemplifying the persistent but transient nature of these underground spaces. Though many microcinema venues in Monteral have closed, there still exist a few tenacious microcinema series and underground festivals that to some degree maintain the feel of a microcinema even if they are in some cases peripatetic.

Ciné-Club La Banque

La Banque screening at Playmind

One of the strictly francophone spaces in Montreal, Ciné-Club La Banque, was originally located in the Plateau (175 E. Roy St.) and then relocated to Little Italy (6751A St.

Laurent) in spring 2013. The former location was a bank, thus the name; the new loft workspace is called Playmind, a "new media studio specialized in digital environments."[583] I attended a DVD screening of *Spirits of the Dead* (Fellini, Malle, Vadim, 1968) in late April 2013, along with about seven other people. Organized by Serge Abiaad, filmmaker, PhD student and instructor at UdeM, screenings are free and take place every Monday night. There is a beer-dispensing concession machine on site, and guests may bring their own refreshments. During my brief conversation with Abiaad, he told me he would like to start projecting celluloid.

Le Cinéclub/The Film Society

The apparatus is central to The Film Society's mission

Philippe Spurrell's Film Society celebrated its twentieth year anniversary in November 2012. Inspired by Jesuit priest and Concordia University Communication Studies professor, Marc Gervais, who hosted free screenings at the Loyola campus, Spurrell wants to get people excited about film. Nostalgic for a time when going to the cinema was a swanky affair for which moviegoers dressed up, he is a purist and cinephile, who wants to recapture "the unspoken magic" of the art form in its "original pre-twentieth century form."[584] To this end, he only screens 16mm and 35mm films, no digital; as stated on the Society's website: "We don't just *watch* films, we *experience* them…on

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[583] La Banque, Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/pages/La-Banque/182433315131548?fref=ts.
[584] Spurrell.

genuine motion picture film!"[585] The Film Society has been a DIY roving series, not by choice but due to the sheer difficulty of finding and holding onto a space that worked, and with each new location comes the challenge of rebuilding an audience. Spurrell recalls the days when his events drew over one hundred people; now, he's happy with a turnout of fifteen. When I asked why he thought there was a drop in enthusiasm, he replied "home cinema," a term he considers to be an oxymoron, as ridiculous a concept as "home rugby." Movies are now "presented to people in this very easy to consume format" so that a formerly "communal experience becomes this solitary, cocooning thing and people get used to that."[586] Hollywood is also to blame, in his opinion, because they stopped making movies for a mature adult audience, which has in turn altered their moviegoing habits. Despite shifts in film consumption practices, as well as financial and promotional obstacles, Spurrell persists in collecting and screening celluloid.

I attended a couple of Film Society events. One at Blue Sunshine, where Spurrell collaborated with Janisse and Bertrand on programming and provided their 16mm projector, and one at the Crowley Arts Centre, an events facility in the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) neighborhood. The former resembled other Blue Sunshine screenings, which I will describe in the next chapter. In October of 2011, I went to the screening at Crowley, which is located in Westmount (walking distance from the Vendome metro). Spurrell often tries to add an additional element to the film, whether it's a theme, speaker or special refreshment, to lure people away from their home cinemas. This particular night was a "drive-in" screening of *The People that Time Forgot* (Kevin Connor, 1977) with a special movie poster exhibition from Spurrell's personal collection. It drew an

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[585] Le Cinéclub/The Film Society, website, http://www.cineclubfilmsociety.com/.
[586] Spurrell.

audience of about twenty people, including volunteers. As with all 16mm single projector screenings, there was an intermission during which Spurrell mingled with the audience in the lounge area where drinks and snacks were available. Socializing is an important aspect of these events as it's one of the few advantages offered by leaving one's home to view a film. It also provides an opportunity for the programmer to get feedback from the audience, and Spurrell is keen to take advantage of this. The space wasn't particularly intimate and atmospheric like many microcinemas. Nevertheless, Spurrell believes his series embodies the microcinema spirit while carrying on the tradition of film societies to show movies that are not available at mainstream theaters.
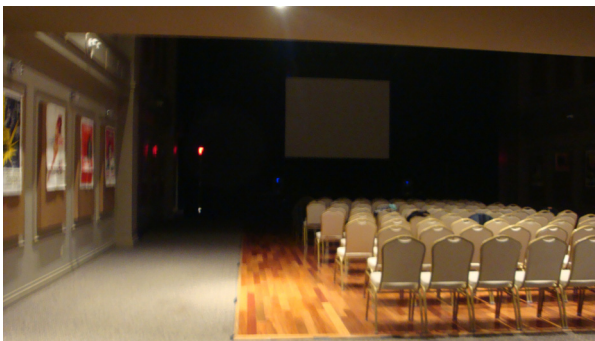
Film Society screening at Crowley Arts Centre

In December 2012, Spurrell's Film Society began screening at two of Concordia University's screening cinemas (J.A. deSève and the renovated VA cinema in the Fine Arts building). In an effort to garner support for the revived series, he sent out an email with the following plea: "We hope you will support this worthwhile organization by attending at least once in a while. Your attendance is the only way we can continue offering you great nights out at the movies (we receive no government or private sponsor funding)."[587] Common to most alternative projects, the elusive audience and lack of funding are persistent issues. Twenty years is a long time for a DIY series to last,

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[587] Philippe Spurrell, list email, 27 November 2012.

especially in Montreal, but as Spurrell contends in the epigraph: "It's always a struggle here."[588]

Grindhouse Wednesdays

Almost every first Wednesday of the month, Grindhouse Crew hosts a benefit event that is organized around a grindhouse film.[589] Usually involving music and other movie-related activities, events occur indoors at the Rialto Theatre most of the year with an occasional outdoor event during the summer months. I have attended two Grindhouse events. The first was the initial event that took place at Cinema L'Amour (4015 St. Laurent), one of the longest-running pornography theaters in Montreal and the perfect setting for watching Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965). Before the show and during the intermission, a rock-a-billy band played, and an MC presided over competitions, one involved audience members doing a striptease. Beer and popcorn were available for purchase inside the theater. It was a lively scene. My second attendance, and the nineteenth Grindhouse event, took place on June 10, 2012. This special Grindhouse event, Zombie Spectacular, took place at the outdoor St. Ambroise Brewery Terrasse. The evening kicked off with activities for families, like face-painting, games and a show by Montreal Improv All-Stars; then a musical component with a live dubstep performance; and finally, at sundown, they projected a 35mm copy of *Night of the Living Dead* onto the side of a truck. At least a couple hundred people, some dressed as zombies, were seated at picnic tables and on blankets, drinking beer and enjoying the balmy June weather.

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[588] Spurrell, interview.
[589] I have been told by several sources they do not pay the rights for the movies, but the proceeds from the $10 admission go to the Head & Hands organization, which provides support for people with HIV/AIDS.

Grindhouse screening at St. Ambroise Brewery

Whereas these types of events are common in cities like Austin and New York, they are rare in Montreal. An *Examiner* journalist laments after a Grindhouse hiatus:

> As I have mentioned before, and as some of you film fanatics may have noticed, apart from the Fantasia Film Festival every summer, and the occasional screening at Cinema du Parc, classic and/or underground films rarely get the respect they deserve on the silver screen, especially grindhouse films. [590]

He contextualizes the films in a way Montrealers would understand by comparing the fare at Grindhouse Wednesdays to that of Fantasia and Cinema du Parc. This, of course, was written before the start of Blue Sunshine, which became the only place to see these types of film on a regular basis. However, he misses one of the key reasons Grindhouse Wednesdays are so important and that is because they make an event of going to see a movie. The other activities and the fact that it takes place either in a beautiful historic theater or outdoors make it a special evening; this is one of the ways repertory cinema, and microcinema, can compete for the attention of the contemporary filmgoer.

Underground Festivals: MUFF and Mascara and Popcorn

As I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, festivals generally should not be included in the microcinema category because many are commercial, big budget events

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[590] Vlachakis.

that often occur in movie theaters (dedicated spaces) and only once a year. However, I find two of Montreal's film festivals to be more similar to microcinema practice than the typical large-scale festivals, such as FFM, FNC and Fantasia, and therefore deserve to be mentioned under the category of alternative exhibition practices. The MUFF and Mascara and Popcorn festivals share some of the qualities I described previously as being critical to the microcinema paradigm. These two festivals both operate on a shoestring budget, occur in small, non-dedicated locales (friperies, music clubs, bars, etc.) and have passionate and dedicated individuals at the helm who take a DIY approach to film exhibition.

In 2013, MUFF, a three-day festival, celebrated its eighth year of bringing mostly short, underground works to the Montreal film community. The majority of their screenings take place at Peut-être Vintage in Mile End with larger events, like opening night and fundraisers, happening at La Sala Rossa (music venue) located on the cusp of the Plateau and Mile End. The founders Mariano and Zöe Brown, who now have a volunteer staff of six, created the festival for the same reason most microcinemas begin: there was no other place in Montreal showing transgressive, underground film. At the time, Mariano was program coordinator for Rendez-vous but was unhappy having to put her own taste aside to screen films that fit into the "corporate" aesthetic of the Cinémathèque. She began to save the films she liked that were rejected (and would be discarded), among them films by Trembles and DeGiglio-Bellemare. A genuine DIY effort, MUFF grew out of this collection of films that would not have been seen otherwise. MUFF does not charge a submission fee so that it does not discriminate against filmmakers of limited financial means. The festival remains a small-scale, low/no

budget affair that relies on a community of filmmakers and paracinephiles to keep it going; especially crucial is their collaboration with DeGiglio-Bellemare's filmmaker collective Volatile Works that provides equipment and technical expertise and the donation of a free space by Peut-être Vintage's owners.[591]

MUFF 2010 Q&A at Peut-être Vintage

In a similar fashion, singer, actress and performance artist, Florence Touliatos started Mascara and Popcorn Festival when she first wanted to perform at festivals. She decided instead of applying to POP Montreal she would create her own festival; she also loves B films and was only able to watch them by renting videos. When conceiving of the concept for the festival, which screens subversive trash and underground films, she asked herself: "What kind of festival would John Waters like? Mascara and Popcorn! Mascara for glamour, popcorn is for horror."[592] With Waters as the inspiration, she decided to include music, theater and performance to add a campy element and to provide her and fellow artists a "platform to express themselves." The first "microevent" took place in March 2011, they then had two more mini-festivals that July and November. Her goal is to show films that would not be seen in "commercial box-office cinema" and to bring in

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[591] Volatile Works' members come out of an activist background and promote "a DIY aesthetic" that corresponds to their café-screening mode of exhibition. The collective has been less active independently since its collaboration with MUFF.

[592] Florence Touliatos, interview, 7 May 2012.

other work to support it.[593] On the evening I went, Touliatos' theater troupe Redhead

Burlesque presented a play "Redheads for Valentine Lovers" that had a B film aesthetic

(like *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, [Jim Sharman, 1975]); a mix of trash, horror and

burlesque elements, it was her response to a Ruby Larocca film *Belated by Valentine's*

Lover (2010) that screened as part of the evening's program. The Cabaret Playhouse

(5656 Parc Ave.), music venue and bar, hosted that night's events, but she's also used

MainLine Theatre (3997 St. Laurent) and Blue Sunshine.

Collectives: Double Negative and Kino

Film collectives are not the focus of this research, and so I have not undertaken a

thorough investigation of those that exist in Montreal. Here I cite two fairly active

collectives, Double Negative, predominantly anglophone, and Kino Montreal (aka

Kino'00), predominantly francophone, for the purposes of acknowledging these

alternative film exhibition practices exist alongside microcinemas. Having attended

several events, I have a partial understanding of how collectives fit into the larger scheme

of alternative film practice in Montreal. I believe they work in some capacity to maintain

an interest in and community for non-mainstream, even experimental, film, and in some

cases offer support to filmmakers, either financially or technically (equipment or studio

access). Double Negative, of which interviewee Rollo is a member, is based in a Mile

End studio paid for with membership fees and whatever income is made at events. It

debuted with a screening at the National Film Board of Canada's cinema located on St.

Denis in June 2004. As Rollo discusses in our conversation, securing funding has been

very difficult because they are not as organized administratively as other nonprofit

organizations. For a while, they did not have official positions, such as Director, or even

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[593] Ibid.

a Board, believing in a more democratic approach to running the collective. However, they have since decided they need to implement structural changes in order to compete for the limited funding available for artist collectives.[594] They often organize events in collaboration with other arts organizations. For example, in April 2013 they joined forces with WNDX collective in Winnipeg to host a screening of "New Prairie Cinema" at Cinémathèque québécoise.

Kino is a far more active and organized association with multiple programs—Monthly Screenings, Kino Kabaret, Kino'00 Annual Gala, Atelier K and Planet Kino. Founded in 1999 by Christian Laurence and twenty members, the original mission was to make a film a month and then have screenings for the local film community. These monthly screenings are at the heart of what the collective refers to as "Le mouvement Kino."[595] I attended one Kino outdoor screening in spring 2013 that occurred at a park in the Latin Quarter. This event does not exemplify their typical exhibition format, which normally transpires at the Rialto Theatre. The audience consisted of about one hundred fifty, mostly white francophone, people across the age spectrum. Some sat on blankets on the grass, others brought folding chairs, and several groups of homeless folks gathered around the edges, drinking and heckling the films. A selection of programmer chosen short films comprised the screening. Each programmer contextualized his group of films in a brief introduction.

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[594] Rollo.
[595] Kino'00, website, http://kino00.com/apropos/historique/.

