

The Local Film Scene:  
Developing a Model for Alternative Filmmaking and Viewing

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## ABSTRACT

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Developments in technology have dramatically increased the ability of non-professionals to take part in the filmmaking process. This burgeoning group of creators often seek out distribution for their films via film festivals or online streaming services. While these models of distribution offer accelerated avenues for exposure and success, most films are not accepted into festivals and are ignored online. [These limitations clearly demand alternative strategies for film gathering and viewing of local creators. The resulting theoretical paradigm, conceived as the **Local Film Scene**, is based on the academic work surrounding **Scene Studies**. This thesis defines the scene as a gathering and interplay between three essential components; **People, Place,** and **Paraphernalia**. The analysis and critique of these elements compose the bulk of the following thesis and it is anticipated that the document will be a resource for organizing, planning, monitoring, and further studying the local film scene.

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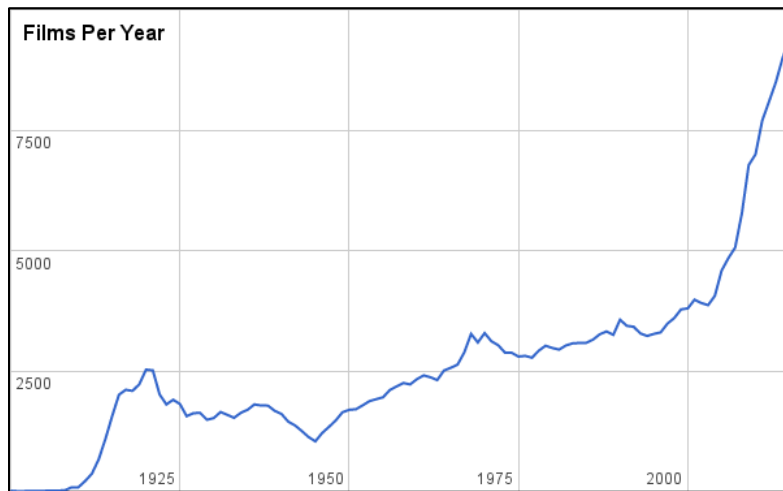
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## Introduction

The local film scene is an idea that I have been processing and revising for years, which has become more fully realized via my thesis research. My intention is to establish an initial academic study of the local film scene, a term that I have created to describe my own vision of local filmmaking and viewing. Knowing where to begin was challenging because the topic has rarely been studied and therefore has no academic standards or expectations associated with it. Associated film structures, like microcinemas and film collectives, have also received little academic study. So, I embarked on this unknown path with my personal interests in filmmaking and other related topics as my guide. The study of these interests, which include micro-budget filmmaking, non-profit arthouse cinemas, niche markets for creatives and data-based arguments, prompted the research and development of a new model for local filmmaking, inspired by Scene Studies, psychology, and digital technologies. As with plenty of film research projects, my initial interest was spawned by the viewing of a film.

My obsession with micro-budget filmmaking started when I watched *Primer*, a sci-fi film initially made for \$7,000 that went on to win the Grand Jury Prize at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. The film was a beacon of hope to me, and many aspiring filmmakers, proving that making a successful, intelligent film with almost no money was possible. The feeling of overwhelming impossibility associated with making a movie shrunk as I read about Shane Carruth's filmmaking experience. I bought a mini-DV camera and didn't make any films, but I did continue to discover other contemporary low budget filmmakers like the Duplass Brothers, Aaron Katz, and Joe Swanberg. These filmmakers and their cohorts were grouped together under the moniker of mumblecore, which conveniently doubled as a genre for categorizing their films. The label of mumblecore is a nod to the ineffectual mumbling of the characters, the result of using non-actors and prioritizing realistic conversations over clever dialogue. The filmmakers used these filmmaking characteristics to position themselves as an alternative to the current crop of independent filmmakers. As the directors' career paths developed and diverged, I continued to read interviews with, and articles about the filmmakers. I wondered why this particular group found success and a devoted audience, in comparison to the thousands of other micro-budget films made each year. The number of soon-to-be-unknown films increases each year, in line with

the sky-rocketing number of films produced since the introduction of digital filmmaking in the early 2000s.



**Fig. 1** Source: <http://www.imdb.com/>.

Of course, mumblecore filmmakers owe a lot of their success to large film festivals such as Sundance and SXSW. These festivals selected many mumblecore films for prestigious debuts often in the festival’s main competition section. Festival programming has changed as the film landscape has evolved. With the advent of digital cameras, film submissions have spiked; Sundance has seen their film submissions rise from 250 in 1992 to over 4,000 in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Filmmaking has become more accessible, but having your film selected has become exponentially more difficult. Statistics like these piqued my interest in how the outlook of micro-budget filmmaking has changed with the rapid development of new technologies for making and distributing films.

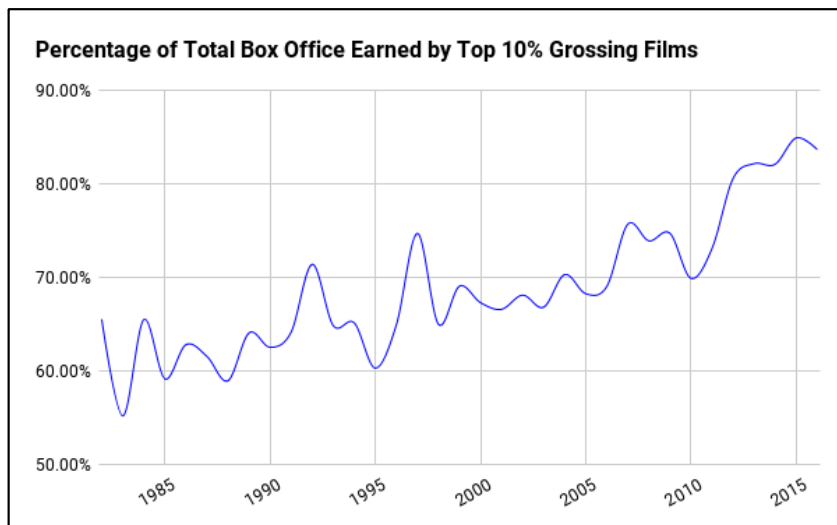
Does the relative cost efficiency and ease of making a film on digital allow for more filmmakers to share their visions with the world? Or is the market oversaturated with films that will never be seen by an audience? Do online distribution models provide access for an audience to see low budget, independent films not previously accessible? These are some of the questions I mulled over during the past five years as I earned an undergraduate degree in film studies and moved on to jobs and internships in the film industry. As I delved into these topics, I noticed certain commonplace assumptions and rhetoric were not always backed up by the data. For

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<sup>1</sup> “33 years of sundance film festival,” Sundance Institute, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.sundance.org/festivalhistory>.



example, since the introduction of digital filmmaking, more and more films are being released in cinemas each year. The early 1980s saw around 450-500 films released in the USA while the past few years have all topped 700 films. One might assume that, as more films are released each year, box office receipts would be more evenly shared across the entirety of the films. In other words, with more options available for consumers, they would attend an increasing number of different films. In actuality, the box office has become more biased, with the top 10 percentile of films released continuing to earn a larger percent of the total gross over the past four decades. The box office has become top-heavy as the most popular films make more money than ever before.



**Fig. 2** Source: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/>.

The odds of gaining acceptance to a well-known film festival have drastically decreased and the current theatrical experience is geared towards fewer marquee films (superhero films, animated kids films) earning the bulk of the total gross. So where does the independent, local, or low budget film fit into an industry that is seemingly diminishing the acceptance and value of the aforementioned art?

These questions originally had little to do with another one of my interests, attending intimate gigs for local bands. I have moved often in the past five years but each new city has offered numerous opportunities to watch bands play small shows and this sparked a thought. Could neighborhood filmmakers and audiences engage in a community screening event similar to the hole-in-the-wall bar gig? Screenings of local filmmakers' work could ostensibly solve the

problem for low budget, independent films that have a difficult time finding a place in the film industry.

Delving into academic writing surrounding music, locality, and communities quickly led to Scene Studies. Because there is little writing or academic work about the local filmmaker and their audience, it was essential for my research to be established through and around an existing discipline. In addition to the scene, other related branches, such as film collectives and microcinemas, were studied as ancillary topics. These organizations are important components for low budget films and their distribution, but did not completely fulfill the requirements of my unique vision. Microcinemas and film collectives can support a local film scene but often lack the creation and distribution of local content. Microcinemas are known for screening cult classics, genre flicks, and foreign films but rarely display local work. Film collectives support local artists creation of films, but these works are commonly submitted to film festivals or released online as part of the distribution process. The inapplicability of these existing structures and lack of actual local film scenes led my research and analysis to be more theoretical than ethnographic. The following chapters investigate the resources, ideas, economies, and geographies that are needed to support a local film scene along with the actual functionality of such an endeavor. My research critiques the different theoretical methods of organizing and establishing a local film scene in hopes of developing a template or model for its prospective existence. The local film scene framework is adapted from the methodology surrounding music scenes, film collectives, microcinemas, and film movements.

This study is not ethnographic or research creation based and field work does not compromise the main substance of the argument. The benefits of an ethnographic study are not doubted but as I explored theories proximate to the local film scene, I found problems and inconsistencies with my initial assumptions that could have derailed a broader research project. My initial opinions and ideas have been changed, modified, and redirected throughout the process of researching and writing of this thesis. It is anticipated that this document can now provide the information needed to organize, plan, and monitor an ethnographic or research creation study of local film scenes. Because the local film scene is essentially only theory and not an actuality, this work has to define the term and then hypothesize its value and applications.

The first chapter begins with a review of the literature surrounding Scene Studies and its relation and application to filmmaking communities and organizations. The chapter critiques the different rules in place for Scene Studies and uses these to define the local film scene. The following chapters examine the three main segments of the local film scene: places, people, and paraphernalia.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter considers the place as a human-created concept that signifies characteristics and values of the appointed space. The film place is explored as a specifically local entity that carries its own unique set of attributes. The physicality of the local place is assessed as an alternative to the online space that is currently associated with low budget filmmaking.

The third chapter is devoted to the relationships and duties of those who are involved with the local film scene. I further explore the psychological and mental impact of the creative, organizational, and critical labor performed by the different members of the scene. This departure from a more traditional study of filmmaking and viewing was compelled by the necessity for data-based arguments that are not directed towards the usual audience of film and communication academics. The local film scene needs participation from all types of interested parties so an argument based solely on film and communication theories would not target the broader demographic that is required.

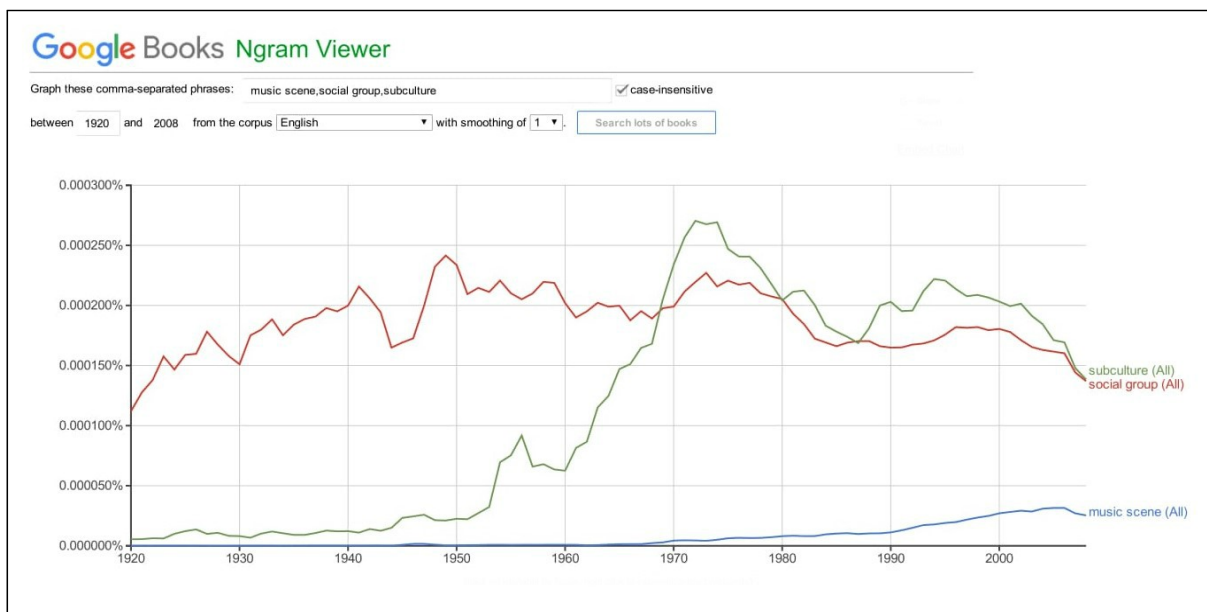
The fourth chapter investigates how paraphernalia (specifically commodities) of the local film scene can be situated as attractive in comparison to current film industry commodities such as theatrical screenings and streaming applications. It examines the benefits and drawbacks of a local film scene product in relation to its cost, niche factor, and physicality. These categories provide a way for future research to be classified and organized before the local film scene is realized.