Artist/Loft Parties and One-off Events

Double Negative screening outside Hotel2Tango

There exists in Montreal a constellation of artist and loft spaces that host ad hoc or occasional happenings at which local filmmakers exhibit their works. I mention these events as a sidebar to the regular programs of the aforementioned sites because the makeshift ambience of the spaces is similar, and they do contribute to the alternative, nontheatrical film exhibition landscape of the city. At these events, the film component often serves more as a backdrop to the social atmosphere rather than as a main focus for attendees. Two of my experiences are connected to the former living, rehearsal and performance space of members of Godspeed You! Black Emperor and A Silver Mt. Zion called Hotel2Tango, now a dedicated recording studio and label (Constellation Records) in a new location. During the first event, in the winter of 2007, the music stopped while a selection of abstract Brakhage-like films were projected, and the second, in June of 2011, occurred outdoors and films screened both as the main focus and as backdrop to live music performances. These types of events are far more elusive due to their occasional nature and word-of-mouth or social media notification. More importantly, the gentrification of areas such as Mile End, Mile-Ex, Parc-Ex and Little Italy has

considerably affected the loft scene as indicated in the following 2013 interview with the band Majical Cloudz:

Jazz Monroe: The Montreal Loft Scene Has Pretty Much Died Out?

Devon Welsh: Yeah, a lot of venues got shut down; it definitely had a lot to do with the police. Before, venues would cease to exist and they'd just find a new place somewhere, but it got too much. The rent got too high; it became a forbidden business venture.

Jazz Monroe: That Seems Kind of Sad.

Devon Welsh: Yeah, I think that was good for the city: having lots of DIY spaces that weren't based on selling liquor and the business of music touring.[596]

Evident in Welsh's response is the precarious nature of marginal DIY practices, as well as the discursively negative role of gentrification in their disappearance.

Pinky Beckles hosting TV Carnage at Le Cagibi

Similar one-off events take place in cafes, bars and gallery spaces. For example, in May 2010, I was one of twenty-five audience members for a curated media performance at Le Cagibi. The host Pinky Beckles of TV Carnage, who travels to

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[596] Jazz Monroe, "Eye of the Storm," *Exclaim!*, June 2013, 39.

different sites around North America, showed video clips from various dated sources—

mostly 1980s and 90s television programs and newscasts or excerpts from VHS tapes—

interjecting comic commentary throughout. The TV Carnage website tagline sums up the

bad taste aesthetic of the program, "Picking the Plumpest, Juiciest Kernels Out of TV and

Video Shit for Over 15 Years," as does this quote from the "About TVC" section of the

website: "exceptionally bad TV lovingly fused together… glorious cesspools of

retardation."[597]

In the same month, I went to a Trash on Wheels screening in the *salle de*

spectacle of Casa del Popolo. To a room of just under twenty people, Jonathan Culp

projected a series of shorts, mostly industrial, classroom and educational films, also

referred to as orphan films, as well as old TV commercials and cartoons from the 50s and

60s. He provided a brief introduction to each film. Audience members could drink and

eat during the event and mingle during the intermission. Both of these events targeted

paracinephiles.

Trash on Wheels at Casa del Popolo

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[597] TV Carnage, website, http://www.tvcarnage.com/wordpress.

Conclusion

A goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the way in which a number of variables within the urban landscape dovetail to create a setting for cultural scenes. DIY projects, specifically, require the availability of affordable space and a critical mass of likeminded, passionate individuals whose needs coincide. Economists and urban theorists have developed strategies to guide city officials in the making of creative cities, in other words in providing an environment that will nurture young creatives and the economy they generate, so that the city may benefit financially from their creative energy and cultural capital. The presence of artists and bohemians is one desirable factor. However, the trend that cultural theroists like McRobbie have identified necissitates a continual transplanting of young creatives to bring development to ungentrified areas of a city before being priced out and forced to move on, along with the other inhabitants of the quarter, and causing a once hip neighborhood to become the domain of the bourgeoisie. Sometimes young creatives are able to parley their skills into well-paid jobs within the creative sector, as have the employees of Ubisoft, demonstrating that it's not just people who generate this trend, but businesses and venues as well. Ironically, alternative cultural projects, like microcinemas, can inadvertently attract development to urban bohemian zones but are then negatively affected by the gentrification their presence initiates because they are not subsidized by the government as are companies like Ubisoft. Thus, their existence is precarious. To survive, they must remain adaptable to external influences and the slow but continual flow of creative capital from one section of a city to another. The nature of microcinema in Montreal is illustrative of this urban trend.

In the world of alternative film exhibition, there appears to be a persistent

transience; spaces come and go, largely because of the lack of infrastructure or support

for such projects, the mismanagement of spaces, the effects of gentrification, as well as

the inability of city officials to understand the role of the microcinema in the cultural

landscape. My interviewees consider their city to be a cinephilic one, yet Montreal

struggles to sustain its alternative film scene. The reality is more microcinema and

alternative venues have closed than have opened since 2007, parallelling the waning of

the DIY music scene and the growth of a festival culture. This, I expect, is due in part to

the gentrification of the city center and neighborhoods to the north, which has pushed the

bohemian sector of the population further north to Parc-Ex, east to Hochelaga-

Maisonneuve (HoMa), and south to St. Henri and Pointe-Saint-Charles. Also, despite

their contribution to the "branding" of the city as culturally hip, microcinemas are

ignored by both the cultural tourism industry and by the city's various offices implicated

in the cultural development policies of the mid-2000s forward. Furthermore, seemingly

archaic and/or subjectively enforced policies and ordinances continue to hinder the ability

of small, independent cultural spaces to survive. For example, all postering in the city

must be done through one company Publicité sauvage that can charge prohibitively

exorbitant rates because they have no competition. This makes a normally low cost mode

of promotion unaffordable to small-scale projects. The city, however, is not consistent in

policing such activity, and those operating at the margins continue to find creative ways

around these issues, which sometimes means engaging in illegal activity. MUFF has

resorted to paying squeegee punks twenty dollars each to poster certain neighborhoods

prior to the festival but open themselves up to possible fines. Notwithstanding these

obstacles and due to the tenacity of a small group of dedicated individuals and the support of certain film communities, there still and will likely continue to exist a few options for the curious, (para)cinephilic viewer beyond large-scale festival screenings. But microcinema in Montreal, for now, remains an under-supported and risky undertaking.

Chapter VI: Blue Sunshine

That [Blue Sunshine] *was the epitome for me; that was it… I don't know how else it could have been improved; it was perfect.*[598]

Rick Trembles

This place is the CBGBs of film in Montreal.[599]

Ariel Esteban Cayer, Blue Sunshine
regular/volunteer/Miskatonic student

While Blue Sunshine was just one small theater in the much larger cinematic apocalypse that is pressing down upon us, we went out like a jerry-rigged battletruck face-first into our inevitable doom. That's how we roll.[600]

Kier-la Janisse

In the previous chapters, I discussed some of the external obstacles faced by owners or

organizers of alternative venues and practices in the city of Montreal—gentrification,

cultural policy, biased ordinances—as well as a few internal impediments, such as

mismanagement and organizer burnout. Now, I present in detail the life, from inception

to termination, of one particular microcinema in Montreal—Blue Sunshine—that

dovetails with many of these DIY pitfalls. During almost two years of operation, Blue

Sunshine offered its audience some of the most eclectic programming Montreal's film

scene has experienced since Cinema du Parc's heyday under the programming leadership

of Davies and Lobel. Even though Blue Sunshine's tenure was only "a blip in the lifespan

of your average cinema," the programmers' efforts "yielded something palpable"—

something that was meaningful to not only their core group of regulars, but also to

cinephiles and paracinephiles across Canada.[601] Because of the persistent transience of

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[598] Trembles.
[599] Adam Abonaccar/Ariel Esteban Cayer, joint interview, 26 April 2012. All further quotes from Abonaccar and Cayer are from the same interview.
[600] Kier-la Janisse, "Blue Sunshine: The Life and Death of a Microcinema," *Incite Journal of Experimental Media* 4 (Fall 2013): 153.
[601] Janisse, 157.

microcinema, venues like Blue Sunshine often come and go without a tangible trace, living on only in the memories and shared stories of those who participated. But these spaces are a vital part of exhibition history and telling barometers of taste formations that coalesce around film texts and programmers, and thus it is imperative their stories be recorded.

Blue Sunshine screening in organizers' living room

Immediately upon entering Blue Sunshine Psychotronic Film Centre, one was struck by the intimate and makeshift nature of the space. Situated on the third floor of a mixed-use building on one of Montreal's busiest streets, Boulevard St. Laurent, Blue Sunshine epitomized the concept of the microcinema.[602] With seating to accommodate about forty-five people, including a lumpy couch for three, the founders' living quarters were transformed into a working cinema every Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and into a learning site, The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, on Wednesday evenings. The goal of educating audiences at all their events is implicit in their mission statement:

> The Blue Sunshine Film Centre is a non-profit arts collective that promotes and
> exhibits Canadian and international film and video art through regular screenings,
> film classes and cultural collaborations to further enrich Canada's film-going
> culture. All Blue Sunshine events provide opportunities for critical discussion,

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[602] It wasn't until I began my case study of Blue Sunshine that the founders and regulars thought of the venue as a microcinema. The term is not mentioned on the website, but Janisse refers to it as such in her *Incite* article. Also, Peut-être Vintage is now referred to as a microcinema on the Miskatonic website. This, for good or bad, demonstrates the effects the researcher has on the researched.

and act as a platform for addressing the perceived divide between high and low

film/video culture, to show that each is inspired and elucidated by its relationship

to the other. Blue Sunshine strives to play films in professional screening formats

with an emphasis on 16mm film, and to pay artist and distribution/archival fees

that enable independent artists to receive professional recognition and

remuneration so that they can continue to make work and have audiences nurtured

to appreciate and anticipate this work.[603]

Put simply, their mandate was to "present classic exploitation side-by-side with arthouse

and experimental cinema and no stratification,"[604] conflating what Hawkins would

suggest are artificial or subjective boundaries between high and low cinematic forms.

The hosts of this singular cinematic venture were Kier-La Janisse and David

Bertrand, both long-time film enthusiasts. Janisse's love of cinema began very early in

her childhood. Her parents were avid horror film fans and exposed her to the genre at a

fairly young age. She began her programming career in Vancouver, BC and eventually

founded the CineMuerte Horror Film Festival and the Big Smash! Music-on-Film

Festival. She has written for various film publications, primarily horror and music-

related, including *Rue Morgue* based in Toronto, and is the author of two books: *A*

Violent Professional: The Films of Luciano Rossi and *House of Psychotic Women*.[605]

Additionally, she was a programmer for the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Austin and

currently programs for various festivals locally and worldwide, including Fantasia.

Bertrand, while also a journalist and amateur programmer, has been more involved in the

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[603] Blue Sunshine, website, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/blue-sunshine.html.
[604] Janisse, 154.
[605] Ibid. Dave Bertrand/Kier-la Janisse, joint interview, 22 November 2011. Unless otherwise noted, all further quotes from Bertrand and Janisse are from the same interview.

production side of the film business. He has written for television, film and video games, as well as produced several short films; was assistant director for Bruce Sweeney's award-winning film, *Excited*, which premiered at TIFF 2009; and was, at the time of our interview, working on the feature-length horror film *Cells*. He cut his programming teeth at the weekly underground series Bizzaro Film-O-Rama in Vancouver.[606] At Blue Sunshine screenings, Bertrand was sometimes stationed at the door, charging admission (of $8), other times manning the A/V equipment or introducing the films while Janisse mostly operated the 16mm film projector and occasionally introduced screenings. They had a small core of dedicated volunteers who worked the door and served drinks at the bar, myself included.[607]

In addition to being a theater "devoted to the relentless enjoyment of good, weird cinema in all its forms," screening exploitation, trash, arthouse, avant-garde and music-related films and documentaries, Blue Sunshine was the home of the Miskatonic Institute.[608] The names associated with the cinema were chosen from the very type of texts—those at the junction of art and trash—the organizers enjoyed and promoted passionately. *Blue Sunshine* (Jeff Lieberman, 1978) is a horror exploitation film suggesting the ill effects of LSD experimentation, while the Miskatonic Institute is inspired by H.P. Lovecraft's serial "Herbert West-Reanimator," which was loosely adapted for the film *Re-Animator* (Stuart Gordon, 1985). These films could also be considered pyschotronic, the genre in which Blue Sunshine specialized, and includes the horror, science fiction and fantasy genres. Specifically, psychotronic fans are interested in

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[606] Blue Sunshine.
[607] I began volunteering when Janisse left for Scotland in March 2012 to finish working on her second book and continued until Blue Sunshine's closing night on 12 May 2012.
[608] Blue Sunshine.

the B movies within these genres—the low-budget products. The term, whose original 'scientific' meaning involved "the interactions of matter, energy, and consciousness,"[609] was appropriated by Michael Weldon in 1980 for his *Psychotronic Encyclopedia*—a written film guide to what he deemed to be cinema's underappreciated oddities.[610] He took the term not from the field of study but from the film *The Psychotronic Man* (Jack M. Sell, 1980). According to Weldon, whose publication subsequently inspired the creation of the Psychotronic Film Society (PFS), the term evolved as follows:

> [It] originally meant to suggest a combination of weird horror films and electronic gadget-filled science fiction movies… After a while, I began to use the term 'psychotronic' as an adjective, to describe all the different kinds of movies that interest me…. monster and science-fiction films, of course. But exploitation films of any sort, really: biker movies, rock 'n' roll movies, musclemen movies, 3-D movies, '60s beach movies, Mexican movies with subtitles – you get the idea…[611]

As noted on the PFS site, the American Heritage Dictionary now defines psychotronic solely as: "Of or relating to a genre of film characterized by bizarre or shocking story lines, often shot on a low budget."[612] The psychotronic category is synonymous with paracinema, whose fans also enjoy the most obscure and lowest forms of these same genres. Interestingly, PFS screenings in Chicago began at art galleries but eventually made their way to bars and restaurants, where the programmers did not have to worry about "political correctness," not to mention the inappropriateness of a sanctioned art

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[609] The full definition, according to the U.S. Psychotronics Association is "The science of mind-body-environment relationships, an interdisciplinary science concerned with the interactions of matter, energy, and consciousness" and their interests include: science, new technologies, alternative health modalities, consciousness studies, radionics and subtle energies. U.S. Psychotronics Association, website, http://www.psychotronics.org/.
[610] Psychotronic Film Society, website, http://psychotronic.info/.
[611] Quoted on PFS website.
[612] American Heritage Dictionary, website, http://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=psychotronic.

space for the screening of subversive content. As discussed in chapter four, the ambiance of the space is vital to microcinema.