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, the term paraphernalia carries a negative connotation that implies superfluousness. The usage of the term here is positive. It has been deliberately chosen because of the necessity for a moniker that can include commodities and other items that are not bought or sold.

## Chapter 1: Scene Terminology

Madchester, Grunge, No Wave, and SWATS: these are a few of the most recognizable and influential music scenes. Any mention of these scenes points the mind in the direction of certain sounds, styles, locations, personalities, and feelings. The designation of Grunge automatically alludes to Seattle, anti-establishment, loud music, ripped jeans, and Kurt Cobain. The *scene* has become an influential term in the world of music because it can efficiently categorize new trends, bands, and/or styles. The terminology gained prominence in the late 60s and usage steadily increased over the following fifty years. However, the motifs of the scene existed well before its synthesis. Previously, vocabularies such as movement, subculture and social group were similarly used to ascribe corresponding classifications of cultural assemblage within genre.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig. 3** Source: [books.google.com/ngrams/graph](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph).

Accordingly, the designation of scene has roots in music studies, but the phrase is not exclusive to the musical landscape. Scene and comparable terms are also applied to art, cultural, and film studies. For example, the categorization of filmmakers and their films as *film movements* has been established since 1921.<sup>4</sup> Film movements, like French New Wave, are defined and grouped

<sup>3</sup> Of course, these vocabularies are still used to make the same comparisons presently.

<sup>4</sup> "Editorials," *Moving Picture Age*, December 1921, 6-7, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/movingpictureage04unse>.

by values such as temporality, politics, sociology, ethics, aesthetics, style, and icons. Congruently, a scene can be determined by using similar values, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the terms. The connectedness merits a more in-depth assessment of the relationship between film and scenes. Despite the analogousness of the terms movement and scene, they cannot be used interchangeably, because key elements of scenes, such as the necessity of local distribution and attendance, do not readily cross over to film movements. Possibly because of these contrasts, film movements are rarely explored as scenes. Specifically, film movements are rarely expressed and studied as “the correlation of tastes and consumption patterns with categories of social identity.”<sup>5</sup> One of the objectives of this thesis is to measure the effectiveness of using Scene Study methodology to build theories around filmmaking and watching. Before a discussion about film scenes can continue, a knowledge base must be developed that considers the scene’s etymology in music studies and the subsequent permeation of the term into other parts of popular culture and media studies.

Akin to scene’s increased popularity, its usage has spread into lexicons beyond music studies as a replacement for movement, fad, trend and so on. This development, as well as an increased focus on *Scene Studies* as an entity independent from music studies, has created a climate for examining other cultural subjects as part of the scene structure.

The definition of the term scene is a perplexing feat when considering the complexity of interpreting multiple channels of influence. According to Will Straw, scenes can be interpreted, “. . . as *collectivities* . . . as *space of assembly* . . . as *workplaces* . . . as *ethical worlds* . . . as *spaces of traversal and preservation* . . . and as *spaces of mediation* . . .”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a specific scene can be affiliated with different characteristics based on the subjectivity of the interpreter. Additionally, these characteristics are not deliberated over during the creation of a scene and are unearthed only as part of the identification process. The resulting scene must exist before it is named. The definition of scene is accompanied by a certain amount of fluidity to account for these paradoxes and the accompanying tradition of change. The scene is both transformative and elusive, a shifting tableau that represents and encompasses the subject being studied.

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<sup>5</sup> Will Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5.3 (1991): 372.

<sup>6</sup> Will Straw, “Some Things a Scene Might Be,” *Cultural Studies* 29.3 (2015): 477.

## Scene Beginnings

In the late 80s and early 90s, Will Straw, Barry Shank, and Holly Kruse wrote about the influence of social relations on specific music communities. Their writings would be fundamental in theorizing the scene as an object of study. The authors' academic backgrounds are decidedly diverse despite their shared interests. Kruse graduated with a B.A. in Political Science and History, Straw in Film Studies, and Shank in American Studies. The differences foreshadow the gradual shift in Scene Studies to include cultural communities beyond music. The trio shared post-graduate pursuits in Communication/Comparative Studies allowing the scholars to find a connection through the music scene. Seminal texts written by the authors include Straw's "Systems of Articulation" and "Logics of Change: Scenes and Communities in Popular Music", Kruse's "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music," and Shank's "Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas."

These texts opted for scene as a new label because of the inadequacy of terms like music community and subculture to specify the authors' intentions. The studies were more interested in how commodities, performances, and spaces differed based on physical locations and temporalities, in contrast to community theories that concentrated on how they were similar. They sought to examine the interactions between the place, space, audience, and performers that encompassed a cultural commodity.<sup>7</sup>

A closer examination of music communities reveals the key discrepancies between the terms (music communities and scenes). Straw argues that a music community has a membership, which explores a musical dialect that is located within a specific geographical area. As the members navigate the differences and similarities between musical traditions of the area and contemporary interpretations of the same traditions, tensions and disagreements may arise.<sup>8</sup> The social interactions between members are the core element of a music community, whereas the scene focuses on the space where commodities and people interact, and subsequent contradictions and cross-breedings arise. It is marked by this *shifting terrain* of members positioning and repositioning themselves according to a vague set of unwritten rules. Antagonism within a music community is, primarily, a result of differing opinions regarding music theory and tradition according to the style. Opposition is more varied within a scene in terms of motives and actions

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Woo, Jamie Rennie, and Stuart R. Poyntz, "Scene Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 29.3 (2014): 287.

<sup>8</sup> Straw, "Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music," 373.

because it is not defined or categorized according to genre.<sup>9</sup> Players may rearrange the boundaries and rules in an effort to fit their lifestyle, gain popularity, or just enact random change. Another crucial distinction is that players are not limited to being just “players” of music, but also include managers, journalists, fans, groupies, club owners, DJs, producers, consumers, and record label owners (to name a few). The scene and music community share this engagement with human relationships but, additionally, the scene positions *place* as an equally significant component. This concentration on place was an inspiration in the development and study of the local film scene.

The place in relation to Scene Studies can be determined broadly (nation, region, or city), more finite (bar, club, or venue), or as a combination of both (Manchester was associated with both a city, Manchester, and a club, the Hacienda). The dynamics between relationship and place do not act alone but are regularly influenced by external scenes and their paraphernalia. A push and pull dichotomy exists as players *inside* the scene pull commodities, paraphernalia, places, and people they deem valuable to the center while pushing the boundaries of the scene to include new concepts or communities. External scenes, commodities, and players can enact the same push and pull actions within a scene. Imagine a scene represented by a visual diagram where arrows represent influence and a circle represents the boundaries of the scene. The representation becomes convoluted as thousands of influence arrows push and pull the scene circle into an abstraction. The envisioned diagram of obscurity provides a metaphorical analysis of Scene Studies. The visual, on a whole, is distorted and discontinued, however, scrutiny of its segments reveal invaluable information, which can only be acquired via the model.

### **Terrains of Logic**

The scene, as either an abstract theory or concrete form, did not appear out of thin air and initial scholars are quick to point out its influences. Straw solidifies the structure of a scene by using specific theoretical devices from Bourdieu and De Certeau to create a “logics of musical

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<sup>9</sup> Scenes have been closely associated with the development of genres like Punk and Grunge. However, many scenes have been grouped together via other characteristics. The Montreal DIY scene is an example where the method of producing music becomes the linking aspect for the scene in lieu of genre.

terrain.”<sup>10</sup> Straw creates three “logics” that become rules for the operation of a scene and I have defined them as such:

1. Scenes have boundaries, which are maintained by activities that either legitimize old patterns or integrate new procedures.
2. Cultural commodities circulate through a scene physically and temporally as they shift in value and usage.
3. Changes within scenes are the result of a complex pattern of successful and failed attempts at transformation.

The first rule uses Bourdieu’s notion of the *field* to describe the metaphysical boundaries of the scene. Bourdieu’s field is a space (physical or abstract) where agents and social positions are located. For example, a music venue (bar) is a field, which contains agents who occupy different social positions such as owner, bartender, musician, audio engineer, and patron. The first logic establishes the notion that a field has boundaries (or rules), which can be either written or unwritten. For instance, the bar opens and closes at specific times, patrons clap after songs are performed, and drug consumption is permitted but only in the designated bathroom area. As agents play the game of the field, they struggle to impose their own definitions and boundaries while using their social position to create taste. As an illustration, the owner of a punk music venue establishes an open mic acoustic night and therefore creates new rules and boundaries. The punk bands react to the new limitations and create a new genre of punkacoustica. Key Bourdieuan terms such as distinction, exclusivity, and taste become essential in the analysis of a scene’s limits and frontiers. It is vital to recognize that a specific field is not autonomous but develops as part of an endless three-dimensional network of fields.

The second logic is concerned with the circulation of cultural commodities and can be studied, in part, to measure what a scene values. As commodities spread through the populace their monetary and cultural value may shift and ebb in response to the ever-changing market. The cultural commodity can take many forms like a physical piece of media, a ticket to an event, or a drug of choice. Tracking and examining the value of a scene’s commodity across temporal and spatial transformations can develop a model of and lifetime for the scene. As a hypothetical example, the VHS copy of the 1981 film *Scanners* may have been relatively inconspicuous on its

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<sup>10</sup> Straw, "Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music," 374-375.



release date, but, after the critical and commercial success of *The Fly* (1986), its value grew as new fans sought out earlier Cronenberg works. With the film's 2001 DVD release, the necessity and value of the VHS copy diminished as fans sought a better quality version of the film. Criterion's 2014 Restored Blu-ray release garnered renewed interest in the film, and the value of the VHS grew exponentially as collectors sought out the VHS for its nostalgic Joann Daley cover art.

Straw's final logic is inspired by de Certeau's ground-breaking work on the concepts of strategy and tactics. Strategies and tactics work the same way in a scene as they do in the world at large. Structures of power employ strategies to control scene interactions while agents use tactics to adapt to the lived reality of the scene's structures and strategies. As an agent practices certain tactics, they are observed and reacted to by other agents' tactics in a never-ending cycle of transmutation. Suppose an indie pop band's tactic included playing a cover of a classic country song. A fan could react to this tactic with his/her own, by remixing the cover into a dubstep version. This newest version can be reacted to positively or negatively by other agents, and, in turn, help develop the taste of the scene and its unique characteristics. Straw perceives these changes as taking place either because of a power struggle for critical and commercial success, or as an evolution of relationships and affiliations between musical communities.<sup>11</sup>

As a scene maneuvers through these *logics of terrain*, it becomes more elaborate and complex and these acts become the essence of the scene. These logics provide a structural basis for analysis, but Scene Studies can be just as expansive as the definition itself. Barry Shank's sweeping survey of the rock scene in Austin is an example of the intensive in-depth geographical study akin to Communications research.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Diana Miller and Daniel Silver's recent article on political attitudes takes a different approach. It begins with a known certainty, place-based voting patterns, and determines the geographical scene and its effect on individuals by using databased evidence.<sup>13</sup> The study of scenes is not dependent on a certain methodology but remains open to interpretation that best suits the subject of inquiry.

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<sup>11</sup> Straw, "Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music," 375.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Diana L. Miller and Daniel Silver, "Cultural scenes and contextual effects on political attitudes," *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 2.3-4 (2015): 241-66.

## Individuality and Shared Identity

Holly Kruse's early work examined the indie pop scene located in Champaign, Illinois during the 80s and early 90s. Kruse's paper argues for a closer analysis of the individual and identity in relation to scene boundaries. Using the same logic, Kruse investigated the post-baby boom generation's (Gen X's) assumed lack of identity and culture as a result of scenes making these principles more disparate and varied. The scenes of the 80s provided a means for someone to identify himself/herself through a process of differentiation instead of resemblance (punk, indie pop, electronica).<sup>14</sup> A scene's shared identity is created, oftentimes, by occupying a distinct oppositional stance to the perceived mainstream of one's spatial and temporal existence. A group will gather in support of alternative cultural commodities, rules are formulated, and structures of power develop all under the authority of those with the most knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, an individual's awareness and comprehension of the scene's strategies, tactics, agents, and boundaries are correspondingly affiliated with distinction and taste. The caliber of an individual's taste (or knowledge) can be translated into power over the scene's ethics, ideas, agents, structures, and guidance. Conversely, someone who does not understand or is not familiar with the alternative lingo, places, rules, and commodities is labeled as a poseur, a person who is pretending to belong but does not understand the intricacy and motives of the codes of conduct. The label is a deeply offensive insult for an individual trying to belong. Identity creation via differentiation and integration in relation to the scene's people, places, and goods is vital for members, but is only part of how one positions oneself in a scene.

A motto sheds light on the intricacy of scene identification: "Who you are is not the **things** you like; who you are is **why** you like those things." An individual must have similar or acceptable motivations to belong in a cultural community. Someone cannot show up to a punk rock show because of their sole interest in the architectural aesthetics of the venue and expect to belong. An agent's motives can influence how outsiders judge a scene, regardless of how the scene would like to be perceived. From both within and without the scene, motivations act as part of identity creation making them imperative in a society that is dependent on taste and distinction.

The study of the individual within a scene is prescient for the same reasons as it was in 1993 (when Kruse wrote the article.) Consideration of the individual and individual processes

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<sup>14</sup> Holly Kruse, "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture." *Popular Music* 12.1 (1993): 40.

<sup>15</sup> Kruse, "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture," 36.

such a writing, recording, performing, purchasing tickets, driving home, and paying bills can reveal specificities about the inner workings of a scene. These specificities can increase understanding of how gender, race, class, and generation experience different social and cultural terrains.<sup>16</sup>

## **Local Internet**

In addition to studying the individual, Kruse has examined identity in music scenes since the coming of the internet era. Kruse continues to use indie music as a source of inspiration because its past is closely tied to geographical locations and physical places. In the early twenty-first century, scholars argued that an increased flow of information (via the internet) would act to disconnect the local from the scene.<sup>17</sup> While this increased access to similarly minded individuals and knowledge has accelerated the process of interaction between local, regional, and national music, the proliferation of scenes has not seemingly dropped off.<sup>18</sup> The tactics, agents, positions, and fields have rapidly transformed while still leaving many of the essential characteristics of scenes intact. The fanzine may now exist as an online blog but it has not destroyed the agents and tactics previously accustomed with the fanzine, nor has it stayed the same. Connecting across countries and the globe has become increasingly more important for bands, but the internet has changed local communication too.

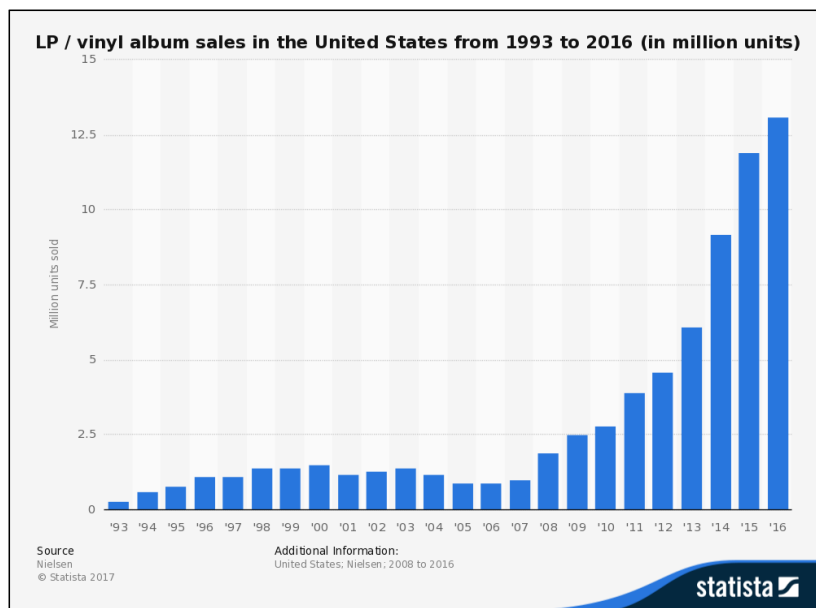
The local scene exists simultaneously in the regional, national, and global spectrums and cannot be separated, these these therefore must be studied together. The interactions between the local, regional, national, and global levels of influence can be analyzed in the same way earlier studies considered exchanges between different fields of local music scenes. For example, parts of the local scene such as music stores, physical media, and magazines have been replaced or diminished by online innovations such as iTunes and music blogs. Initial reactions predicted the death of physical media without comprehending the future consequences of these changes.

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<sup>16</sup> Kruse, "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture," 40.

<sup>17</sup> Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, eds., *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Holly Kruse, "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off," *Popular Music & Society* 33.5 (2010): 636.



**Fig. 4** Source: [www.statista.com/statistics/188822/lp-album-sales-in-the-united-states-since-2009](http://www.statista.com/statistics/188822/lp-album-sales-in-the-united-states-since-2009).

Artists and labels are selling physical media like tapes, records, and CDs to create a value of authenticity that is not associated with the online. While a CD is not verifiably more authentic than the same album on Spotify, the tactile nature of the former can be considered more real (and therefore more authentic) than the unknown qualities of streaming audio. Bands will release limited editions of recordings only on physical media to create the feeling of rarity that is missing since the digital publication of the record catalog. LP sales in the United States have risen to a high not seen since the late 1980s and now make up 6.5% of total album sales (1.6% increase over the previous year).<sup>19</sup> While DVD and Blu-ray sales continue to decrease, (like record sales did when tapes were first introduced), specialty labels that distribute cult, genre, and classic films have actually seen an uptick in sales.<sup>20</sup> Collectors and film aficionados continue to support a niche market of restored rarities for the same reasons that people are buying LPs. The market for rare physical media continues to grow, as evidenced by Massacre Video’s recent 50-copy VHS run of *555*, which unexpectedly, sold out in three minutes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "LP / Vinyl Album Sales in The United States from 1993 to 2016 (in Million Units)," Statista, accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/188822/lp-album-sales-in-the-united-states-since-2009/>.

<sup>20</sup> Jason Bailey, "The Premature Death of Physical Media – and the Cult Home Video Labels Keeping it Alive," Flavorwire, accessed August 20, 2017, <http://flavorwire.com/535883/the-premature-death-of-physical-media-and-the-cult-home-video-labels-keeping-it-alive>.

<sup>21</sup> Bailey, "The Premature Death of Physical Media – and the Cult Home Video Labels Keeping It Alive."

This new market has developed around a desire for a tactile experience contrary to digital streaming and downloads. Authenticity also takes the form of local gigs, which play a vital role in creating knowledge, taste, and power within a scene.<sup>22</sup> An individual's distinction and power could depend on their answer to the question, "Were you there when Arcade Fire played songs from *Funeral* before the album was released?" This type of question still matters despite the online presence of written, audio recorded, or video-recorded documentation of the event.

On a personal note, my experience as a teenager growing up with internet access confirmed many of these assessments. As a music obsessed youth, I would pore over websites like allmusic.com and pitchfork.com seeking to discover new and old music. However, I only discovered the band Modest Mouse after my friend let me borrow her *The Lonesome Crowded West* album. Personal relationships and the internet provided comparable amounts of taste and distinction in my search for new songs and bands. The internet has acted as a catalyst for the exponential growth of global communication but, within the model of Scene Studies, it has also expanded the regional and local connections.

The very act of getting on a computer and communicating is only attainable because of local implications such as computer access and internet service.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the local and the online cannot be thought of as separations because they are invariably connected. Online connections are used to access the larger national and global community and in the same way, they also link the user to the local. The local scene does not disappear because of the internet but becomes more varied as fields react in new ways to the increased communication spectrum. For example, a band may try to limit their online exposure to create a mystique about themselves, while still using the internet to communicate with local agents about show times and tape releases. Beyond the entanglement of domestic fields and local internet usage are the inclusion of global networks.

Suppose a university student has recently moved from Australia to Montreal. The student creates a Spotify playlist for their friend living in Sydney because they dislike the recommendation based on the website's algorithm. The tastes and playlist selections of the student have been influenced by their roommate, who grew up in Montreal. The roommate has taken the student to local francophone concerts, which were discovered via online music blogs

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<sup>22</sup> Kruse, "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off," 631.

<sup>23</sup> Kruse, "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off," 634.

run by locals. This simple model demonstrates how entangled the local and global have become, while still recognizing the significance of scenes and local communication, whether it is through online or offline means.

### Data Based Models

Scene Studies is not without its critics, who cite these theories as being too ambiguous and confusing while providing too little structural definition.<sup>24</sup> In its defense, the scene has been argued as less of a rubric and more like a model or exemplar, a concept that stimulates the senses without being about the senses.<sup>25</sup> While the model of the scene provides an excellent base for studying culture, the writings have focused too heavily on lifestyles of white male youth while ignoring groups of different race, gender and age. In addition, the politics and economics of locales being studied are too often ignored in such a way as to highlight the cultural resonance of the studies. By acknowledging previous shortcomings, the scene can continue to provide the resources to study locality while also embracing the underrepresented.

A new development has seen recent studies move away from the “classical” type of scene analysis to offer more analytical and data based studies. The origin for these studies is Daniel Silver and Terry Clark’s paper “The Power of Scenes.”<sup>26</sup> The essay argues for a set of analytical dimensions, which can be applied to scenes so they can be analyzed pragmatically while avoiding abstract qualities.

TABLE 1 Analytical dimensions of scenes I: theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy.		
Theatricality	Authenticity	Legitimacy
Mutual self-display	Discovering the real thing	Acting on moral bases
Seeing and being seen	Touching ground	Listening to duty
Appropriate vs. inappropriate	Genuine vs. phony	Right vs. wrong
Appearance	Identity	Intentions to act
Performing	Rooting	Evaluating

Fig. 5 Source: Silver and Clark 2015, 431.

<sup>24</sup> David Hesmondhalgh, "Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above," *Journal of Youth Studies* 8.1 (2005): 28-29.

<sup>25</sup> Woo, Rennie and Poyntz, "Scene Thinking," 292.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Silver and Terry Nichols Clark, "The Power of Scenes," *Cultural Studies* 29.3.

Legitimacy, theatricality, and authenticity were chosen as the three variables because of their impact on scene analysis and their ability to be quantified and measured.<sup>27</sup> By studying the specific modes of these variables, we can categorize, analyze, and evaluate scenes as cultural, social, and political elements. Underneath each of these categories are dimensions that consist of opposing terms which are used to classify which qualities relate to a particular scene or its amenities. Application of this framework can distinguish some of the major similarities and differences between a film scene and the more familiar music scene.

**TABLE 2** Analytical dimensions of scenes II: 15 dimensions of theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy.

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<i>Theatricality</i>	
Exhibitionistic	Reserved
Glamorous	Ordinary
Neighbourly	Distant
Transgressive	Conformist
Formal	Informal
<i>Legitimacy</i>	
Traditional	Novel
Charismatic	Routine
Utilitarian	Unproductive
Egalitarian	Particular
Self-expressive	Scripted
<i>Authenticity</i>	
Local	Global
State	Anti-state
Ethnic	Non-ethnic
Corporate	Independent
Rational	Non-rational

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**Fig. 6** Source: Silver and Clark 2015, 432.

Each larger category has five dimensions or subcategories underneath of it. The theoretical local film scene can be ranked in each of these subcategories, therefore giving an idea of what type of person, community, or location it might be most adept at thriving in. Using these scales to rate a scene will always be subjective, but the opposition of the categories provides a measure that can usually be agreed upon in an overwhelming majority.

<sup>27</sup> Silver and Clark, “The Power of Scenes,” 426.

## Local Film Scene Characteristics

The scales developed by Silver and Clark can be used to outline the characteristics of a local film scene. When assigning traits to the local film scene, it is necessary to reason why each trait is being associated. This act of categorizing is the first step in defining the local film scene.