The array of films described above by Weldon accurately describes the content screened at Blue Sunshine.[613] Generally, on Thursday evenings one could expect an obscure music-related film or documentary, such as *La Brune et moi* (Philippe Puicouyoul, 1981) and *Sonic Outlaws* (Craig Baldwin, 1995), sporadic sing-along events like "Ladies of the 80s Sing-Along," and on the rare occasion, a montage of TV clips assembled by Janisse herself, such as *I Was a Teenage Quincy Punk* (2005). Oftentimes, a musical performance and/or guest speaker accompanied screenings, especially if Janisse had to project a DVD because celluloid was not available. She was uncomfortable showing digital films unless she provided the audience an additional feature. Once in a while, a Thursday night screening would occur in conjunction with a live music performance at a nearby venue, as demonstrated in the following blog post by Trembles:

> Evening of Montreal punk & post-punk roots starts off with movies at Blue
> Sunshine (3660 St-Laurent) & continues at Barfly (4062 St-Laurent) with The
> Nils FC & The American Devices. The live show will be preceded by 2 short
> documentary films, the recently completed *MTL PUNK: THE FIRST WAVE* about
> 70's punk in MTL, & *THE NORMALS*, about one of Montreal's first punk bands
> The Normals, which was actually filmed in the 70's. Screening will be just 2
> blocks away from Barfly at Blue Sunshine. All the members of The Normals will
> be in attendance at the film & will be heading over to The American Devices &

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[613] See Appendix H for an example of a typical month's programming.

Nils FC show afterwards… SPECIAL DEAL! PAY $12 AT *BLUE SUNSHINE*

TO SEE THE MOVIES & THE BANDS AT ONE DISCOUNT PRICE![614]

Friday nights' screenings celebrated trash and exploitation, with the occasional movie

marathon; for one event, they showed five consecutive biker movies in one night. At

marathon events, attendees paid to get out not to get in. The longer one stayed, the less

one paid. Saturday nights were dedicated to avant-garde and arthouse cinema. Most of

the films shown fell within the rather broad and ambiguous cult film category, with an

emphasis on Canadian content. As one blogger commented:

> More than just a screening venue with some of the most eclectic cult
>
> programming this side of the border, co-founders Dave Bertrand and Kier-La
>
> Janisse's focus on all strains of Canada's filmmaking past made Blue Sunshine
>
> one of the best places to catch everything from pioneering Montreal gay classics
>
> of the 1970s to vintage local ephemera, forgotten maple syrup porn and just plain
>
> ol' sleazy tax shelter trash.[615]

Blue Sunshine programming earned Janisse and Bertrand much recognition, which in

turn drew reputable guests. "An early coup was getting Robert Morin to attend a

screening of his film *Petit Pow! Pow! Nöel* (2005)." They hadn't realized what an

achievement this was until other programmers asked them how they managed it "when he

wouldn't even show up to the Jutra Awards."[616] Clearly, the cultural capital gained from

their association with celebrities and esteemed filmmakers helped to legitimize them as

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[614] Snubdom, blog post, 21 July 2011. Italics and caps in original.
[615] "Blue Sunset: A Q&A With Programmers Dave Bertrand and Kier-la Janisse," *Canuxploitation! Your complete guide to Canadian B-film,* blog, 7 May 2012, http://blog.canuxploitation.com/2012/05/blue-sunset/.
[616] Janisse, 155.

programmers and their space as an important exhibition site, as well as establishing their positions as cultural intermediaries.

The deep involvement on the part of the organizers and the fact that you felt you were watching films in a friend's living room made Blue Sunshine a special filmgoing experience. During regular screenings, volunteer Frank Fingers served guests beverages and hot dogs from the kitchen.[617] In January 2012, they hosted a Spaghetti Western/Spaghetti Feast event—a screening of Giulio Petroni's *Death Rides A Horse* (1967), which audience members enjoyed while eating bowls of spaghetti topped with Bertrand's homemade sauce.[618] And a home microcinema would not be complete without the resident cat, Cisco Pike—named for Bill Norton's 1972 film starring Kris Kristofferson as an ex-rock star drug dealer. But having a combined live/work space is what also led to their burnout; the organizers' public and private lives, work and leisure time, were inextricably fused. This relatively new type of work enacted by subcultural entrepreneurs requires what Angela McRobbie refers to as network sociality, meaning one must always be "on"—self-promoting and keeping nontraditional (i.e. late) business hours.[619]

Fingers serving drinks from the kitchen

Most screenings were 16mm projections, with the rare exhibition of DVD and

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[617] One free drink—can of beer (PBR), glass of red wine, soda or bottled water—came with each admission.
[618] This event was inspired by similar Food and Film events hosted by the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema.
[619] Angela McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies."

VHS. Part of the experience, resulting from them having only one projector, was a mandatory intermission for a reel change during which time people refreshed their beverages, smoked on the back balcony and chatted. This fostered socializing among audience members. Other alternative exhibition venues in Montreal have a social atmosphere, some even offer food and drinks, but the real distinction, beyond the programming, is that Blue Sunshine "got everything from filmmakers, distributors or archives, and paid rental fees"[620] whereas the others play rented DVDs and/or show films without paying for the rights[621]– demonstrating an extra level of commitment and professionalism. Their commitment to 16mm is what attracted cinephiles and paracinephiles to their venue. During our conversation, a Blue Sunshine regular told me he didn't bother going to places that showed DVDs: "Anybody could do that… When you get prints involved and a projector, it's a whole different ball of wax."[622]

A Micro-history

The project was born out of a relationship formed between programmer and fan; Janisse and Bertrand first met while she was programming screenings in Vancouver, and he was attending them. A friendship was established, and they continued to keep in touch over the next six to seven years as Janisse moved from Vancouver to Austin to Winnipeg. During this time, they considered the idea of partnering up to open and run a microcinema. Janisse summarizes: "I'd been toiling away as an independent exhibitor, four-walling ill-equipped venues, cobbling together 'atmosphere' in bars and backyards, and realized I had to take that risky leap to the next level—the ill-advised and oft-dreamt-

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[620] Janisse, 155.
[621] Cinequanon is an example of the former and Grindhouse Wednesdays an example of the latter.
[622] Le Borene. All further quotes from Le Borene are from the same interview.

of 'permanent venue'—before I burnt out completely."[623] In March 2010, as Janisse prepared to leave Winnipeg, she called Bertrand who was still interested and ready to relocate to Montreal. After looking at a number of "grungy warehouse spaces" listed on Craigslist, they settled on the third storey live/work loft on St. Laurent.

They chose the loft for several reasons. It was a finished space—with a (funky, all mirror) bathroom, kitchen, sprinkler system, central air —and was in one of the main thoroughfares for Montreal nightlife. Being centrally located was important to them both for audience turnout and when bringing in out of town guests (filmmakers, actors, musicians, etc.). Moreover, the loft was in move-in condition, and the effort and cost of transforming a warehouse space would have been prohibitive. Their decision to pay high rent so as to be in the city center contradicts DIY start up practice, which usually opts for low or no rent spaces on the fringes. Situating the cinema in the heart of the Main proved to be not only too pricey of a locale, but also "so overrun with drunk students" that their "intended audience avoided the strip altogether."[624]

With some long distance planning, Janisse and Bertrand incorporated as a business before arriving at the loft on June 1. Then began the process of physically setting up the space–getting a screen, fitting the skylight in the center of the screening room with a cover, building a 16mm projection booth, having curtains made for the screen, wiring the room and installing sound gear and video projectors.

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[623] Janisse, 153.
[624] Ibid., 154.

Bertand in the projection booth

They opened their doors on June 25, 2010. That is how quickly it happened—from a phone call in March to fully operational within three months. The "newly restored Canuxploitation classic" *Cannibal Girls* (Ivan Reitman, 1973) served as their "kick-off film," but the first thing people saw on the screen was a pre-show video—documentary footage from a visit to the Spam factory.[625] Bertrand laughs when recalling the visuals people saw upon entering Blue Sunshine for the first time was "a bunch of grinding meat"—an inadvertent reference to the grindhouse history to which their programming was indebted. Opening night was very successful; they had a packed house of "50-odd cinephiles."[626] Bertrand claims, "we promo-ed the hell out of it." They didn't know they couldn't advertise in the paper at that point because they thought they would have all their permits before opening night. In anticipation of the opening, the media began interviewing Janisse before she even moved to Montreal, and Trembles created a *Motion Picture Purgatory* (*MPP*) comic strip in *The Montreal Mirror* to hail the cinema's

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[625] Ibid.
[626] Ibid.

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arrival.[627] By the time they realized the legal situation was not working in their favor, it was too late; the press was out.[628]

Janisse and Bertrand decided to make Blue Sunshine a membership organization from the beginning in order to circumnavigate Quebec's censorship laws. Many distributors of psychotronic films would not bother to submit their films to the Régie du cinéma's classification process in order to get a stamp for exhibition. And because Blue Sunshine specialized in exploitation film, the Régie's system of classification would have clearly interfered with Blue Sunshine's programming:

> The Régie du cinéma may refuse to classify certain films. These cases, which are quite rare, involve films deemed to interfere with public order. They are usually based on an undue exploitation of sexuality, presented in a context of non-fictional violence, cruelty and dehumanization of the protagonists. It is considered that such exploitation is beyond the threshold of tolerance of contemporary Québec society, and that the film cannot be made public in this form.[629]

When it is decided thus—that the film "presents a real danger to the public good, especially in terms of obscenity"—the Régie "reserves the right to refuse classification. In such cases, the showing, sale and rental of the film are prohibited."[630] By making Blue Sunshine a membership cinema, the programmers did not have to restrict their projections to films with a classification. Not only did membership help address censorship issues, it also allowed them to serve alcohol, though they flagrantly

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[627] Rick Trembles, "*Cannibal Girls*," *Motion Picture Purgatory*, http://www.snubdom.com/MPcannibalgirls.htm. Trembles also made one for Janisse's departure: "Quincy Punks + Bye-Bye Kier-la," *Motion Picture Purgatory*, http://www.snubdom.com/MPquincy.htm.
[628] At least five media sources (three anglophone, two francophone) heralded the coming of Blue Sunshine: "Midnight Poutine," *The Hour*, *Montreal Mirror*, *Ion Magazine* and "Panorama-Cinema." Blue Sunshine, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/press.html.
[629] Régie du cinema, website, http://www.rcq.qc.ca/mult/process.asp?lng=en.
[630] Ibid.

transgressed licensing laws by selling it. The founders of Blue Sunshine eventually opted

for operating as an underground cinema with marginal business status, but this was not

their original intention. Their primary goal was to be a legitimate incorporated business

with the proper permits and licenses. This, however, proved to be too great a task for two

independent programmers with very little capital.

The Struggle to Be Legit

That Blue Sunshine was located on Blvd. St. Laurent presented Janisse and Bertrand with

one of their greatest obstacles: high rent (nearly $3000/month). Still others were

unexpectedly high utility bills and the inability to get the proper permit to operate as a

business, despite making numerous trips to the Régistraire des entreprises (REQ) and

Direction du développement du territoire (Division des permis et des inspections), paying

all the annual fees required to register as a business, and hiring an expensive architect to

address building code issues for a Certificate of Operation (C of O), class A1. The city

does not have protocol in place for small cinema spaces, only regulations for big

commercial theaters; consequently, they were classified in the gallery category. No one in

either of the aforementioned offices seemed able to assist them with their specific and

atypical business paradigm for a small theater in a domestic space, let alone understand

the concept of a microcinema. Moreover, they were given different and conflicting

information each time they attempted to make progress with their C of O. These issues—

the rigidity of permitting classifications so as not to be inclusive of alternative enterprises

and inconsistent and sketchy municipal and provincial bureaucracy—presented

unconquerable impediments to them obtaining the proper permit, which would have

allowed them to advertise, publish their listings in the paper, apply for city funding,

collaborate with sponsors, and put a sign at street level (other than an 8 by 11 inch sticker on the door).

Ground floor door on St. Laurent

Bertrand and Janisse were visibly frustrated when explaining to me their experience navigating the city's commercial enterprise requirements and continually arriving at dead ends. In her article about Blue Sunshine, Janisse describes the experience as "a yearlong Kafkaesque nightmare involving crooked architects, Napoleonic law, and insoluble [sic] catch-22s."[631] Here I paraphrase from our interview their retelling of the events that transpired between them and the parties involved in their struggle to become a legitimate business.

Before arriving in Montreal or signing the lease, they inquired via a friend whether they would be able to run a microcinema business at 3660 St. Laurent. It was not the registered usage of the loft, as it was a photography studio prior to their rental; this meant when they were ready to get their occupancy permit (approximately $200), they were going to have to pay $300 to change the zoning classification from D to A1.[632]

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[631] Janisse, 154.
[632] The photo studio had a D permit which was for office use, but if Blue Sunshine was going to have many people in the place at the same time, they had to have an A1 or gallery permit. Janisse explained that a

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While looking at the information on the computer screen, the representative at the Division des permis et des inspections assured the friend this was possible. Bertrand and Janisse signed their lease based on this information. When they went to pay their $500 for the permit, however, they were told they could not turn the loft into a cinema space. And it is here where the discrepancy began between what should have been possible and what actually was possible. Technically, the space was eligible for an A1 permit, but the renovations that were necessary for this classification were impossible to make in that space. However, because the Blue Sunshine founders could not get a complete list of requirements upfront, which changed depending on whom they asked on any given day, they spent thousands of dollars trying to meet the permit requisites before discovering the impossibility of the situation.