Under the category of theatricality the local film scene is considered **exhibitionistic** because it relies on those willing to exhibit and share their work in front of an audience. While Hollywood film is associated with the glamorous, a local film scene can be considered **ordinary** because it does not have stars, red carpets, and big premieres. The film scene can be considered **neighborly** because it is associated with a close community of people who know each other. The film scene is definitely not conformist and fits the **transgressive** label because it allows for all types of films regardless of their content or themes. The scene is **informal**: there are no dress codes or lavish parties for those who want to participate.

As for legitimacy, the local film scene would fall under dimensions such as **novel** and **charismatic**. These choices are relevant to the local film scene's unique differences from mainstream film in production and distribution. The scene can also be considered **utilitarian** and **egalitarian** because it provides an outlet for those who are underrepresented or misrepresented to express themselves. And finally, it provides an opportunity for those who participate to be **self-expressive** through filmmaking.

In terms of authenticity, the film scene has strong ties to being **local** and **independent**. While the scene might receive **state** funds for its operation, it can act as an **anti-state** operation depending on the films being programmed. The local film scene is intended as a forum for varied representation by diverse people making it hypothetically **non-ethnic**.

The film scene's position on these scales produces an identity that is ordinary and accessible for everyone despite its willingness to exist outside of the norms of mainstream culture. It is this combination of qualities like transgressive, charismatic, novel, and self-expressive with seemingly opposed values like ordinary, local, rational, egalitarian, and utilitarian that makes the local film scene so unique. Furthermore, particular values are more significant in creating the identity of the film scene, such as local and self-expressive. The determination of the values associated with a scene help to categorize it by revealing its mood and tone.



## Defining Moment

The application of Scene Studies to film scenes is borne from the question, “Can a film scene exist in the same way a music scene does?” Key components of Scenes Studies have been summarized and discussed in this chapter because of their efficacy in being able to define the model of how a film scene may work.

Film societies and communities have been studied as smaller fragments of a scenic whole. For example, audience theory can analyze how spectators receive and process horror films,<sup>28</sup> while spatial theory might analyze the methods a microcinema employs to create authenticity.<sup>29</sup> Often, these studies remove the creator from the equation because of over-complication or inaccessibility. In contrast, the local filmmaker becomes an essential part of this study because of their interconnectedness with the local film scene. This study is uninterested in local audiences watching films directed by outsiders set in unfamiliar places. The idea is to discover, contemplate and consider the creation and circulation of films made within fixed borders of locality.

To better understand how the film scene acts, a theoretical framework must be assembled to define key terms and ideas. In this first chapter, a collection of essays and articles dealing with Scene Studies were reviewed and analyzed. This wide breadth of work deals with different definitions and applications of the scene as an analytical tool. The studies have been chosen because of their direct correlation to my personal work of creating a theoretical framework for defining/creating local film scenes.

As emphasized in this first chapter, the definition of a scene is fluid and subjective, which is why it can be useful in studying transitory communities based on cultural commodities. The flexibility of the term does remain limited in its usefulness if terms and definitions change throughout the writing process. Therefore, it is vital for this study to define the scene on its own terms before beginning an extended analytical expansion on the ideas explored in the first chapter. The subsequent application and analysis of local filmmaking/viewing through this lens will provide the groundwork for a *local film scene model*.

Simply put, a scene is where **places**, **people**, and **paraphernalia** interact with each other synchronously as a cultural process. These three components are the foundation for defining the

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<sup>28</sup> Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (1991): 2-13.

<sup>29</sup> Donna De Ville, “The Microcinema Movement and Montreal” (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2014).

local film scene and its operations. As such, each chapter will be dedicated to the examination of these components, in turn, revealing how each piece plays a part in scene creation individually, and as interwoven fragment of a whole. Studying each element independently can be perplexing because of their interdependence on one another. Consequently, a complete separation of these elements can never be fully realized. But, as we fragment the parts, a closer analysis of how these pieces are related to film viewing and filmmaking is possible (in opposition or similitude to the previous discussion of music scenes). In addition, this analysis originates a theoretical model for local film scenes based not only on film viewing, but also on the creation and distribution of films. The creation, distribution, and viewing of films are all essential parts of a scene and the locality of these actions are essential for a scene to exist. Contrastingly, music scenes are often built on local and touring artists but the film scene must focus on the local artist because of the rarity of touring filmmakers.

Of course, many discourses relating to these places, people and paraphernalia have been written and are continually augmented. Not all of these can be taken into account, but particularly prescient studies and theories will be used to develop how places, people, and paraphernalia work together or against one another as parts of a local film scene. I seek to answer questions such as:

1. Why are local films made?
2. Who makes local films?
3. Where are local films made?
4. Where can someone watch a local film?
5. What does a local film scene look like?
6. What does a local film scene offer that other services, structures, or models cannot?
7. What type of audience wants to watch local film?
8. What types of films are made locally?
9. What are the economics of a local film scene?
10. What is the difference between local film distribution and online or film festival distribution?

## Chapter 2: Place

Scene study theories have been closely associated with the analyses of the transmission of ideas and objects among a group of individuals. The entry point to many of these studies is the *place*. Whether the subjective place is a city, a neighborhood, or a club, this gathering spot enables a transference of various actions among its members. The study of place is not possible without acknowledging *space* and the connection between the two. The dictionary describes space as “a limited extent in one, two, or three dimensions,”<sup>30</sup> while place is defined as “a particular portion of space, whether of definite or indefinite extent.”<sup>31</sup>

Scholars have made distinctions between space and place based on their own discipline, social position, and political beliefs. Yi-Fu Tan's explanation and distinction of the terms is the most influential for this study. For Tan, the difference is related to the ways in which humans give meaning to specific areas or spaces.<sup>32</sup> For example, an conjectural grassy field could be defined as space because its beginning and end are undetermined and only exists as a notion. If the field exists and is given a name such as Little Grassy Park, new meanings become associated with the grassy field; it has become a place. According to Tan, this signification can be created in two different ways: through the senses or through conceptual models such as symbols or art. In other words, space is organized into places so humans can derive meaning from them.

The organization of space in support of local film communities has created new diverse meanings in contrast to the experience of attending mainstream theatres.<sup>33</sup> The introduction of mall multiplexes in the 1960s paved the way for the megaplex and a new focus on incorporating the theatre into a more varied amusement complex.<sup>34</sup> Modern megaplexes augment the film-going experience with arcade games, televisions in the lobby, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and pre-show trivia. These additions purport to provide a varied entertainment encounter, but, when distribution, marketing, and content are all standardize across corporate cinemas, the result is

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<sup>30</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Space,” accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/space>.

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “Place,” accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/place>.

<sup>32</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-5.

<sup>33</sup> de Ville, “The Microcinema Movement and Montreal,” 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Gomery, “Thinking about Motion Picture Exhibition,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 25 (1990): 6.

limited options and experiences.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the film scene place can be extremely varied in its locations and amenities, thereby creating a unique overall experience each time. These sites are represented by microcinemas, coffee shops, community centers, and filmmaking collectives. In fact, these sites can be anywhere; all that is needed is a projector, some white sheets, and a speaker for the local film-viewing place to exist. As film scene places are discussed in this chapter, it is these types of environments that are being referenced.

The place for film viewing must be a geographical location, which provides the opportunity for it to be valued as local. This understanding of a film scene's place as local (in contrast to global) is vital in building its social and political credentials. Similarly, the multiplex or megaplex is also local because of its geographical location, but the actual operation is realized on a global scale. CEOs relay information and direction to regional managers who relay it to cinema managers who then relay it to their employees. Decisions about programming, food, beverages, services, and scheduling are not made by local managers. Because of these differences, the multiplex is more closely related to the characteristics of a global identity.

### **Local and Global Place**

*Local* is defined as: "of, or relating to, or characteristic of a particular place."<sup>36</sup> According to this definition, there is a close relationship between the creation of local place and the characteristics of a place or places. Places are created out of spaces by giving them meaning and the grouping of these significant spaces results in tangible localities. The designation *local* cannot exclusively represent an idea but is a comparative term, thus, it must represent a geography or ideology that is smaller in comparison to another. The word is meaningless without at least two or more assumed or declared locations or ideas in active comparison. For example, local customs may be defined in terms of cities, regions, or countries as long as they are being compared to something larger like another country or the world. The scene draws much of its appeal from *locality* that is contingent on cities/neighborhoods and their characteristics. The local character of a scene is not wholly defined by comparison to larger corpuses but finds meaning in similarity to and difference

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<sup>35</sup> William Severini Kowinski, "The Malling of the Movies," *American Film* (September 1983): 52-56.

<sup>36</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. "Local," accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/local>

from other scenes (or existence in absence thereof).<sup>37</sup> Oftentimes, a particular locale will be valued because it offers something unique from another. For example, Montreal, as an urban center, offers different commodities, services, and social events than Toronto. These different events, languages, and shared beliefs can create value based on distinction and evaluation. Of course, these same localities can be created within cities when values are attributed to certain neighborhoods in comparison to others. The local film place becomes valuable because of its difference to what other locales offer or don't offer at all. The local multiplex may have local physicality and workers, but the films, filmmakers, film locations, concessions, and marketing materials are all either located or created somewhere else. The multiplex derives value from its global characteristics in contrast to the unique value inherent in a local film place.

The division between local and global ideas and values can be difficult to assess because of the terms' interconnectedness. In one comparison, a country can be considered local while, in another, the same geographic location would be considered global. So, what is actually being promoted by catchphrases encouraging people to “shop local” or “think global” and why are these statements easily understood? Or, how can these comparative terms denote and connote specific messages as signifiers in definitive statements?

It is generally acknowledged that economic theories recognize the global as penetrating, powerful, and influential while the local remains powerless, ineffectual, and readily manipulated by the global.<sup>38</sup> A power dynamic has been created that iterates the unequivocal importance of the global over the local. In response, scholars have attacked the global versus local binary in an effort to destabilize the relationship between the two and create a dynamic that does not innately value one over the other. Six points have been established by economic geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson to encourage a more complex discussion of these terms. Their points are as follows:

1. *Global and Local are interpretive frames*

The local and global are not actual places but frames of analysis. Not one place can be determined as local because it is dependent on the frame, which is being used to analyze the place. Again, a multiplex theatre can be seen as local because of its location in comparison to other

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<sup>37</sup> Janine Marchessault, "Film Scenes: Paris, New York, Toronto," *Public* 22-23 (2001): 68-69.

<sup>38</sup> J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame," in *Geographies of Power: Placing Scale*, eds. Andrew Herod and Melissa W. Wright (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 27.

multiplex theatres. It is also global because the content being shown comes from many different parts of the world. The local film is restricted to filmmakers, audiences, and products that are local in comparison to studio-produced films, independent films, and film festival films.

2. *Global and local derive meaning from what they are not*

The local cannot be defined without an existing definition of global and the contemplation of how local *is not* the same as the global. They rely on each other for position, power, interpretation, and meaning. Modern globalization has increased local communities' awareness of world issues and events. Accordingly, the local film scene acquires substance by differentiating itself from the global mainstream.

3. *The local and global offer points of view on networks that are more or less connected*

Because of their reliance on one another for existence, the global and local are always tethered. Different perspectives of networks can be generated by analyzing their localness/globalness and correlating connections. For example, a microcinema's website will generate visits from users located in the surrounding urban region while a corporate theatre chain's website visitors will encompass the entire country. The locations of a networks connection(s) can determine the scale and quality of the relationship.

4. *The global is local*

The global is made up of lots of locals. A closer look at anything global reveals the local. Global issues are always local on some level because they must first exist locally. The local film may not be distributed or viewed globally but still addresses global issues through local specificity.

5. *The local is global*

The local is always part of a larger whole. It only exists because it is a smaller region or entity in comparison to a larger one. The local film must use technologies that are produced and distributed on a global level.

6. *The global and local are processes, not locations*

Any local or global object is a hybrid of both local and global. Binaries can produce both differentiation and integration and are not fixed entities. The local film place can offer locality and globality depending on the lens being used to analyze it.<sup>39</sup>

These six points challenge and deconstruct the global/local binary of power as purveyed by mainstream ideologies. The labels are more akin to lenses by which one can analyze the social or political processes of scenes. The oppositional viewpoints evaluate contrasting characteristics and beliefs. A choice to study the film scene using local methodology was made to better evaluate its strengths. The local lens excels in highlighting reserved or hidden sites and forms of labor whose effect on the economy is often ignored.<sup>40</sup> A new language of economy can be developed for local areas so that social and political creativity and innovation may be embraced.<sup>41</sup> In their article, Graham and Gibson share examples of their own personal activities that are being enacted to effect change in their home regions.<sup>42</sup> Their prototype organizations consist of community gardens, how-to workshops, and creative reuse centers. The organization, funding, and applications of these spaces are aligned with those of the theoretical local film scene. The local film scene is an example of “the diverse economy, where non-capitalist activities are visible and viable in the economic terrain.”<sup>43</sup> The ideas and projects are small (local), but the authors acknowledge that they are hopeful their vision may have a global purchase one day.<sup>44</sup> In the author's own words, “if globalization discourse has produced weak and sickly locals, we will treat these symptoms by creating small, barely profitable enterprises, offering visions of communities that survive on gifts and voluntary labor, and telling stories of depressed regions where people cluster to make artifacts in community workshops.”<sup>45</sup>

This timely affidavit can be directly applied to the local filmmaking scene as a response to oversaturation of the global film product. The quote describes an imagined economy (here applied to a local film scene) that exists in opposition to globalization practices (theatre chains) in

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<sup>39</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame,” 30-33.

<sup>40</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame,” 40.

<sup>41</sup> A language that emphasizes activities like volunteering, donating, representing over profit, supply, demand, and salary.

<sup>42</sup> Community gardens, how-to workshops, working groups, creative reuse center.

<sup>43</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame,” 36.

<sup>44</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame,” 53.

<sup>45</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Beyond Global vs Local: Economic Politics Outside the Binary Frame,” 50.

order to enable new options and choices for the deprived locals (artists and audiences). The resulting diverse economy is almost unrecognizable as a ‘theatre’ because of its attention to the local and disregard for capital gain. The scene will be nurtured monetarily through alternative means such as volunteers, donations, and grants. By shifting the components of the movie economy (filmmaker, content, audience, distribution, and exhibition) to the local side of the scale, power and influence are repositioned inside the community instead of globally.

This position of power allows for local filmmakers to address issues that are relevant to the locale's own particularities, regardless of popularity or topicality. In contrast, global films are seen as brands (products), therefore, they must avoid untested themes, risky casting choices, and anything else that could negatively affect the profitability of the film. Global films are largely reactionary products that respond to the global majority’s acceptance of social and political issues. For example, the social lives of the LGBT community have only become more visible in mainstream (global) media since the lifestyle has become more socially and politically accepted over the past few decades. The local film scene can offer freedom for filmmakers to create art about lesser known or controversial issues and in the process anticipate future global trends and changes. Differences between global and local filmmaking can be evaluated by focusing on the dissimilar values that they are associated with.

### **Values of Local Authenticity**

Daniel Silver and Terry Clark’s paper “The Power of Scenes” provides a data-based analytical framework based on specific dimensions and their binary sub-values. The local/global binary falls under the dimension of *authenticity*. Locality is recognized as: a sense of being from, rooted in, this unique, distinct, irreplaceable place.<sup>46</sup> Silver and Clark rank areas as local when inhabitants prefer independent bars and music to bigger-named, glitzier, products produced by far away, anonymous companies. Proud locals associate superior quality with *being from somewhere* and seek out amenities that affirm this idea. Other key examples of a local person/place/thing include community theatre, local artists, independent bookstores, and poetry/stories/films about the regional. Minimal corporate entities and a low media presence are indicative of an area that scales as local.

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<sup>46</sup> Silver and Clark, “The Power of Scenes,” 430.



The amalgamation of local and place is a central concept upon which a local film scene must be built. The local film place embraces values and ideologies that differ from the multiplex and the independent theatre. Theoretically, the place is imbued with power, position, and influence because it is a key component of a scene. In addition, the local place acquires specific authority and influence because of its geographical position. An analysis of the values associated with local place further the argument for its existence as a counterpoint to global aspects of filmmaking and viewing. Local film scenes are not currently prevalent as cultural objects and therefore are difficult to study and analyze. The analysis of these values is often hypothetical or taken from an alternative scene that can be correlated to that of the local film scene.

### *Alternative*

The local film place is valuable as an alternative to the megaplex theatre. The multiplex exudes corporate sensibilities in opposition to the local film scene. For example, commercials for large corporations are played at loud volumes before the movie and a large assortment of pre-made snacks can be heated up and purchased at exorbitant prices. The multiplex theatre is often streamlined for entry and exit. There are few places for patrons to sit and chat while lingering is frowned upon.<sup>47</sup> For the corporate theatre, the less time patrons spend in the building the better. The quicker they can get audiences out of the building, the less turnaround time they have for the next showing, in turn making the theatre more profitable. Many of these large complexes house fifteen or more screens, resulting in large audiences leaving multiple theatres all at once. After film screenings, the audiences converge in the lobby or the parking lot, but only a small percentage have actually watched the same film, making post-screening discussions with other guests difficult and rare.

Oftentimes, the content is so familiar that an audience already knows what they will see before they see it. The mainstream theatre is obligated to show the latest superhero movie, the children's CGI animal comedy, or the adaptation of a popular YA novel.<sup>48</sup> The characteristics of the multiplex theatre are in direct contrast to those of the local film scene place. The independent

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<sup>47</sup> As a theatre manager I was taught to be suspicious of people lingering in the lobby.

<sup>48</sup> These categories represent 12 of the 13 top grossing films of 2016. "2016 Domestic Gross," Box Office Mojo, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2016>.

theatre is more closely aligned with the film place, but there are still differences that arise when they are compared to each other.

Montreal is a thriving artistic urban center and yet there are only a few independent theatres that operate on a weekly basis. The mainstays of the film community are Cinema Beaubien and Cinema du Parc, which are owned and operated by the same company. The Cineplex Forum programs about half of its twenty screens with alternative viewing choices and La Cinémathèque québécoise represents the only operating theatre that is dedicated to screening repertory films. These alternative cinemas offer alternative film viewing opportunities for locals but only La Cinémathèque québécoise regularly programs films made by local filmmakers. Most of the programming for these theatres (like almost all independent cinemas) concentrates on films that debuted at Sundance, Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, or Venice and will only receive limited releases. This is great for film lovers in the community but does not fulfill the demands of a local film scene. In comparison to megaplex theatres, the independent cinema is satisfying more of its operating functions through local means (ownership, programming choices), but the majority of the content remains global (a major draw for these establishments). With only one theatre willing to program local artists, this leaves a void for public expression through filmmaking.

A local film scene can provide the alternative to the alternative, a place for those freaks to come together in an effort to coalesce their eccentricities into a feasible sphere.<sup>49</sup> It provides entertainment for an audience that wants to be surprised and challenged by their film viewing experience. In support of this “other” are alternative places. These are places where filmmakers are allowed to set up shop before and after a film to answer questions and welcome critiques; places where the audience is seen as part of the film because of their close proximity to its creator and content; places where a community forms to support the screening of local content by donating money and voluntary services; places where films are made with minimal budgets and quick turnarounds. There is an assumed link between the envisioned film place and the film being shown. The alternative quality of the locale and its layout are harmonious with the alternative filmmakers and content. It must not be assumed that alternative is equivalent to experimental. The alternative exists because it is local in comparison to global mainstream films. Local film place emphasizes local representation without being restricted to certain genres, filmmaking

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<sup>49</sup> Alan Blum, “Scenes,” *Public* 22-23 (2001): 27-29

devices, budgets, casts and themes. By making a genre film in one's own community, it can access modes of alternativeness because of representation.<sup>50</sup>

### *Meet*

The local film scene is dependent on local film space as somewhere members can meet. A scene is sustained by the communication of its members and the introduction of new members. A place determines a physical access point where people can flow among one another. Many of these agents are involved in organizing, changing, and disrupting the scene's power structure as it is related to the place. The place encourages gathering, organizing, and conflict, as it is essential for scene creation.

The local film place encourages people to be themselves. It is inviting; visitors are allowed to loiter, the internet is free, there are places to sit and desks to use, and there is lots of food and drink for the masses. It might look like a neighborhood coffee shop with the only difference being a projector and screen on the back wall. It is an event space where people come early and stay late because they want to be there. It might be a room where tables are pushed to the sides and chairs are realigned to allow for film screenings and then rearranged for post-film discussion. The space does not matter but the place being formed does. The film place must strive for necessary amenities that complement the growth and interaction of the people, commodities, and other paraphernalia of the scene. These might include open access areas for sitting and talking, volunteer workers, and bathroom access. The physicality of the place becomes essential for the film scene in the same way a music venue works even though the owner/operator does not always pre-form the space. It is the imperfection of space and place that allows for creativity and development among the scene's members.

The gathering place also allows for the filmmaker to build an audience in the same way a music venue does. A glance at the local music venue La Sala Rossa's upcoming events reveals that the overwhelming majority of their gigs feature more than one band or artist performing. An audience may show up to see a specific band, but will be exposed to other artists' music in an attempt to create a bigger audience that is linked through place and commodity. A filmmaker at a local film place will invite friends, family, and their fans who will also be exposed to other films.

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<sup>50</sup> For example, a horror film becomes alternative when it is affiliated with and made by senior citizens.

This local audience growth through artist and place linking is an effective process that creates new communities around cultural commodities.

Another important aspect of the local film place is developing a sense of *liveness* in the same way a music show does. In this realm of a live show, audience members can meet the band and interact with its members on a personal level. This sense of living reality can be accomplished when filmmakers introduce their art and perform Q&As after the screening. The interaction and meeting of filmmaker and audience become the reason for attendance, similar to seeing a band or comedian perform live. In addition, experimental practices such as performed musical scores, dubbing, sing-a-longs, and themed viewing parties create a sense of liveness and interactivity as an alternative to the regular film viewing experience.

The music venue is important because it gives access to a living, breathing scene while making the product scarce at the same time. For example, I attended a local gig in Montreal, where, after the show, a DJ played music while the billed artists chatted with attendees. Access to the event was valued at \$5, and knowledge about the event was acquired through inside connections.<sup>51</sup> The boundaries that I overcame to attend created a sense of exclusivity and rarity that increased when the artist played new unreleased songs. The combination of locality, exclusiveness, rarity, and sociality provided an outlet for the creator and an inlet for the audience to form a scene moment. Because admission includes monetary exchanges it provides income for both the artist and place (shared between the two). The place can also provide the artist with a temporary storefront where they can sell merchandise such as t-shirts, posters, and buttons.

Theoretically, the film place can use this model to create a scene juncture for the movie commodity despite the differences in performance. By making these events rare and exclusive, filmmakers can create reasons for an audience to attend film screenings. This includes not posting new films to YouTube or Vimeo so they can only be seen first at film screening events. In addition, filmmakers can sell physical commodities that support their artistic vision such as DVDs or movie posters. Of course, the line between making something accessible and inaccessible is always being redrawn and discussed in the scene movement, but the significance lies in how this works in opposition to the accessibility of mainstream and independent theatre screenings.

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<sup>51</sup> In this instance, the artist's Twitter feed.

## *Share*

A local film place is somewhere for sharing, where creators have access to an audience that is willing to participate. The film space is somewhat exclusive because of the lack of mainstream marketing used to gain audiences. A film space like Double Negative, located in Montreal, relies on word of mouth to reach new audiences and creators that are interested in niche local filmmaking. The audience has to work to be there and looks to gain and give to the screening in a more direct way. The place's impact on sharing cannot be overstated. A question kept coming back to my mind as I viewed sharing practices in different spaces and places. As a filmmaker, would I rather have my film watched and liked by thousands of anonymous people online or viewed by thirty people in a room with whom I can have a post-screening discussion?

Of course, the answer bears complexities that include economic considerations, a filmmaker's intentions, and the advantages/disadvantages of critique. These considerations are covered in following chapters that focus on people and paraphernalia. Regardless of the answer, the dichotomy of face-to-face discussion versus online comments can be reorganized into locality versus globality. The local film place empowers discussion as a tool for learning and understanding whereas online exhibitors imbue a view or comment with monetary value as evidenced by YouTube's economic model. The argument of online sharing versus local sharing becomes one about local values versus global values.

There is a closeness and vulnerability synonymous with local publication of creative material. Sharing is the necessary acceptance of exposing oneself for critique or praise. The local film place can encourage and support positive benefits of vulnerability<sup>52</sup> by creating a *safe space*. A much-debated talking point in the political sphere, the safe space has numerous iterations that correspond with different philosophies. It is best for a local film place to have an adaptive approach to safe space principles because the organizers cannot always perceive what may or may not make a space unsafe. Safe spaces have been criticized for stifling discussion about controversial topics while ostracizing both marginalized communities and those who oppose their beliefs.<sup>53</sup> The balancing act between freedom of speech and safe space is constantly shifting

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<sup>52</sup> Erik M. Gregory and Pamela B. Rutledge, *Exploring Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Well-Being* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2016), 10.