Initially, several different issues had to be addressed. They had to have an architect make a floor plan of the space. They already had plans of the loft drawn by an architect in Ontario, but these would not be accepted unless signed off on by an architect licensed in Quebec. The local architect eventually signed off on the floor plan and charged them $3000. The fee was so exorbitant and unexpected they had to pay in installments. As Bertrand recounts, "This almost destroyed us… [It was] one of the most debilitating things that happened for us."

When the architect first visited the space, he told them they would have to change major architectural elements. But, as Janisse describes, it unfolded in a series of events. To begin, the floor was neither the right material nor thick enough, about which they could do nothing. Once they expressed that, he approved the floor and focused on the

regular A permit is for a *salle de spectacle* like La Sala Rossa, and that A1 is for a business that is conducting some of the same activities but on a smaller scale.

windows in the back of the loft. The architect explained that the giant windows near the fire escape were a safety hazard because they could blow out during a fire and injure people using the fire escape; they would have to get a metal shutter for the windows. Bertrand and Janisse could not afford this renovation; moreover as renters, they did not feel comfortable making it. After some time passed, they discovered the windows were acceptable.

The only issue remaining unresolved was that the doors had to be steel fire doors, which they felt was a reasonable demand. But this turned out to be far more complicated than it appeared. To replace the doors would cost three thousand dollars per door, so they decided to have a fundraiser. Janisse planned to use money inherited after her mother's death, but they used that to pay "the stupid architect." They also had to change the floor plans to show the existing sliding door to the fire escape would become a door opening outwards (incurring more architect fees). They brought the new floor plan to the Régie. That was the moment at which all their efforts, plans and hopes to be a legitimate cinema ended, as they were told they could not have a door that opened outwards in that location. The conversation, as Janisse retells it, went as follows:

Janisse: But we have to have a fire door – doesn't a fire door have to open outwards?

Régie: Yes.

Janisse: And we have to have a fire door?

Régie: Yes.

Janisse: But we can't have a door there opening outwards?

Régie: No. The property line ends where the building ends. Your fire escape is not actually your fire escape. It's the city's fire escape–city property. You can't open a door onto city property–it's illegal.

Janisse: But we're on the third floor, we're not opening the door onto the street. And the landlady built the fire escape according to the city's specifications. No one from the city ever cleans or maintains the fire escape, so for all practical purposes the fire escape is ours.

It seems odd the landlady built and paid for the fire escape, yet it's considered city property. None of these irregularities or rules could be clarified by the Régie or Division des permis to the satisfaction of the Blue Sunshine founders. They could do nothing; they had reached a dead end. At that point, they called the architect to fire him. Janisse recalls:

We're just hemorrhaging money, and nobody is helping us. They're just giving us the runaround. It's not like they're even saying do this and pay the money. Because at the beginning of the process, we had the money to pay for [anticipated expenses]–we had money saved. By the end of it, it had sucked up all our money, and we had gotten no further ahead in getting our permits. It was just people ripping us off constantly.

Bertrand adds:

That has been the learning experience–how Kafkaesque the bureaucracy is and how random and corrupt those twists and turns are. The realization for us was it's a damned if you do, damned if you don't situation where you can't win unless somebody who's in the midst of that is going to bat for you specifically. I think in most cases you're shit out of luck.

This is just one enterprise's experience with municipal bureaucracy, but many owners of small businesses, especially alternative in nature, have bumped up against similar obstacles. It is disheartening and costly occurrences like the above that can deter DIY projects from attempting to establish themselves as legitimate enterprises.

Finances

Because of Janisse's and Bertrand's dedication not only to being a legitimate organization but also to supporting filmmakers and distribution companies, they paid all associated copyright, rental and archival fees, as well as shipping costs, which made each 16mm screening a costly endeavor ($175-$300/film).[633] But they prided themselves on providing viewers with a rare viewing experience by showing celluloid and doing it professionally. Janisse points out that other alternative exhibition sites were simply playing DVDs they rented (like Cinequanon) or not paying copyright fees: "It's an extra level of commitment; there's a clear line between us and Grindhouse Wednesdays, who doesn't pay for the rights to Grindhouse releasing." Their opinion is that people appreciate this distinction if they know about it but feel that few patrons recognized the difference. Some of the other venues have a similar fun and social atmosphere– drinks, food, opportunity for discussion–and the Blue Sunshine organizers' feared audiences viewed them in the same way. They are right in that it would be difficult to know which sites were showing films legally, but it is certainly evident whether the programmer is inserting a DVD or spooling a film reel. And their regulars were dedicated to Blue Sunshine because they screened celluloid.

Their financial situation was untenable though. Admission never covered

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[633] Janisse has many connections among distributors, archivists and filmmakers and often received discounted prices for this reason and for being a small, DIY space.

expenses. As Bertrand bemoans, "the place doesn't make money and it's never gonna make money." The bills were higher than they expected (about $500 a month), and there were "many unwelcome surprises in terms of costs." Because they intended to run the space as a legitimate business, they had various business-related fees, without being able to reap the benefits of a permitted space. They paid annual fees to assorted commercial entities that began badgering them as soon as they registered as a business, and they had to hire a business accountant ($800) to file their year-end corporate taxes.

By living in the same space as the cinema, they estimated they could each spend about six hundred dollars a month on rent, and Blue Sunshine profits would cover the rest. Some months it happened like that, but some months they each had to pay as much as eleven hundred dollars in rent. It was always an unknown factor, as they had to make up the difference of whatever was not covered by income from ticket and alcohol sales.[634] Janisse states, "Overall, we do feel a lot of love from people… It's just that our rent is too expensive… so it really is the venue." When asked if they could do it over would they opt for a cheaper space off the beaten path, they responded they would not have registered as a business. The costs associated with that were prohibitively expensive considering they received none of the advantages. Believing they would be able to obtain a permit they set themselves up as a legitimate business, but in the end they had to operate as an underground venue.

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[634] They offered one free drink with the price of admission and charged a modest price for additional drinks.

Miskatonic

The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies began shortly after Blue Sunshine opened. Their mission is as follows:

> The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies is a non-profit, community-based curriculum through which established horror writers, directors, scholars and programmers/curators celebrate horror history and culture while helping enthusiastic fans of the genre to gain a critical perspective.[635]

Though Blue Sunshine closed its doors, Miskatonic continues offering horror studies courses at Peut-être Vintage Microcinema on Tuesday evenings. Stuart Gordon and Dennis Paoli, the director and writer, respectively, of *Re-Animator* (1985) and *From the Beyond* (1986), taught the first course at Blue Sunshine, "Adapting Lovecraft for the Screen"; it was co-sponsored by Fantansia and tied into one of their festival screenings. Other course themes include: "The 'Terror' Films of Val Lewton," "Creepy Kids" and "Getting Even: A History of the Rape Revenge Film." Targeting young adults fourteen and over, two- to four-week courses are open to all horror fans and are taught by instructors from Montreal and beyond, including filmmakers, writers and programmers. The Miskatonic faculty consists of educators trained within "the academy." Three of the instructors—Kristopher Woofter, Dru Jeffries and Charlie Ellbé—are or were students in the film studies graduate programs, PhD and MA, at the Mel Hoppenheim School at Concordia University. Éric Falardeau is an award-winning filmmaker and MA graduate from Université de Montréal. Carl Sederholm is an Associate Professor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and Karen Herland, a McGill MA graduate, is an adjunct lecturer at Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institute. Some

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[635] The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, website, http://www.miskatonicinstitute.com/.

instructors also teach at colleges in Montreal—Woofter (Dawson), Anne Golden and Degiglio-Bellemare (both at John Abbott).[636] Janisse also teaches Miskatonic courses.

The faculty's credentials work to legitimate the viewing and study of horror films and support the Institute's mission to approach horror texts with the same academic rigor as other genre studies texts. To this end, scholarly articles are assigned for each class, which form the basis of discussion before and after film viewing. Approaching the study of horror in this manner raises it to the level of other academic subjects worthy of critical examination, while at the same time mimicking the academy's approach to legitimization. As I noted in chapter two, Sconce argues paracinema fans have historically seen themselves as "exiles from the legitimizing functions of the academy;" they, along with graduate students, "the most disempowered faction within the academy," "look to trash culture as a site of 'refuge and revenge.'"[637] However, in the almost two decades since his article, horror films have been integrated into academic curricula.

But while institutions of higher education have legitimized the study of horror films and effectively neutralized their previously subversive nature, most of the Miskatonic instructors admit in their bios to being self-taught from adolescence. This is likely due to the fact that horror is not offered at the primary or secondary levels of education. Thus, the autodidacticism that Bourdieu argues constitutes a counterculture is a trait shared by this group of instructors/paracinema fans who were unable to study these texts prior to university. Furthermore, Bourdieu writes that such individuals strive to produce "another market with its own consecrating agencies," which is demonstrated on the Miskatonic website: "In Miskatonic courses, they'll get… the chance to connect with

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[636] Ibid.
[637] Sconce, 379.

horror professionals who can help them to respond with intellectual curiosity and steer them toward a career in the world of horror films and fiction."[638] In seeking to professionalize horror appreciation and studies, this program contributes to the cycle of consecration. Ariel Esteban Cayer is a prime example of a self-taught paracinephile who found his way to the Miskatonic Institute, then became a regular and volunteer at Blue Sunshine. He subsequently won a coveted position at Fantasia and was accepted into the Cinema Studies program at Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema.

Miskatonic keeps its tuition fees low so that anyone can attend no matter their economic situation. One has the option of paying a seven dollar suggested donation, on a sliding scale, at the door for a single class or pre-registering for an entire course. Registration prices for individual courses vary depending on course length (2-6 weeks). Students may also register for an entire semester's curriculum at a discounted price of fifty dollars. Fantasia offers five yearlong (2 semester) scholarships annually to students (ages 14-29) who demonstrate financial need. Generally, class size ranges from five to twelve individuals; this often includes a few of the other teachers who sometimes attend one another's classes.

Audience

Considering the subject matter, which required a certain aesthetic taste, Blue Sunshine audience members were fairly diverse in age, race/ethnicity and language (French and English), but varied depending on the night of the week. Since Thursday screenings centered on music, they typically appealed to those in the music scene. One regular recognized many people from the Montreal music world at Thursday night screenings,

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[638] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 96; Miskatonic.

DJs from nightclubs Catacomb, Korova and Casa, but the turnout was subject-specific. The punk rock folks turned out for the punk documentaries, whereas the films about Lee Hazelwood or Leonard Cohen drew more of the hipsters. Friday and Saturday nights attracted both paracinephiles and cinephiles, though Fridays tended to be restricted to a more regular crowd of exploitation fans. And special screenings, for example a documentary about a figure in the fashion world, naturally drew individuals interested in the specific subject matter of the film. The following quote from Bertrand concerning the audience's response to regionally specific content articulates how this attendance phenomenon played out:

> I think we've had great success here at Blue Sunshine for anything with a local connection. Hell, we opened our doors with *Cannibal Girls* and that was a sell-out night! I do think, though, that—*Cannibal Girls* aside—this excitement for our national cinema is localized more or less to the city of Montreal itself, and not Canada as a whole. For example, our night of classic Toronto punk films— including the only known existing 16mm print of The Diodes film *Crash N' Burn*—kind of bombed, whereas for the film *MTL PUNK* we had two separate, packed screenings, despite the film having previously played elsewhere in the city (to sold out crowds). Likewise, our superb night of bizarre Winnipeg ephemera compiled by filmmaker Matthew Rankin was attended by a crowd consisting exclusively of transplanted 'Peggers.'[639]

A fair generalization one could make about the audiences, no matter which evening or screening, is they genuinely appreciated and were enthusiastic about the films being programmed. It was clear, for the most part, they were there for the films, more so

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[639] "Blue Sunset."

than the environment. That said, a core group of regulars quickly coalesced and could be found at each of the three weekly screenings. For them, the homey atmosphere and the friends they made at Blue Sunshine were part of the allure, in fact some admitted the films were secondary to the social aspect. Most of them disclosed that it didn't matter what film was showing; they trusted Janisse's programming choices—her taste—and knew they would enjoy, on some level, whatever she was showing. In this way, Janisse clearly served as a cultural intermediary for this particular taste formation.

Going to Blue Sunshine became a social habit for some, who told me they reorganized their lives around attending screenings or volunteering two or three nights a week for the two years it was open. Elsewhere I argue that cinema spaces and programmers can foster the same type of cult fandom as film texts.[640] As I will demonstrate, several characteristics of cult fandom are enacted by the regulars at Blue Sunshine, namely ritualistic attendance (including sitting in particular seats), initiation to the venue, great admiration for the programmers, repetition of movie lines and the sharing of text-related trivia (regarding production, actors, director, etc.).

The general consensus among the regulars and organizers is there was a core group of six who attended regularly and about twenty on a semi-regular basis. I conducted forty-minute interviews with five of the regular attendees: Atom, Dan, Ariel, Adam and Frank.[641] The two Adams were affectionately known as Big Atom and Little Adam around Blue Sunshine, so as to be able to distinguish between the two in conversation. I am unsure as to whether this referred to their age or size. Unfortunately, I

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[640] de Ville, "Cultivating the Cult Experience."