<sup>53</sup> Alan Levinovitz, "How Trigger Warnings Silence Religious Students," *The Atlantic*, August 30, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/silencing-religious-students-on-campus/497951/>.

based on participants' histories and needs. Establishing ground rules for presentation and discussion should not limit an artist's expression or an audience's discussion. The rules are fluid and can change in respect to different marginalized groups or material shown.

I have personally witnessed equally great and awful Q&A sessions at film festivals such as Sundance and SXSW. I pondered on why some of these discussions were so engaging while others became painful to be a part of. It is often surprising to find that most of these venues and events don't have any guidelines to help situate and organize the actual discussions. In lieu of these types of documents, I have created my own personal set of rules that encourages expression, freedom of speech, discussion, criticism, safety, empathy, and respect as much as possible. These guidelines are the culmination of my analysis of great filmmaking discussions I have been able to participate in. It must be acknowledged that not all of these sentiments can exist at their full potential all of the time. Artistic expression is vulnerability and therefore the susceptibility to emotional harm and criticism making one feel unsafe is a natural consequence, but this must not replace the desire to make one feel respected for his/her beliefs. A beginning list of guidelines is as follows:

1. Participants can pass on questions that make them feel uncomfortable.
2. Participants do not need to know the answer to all questions but are still responsible for trying their best to answer questions. Making art is not always easily explained.
3. Participants must speak for themselves by using "I statements" when expressing feelings or opinions.
4. An organized system for question asking and answering must be developed so participants are not overlooked or ignored.
5. Arguments are good. They cannot be avoided. Embrace them in a respectful manner.
6. Be vulnerable. You can be wrong. You can have your mind changed. You make mistakes.
7. Think before you speak. Take one or two minutes to formulate what you are trying to express and why.
8. Aggressive tone or content will need to be rephrased or it will be dismissed.

Reviewing guidelines before discussions can result in better organized and more productive debates among participants. The film place can be an access point for those who want to share while also being a safe space by accessing guidelines and being open for discussion and change.

By creating a set of guidelines, one can also analyze why some rules are unwritten and how the scene's culture determines its protocols beyond written guidelines.

### *Discuss*

Closely related to the ideas of sharing and meeting, the place becomes a communication hub for all types of interactions. *Meeting* is centered on how the individual encounters the place and *sharing* highlights the interaction between the audience and the creator. *Discussion* refers to the place as a communication hub for creator-to-creator and audience-to-audience conversations.

The access to the film and creator may inspire and motivate the audience member to act on their own creative inclinations. Audience members can share ideas for films with other audience members who can then collaborate on the project. The resulting film may then be screened at the same venue in the coming weeks or months. In this example, discussion allows the audience member to cross the line between artist and audience. Discussion allows the local film scene to thrive as collaboration increases. The local film has smaller crews but is just as cooperative as a blockbuster or independent film. The place offers itself as a gathering area where collaboration can begin.

Creator-to-creator communication is the other half of communication associated with discussion. Artistic expression can be emotionally and physically draining and support from fellow creators is essential for a filmmaker. Creators can identify with similar obstacles, critical responses and other issues related to their art. The support group made up of creators can rely on one another for ideas, critiques, revisions, and notes. This communication is not always supportive and creator conflict drives the scene forward in new and exciting ways. Many songs, paintings, and films have been made in response to a like or dislike of peers' work. Sometimes, creators dismiss the work of others or try to surpass their artistic invention. The Beatles' producer spoke about this competitive nature, in regards to the band's reaction to the Beach Boys album *Pet Sounds*, when he said, "Without *Pet Sounds*, *Sgt. Pepper* would have never happened . . . *Pepper* was an attempt to equal *Pet Sounds*."<sup>54</sup> Support and competition between creators is stimulated by in-person contact and viewing one another's films made available through the film

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<sup>54</sup> Jerry Crowe, "Pet Sounds Sessions: Body of Influence Put in a Box," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/nov/01/entertainment/ca-48891>.

place. These interactions are just a few of the many that take place as taste and distinction are defined effectively creating the boundaries of the scene.

Because creators are often showing their films alongside each other, the local film space is a natural venue for this type of interaction. Comfort, access, and design are all characteristics of the place that support interplay. For example, an open design with comfortable chairs encourages participants to linger after screenings and discuss current and future projects. Even something as simple as having tables in the lobby can further promote the necessary note-taking for future projects. The impact of small spatial decisions cannot be overlooked when creating a place for the local film scene.

### *Consistency*

The local film place has a consistency of location and geography that is similar to those of a multiplex or independent theatre. One could argue that film festivals have taken the place of arthouse theatres in Montreal, but these one-off structures build more fluid communities. Firstly, the goods and creations are often imported from all over the world. Artists and audiences arrive from all over the world to either watch or show their films over a short period of time. As quickly as filmmakers and audiences appear, they leave again.

Local attendance of film festivals vary widely depending on the stature and cultural cachet of the event. This past year, about 83% of Fantasia Film Festival attendees were from the Montreal area<sup>55</sup>, contrastingly, only 33% of Sundance Film Festival attendees were residents of Utah.<sup>56</sup> As noted, it is possible for the film festival to bring local audiences together in support of local content, but this is a small percentage of the overall demographics of the festivals. Of the one hundred and fifty eight films that played the 2016 Fantasia Film Festival, only eight were listed as Canadian. Of these eight films, there were zero that were made by local filmmakers in Montreal. This is not a slight to the festival, but positions the local film place as an alternative to the locality that is associated with such festivals. Beyond the two week length of the festival there is little support for bringing local filmmakers and audiences together. In contrast, a local film scene has regular screenings and events. Consistency has been aligned with building a strong

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<sup>55</sup> "Sponsorship and Advertising Opportunities," Fantasia Film Festival, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://www.fantasiafestival.com/2016/en/pre-festival/sponsorships-advertising>

<sup>56</sup> Dianne Meppen and Juliette Tennert, "Economic Impact of the 2016 Sundance Film Festival," *Report, University of Utah* (2016): 3.



social media presence and similarly, a strong local scene cannot be formed without having consistent events.<sup>57</sup> Consistency is important because it replicates models of distribution like TV or mainstream theatres where there is a schedule. The consistency of a local film place creates a scene where members can assume the location is open certain days at certain times allowing for easier access and more attendance.

### *Seeing Yourself*

The local film is an anomaly for anyone not living in New York or Los Angeles, *but*, when we do see something that is recognizable on screen, it can be an empowering experience. In addition to the space of the screening being local, the actual space and place represented on screen is located locally. This representation of space and place while being located in the same space and place can result in an intense sense of reality or connection to the image. This is similar to special event screenings that put the audience in the movie, for example, a recent screening of *Jaws* took place at a lake with the spectators floating on inner tubes watching a giant inflatable screen on the shore.

Immediate and direct representation of locality is a way for the audience to discover others and themselves. The different way someone sees home may inspire an artist's filmmaking practice, or better yet, encourage discussion and thought on how one views themselves at home. A battle of representation can be played out on the screen by local filmmakers rather than foreign ambassadors. An important factor of a local film scene is its ability to represent those who are undermined by classical filmmaking.

It goes without saying that seeing one's home on screen is exciting and invigorating. The experience is similar to watching a home movie and delivers a similar viewing sensation that is extremely immediate and relevant. The film is no longer a window to the outside world but a mirror reflecting an individual's own reality. At the same time, the reflection is altered because it represents a different perspective on the same reality. Being able to watch yourself or your work on screen with community members from your neighborhood brings together layers of community in a new and exciting way. Many of the effects can only be assumed because there is so little research or data to represent the types of feelings or benefits associated with this practice.

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<sup>57</sup> David Garland, "12 Keys to Building Your Online Community," *The Rise to the Top*, accessed June 10, 2017, <https://therisetothetop.com/davids-blog/12-keys-building-online-community/>.

All of these values and their merits are recognized because of the physicality of the local film place, but how do they work in opposition to or conjunction with the online culture of today?

### **Physical Place and Digital Space**

To begin, this is not an argument that the physical place is better than the digital space or vice-versa; it has to be understood that the conventional and virtual are not truly separate.<sup>58</sup> For a filmmaker, the Internet has been advertised as a tool that can expose one's work to a wider audience via streaming sites, blogs, or artist-run pages. The theoretical model is one of a decentralized filmmaking network where access to content is efficient and accessible. The artist's film can be shared to millions with the simple push of a button. Vincent Mosco, a Communications scholar, calls this idea "the digital sublime," a place where the myths and models of the technological age are unproblematic and perfect.<sup>59</sup> This digital sublime ignores simple problems that plague the technological revolution, such as limited internet access for a large portion of the world due to expensive equipment, no computers, or no electricity. The speed of internet connections also limits the quality of files that can be streamed. For example, Netflix films max out at a bit rate of 14 Mbps while Blu-Ray can have a maximum bit rate of 50 Mbps.<sup>60</sup> The compression of films for Netflix results in degraded quality. A local film place can be more flexible in its viewing options, allowing the creator to show the best quality version of the film to the audience.

These are the types of issues that split the locality of the film place and the globality of the online viewing sites. The globality and easiness of uploading videos to YouTube and Vimeo have resulted in a proliferation of content for audiences. Consequently, William Dutton observes, "If the proliferation of communication options becomes overwhelming, people might well look again for gatekeepers to filter, prioritize, and select information for the user or consumer."<sup>61</sup> The local film scene offers a place where gatekeeping and taste-testing is made smaller and more accessible to an audience. Again, the film place offers an alternative to the online, a local option

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<sup>58</sup> Kruse, "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off," 632.

<sup>59</sup> Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005).

<sup>60</sup> Bit rate is the best indicator of video quality because it is a determination of how much information or data there is in each frame.

<sup>61</sup> William H. Dutton, "The Internet and Social Transformation: Reconfiguring Access," in *Transforming Enterprise: The Economic and Social Implications of Information Technology*, eds. William H. Dutton et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 375

in the face of the global. With the proliferation of content, online communication scholars contend that, “Unless musicians could generate significant links from other websites<sup>62</sup>, or could mobilise audiences for self-produced material, their sounds were likely to be lost in a ‘sea’ of digital noise.”<sup>63</sup> This is a complex problem; the internet has radically changed the structure of the film industry to allow independent creators the ability to share their work with more people more easily. But this easily accessible content has drastically increased the competition between independent creators. The local film place provides community members with a creative outlet, in turn, generating more local content. As more local content is created, the film place generates competition (more content, less available screen time) which breeds different types of responses.

A wealth of academic research demonstrates that online communication is as valuable and meaningful as offline communication (examples include examinations of college students’ relationships via email<sup>64</sup> and the work of Joe Walther<sup>65</sup>). However, we should not and cannot assume that the internet operates outside notions of locality or located-ness, or that these concepts are no longer relevant to how people identify and understand themselves and others in an increasingly online world. In fact, as personal mobile communication devices become pervasive, noting one’s physical location has become commonplace.<sup>66</sup> For instance, tweets on Twitter and status updates on Facebook can post a person’s location. Snapchat has recently passed Twitter to become the third most popular social media app among millennials.<sup>67</sup> The app is based around the idea that users can share their own locality (through pictures and video) instantly with those who are following them. When a user takes a picture or video, it is immediately available to friends and, in turn, visually assigns the user to the place in which they are currently located. It is this combination of the digital and physical that appeals to the millennial generation that works beyond the local and global dichotomy.

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<sup>62</sup> This *other* refers to websites other than their own personal music website.

<sup>63</sup> John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 261.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson et al., “College Students’ Use of Relational Management Strategies in Email in Long-Distance and Geographically Close Relationships,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13.2 (2008): 381-404.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph B. Walther et al. “Interpersonal and Hyperpersonal Dimensions of Computer-Mediated Communication,” in *The Handbook of the Psychology of Communication Technology*, ed. S. Shyam Sundar (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 1-22.

<sup>66</sup> Kruse, “Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off,” 637.

<sup>67</sup> “Snapchat is Now the Third Most Popular Social Network Among Millennials,” MW Partners, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://mwpartners.com/snapchat-is-now-the-third-most-popular-social-network-among-millennials/>.

A recent study drew attention to the increased popularity of concert going over a two-year period. From the beginning of 2013 until the end of 2014, concert attendance increased among those making under \$30,000 and with those aged 18-24. Going to a concert at a bar (smaller shows) increased by 5%, indicating that local venues are gaining popularity.<sup>68</sup> This data supports the growing trend of younger people attending smaller local venues as a place for entertainment. The digital space is an important contributor to the increase in concert attendance. 58% of concert goers bought a ticket online, an increase of 5% over the previous year. Online purchasing was far and away the most used method of obtaining a concert ticket (box office was 15%). The digital space and physical place are finding new ways of supporting one another and the local film place must also adapt to these changes.

A visible and consistent online presence would effectively position the film place as easily accessible for different audiences while maintaining its physicality. Online access can strengthen the boundaries and bonds of the local film scene while providing information about schedules, submission requirements, and upcoming programs. Websites and social media pages can reinforce values previously discussed, such as meeting, sharing, discussing, consistency, and seeing yourself by producing posts that highlight these ideas (for example, a post that compares the diversity of creators for an upcoming program with the current sameness of directors whose films are playing at the multiplex). The local film place creates a sense of authenticity for both filmmaker and audience that cannot be replicated by theatre chains or independent cinemas.

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<sup>68</sup> “U.S. Live Event Attendance Study,” LiveAnalytics, accessed June 10, 2017, [https://www.slideshare.net/LiveAnalytics?utm\\_campaign=profiletracking&utm\\_medium=sssite&utm\\_source=ssslideview](https://www.slideshare.net/LiveAnalytics?utm_campaign=profiletracking&utm_medium=sssite&utm_source=ssslideview).

### Chapter 3: People

A local film scene is a place for people to gather, converse, participate, purchase commodities, and share other paraphernalia. Most often, the commodity acts as the connecting force of a scene (e.g. similar sounding bands are grouped together and named to distinguish them from others). Consequently, the people involved in a scene are also united in assumed expectations of attire, vernacular, and sociality. The reality of this presumption is obviously more complex. Scene members gather together because of their shared interests and can be observably similar, but neglecting their individuality oversimplifies the labyrinth of individual interactions present in scene maintenance. A group-focused analysis ignores the presence of a power structure within the scene. Members hold varying degrees of influence on taste and opinion, positions of authority that are constantly shifting in reaction to other members' approval, opposition, or indifference.<sup>69</sup> The dynamics of the group and individual relationship are inherent to the scene.

In this particular model of a film scene, the members are *local*, meaning they reside in the city or neighborhood determined by the geographical limits of the scene. The members are dependent on one another because their varied actions and duties coalesce in the paradox of entropic creation. For example, in a large urban center such as Montreal, there is no shortage of local filmmakers wanting to create and share their work with a (live) audience, but there are limited spaces and events dedicated to this idea. Montreal has a number of film collectives that host weekly and/or monthly screenings, but the majority of these events show films from filmmakers who are not local (Montreal-based). Currently, Kino'00 is the only film collective which hosts monthly events to screen their works. Furthermore, even if there were more events for local filmmakers to screen their work, there is still a need for an audience to attend. It is true that the audience provides financial support for the scene, but just as crucial is the cultural capital that is created when events are well attended and discussed (word of mouth). The scene cannot exist without the multiplicity of roles being filled with individuals, whether they are artists, club owners, or audience members. The members of a scene can be categorized by their interactions with commodities, paraphernalia and places associated with the scene. The three categories that

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<sup>69</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 84-86.

encompass the members of the scene are creator, audience, and organizer. The categories are not mutually exclusive; many individuals belong to more than one of these groups.

Although a scene is defined by the grouping of people, places, and paraphernalia, individual artists are often chosen or volunteer as the *voice of the movement*. In response, some scene members may despair at these categorizations because they do not identify with those individuals and their commodities. During the explosion of grunge, Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain famously insulted Pearl Jam in numerous interviews, labeling the band as corporate puppets.<sup>70</sup> In defense of the artist as an individual, a scene could be described as the gathering of *difference* rather than lumping artists and their commodities into *sameness*. By this definition, creators come together in scene formation, not because of similitude and conformity in artistic endeavors, but because they are working in an alternative to the mainstream.<sup>71</sup> By drawing boundaries around their art as alternative (or authentic, local, essential, singular), artists often create groupings based on difference in relation to the mainstream (or any other designated commodity grouping) rather than similarity to each other's artwork. The local film scene can be approached using this methodology as creators, organizers, and audience act as and encompass an alternative to the existing filmmaking and viewing options.

## Creator

In filmmaking, the creator label is associated with the director. Their responsibilities change from movie to movie, as each individual's directing style differs. Overall, he/she can be described as the author of the film and is given creative control over the project. Of course, this simplified definition undermines the collaboration needed when making a film but job responsibilities like director play an important part. Roles such as cinematographer, writer, and editor each have specific duties and, in turn, define the way in which a film is approached and created. Jobs and responsibilities are designed to streamline the filmmaking process, making it more efficient and more profitable. As outlined in the previous chapter, the local film scene can provide an

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<sup>70</sup> "An interview with...Kurt Cobain," The Internet Nirvana Fan Club, accessed June 06, 2017, <http://www.nirvanaclub.com/info/articles/05.00.92-flipside.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Shan Huang, "Independence at Large: Contemporary China's Alternative Music Scenes and the Cultural Practices of Post-Socialist Urban Youth" (MA Thesis, University of South Carolina, 2012): 1-2.

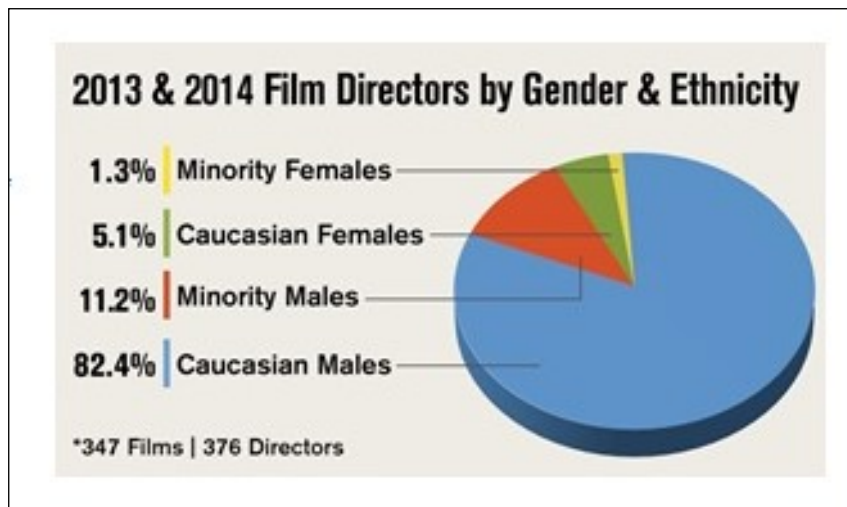
alternative to the existing culture of filmmaking. Because the film scene is not driven by profits, the creators can take more risks and experiment during the creative process of making the film.

Local films lack the manpower and budgetary support to which mainstream films are accustomed (film crews can range anywhere from a couple of hundred to over three thousand people).<sup>72</sup> It is not practical for a local creator to make films using the same mold as mainstream filmmakers, but they can overcome restrictions (no budget, no actors, limited equipment) by employing alternative practices that deconstruct the traditional film jobs. It can be difficult for a local filmmaker to find enough time to write, film, and edit a full-length film. Alternatively, a group of filmmakers could write a script together and each direct a piece of the film using different actors and sets and combine them to make one film. The quality and availability of prosumer equipment and software can make it possible for one person to work in every department (director, editor, composer and so on). Digital files make it easier to pass the film from individual to individual in the creative process. As an experiment in interpretation, a film could be made where the writer, director, editor, and composer never meet but interpret the work given to them in their own way. Because the local film scene is concerned with community and expression, the commodities are not produced to maximize a ticket-buying audience. In fact, alternative creative practices become part of the reason for a (niche) audience to attend a film screening.

In addition to differing creative practices, the local film scene can also separate itself from the gender, cultural, and ethnic standards associated with mainstream film. A report produced by the DGA in 2015 detailed the percentage of full length film directors by gender and ethnicity. The data shows a great disparity in the number of men versus women directing films and even more so, Caucasian versus minority directors.

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<sup>72</sup> "How many people work on a Hollywood film?," Stephen Follows, accessed June 06, 2017, <https://stephenfollows.com/how-many-people-work-on-a-hollywood-film/>.



**Fig. 7** Source: <https://www.dga.org/News/PressReleases/2015/151209-DGA-Publishes-Inaugural-Feature-Film-Diversity-Report.aspx>.

This data is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the disproportionate amount of women and minorities either working behind the scenes or in front of them. In 1998, 17% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers were women and that number remains the same in 2016.<sup>73</sup> This data is based on the top 250 domestic grossing films, but the report also covers percentages for top 100 and top 500 domestic grossing films.

Unsurprisingly, the percentages of women behind-the-scenes increases when including lower grossing films and decreases when only looking at the top 100 films. The local film scene is not a solution to these problems, but an alternative where these types of issues can be addressed on a local level. The local film scene cannot provide the same exposure or economic rewards as mainstream filmmaking, but it can be organized to support those who are overlooked and underappreciated. Filmmaking minorities can group together as *alternative artists* to increase their cultural cachet in the same way that saw punk or grunge bands increase their prominence. A recent example is the formation of Women in Film and Television Atlantic, a non-profit association that, “advances the careers of women working in film, television and screen-based media based in Atlantic Canada.”<sup>74</sup> The group programs a festival and workshop that is represented by almost only females (there were two male speakers). They hold bi-annual film

<sup>73</sup> Martha M. Lauzen, “The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Film of 2016,” *Report, School of Theatre, Television & Film, San Diego State University* (2017), accessed June 6, 2017, <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research/>.

<sup>74</sup> “Welcome to WIFT-AT,” Women in Film and Television Atlantic, accessed on June 11, 2017, <http://www.wift-at.com/info>.



club screenings of women-directed films that only women members are allowed to attend. They also support women filmmakers through grants and development programs with the resulting films being screened at WIFT-AT events. The group now has over a 160 members and is a testament to the power of gathering minority and difference together to effectively create distinction and prestige. The local film scene provides a necessary outlet for alternative artists to gather together, practice their craft and screen their films to an audience.

Restrictions and barriers for the screening of films will necessarily still exist for the scene because of the requirement of selection.<sup>75</sup> By basing restrictions for submission on the geographical residence of the creator/film, previous constraints are dissolved by imposing new ones. Constraints and rejections will still exist within the film scene based on the taste of its creators, organizers, and audience, but the hope is they work alternatively to the existing power structure of mainstream cinema. As evidenced by collected data,<sup>76</sup> it can take decades of struggle for the rigid power structures of mainstream film to move in any direction.<sup>77</sup> The fluidity of the scene allows for a structure that can readily change to accept new creators (or rid itself of old ones). Whether this has a positive or negative effect on an existing film scene has to be argued separately, but the value is situated in the ability and predisposition for change.

The moniker of alternative creator can extend beyond gender and cultural minorities to include neglected creative minorities. Locality allows for first time filmmakers to be embraced and nourished despite their unfamiliarity with the filmmaking process. The model anticipates filmmakers of all ages and economic positions making films as a way to exercise their creativity while forming a diverse local sociality. Specific groups<sup>78</sup> can be highlighted by developing programs based on various thematic elements to which creators can relate.

This output is still limited by the creator's ability to access the devices needed to make a film, but with the onslaught of cheap digital video recorders, filmmaking has become more and more accessible. All new smartphones can record video in HD quality and there are a plethora of

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<sup>75</sup> This is based on the assumption that more films will be submitted than time will allow for the screening of said films.

<sup>76</sup> "Research," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, accessed June 06, 2017, <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research/>.

<sup>77</sup> There are many reasons for this rigid structure and the difficulty for it to change. This paper is concerned with finding alternative methods of film screening for these types of creators but does not advocate for the local film scene as a substitution for the gross inequality represented by mainstream films.