[641] I choose to refer to the regulars by their first names here because I became friendly with them and think that should be reflected in the informal nomenclature. Moreover, the use of both last names for citations and first names for in text prose and footnotes demonstrates the ambiguous position of an ethnographic researcher.

was not able to interview the only woman in the core group of regulars.[642] All of the regulars were primarily anglophone, differing in degrees of French proficiency, with the exception of Ariel, who was a bilingual francophone. Atom, a regular who attended every Thursday and Friday night for two years, admitted he would have been there on Saturdays, too, had he not had to work as a gas station attendant that night of the week. Extremely knowledgeable about music and cinema, Atom, in his early forties, acted as a mentor of sorts to the two youngest regulars, Adam and Ariel. Exactly the same age (born the same day), Adam and Ariel attended their first screening on their eighteenth birthdays when Ariel convinced Adam to go with him. From that point on, they became regulars, attending two or three times a week. Ariel had already been to Blue Sunshine for Miskatonic courses and a Fantasia event but had to wait until he turned eighteen before he could begin attending regular screenings. From the moment he was of age, Ariel became a committed volunteer and could often be found selling tickets at the door. Adam helped with projection and editing the pre-show videos. They have both since begun pursuing undergraduate degrees at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema: Ariel in Cinema Studies and Adam in Film Production. Dan, a graduate of Mel Hoppenheim and in his early 40s, began attending in the cinema's first month. At first, he was concerned about going alone, but after being initiated by his friend Atom, he immediately loved the cozy and welcoming atmosphere and went by himself to every screening (three times a week) from then on. And finally, Frank, in his mid-30s, began attending from opening night and estimates he attended approximately three hundred of the three hundred sixty

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[642] She originally agreed to an interview but then cancelled. I had spoken to her informally about Blue Sunshine; consequently, her insight is still included in anonymous references.

plus screenings over the two-year duration of the cinema. The first volunteer, he served drinks and assisted with programming and promotion.

The manner in which the regulars first became aware of Blue Sunshine's presence and knew it would be a place of interest to them is significant in relation to both the role of the cultural intermediary (Janisse) and paracinephilic practice. Most of them read about it in *The Mirror,* which no longer exists. Demonstrating the importance of particular media sources for informing certain niche audiences, in this case anglophone (para)cinephiles living in Montreal, it leaves one to wonder what will replace *The Mirror* for these individuals. All but Ariel had learned of Blue Sunshine's imminent opening as a result of either an article in *The Mirror* or Tremble's *MPP* published in the same newspaper. Moreover, three of them were already familiar with Janisse's publications (blog and zine) and/or programming before she came to Montreal and felt confident they would like any project with which she was involved. Having lived in Vancouver, Frank knew of Janisse's projects, specifically the CineMuerte festival, and "was already a fan of hers before she arrived." He explains that when he moves to a new city, he immediately locates his "nest of interest," a repertory cinema showing obscure films. Before Blue Sunshine, he hadn't found his "niche of really important programming in Montreal."[643] Ariel became aware of Miskatonic first through either the Fantasia or *Fangoria* blogs, where he was introduced to and subsequently followed Janisse's contributions. Reflecting on when he learned about the Horror Institute, he recalls thinking it was a hoax. Atom met Janisse at Fantasia before she opened Blue Sunshine and had purchased zines she produced. He first found his way to the microcinema for a special Fantasia event with Stuart Gordon.

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[643] Frank Fingers, interview, 5 May 2012. All further quotes from Fingers are from the same interview.

A few points were raised repeatedly during our discussions: the focus on "old" film (i.e. repertory), the reverence for celluloid and the ritualistic nature of attendance. Both Dan and Frank repeatedly mentioned throughout our conversations that they had no interest in contemporary films. They only sought out older films; when they go out to see a movie it is only at a repertory cinema. Dan explained he usually buys an annual pass to Cinémathèque québécoise but other than that he either borrows movies from the library or watches them on YouTube. Frank reports, "I have no interest in new cinema. Films today are all about producers and cash flow… I'm all about seeing films where the context of production was limited, but it brought out more innovation. I live in the past." This nostalgia for the past—texts (films) and modes of exhibition (celluloid, 16mm)—is key to understanding what motivates fans of repertory microcinema. All the regulars mentioned in some manner that one of the singularly special features of Blue Sunshine is the care they take in exhibition—that they showed film the way it was "meant to be shown" and with a level of professionalism, knowledge and passion second to none. Ariel comments that Blue Sunshine was single-handedly responsible for keeping 16mm projection alive in Montreal and the organizers' "high standards in terms of presentation" could not be found elsewhere in the city; Adam adds "not even at FNC where they know how to project it properly." Invoking the materiality of the apparatus, Ariel expresses, "you're watching it so close that you can hear the projector and see the texture on the screen."

During my interviews with the regulars, we discussed the subject of audience and the distinctive characteristics of Blue Sunshine, which, in addition to their commitment to showing celluloid and to a professional-level of exhibition, was the community feeling

fostered by the programmers, regular attendees and the homey space. Atom notes, "With the regulars, it's a family type of thing… like going over to somebody's house… and watching a movie, but you're watching a print." Frank emphasizes the group's communal mindset, regarding respect and appreciation of the films, and suggested the space allowed for that type of shared experience. Most meaningful to Adam was "when the projector is turned off," and there was no one there but the regulars: they were the "most important, informative moments" of his life. At first, Ariel is apprehensive about "taking the movies out of the equation" because "the programming is so amazing," but he later admits that he would go no matter what was screening: "The movies are second to hanging out." Probably the most affected by his time at Blue Sunshine, Ariel said it became a significant part of his life.

The regulars were fairly unanimous in their perceptions of their own group but differed in their opinions of the general audience. Whereas Dan stated that Blue Sunshine catered to an audience that is open-minded to all types of cinema, highbrow to low, Atom found the general audiences to be rather unenthusiastic. He suggested the younger attendees were not aware of the midnight movie phenomena and accompanying behavior, except perhaps for *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and so it was usually the regulars and older viewers who would engage in "hooting and hollering and talking back to the screen." He recalls the audience for cult screenings was small, sometimes just the regulars, but was made up of "rabid, die-hard fans." "You have to have a little bit of edge if you're actually gonna come here," he says, "The people who want to see *Titanic* are not going to be coming here." He expresses an us vs. them dichotomy demonstrating a perceived distinction between fan groups. But the demarcation here is between

cult/exploitation fans and the supposed mainstream, as represented by *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), supporting Sconce's argument that paracinema fans position themselves in opposition to Hollywood and the mainstream. I find this particularly interesting in light of the work of a number of film scholars who have argued for the existence of cult blockbusters, some citing *Titanic* as a prime example.[644] This represents a fairly common disjuncture between scholars' and scene members' understandings of cult cinema. For example, sitting on the cult cinema shelves of almost every video rental store I've entered have been the films of Russ Meyers, John Waters and Ed Wood, not James Cameron. But academics tend to approach taxonomies with different sets of defining parameters (beyond the texts), and in the case of cult films, fans base their categorizations on the films themselves. For this reason, Dan and the "rabid, die-hard fans" would understand the distinction Atom makes about *Titanic* seekers. Adam describes the general audience pejoratively as hipsters but is complimentary when speaking about the regulars: "As far as the regulars are concerned, these are very, very learned individuals. These guys have watched a hell of a lot of movies, the people who come here on a weekly basis, and they know their shit." Again, a trait associated with cinephiles, and perhaps even more so with paracinephiles, is great respect for a depth of knowledge in the shared area of interest, especially details related to the production of the text, which translates as subcultural capital for this group. To the younger members, Atom, Dan and the programmers' expertise in psychotronic cinema positioned them at the top of the social hierarchy with the touristic hipsters occupying the bottom rung.

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[644] See Joanna Hollows, "The Masculinity of Cult," in *Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. Mark Jancovich et al. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), 38; Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, *The Cult Film Reader* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 5, 169.

(Para)Cinephilia and Blue Sunshine

Blue Sunshine described its programming content as psychotronic in its name. However, it seemed few people associated with the cinema, myself included, had a good understanding of this term and instead used descriptors such as cult, trash, exploitation, grindhouse and B movie to describe the programming. In three of the five articles announcing their opening, "cult" was employed to describe either the films shown at Blue Sunshine or the cinema itself; in two sources the term appeared in the title: "Blue Sunshine opens with a Canadian cult classic"[645] and "Cult Sunshine."[646] Interestingly, the word was absent from the two francophone articles that stated the films were "du style Grindhouse et de série B"[647] and "entre le « trash » et l'art."[648] And in Trembles pre-review of the film and the cinema, he described the opening film *Cannibal Girls* as "Canada's first big international B-movie hit" comparing it to the "drive-in/grindhouse fare of the day."[649]

These terms—cult, grindhouse, trash, psychtronic, B movie—are often used interchangeably, and while they may conjure a similar aesthetic style associated with low budget production, the terms actually refer to rather different modes of exhibition, reception, production and genres. Similarly, terms members of these formations use for describing themselves and other fans of these film categories are not as standard or consistent as academics imply. More importantly, I have found participants in subcultural

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[645] Melora Koepke, "Cereal killer: Blue Sunshine opens with a Canadian cult classic, and awesome snacks," *HOUR,* 24 June 2010, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/press.html.

[646] Malcolm Fraser, "Cult Sunshine," *Montreal Mirror*, 24 June 2010, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/press.html.

[647] Emmanuel Delacour*,* "Blue Sunshine: Le centre psychotronique de Montréal," *Midnight Poutine*, 26 June 2010, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/press.html.

[648] Jasmine Pilapia, **"**Le centre BLUE SUNSHINE répend la fièvre psychotronique à Montréal," Panorama-Cinema, 28 June 2010, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/press.html.

[649] Trembles, "Cannibal Girls."

groups are often unfamiliar with the terminology scholars have applied to them, as I described in an earlier chapter with the term microcinema.

In the case of Blue Sunshine, as well as similar microcinemas whose specialty is psychotronic or para- cinema, the cinephilia expressed by audience members took on a slightly different tenor—one that blended aspects of cinephilia with paracinephilia. Paracinephilia, while perhaps not distinguishable for Blue Sunshine regulars from cinephilia, also fosters a sense of community. Because many of the traits of paracinephilia overlap with cinephilia, the distinction lies predominantly in the chosen texts, their obscurity, and the manner in which fans consume these texts. Whereas cinephiles look upon their preferred films with *un certain regard* that is wholly one of reverence, paracinephiles' relationship to paracinema is more ambiguous. They genuinely enjoy viewing paracinematic texts, but the pleasure is derived from a combination of respect and ironic appreciation—the latter causes them to laugh at aspects of the films, what Sconce describes as "derisive interaction."[650] These two qualities of paracinematic pleasure bind fans together. For Blue Sunshine regulars, the lack of heckling a midnight movie was a sign of not being in the know about such customs, attributed to age (too young to know) or some other outsider status.

Not one of my interviewees used the terms paracinema or paracinephile to describe their preferred texts or themselves, though clearly they shared texts and practices with this fan culture. In referring to themselves and other regulars, they employed the descriptors cinephile, film buff or cult fan and so, for them, there was little difference amongst these terms. As is evident in Dan's self-description:

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[650] Sconce, 373.

By 1995, I was kind of identifying myself as a film buff, and so I started going to

the Cinémathèque québécoise in 1997. And that was really when I started to

watch movies on a regular basis. I took a year off between CEGEP and university,

and I did nothing but rent movies–that was 1997.

This lack of differentiation among the Blue Sunshine fans, who had both shared and

divergent tastes in film, poses a problem for Matt Hills and Mark Jancovich's contention

that paracinema fan cultures "tend to struggle for distinction internally and in relation to

other fan cultures" and Sconce's argument that a primary motivation for fans of

paracinema is their disdain for the academy's system of legitimization and their canon.[651]

At the same time, it is emblematic of Hawkins' observation that the difference between

high and low film cultures, between cinephiles and paracinephiles, may not be so

exaggerated or clear cut, as demonstrated by the video catalogs of the 1980s and 90s that

placed art and avant-garde films alongside horror and exploitation works.[652]

The majority of my interview subjects from the programmers to the patrons

mentioned the desire to maintain and support exhibition methods of the past. In an earlier

chapter, I included an excerpt from a conversation between Ed Halter and Bradley Eros

that reflects the appreciation for, perhaps even the privileging of, celluloid by

microcinema participants. Halter is nostalgic for the atmosphere of the movie club or

home movie viewing—a sense of intimacy and community evoked by people gathering

around a film projector. Ariel echoes this appreciation when he speaks of the mood

created at Blue Sunshine by the audibility of the projector and visibility of the film's

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[651] Matt Hills, "Para-Paracinema: The *Friday the 13th* Film Series as Other to Trash and Legitimate Film
Cultures," in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce
(Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 222-223; Jancovich, "Cult Fictions"; Sconce, 379.
[652] Hawkins.

texture on the screen. These are visceral and immediate responses to film viewing but are tinged with or informed by a yearning for something, a practice and art form, that is perceived to be dying. Thus, when the regulars mentioned exhibition mode as one of the exceptional features of Blue Sunshine, in other words there remained few if any places to see 16mm in Montreal, this was often part of a larger conversation about the takeover of the big box cinema, in which most of them refused to set foot.

While a minority still enjoyed seeing certain films in commercial theaters, they mostly expressed antipathy for the multiplex while championing the DIY model, which aided in positioning themselves in opposition to the mainstream. This was made most evident in the case of Cinema du Parc, which according to the majority of interviewees was reputable when Davies and Lobel were programming rare films on celluloid but became intolerable after the change in ownership and management led to more first-run mainstream features projected digitally. The type of experiences the regulars describe above cannot be had in a multiplex theater where one is so far removed from the apparatus, which now soundlessly delivers digital images, the person in the adjacent seat is a stranger, and the owner/programmer is invisible and completely removed from interaction with the public.

Not only did these Blue Sunshine fans possess a heightened passion for film, they were also keenly aware of their idiosyncratic viewing tendencies, which manifested in highly specific seating preferences and habitual attendance patterns. Each regular went to the cinema the same evenings each week and often sat in the same seat. Those who weren't volunteering arrived early in order to secure their places. A highly specific seating arrangement existed among this group of committed Blue Sunshine members, and

they did not deviate from it unless an unknowing patron happened to take one of their spots. The one high-backed chair, easily the most comfortable seating option, was claimed by Atom, who arrived as doors opened in order to secure his throne. The next tier of regulars often occupied the adjacent velveteen couch. When Atom was absent on Saturday nights, Dan took the big chair; otherwise, he sat in one of the row-side chairs in the front right of the house. Dan articulates this preoccupation with position the best:

> Whenever I go to a movie I always like to get there about half an hour to forty-five minutes early because I'm very particular about where I sit. I always like to sit in the same place in different theaters. At Cinematheque I have my certain seat, at the AMC or at the Scotiabanque, on the rare occasion that I do go there, I have my certain seat that I like. And I like to get that seat. So I like to go and claim it. Here [Blue Sunshine] I show up forty-five minutes early.[653]

This ritualistic behavior and Dan's connection between his enjoyment of the film experience and his position in the theater is common among cinephiles. As Czach has alluded to, one of the markers of cinephilia is watching from "the preferred vantage point of third row center."[654]

To reiterate a point stated above, the regulars at Blue Sunshine self-identified as cinephiles, yet it is clear their texts of choice were primarily paracinematic, as were their reading/viewing practices. However, their approach adapted to the text. Depending on the film, they moved between the respectful demeanor a cinephile would have for the artistry of a Fellini film and the paracinephile's ironic appreciation for the creative, if hokey, techniques employed by producers of low budget films; for example, they erupted into

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[653] Yates. All further quotes from Yates are from the same interview.
[654] Czach, 140.

laughter at the dachshunds dressed as rats scampering across the screen in *Deadly Eyes* (Robert Clouse, 1982). Sconce describes this latter viewing mode as follows:

> Paracinematic culture celebrates the systematic 'failure' or 'distortion' of conventional cinematic style by auteurs who are valued more as 'eccentrics' rather than as artists, who work within the impoverished and clandestine production conditions typical of exploitation cinema.[655]

Blue Sunshine's fans complicate the separation of cinephiles and paracinephiles, seemingly exhibiting a sort of (high/low) culture agnosticism. Sconce's paracinephiles are ardently opposed to "legitimate culture," both the elitism of the academy and the mainstream-ness of Hollywood, but I did not witness during my research an opposition to highbrow texts revered by academia and cineastes, nor did the patrons of Blue Sunshine appear to be looking to "trash culture as a site of 'refuge and revenge.'"[656] In fact, regulars like Dan and Ariel were fans of Blue Sunshine and Cinémathèque québécoise, a sanctuary for Montreal cinephiles, and they appreciated the fact that Blue Sunshine screened art films alongside the psychotronic content. This bridging of high and low was one of the goals of Blue Sunshine founders as expressed in their mission statement: "All Blue Sunshine events provide opportunities for critical discussion, and act as a platform for addressing the perceived divide between high and low film/video culture, to show that each is inspired and elucidated by its relationship to the other."[657] The result was the programming calendar, an example of which can be seen in Appendix H, often went in "wildly different directions," much like the listings of Hawkins' video catalogs.[658] The

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[655] Ibid., 385.
[656] Ibid., 379.
[657] Blue Sunshine.
[658] Hawkins, 7-8.

programmers' attempt at blurring the boundaries between "brows" is a contemporary

example of what Mark Betz suggests existed in the 1960s, when he found the earliest

evidence for the dismantling of the high/low culture split, at least in cinema.[659] He

provides historic accounts of theaters that screened European art films as well as

exploitation. Eric Schaefer also suggests that in the 1920s and 30s art films not

sanctioned by the Hays Office played in grindhouses.[660]

Because the regulars trusted Janisse's taste, and valued the social atmosphere of

the space as much as, if not more than, the films themselves, their threshold for cinematic

entertainment was far more elastic than scholars of fan cultures would generally allow.

Dan's comment exemplifies this: "They show art, they show trash, they show classy

movies, they show sleazy movies, and they treat everything with the same level of

importance. I admire them for that." Of course, it's difficult to know exactly what he

means by these different film categories, but the key point is he enjoys seeing high and

low brow films and feels they are equally worthy of attention.

Another point of departure from Sconce's argument demonstrated by Blue

Sunshine members resides in their embracing of *some* popular texts. Like the lack of

disdain toward highbrow texts that features prominently in Sconce's thesis, there did not

exist an across the board disavowal of mainstream media. Their opposition toward the

Hollywood system was expressed more in their rejection of commercial theaters than

movies; though some did voice an opposition to Hollywood products as well. What truly

complicates their taste formation was their appreciation for mainstream television texts

such as *Golden Girls*, *Degrassi High* and *Pee-Wee's Playhouse.* Besides the Celebrity

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[659] Mark Betz, "Art, exploitation, underground," in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. Mark Jancovich et al. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003): 203.
[660] Schaefer.

Work-out Wednesdays, the celebration of trashy popular culture was epitomized by Blue

Sunshine's XMAS TV Trash Party, for which they programmed "rare retro Xmas TV

specials, movies and ephemera," another event "Where You Don't Pay to Get In...You

Pay to Get Out!!!"[661] True to the event title, the selected media exhibited a consistently

trashy quality that was underscored by the degradation of the medium.[662] Having

attended two of these parties, I got the sense that similar to the paracinematic texts they

enjoyed, the pleasure derived from these programs was one of ironic appreciation—a

tongue in cheek enjoyment of agreed upon bad media that was fun to laugh at.

Another way in which paracinephiles express themselves and connect with other

paracinephiles is through the sharing, or perhaps demonstration, of obscure trivia about

their preferred texts. As discussed earlier, Sarah Thornton refers to the knowledge

exchanged among members of subcultures as subcultural capital. John Fiske and Sconce

argue this very same extratextual information, or an elitist interest in "enriched

appreciation," combines with fans' "popular interest in seeing through 'production

processes,'" providing fans pleasure and possibly a sense of ownership of that particular

text. I describe this reading strategy in the *Deadly Eyes* example above. A post-screening

discussion of paracinephiles often turns into a round robin of who recognized which actor

from another rare, low-budget film or obscure facts about the context of production, the

director, etc. I witnessed this behavior at Blue Sunshine when the regulars gathered

before and after screenings, and during reel changes. Discussions were often focused on

both textual and extratextual aspects of paracinematic films and consisted of opinionated

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[661] Blue Sunshine, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/trash-cult-reader/events/blue-sunshine-teenbeat-takeover-xmas-tv-trash-party.html. Although Blue Sunshine closed before Christmas 2012, Janisse programmed a Blue Sunshine Xmas Party at Peut-être Vintage.
[662] Many of the videos appeared to be VHS copies of programs taped directly from the original television broadcast, complete with era-appropriate commercials.

remarks, information dissemination and questions that began with "Did you see…?" Communication of this nature helps to establish which level individuals occupy in the subcultural hierarchy and determines what type of subcultural capital should then be exchanged. This practice is also common among cult film fans, often intersecting with paracinephiles, as noted by fan studies scholars such as Hills and Jankovich.[663] But contrary to what these scholars suggest, I did not see this type of behavior play out in a competitive manner at Blue Sunshine. It seemed to be used more as a way of indoctrinating or initiating new but interested fans into the group.

While Blue Sunshine regulars valued what have traditionally been defined as 'good' and 'bad' texts, they did not demonstrate the same tolerance for all mainstream products or modes of exhibition. In short, they still maintained cultural hierarchies or taste preferences, but those lines were not necessarily drawn at the traditional boundary between high and low art. In this way, their relationship to film (and media texts) perhaps represented cinephilia in its purest form.

I imagine the debate concerning cinephilia, and its myriad iterations, will continue, as will the naming of new and different fan cultures. It's clear that some of the categories and theories for taste formations, such as cinephilia and paracinephilia, must be reexamined to account for new modes of fan interaction and contemporary viewing practices—practices that are more fluid than the previous wave of fan studies suggests. Susan Sontag was correct insofar as the idea that cinephilia and the future of cinema are inextricably linked, though that future is not reliant upon the darkened theaters for which she reminisces. And despite my experience at microcinemas throughout Canada and the US, I'm not convinced it's dependent on the materiality and apparatus of film itself.

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[663] Hills, *Fan Cultures*; Jankovich, "Cult Fictions."

These are simply ways that certain subcultures of cinephiles keep particular aspects of film history alive, sustaining cinephilia yes, but not its only lifeline. Contrary to Sontag's assertion, however, neither a resurrection nor a birth of a "new kind of cine-love" is necessary. I would argue a passion for cinema has always existed in the alternative exhibition spaces of any given locale, and will continue to do so as long as nontheatrical noncommercial DIY venue options, like microcinema, remain a part of the cultural landscape.

Conclusion

Not comprehending the precarious nature of microcinema sites, for some, Blue Sunshine was an intriguing venue they intended to investigate at some point. But Blue Sunshine had to close its doors on May 12, 2012. Despite a valiant effort on the part of the regulars, who banded together to settle the cinema's bills so as to avoid bankruptcy, Janisse and Bertand had run out of money and could no longer keep the space operating. For this small group of dedicated (para)cinephiles, a gaping hole was left in their weekend social lives, not to mention a void in 16mm projection in Montreal. And what makes this a particularly heartbreaking story is that because the organizers were so dedicated and passionate about this project, they spent all of their savings, including funds inherited after a parent's death, and ran up debt on lines of credit to finance Blue Sunshine.

In the organizers' final estimation, they feel people supported them and were enthusiastic about the films screened. But many nights were severely under-attended. In general, they had as many or more viewers, relative to their size, as local arthouse

cinemas, like Cinema du Parc. However, the latter has a greater seating capacity and multiple screens, and so can handle larger turnouts for popular films, whereas Blue Sunshine had to turn people away from some events. On those nights, potential customers got annoyed, and the venue lost money. But for the most part, the space accommodated their audience.

The fact is there does not exist a great enough number of dedicated fans for the type of programming in which Blue Sunshine specialized, and they could not advertise to bring in a wider than word-of-mouth audience. Trembles' assessment is that "nerdy cinephiles into the kind of films shown at Blue Sunshine are kind of broke. All the people I know who are into that stuff don't have much money. I wouldn't have been able to go to Blue Sunshine if they hadn't let me in for free" (for covering their screenings in *MPP*). He adds, "It was reasonably priced, it's just that I'm unreasonably broke all the time… and I'm not the only person like that."[664] Spurrell, like Trembles, feels there is less disposable income among Montrealers for such leisure activities and reports similar spaces in Toronto are faring much better.

Even though the core group of regulars was small in number, and Janisse questioned the cinema's impact, Blue Sunshine made a big impression on their lives. Dan comments: "I love it. I can't imagine what it's going to be like not coming here every weekend." He thinks the filmmakers and festival programmers in Montreal didn't appreciate "the real hands-on effort" of places like Blue Sunshine. Atom, Spurrell and Trembles attribute the widespread failure of nontheatrical exhibition to shifts in technology and modes of consumption: digital streaming/downloading and individual viewing. Taking a broader view of the trend in arts and culture cutbacks, Ariel believes

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[664] Trembles.

the film scene in Montreal to be in bad shape; the alternative sites are hurting and "the francophone sites are in even worse shape." Cinema du Parc used to support more eclectic programming and celluloid projection but has changed its mission significantly, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) has closed all its public access sites, and the future of the Cinémathèque québécoise is uncertain. So, Blue Sunshine's closing could be part of this same trend, which is an effect of federal budget and funding cuts to the arts. The festivals are thriving because cultural dollars are funneled in that direction, as they attract tourists, but not toward the day-to-day screening venues.

Among the larger pool of interviewees, there is a bit more hope for the future of alternative exhibition in Montreal. Blue Sunshine regulars, however, express mostly concern. Frank's response is probably the most optimistic: "After Blue Sunshine closes, there will be a void in Montreal. I'd like to take the things I learned from Blue Sunshine and do my own. I want to show movies to people." Frank did organize a microcinema series, the Noah, which was very similar to Blue Sunshine, though mostly on DVD as Peut-être Vintage Microcinema had not yet built a projection booth. But unfortunately, the Noah ceased to exist before the booth was built. Bertand sums up best the general feeling among interviewees regarding the closing of Blue Sunshine and the persistent but transient state of microcinema in Montreal:

> Toronto fares much, much better, on both the "high" and "low" ends, all the way from the Bell Lightbox to Trash Palace… It's really possible, though, that Blue Sunshine will inspire others to take up the reigns, and maybe take this idea one better. Who knows? Or maybe we'll be back someday. I definitely prefer to live in a world where someone, somewhere, is screening *Deadly Eyes* on 16mm inside

a glorified living room/theatre to a crowd of happy, drinking curio-seekers who, the week before, had no clue there was a movie about giant killer rats eating people in the sewers of Toronto. It's been thrilling doing Blue Sunshine. We're gonna miss it.[665]

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[665] "Blue Sunset."

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Microcinema is part of the history of cinema, period. The first films ever projected by the Lumière Brothers, that's microcinema.[666]
<div align="center">Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare</div>

I return now to the goal of exhibition scholars: "to document the historical making and remaking of cinema's exhibition contexts."[667] To this end, the actual documentation of exhibition practice is required. With this in mind, I have devoted several years to the study of one particular subcultural scene within nontheatrical exhibition, and I have recorded it in painstaking detail. The level of detail I have provided is an essential part of my method, as it is the observations and conversations—from more than sixty screenings and with over forty individuals—that transpired over the course of my research that constitute my data and contribute to a fuller understanding of cinema's exhibition contexts. The thick descriptions I provide are a requisite step in interpreting the cultural phenomenon of microcinema. And through this approach, I have captured the passion and vitality that many assumed vanished from exhibition practice, even though these remain tenuous and transient. Above all, I made the case that microcinema plays a significant role in the field of cultural production that is alternative film exhibition, and that it is a critical and fertile site for analysis, especially for the consideration of subcultural scenes, taste formation and cultural hierarchies.

As one member of the Montreal alternative film scene expresses above, microcinema is a fundamental and inevitable part of film history. He is correct in connecting contemporary modes of microcinema to the earliest moments of film exhibition, in that both are emblematic of DIY experimental efforts taking place in

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[666] Mariano/DeGiglio-Bellemare.
[667] Acland, "Theatrical Exhibition," 87-88.

nondedicated spaces. Cinema practice began with nontheatrical exhibition. And after more than a century, people still derive pleasure from gathering in public venues to watch projected images. While to some extent exhibition and consumption practices have been standardized by the film industry as exemplified in the multiplex model, there remains some diversity within this field of cultural production. Microcinema provides one such variation or, as many practitioners would aver, a reaction against mainstream practices, and to a lesser degree institutional practices. In fact, a perceived opposition to, or subversion of, Hollywood and the mainstream is one ideology that discursively unites the microcinema community. Microcinemas foster a sense of community among cinephiles who seek an alternative to the multiplex, but more than that an "authentic" cinematic experience, in other words as something more akin to the now mythic story of the original mode of spectatorship, epitomized in the Lumière Brothers' first projection at the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris.

Seven key factors work together to constitute the practice of microcinema exhibition: DIY approach, modest venue size, shoestring budget, passionate organizers/programmers, community-oriented mission, shared cinephilia and rare content. A sense of alternativeness informs all of these qualities; indeed it is the motivational force on which the movement is founded. Despite differences among how practitioners define microcinema and what texts they value, they are united in their belief that mainstream exhibition leaves un-served niches that microcinema helps address.

I have demonstrated that the microcinema movement developed as a marginal practice to mainstream commercial and residential film consumption at a time when art house and repertory theaters were on the decline, the DIY ideology began to take root and

a decrease in public funding for the arts made it difficult for the continued institutional and government support of experimental filmmakers and nonprofit arts organizations. Simultaneously, economic hardship and technological advancements provided subcultural entrepreneurs the tools they needed—cheap space and equipment—to create makeshift spaces for film viewing within the urban public landscape. Thus, a network of small-scale alternative exhibition venues sprang up across Canada and the US allowing independent filmmakers to screen their work at sites locally and afar, as well as providing genre programmers like Kier-la Janisse opportunities to introduce audiences to cult films. Angela McRobbie has theorized that the homegrown labor performed by these youth subcultures was a result of an economic recession and a subsequent lack of (meaningful) work opportunities in the dominant job market. Sherry B. Ortner has described this era (beginning in the mid- to late 80s), which coincided with the birth of the independent film movement in the US, as the "end of the American dream."[668] The middleclass was most affected by the realization that hard work in "normal jobs" was not necessarily going to bring economic reward and security or happiness. Generation X was the first (middleclass) generation to feel the "effects of the neoliberalization of the economy"; the result being they were not likely to do better than their parents, prompting a fear of "downward mobility."[669] This ominous reality led artists and cultural producers to find other ways of surviving, thus the birth of the DIY ethos, and consequently microcinema.

Microcinema has occupied a precarious position within nontheatrical exhibition. Due to its marginal status in the field of cultural production that is film exhibition, and the DIY approach to operations that organizers adopt, the average life span of a space is

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[668] Ortner, 15.
[669] Ibid., 21, 16.

relatively short. There are multiple factors that influence this: changing populations and habits of cinemagoers, increased access to obscure films via the internet, a lack of municipal infrastructure and government support for the arts, organizer burnout, gentrification and biased cultural policies. Based on these variables, some cities are better at sustaining subcultural scenes than others. And some scenes fare better than others in particular locales.

The music scene in Montreal is still vibrant and prolific with many alternative venue options, but the cinephiles to whom I spoke were not optimistic about the future of microcinema in their city. The closing of Blue Sunshine for some was a portent of a continued regression in alternative exhibition options, part of an overall decline in support for nontheatrical exhibition that includes the closing of NFB theaters and possibly the Cinémathèque québécoise. As Dave Bertrand quips, "for year-round programming, there's a big hole in La Belle Province that's about to get bigger."[670] That said, the tenacity of underground film festival organizers does not appear to be waning, and perhaps less frequent screenings is the answer to survival in Montreal. But with the daily screening venues will likely go celluloid projection, as it has been microcinemas and film societies that have been the advocates of residual media. Blue Sunshine was, to my knowledge, the only venue screening 16mm film on a regular basis.

Alternative film practice requires certain economic, demographic and cultural attributes of a metropolitan locale to be present in order to be sustained. A key requisite is the availability of affordable or free space, in under- or un- developed areas, around which taste formations come together. Another is a large enough base of cinephiles and/or parancinephiles with similar taste to support a microcinema. Generally, the types

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[670] "Blue Sunset."

of people who would support microcinema are bohemians, hipsters and young creatives, those whose presence are indices of a creative city. Additionally, educational institutions, especially those with art, film and media studies programs, help draw both potential audiences and producers. However, a city's cultural policy is also a factor; if it does not proactively support small-scale independent enterprises, or focuses solely on grand-scale projects for the purpose of attracting a tourism economy, alternative projects will remain underground and transient.

While Montreal has been a city that offered the promise of a bohemia—a place where artists, musicians and filmmakers could live cheaply, collaborate with others and produce their work—since the mid-2000s this romantic notion of Montreal has been considerably undermined by the increased development of previously affordable neighborhoods. Gentrification has occurred for many reasons including municipal cultural policy, provincial hipsterisation strategies and the seemingly unavoidable urban trend that sees creative sections of a city eventually co-opted by bourgeois bohemians and young urban professionals (Bobos and yuppies). The establishment of Ubisoft in the Mile End neighborhood is a prime example of a creative economy enterprise that set into motion the gentrification of a bohemian section of the city that was not only home to a vibrant Anglo-bohemian music scene, but also to longstanding populations of ethnically diverse immigrants.

Some economists and urban theorists would view this as a wonderfully successful result that has brought highly skilled and creative workers to the city and has boosted Montreal's reputation and position in the global market, while others lament the displacement of former inhabitants and the changing face of the quarter from boho hip to

bobo chic. Microcinema organizers, for the most part, have been sensitive to the concerns of locals to gentrification. Organizations like Aurora Picture Show, Rooftop Films and Moviehouse purposefully consider the needs of the communities in which they establish themselves alongside the needs of local filmmakers. They seem to be aware of the impact of their presence in the neighborhood. And unlike artisanal sausage and chocolate shops whose clientele are the bourgeoisie and upper class, microcinemas attempt to be inclusive spaces that serve the local communities as part of their mission. However, microcinema does contribute to the bohemian nature of a place, which attracts investors and developers to it, and therefore is implicated in the gentrification process.

I align myself with McRobbie's argument concerning new modes of governmental harnessing of creativity. That is to say, the hipsterisation strategies embraced by cities worldwide promote an apolitical, apathetic position—one that may in fact support big business under the guise of independents—that ignores the local people whose work does not fall within this new, creative category: "Scene factors hide social realities."[671] As McRobbie further posits, Richard Florida's "monopolistic takeover" via the creative economy plan replaces decades of investment in social-democratism and urban welfare programs, dazzling policy makers with the idea of "creative excitement and entertainment" and blinding them to issues of inequality and poverty. We only need to think of the energy and money poured into cleaning up touristic zones of a city—the Quartier des spectacles in Montreal, for example—to see this at work. Long-term inhabitants and small, independent businesses are squeezed out as grandiose plans to capitalize on creative work are put into place.

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[671] McRobbie, "Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy."

For subcultural scenes to thrive, the necessary characteristics of place described above must work in conjunction with the presence and influence of pivotal individuals, or cultural intermediaries such as programmers, who guide the audience in its reception of rare, niche films, be they avant-garde, trash or a variety of underappreciated cinema. A programmer's taste, which is honed through what Pierre Bourdieu has identified as autodidactic learning but is influenced by their education, social milieu and class, is usually what coalesces a scene. Programmers play a significant role in the cycle of consecration that assigns value to a set of texts or objects. The more obscure the object the greater the risk, but also the greater the opportunity for earning cultural or subcultural capital, which may be compounded by championing archaic technologies and residual media. And in the other direction, the more (sub)cultural capital a programmer possesses, the more influential her opinion. Janisse is a good example of this, as many of the Blue Sunshine regulars knew of her (and her taste) before she arrived in Montreal. This provided her a small following and core group of regulars at her microcinema, who admitted they would watch anything she screened. Over her years as a writer and programmer, she cultivated an audience with a particular taste. At Blue Sunshine, it was one that combined elements of both cinephila and paracinephilia, consciously blurring the boundaries between high and low.

Despite the fact that film scholars such as Jeffrey Sconce have argued that fans of paracinema tend to position themselves wholly in opposition to the texts of cinephiles (eg. aesthetes, academics), I have found these categories to be more fluid. I suggest that paracinephilia, if ever it was a monolithic subversion of the mainstream and the academy, was a symptom of an earlier era, one that predated mass consumption of digital media.

Even though there remain some films that are inaccessible or difficult to obtain, and microcinema to some degree relies on this for its existence, it is easier to view and learn about all manner of obscure media today, rendering the exclusivity and insider-ness of paracinephiles almost meaningless. Accessibility may also account for the merging of cinephiliic and paracinephilic qualities. But one does have to know what she's looking for and dedicate a generous amount of time to seeking it out; this requires building relationships with distributors, filmmakers, etc. For this reason, the programmer as cultural intermediary is still a viable role in the film community.

It is not my aim to predict the future of microcinema and whether, in its current form, it's a sustainable model for film exhibition venues. Cultural studies is not meant to be predictive but to analyze what has already occurred or is occurring. McRobbie observes that one effect of the commodification of creativity is that business school ideology has permeated arts school curricula so that creatives from fashion designers to architects are expected to have business plans.[672] This would have been a good idea for the Blue Sunshine organizers, possibly saving them from financial ruin, because not everyone can fly by the seat of their pants to success, like the Leagues have done with the Alamo Drafthouse. At the same time, though, there is something timelessly romantic about forging ahead with just passion and dedication; it keeps the bohemian spirit alive.

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[672] Ibid.

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Appendix A
Montreal Microcinemas and Microcinema Organizations
2007-2013

Name	Locale	Frequency	Dates Open	# of Visits
Cinéma Parallèle	(loft) Bordeaux/Ontario, Sainte Marie/Gay Village 3682 St. Laurent Blvd., Plateau 3536 St. Laurent Blvd., Plateau	nightly screenings	1970-1978 1978-1999 1999-present*	3
Le Cinéclub/The Film Society	various, currently most events at Concordia University, Downtown	1 x week	1992-2012 2012-present**	2
Kino'00	various, mostly Rialto Theatre, 5723 Park Ave., Mile End	1 x month	1/1999-present	1
Cinéma Abattoir	various	occasionally	2005-2011	0
Lab Synthèse	(loft) Beaubien/Durocher, Mile-Ex	1 x week	12/2007-?/2008	2
Sky Blue Door	St. Laurent/St. Viateur, Mile End	occasionally	2008-2009	1
Ciné-Club La Banque	175 E. Roy St., Plateau 6751A St-Laurent Blvd., Little Italy	1 x week	2008-present	1
Cinequanon	(backyard) 4562 St. Dominique St., Plateau	1 x week	2009-9/2011	3
Grindhouse Wednesdays	various, mostly Rialto Theatre, 5723 Park Ave., Mile End	1 x month	12/2009-present	2
Blue Sunshine	(loft)3660 St. Laurent Blvd., Plateau	3 x week	6/2010-5/2012	20+
The Noah	(store) Peut-être Vintage, 6029A Park Ave., Mile End	1 x week	8/2012-4/2013	2

*The most recent iteration does not constitute a microcinema as it is housed at Excentris, a multiplex venue.
**The most recent iteration does not constitute a microcinema as it is housed at Concordia University, though the programmer still organizes offsite one-off events at site-specific spaces.

Appendix B
Additional Site Visits, Alternative Film Events Observed & Panels Attended

<u>Microcinemas and Microcinema Organizations Outside Montreal</u>
Rooftop Films: music performance & screening (on The Roof of New Design High School [formerly Open Road]) Lower East Side, NY
Moviehouse: VJ, screening and Q&A, 3rd Ward, Brooklyn, NY
Secret Cinema: Exotica Music Films 2 (The Trestle Inn) Philadelphia, PA
Aurora Picture Show: music performance and Ann Arbor Film Festival screening (outdoors in Market Square Park) Houston, TX
Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-in: Austin, TX
Spider House Patio Bar and Café: Austin, TX
Trash Palace: Toronto, ON
Cineforum: Toronto, ON
CineCycle: Pleasure Dome & The Power Plant screening, Toronto, ON

<u>Alternative Exhibition Events and Sites in Montreal</u>
Bike-in Film screening, short films (under train overpass at St. Laurent Blvd. in Mile End) Montreal, QC
POP Montreal's Ring My Bell: Ciné-Vélo Italodisco, screening and DJ/dancing (outside at St. Ambroise Brewery) Montreal, QC
Loft party, music performance & experimental shorts screening (Hotel2Tango) Montreal, QC
Rick Trembles' Trash and Treasures film fest (Redbird Studios) Montreal, QC
TV Carnage, video montage event (Le Cagibi) Montreal, QC
DoubleNegative Collective screening, musical performance, installation art & experimental shorts (outdoors at Hotel2Tango) Montreal, QC
Trash on Wheels, industrial shorts/orphan films (Casa del Popolo) Montreal, QC
Art's Party, music performance, DJs/dancing, experimental shorts screening, annual event hosted by CKUT (L'Envers) Montreal, QC
Vincent Moon's *An Island* (2010) screening (Laïka) Montreal, QC

<u>Alternative Film Festivals in Montreal</u>
Montreal Underground Film Festival (MUFF): multiple screenings (La Sala Rossa & Peut-être Vintage) Montreal, QC
Mascara & Popcorn Film Festival: performance art & screening (Cabaret Playhouse) Montreal, QC
Film POP: multiple screenings (Eastern Bloc, St. John the Evangelist Church, Trylon apartments pool) Montreal, QC

<u>Panels Related to Research Topic</u>
Cultural Scenes Panel at Pop Montreal Montreal, QC
Alternative Exhibition Panel at South by Southwest Film Conference Austin, TX

Appendix C
Formal Interviews

NAME(S)	AFFILIATION(S)	DATE OF INTERVIEW
Philippe Spurrell	Le CinéClub/Film Society, Montreal	September 28, 2011
Mike Rollo	Double Negative; Concordia University, Montreal	October 22, 2011
Kier-la Janisse & David Bertrand*	Film POP; Blue Sunshine; Fantasia Film Festival, Montreal	November 22, 2011
Timothy Kelly & Pablo Toledo Gouin*	Cinequanon, Montreal	November 24, 2011
Daniel Yates	Blue Sunshine, Montreal	February 10, 2012
Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare & Karina Mariano*	Montreal Underground Film Festival; Volatile Works; Blue Sunshine, Montreal	February 12, 2012
Delicia Harvey	Aurora Picture Show, Houston, TX	March 2, 2012
Adam "Atom" Le Borene	Blue Sunshine, Montreal	April 19, 2012
Adam Abonaccar & Ariel Esteban Cayer *	Blue Sunshine; Fantasia Film Festival, Montreal	April 26, 2012
Frank Fingers (Labonte)	Blue Sunshine; The Noah, Montreal	May 5, 2012
Florence Touliatos	Mascara and Popcorn Film Festival, Montreal	May 7, 2012
Stacey Case	Trash Palace, Toronto	June 1, 2012
Rick Trembles	Motion Picture Purgatory; Blue Sunshine, Montreal	June 30, 2012

* Conducted interview with both individuals together

Informal Interviews

Chris Henderson	Moviehouse, Brooklyn, NY	October 9, 2011
Reg Hartt	Cineforum, Toronto, ON	May 31, 2012
Eric Veillette	Freelance journalist; programmer; collector/archivist, Toronto, ON	June 1, 2012
Martin Heath	CineCycle, Toronto, ON	June 2, 2012

Appendix D
Interview Questions Template

1. How long have you been involved in the Montreal film scene(s)?
2. How would you describe it now? How has it changed?
3. What are some of the more memorable venues/locales? If gone, what happened to them?
4. What are some of the more memorable events or film series that you have attended? If ended, what happened to those programs?
5. Who are the primary programmers/organizers who have helped to shape the film scene in Montreal?
6. What is your understanding of "microcinema"? What, for you, are exemplary microcinemas (anywhere)?
7. Would you consider (your site) a microcinema? Why or why not?
8. What has been your experience with establishing a nontheatrical exhibition space in this city? The advantages? The difficulties/obstacles?
9. Have the city's cultural/arts policies or other ordinances (language, noise, etc.) affected your project(s)? Please explain.
10. How would you describe your audience(s)?
11. Why do you think they are drawn to your space/programming?
12. What type of relationship do you have with your audience members?
13. Have you been personally involved in organizing nontheatrical film/microcinema exhibition outside of Montreal? Tell me about it.
14. How did working with other cities' ordinances/audiences compare to Montreal?
15. What is your assessment of the current Montreal microcinema scene as compared to 10 years ago? 15-20 years ago? Other cities'?

Appendix E
Canadian and US Recreational Public Film Exhibition Timeline

April 1894	1st Kinetoscope parlor (i.e. peep show) = 1st commercial exhibition of motion pictures (New York)
1895	sporadic projections with Eidoloscope
Oct 1895	Phantoscope debut at Cotton States Exhibition (Atlanta)
April 1896	1st projected Vitascope motion picture at Koster and Bial's Music Hall (New York)
June 1896	1st Canadian projection (Montreal)
1896/97	itinerant/traveling shows: opera houses, town halls, vaudeville theaters, fairs, expositions, etc.
1902	1st permanent movie theaters, Tally's Electric Theater (Los Angeles) and Edison Electric Theatre (Vancouver)
1904	Hale's Tours, train car theaters (Kansas City & St. Louis)
1904/05	storefront (and make-shift) nickelodeons
June 1905	Nickelodeon Theater (Pittsburgh), 1st purpose-built nickelodeon
March 1906	1st theatorium (Toronto)
1906	airdomes or outdoor nickelodeons (rooftops, vacant lots, amusement parks, against building walls)
1907/08	dedicated, purpose-built nickelodeons
1908	Dewey, upscale movie theater converted from church to vaudeville/burlesque to movies (New York)
1909	church-shows 2nd wave of permanent theaters, small-time vaudeville theaters
1914	Strand Theatre (New York), 1st movie palace
1917	air-conditioned theaters (Birmingham & Chicago)
1920s	picture palaces peak

1926	Screen Guild begins 1st regular US art film programming, Cameo Theater (New York)
late 20s-30s	art theater movement (1st wave)
1929	Film Guild Cinema opens, 1st purpose-built art theater (New York)
1930s	free farm shows
1933	Hollingshead's drive-in (Pennsauken, NJ), 1st drive-in theater
1935	MOMA collects, exhibits & circulates films National Film Society of Canada (Ottawa), 1st North American film society
mid 1930s	film society movement in Canada university screenings (US)
1946	Art in Cinema program started (San Francisco)
1947	Cinema 16 founded (New York), membership society
late 1940s	film society movement in US
1952	1st film festival (Columbus, OH)
1950s	drive-in theaters peak
1960s	art house cinemas peak (2nd wave)
1961	1st floating cinematheque, Canyon Cinema (Canyon/Berkeley/San Francisco)
1962	dual-screen theater in Place Ville Marie (Montreal), 1st Canadian multiplex
July 1963	The Parkway Twin (Kansas City), 1st US multiplex
1960s-80s	cineplexes/multiplexes peak
1970s	film festivals peak repertory cinemas peak
1978	New Cinema opens (New York), underground cinema
April 1979	Taylor opens 18-screen Cineplex in Eaton Centre (Toronto), 1st megaplex

1981	Eaton Centre expands to 21 screens
1986	1st microcinema format, Other Cinema (San Francisco)
1989	Angelika Film Center, 1st indieplex
1994	1st microcinema, named as such, Total Mobile Home microCINEMA (San Francisco)
1995	AMC Grand 24 (Dallas), 1st US megaplex

Timeline compiled with information from the following sources: Musser "Introducing Cinema to the American Public," Fuller *At the Picture Show*, Gomery *Shared Pleasures*, Moore *Now Playing*, MacDonald *Cinema 16*, Newman *Indie*, Acland *Screen Traffic*, Waller, Wasson and Morey articles in *Going to the Movies*, Polan, Groening, Wasson and Acland articles in *Inventing Film Studies,* de Valck *Film Festivals*, cinematreasures.org, cinemaspeakeasy.com.

Appendix F
Timeline of Historical Microcinemas

1961 - 1967   Canyon Cinema, Canyon, CA

1986 - present   Other Cinema, San Francisco, CA

1991 - present   CineCycle, Toronto, ON*

1991 - present   The Secret Cinema, Philadelphia, PA*

1991 - present   Basement Films, Albuquerque, NM

1992 - present   Cineforum, Toronto, ON*

1993 - 1997   Total Mobile Home microCINEMA, San Francisco, CA

1993 - 2000   The Mansion, Baltimore, MD

1994 - present   Flicker (film festival), Chapel Hill, NC

1995 - 1996   X-film, Chicago, IL

1997 - present   Rooftop Films, New York, NY*

1998 - 1999   Robert Beck Memorial Cinema, New York, NY

1998 - 2003   The Blinding Light!! Cinema, Vancouver, BC

1998 - 2004   Movies with Live Soundtracks, Providence, RI

1998 - present   Aurora Picture Show, Houston, TX*

2000 - 2009   40 Frames, Portland, OR

c2000 - present   Spider House Café, Austin, TX*

2004 - present   Magic Lantern, Providence, RI

2007 - present   Trash Palace, Toronto, ON*

2007 - present   Moviehouse, Brooklyn, NY*

2008 - present   Light Industry, New York, NY

2011 - present   Cinema41, Austin, TX

* Sites I have visited.

N.B. This timeline may give the inaccurate impression that more microcinemas have survived than not; this is because I have largely written about those spaces that were successful, documented in *A Microcinema Primer* and/or I was able to visit and therefore are still running.

Appendix G
North American Microcinemas

The following list of "ongoing four-wall independent film screenings" was compiled by Cinema Speakeasy and was current as of 20 January 2010:[673]

United States: West
- Cinefist (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.cinefist.com/
- Film Courage (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.filmcourage.com/
- Downtown Independent Theater (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.downtownindependent.com/
- Echo Park Film Center's Microcinema (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.echoparkfilmcenter.org/cinema/cinema.html
- New Filmmakers LA (Los Angeles, CA): http://newfilmmakersla.com/
- Cinefamily @ Silent Movie Theatre on Fairfax (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.cinefamily.org/
- Burke Roberts' Engine Theatre (Los Angeles, CA): http://www.theenginetheater.com/
- Dolores Park Movie Night (San Francisco, CA): http://www.doloresparkmovie.org/faq.html
- NorthWest Film Society (Portland, OR.): http://www.nwfilm.org/
- Living Room Theatres (Portland, OR.): http://www.livingroomtheaters.com/
- Northwest Film Forum, (Seattle, WA.): http://www.nwfilmforum.org/
- Boise MicroCinema (Boise, ID.): http://www.boisemicrocinema.com/
- Denver Film Society (Denver, CO): http://www.denverfilm.org
- The Filling Station (Albuquerque, NM): http://www.fillingstationabq.com/
- Mesilla Valley Film Society (Mesilla, NM): http://mesillavalleyfilm.org/

United States: Midwest & South
- MusicBox Theatre (Chicago, IL): http://www.musicboxtheatre.com/
- Siskel Film Center (Chicago, IL): http://www.siskelfilmcenter.org/
- The Nightingale Theatre (Chicago, IL): http://nightingaletheatre.org/
- White Light Cinema (Chicago, IL): http://www.whitelightcinema.com/
- Milwaukee Independent Film Society (Milwaukee, WI): http://festival.milwaukeeindependentfilmsociety.org/
- Des Moines Social Club (Des Moines, IA): http://www.desmoinessocialclub.org
- Speakeasy Cinema (Louisville, KY): http://www.louisvillespeakeasy.com/
- Open Screen Nights at Alamo Drafthouse Cinema (Austin, TX): http://www.originalalamo.com/
- Aurora Picture Show (Houston, TX): http://aurorapictureshow.org/
- 14 Pews (Houston, TX): http://14pews.org/
- O-Cinema (Miami, FL): http://www.o-cinema.org/
- The Enzian Theatre (Orlando, FL): http://www.enzian.org/
- Cinefest Theatre (Atlanta, GA): http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwcft/

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[673] Cinema Speakeasy, website, http://cinemaspeakeasy.com/2010/01/20/diyscreenings. The list has not been updated since.

United States: Northeast

- Slamdance East Coast (New York, NY- Dir. Paul Rachman): http://www.slamdance.com
- Astoria Indies (Queens, NY): http://www.astoriaindies.com/
- Rooftop Films (New York, NY): http://www.rooftopfilms.com/
- New Filmmakers (New York, NY): http://www.newfilmmakers.com/
- Angelika Film Center (New York, NY): http://angelikafilmcenter.com/
- BAM (New York, NY): http://www.bam.org/
- Rosendale Theatre (Rosendale, NY): http://www.rosendaletheatre.org
- Rehoboth Beach Film Society (Delaware): http://www.rehobothfilm.com/
- Indies for Indies (Pittsburgh, PA): http://indiesforindies.com/
- The Annapolis Pretentious Film Society (Annapolis, MD): http://www.pretentiousfilm.com/
- The Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, MA): http://www.icaboston.org
- ImprovBoston (Cambridge, MA): http://www.improvboston.com
- The Brattle Theatre (Cambridge, MA): http://www.brattlefilm.org
- The Coolidge Corner Theatre (Boston, MA): http://www.coolidge.org/
- Somerville Theatre (Somerville, MA.): http://www.somervilletheatreonline.com/
- Fete Films (Jersey City, NJ.): http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=156269951054711
- The ShadowBox (Roanoke, VA.): http://www.theshadowboxcinema.com/

Canada

- Open Cinema (Victoria, BC, Canada): http://www.opencinema.ca/
- Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (Calgary, Canada): http://csif.org/csif/

Appendix H
Blue Sunshine Sample Program[674]
January 2012

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
4	**5** MELLODRAMA: THE MELLOTRON MOVIE!	**6** Peter Bogdanovich's SAINT JACK - 16mm Print!	**7** BLESS THE BEASTS AND CHILDREN - 16mm Print!
11	**12** NASHVILLE GIRL on 16mm + short film HONKYTONK BEN!	**13** HÄXAN: WITCHCRAFT THROUGH THE AGES - WITH LIVE SCORE BY THE MONTREAL NINTENDO ORKESTAR!	**14** PUPPET - A history of American puppetry, from children's theatre to high art!
18 Miskatonic Institute: THEORIZING HORROR	**19** PUNK ROCK - "the seamy underside of the New York rock scene!"	**20** Spaghetti Western / Spaghetti Feast: DEATH RIDES A HORSE - 16mm Print!	**21** Hideo Gosha's THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI - 16mm Print!
25 Miskatonic Institute: THEORIZING HORROR	**26** DR. HORRIBLE'S SING-ALONG BLOG - THE SING ALONG!	**27** THE SENTINEL - 16mm Print!	**28** THE PLAGUE DOGS Director's Cut + ELECTRIC LITERATURE'S SINGLE SENTENCE ANIMATIONS!

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[674] Blue Sunshine, http://www.blue-sunshine.com/calendar.html?month=201201.