<sup>78</sup> First-time filmmakers, women, immigrants, seniors, youths, religious groups, impoverished peoples, etc.

cheap attachments for these phones that allow for more customization. In addition, there are several sites dedicated to helping filmmakers build DIY additions (Steadicams, shoulder mounts, dolly tracks, and so forth) for very little money. In the past decade, the introduction of smartphones has given users the ability to film high-quality video at any time and anywhere. The bigger issue for filmmakers is recording sound and being able to edit their video. For any large production, these are necessities, but the locally-made film can effectively use these problems to express creativity. For example, a program of silent films could be organized where accepted works and their creators are paired up with local bands to create a score that can be played live at the screenings. The past can be used for inspiration such as Italian Neorealism's use of dubbing in post-production. With a relatively small amount of investment, a local film place could also set up a workstation for editing that could be scheduled for use by local filmmakers. In one month, the Austin Film Society has 19 separate classes or workshops devoted to different skills such as editing, cinematography, and audio recording.<sup>79</sup> Film collectives and film societies provide examples for how the local film scene can reach out to support filmmakers in a variety of ways beyond the screening of completed films. This outreach is essential for the local film scene to help develop local talent and support its own growth. It is important that the local film scene works to make the filmmaking process as accessible as possible for those who want to get involved. It is also a way to make sure there is a consistency to or growth in submissions.

## **Organizer**

This job rests in the hands of the organizer(s) who create the (power) structure for the local film scene. Oftentimes, creators/audience take on the role as organizer to facilitate opportunities for themselves and close associates. This role is more abstract than the creator because of the different functions that must be filled by the organizer. The organizer can move from programmer to copyreader to presenter in the space of a few hours and this only represents a small fraction of the jobs performed by the individual. The organizer is responsible for reaching out to both creators and audiences by creating and advertising programs of interest for both parties. This job of middle man extends to moderating discussions where the organizer controls the environment for both the creators and the audience.

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<sup>79</sup> "Classes and Events," Austin Film Society, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://www.austinfilm.org/classes-events/>.

The job of creating screening programs inevitably includes the acceptance and rejection of submitted films. By taking part in this type of organizing, the person is creating taste for the local film scene based upon their programming and film selections. Bourdieu would argue that this taste-making activity could result in class fraction or cultural hegemony.<sup>80</sup> The organizers would take up the position of “ruling class,” and determine the dominant aesthetic. The audience, as part of the “working class,” are required to define their own aesthetic by way of the dominant “ruling class” aesthetic.<sup>81</sup> Their taste must be positioned in relation to the taste of those in control. Referring to power and control, Bourdieu’s theories pay particular attention to how children develop taste by watching, listening and being taught by their parents.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, those who enter the film scene are persuasively instructed concerning the scene’s principles of taste from existing members, organizers and creators. Taste-making is a necessary process for the scene as it fulfills the need for boundary-making and, in turn, separates the scene from other cultural activities. At the same time, it can enact a power dominance that is representative of the “ruling class” which can push new members away. The struggle for taste and power can ultimately break up the scene as people and groups disperse because of disagreements.

Because the local film scene is smaller in scale and populace than Bourdieu’s theorized classes it can be poked and prodded to ensure this type of dominance does not develop. For example, programming duties can be fulfilled by audience members or creators and therefore shift the power of taste-making from the organizers. The organizer who is willing to have input or actively seeks out programming help from other sources will reap the benefits of a stronger scene because the power of taste-making is shared amongst the total group. When this type of power only lies with one person it can easily be toppled by creators or audience members who united because of concerns. The organizer can also develop unique programs related to alternative creators, therefore combatting issues of social and cultural reproduction. It must be recognized that disagreement and contention are fundamental for a scene so it cannot be avoided. The organizer has the difficult task of creating the taste of a scene but then also having to share that ability for the benefit of the growth of the scene.

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<sup>80</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 260.

<sup>81</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 41.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 56.

In addition to these tasks the organizer must work closely with government councils that provide grants for art organizations and institutions. The local film scene is best structured as a non-profit organization so the admission prices can be kept to a minimum. This can position the film scene as an alternative to mainstream films where the cost of attendance continues to rise. The organizer can orient the film scene as a community support group that can bring together different groups of people with the intent of strengthening community ties and development. The duties of the organizer go well beyond that of just setting up a screening; they are called upon to act as liaison for the entirety of the scene. An organizer is someone who has the vision and the determination to overcome the many obstacles and difficulties that come with organizing any type of cultural activity.

The types of grants and aid made available to local film scene's varies widely depending on the governing country, province, state and city. The efficacy of applying for community building and local art grants is another divergent path of study that this thesis is attempting to encourage.

## **Audience**

The audience has a role that is not often associated with those who simply pay to come and watch an event. The audience more importantly provides the cachet for the local film scene and without their attendance the scene will quickly die. There has to be a reason for the audience to want to attend a local screening rather than watching a movie at home or the theatre. Early stages of the audience may look more like a family reunion for the presenting filmmaker. This is actually an invitation that must be extended because, as friends and family attend creators' screenings, this may influence them to be more interested or even make and submit films of their own.

The rest of the audience is represented by a niche group of individuals who are interested in community events despite their unprofessionalism. Many times, the audience will include organizers and other filmmakers. The film scene can build a tight knit audience in the same way a music scene does. Individual audience members bond quickly due to the shared specificity of their interests. In turn, smaller attendance numbers increase the probability of overlapping connections and decreases the degrees of separation across the network. For an audience, the appeal is related to the feeling of being part of something that no one else knows about. Sarah

Thornton's seminal book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* further illustrates the allure of niche groups. The book expands upon Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital by formulating a new category called subcultural capital that is more reflective of subcultures. Subcultural capital or the hierarchy of the niche economy is based on three distinctions, ". . . the authentic versus the phoney, the 'hip' versus the 'mainstream', and the 'underground' versus 'the media'."<sup>83</sup> The audience is attracted to the authentic feel of the local place as discussed in the previous chapter, but, in addition, the group is built on being *hip* and *underground*. Thornton states that the measurement of hipness is attributed to the cultural capital one can obtain in opposition to mass culture.<sup>84</sup> The audience is drawn to the local film scene because they crave something different than what they see on TV or in the theatre. By obtaining and consuming content in direct opposition to popular culture, they gain a sense of being *hip*. In addition, this same audience finds the quality of underground media preferential to mainstream news, newspapers, and magazines. The underground is averse to *selling out* and is proud of mainstream media's confusion and misconception of their community.<sup>85</sup> Underground media is valued as rare because it is often printed in limited numbers and can only be purchased through direct channels of hipness. These same distinctions drive almost all scenes and contribute understanding to why an audience might attend a local film screening and how to get them there. While the niche audience enjoys the confidentiality of their consumption, they also grow the scene through word of mouth and their own hip associations. For example, Devon Welsh is a Montreal musician whom I follow closely and he recently posted about some of the bands from Montreal that he listens to. I have checked out these bands because of their association with a musician that I find hip. Because of the hipness associated with Devon Welsh (he is often represented as an authentic, underground artist), I often share his music with others, in turn, highlighting how hip I think I am.

Furthermore, audience members drive the programming and filmmaking based on the frequency of their attendance and paratextual communications like blog posts, social media posts and direct messages to friends. In theory, if a specific type of screening has a larger audience and social media presence, filmmakers will focus their efforts on submitting films to this category. The scene is financially dependent on the audience and can make screenings accessible only

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<sup>83</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996): 3-4

<sup>84</sup> Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, 10-12.

<sup>85</sup> Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, 115-118.

through small fees or donations. By supporting the filmmakers, the audience can also become a larger part of the process and be more connected to the films they are watching. La lumière is an exhibition space located in Montreal, where all screenings are free but there is a recommended donation of \$7. This helps to support the artists but only represents a small amount of income that is needed to continue to run the space. Because of this, the financial presence of the audience is only supplemental for the local film scene where grants, subsidies, and donations provide the main funding support. Tickets fees are kept low (or donations are optional) to make sure access is open to all who want to attend. Financial donations exist mainly as way for the audience to connect more with the scene. The power of taste and distinction is shared between the organizers, creators, and audience as they coexist in the local film scene.<sup>86</sup>

### **Film as Empathy**

The discussion of individuals' roles in the local film scene must be understood as being part of a more significant network than just one concerned with the production and distribution of local films. The act of creating and viewing art has been associated with rituals of healing throughout history.<sup>87</sup> A recent study observed the outcomes of introducing nursing students to fine arts and humanities, in addition to their medical classes. After a few weeks, the students displayed an increased awareness of how to deal with ill patients and a larger capacity for critical analysis in caretaking situations.<sup>88</sup>

Space and time devoted to creating or observing creations can help local film scene members become more aware of their surrounding community. As audience members view films, they can develop empathy and sympathy for the creators and characters that is enhanced by the opportunity to have a discussion with present filmmakers. In contrast, the creator must plan/execute/achieve/intend while creating their work. In other words, what do they want to say and where does their film fit in the world/community around them? The process of answering these questions begins with the creation of the film, while screenings can push the filmmaker to

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<sup>86</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 230-234.

<sup>87</sup> John Graham-Pole, *Illness and the art of creative self-expression: stories and exercises and the arts for those with chronic illness* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2000), 31.

<sup>88</sup> Graham-Pole, *Illness and the art of creative self-expression: stories and exercises and the arts for those with chronic illness*, 31-32.

critique or justify their own work.<sup>89</sup> The local film scene is built on the idea that filmmakers attend their screenings and make themselves available for discussion afterwards (public or private). The purpose is to create an alternative format in relation to how discussion is approached online, whether the film is distributed on a website or not. While there are individuals who exhibit increased acts of compassion online, many others use the internet to cyber bully (a brief survey of almost any YouTube comment section confirms the general assumption). The psychology behind this type of interaction has been termed the **online disinhibition effect** by scholars Terry Christopher and Jeff Cain and explains why the internet regularly breeds sarcastic, hateful, demeaning, and absurd comments.<sup>90</sup> Christopher and Cain have determined three factors as major reasons for the associated behaviors:

1. *Dissociative anonymity* is the idea that a person can possess an alternate online identity that is separate from their own in-person identity (and moral agency). A user can express hostility and criticism without affecting their psyche and, at the same time, dissociate online users as actual people by viewing them as just usernames.
2. *Online communication is asynchronous* meaning a user's conversation is not instantaneous or immediate. Users can remove themselves from the repercussions of their online comments by avoiding or deleting ownership of such posts.
3. There are examples of non-anonymous communication online (email), but these conversations *do not allow for physical communication* such as eye contact or body language. Traditional face-to-face communication includes nonverbal cues and, without them, online conversations lack an element of understanding.<sup>91</sup>

The local film scene allows for a more sensitive approach to criticism, analysis, and discussion because it rests upon traditional communication between the organizer, creator, and audience. Organizers can intermediate communication to ensure discussion is focused on the screenings and their perceived meaning or emotional impact. Post-screening conversations become

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<sup>89</sup> A recent example includes the film festival premiere for *Of The North* and the resulting discussion between filmmaker and audience. It must be noted the filmmaker did not attend any of the screenings but time was allotted for discussion after screenings.

<sup>90</sup> Terry Christopher and Jeff Cain, "The Emerging Issue of Digital Empathy," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 80.4 (2016).

<sup>91</sup> Terry Christopher and Jeff Cain, "The Emerging Issue of Digital Empathy," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 80.4 (2016).

enlightening because they help audiences and creators process the emotional experience of creating/watching a film together.

The emotional response to film viewing has been theorized from the beginning of film criticism. Early scholars introduced concepts such as *photogénie*, the idea that certain types of filmic reproductions (close-ups) could enhance moral characteristics beyond their regularity,<sup>92</sup> an approach which has been continued through today with research examining how neural mechanisms act in synchronicity as participants watch the same film.<sup>93</sup> The positive influence of moral and emotional intensification as a result of movie watching has been stressed by film critic icon Roger Ebert,

Movies are the most powerful empathy machine in all the arts. When I go to a great movie I can live somebody else's life for a while. I can walk in somebody else's shoes. I can see what it feels like to be a member of a different gender, a different race, a different economic class, to live in a different time, to have a different belief. This is a liberalizing influence on me. It gives me a broader mind. It helps me to join my family of men and women on this planet. It helps me to identify with them, so I'm not just stuck being myself, day after day. The great movies enlarge us, they civilize us, they make us more decent people.<sup>94</sup>

One of the goals of the film scene is the application of this sensibility on a smaller scale. The organizer strives to foster a film scene that is inclusive and empathetic in regards to the idiosyncrasies of individuals and groups of that scene location.

The local film scene benefits members by increasing opportunities for positive social experiences in the community. Research psychologist's Jill Riley, Betsan Corkhill, and Clare Morris constructed a study of a different type of creative gathering - a knitting group. Their analysis found that engaging in creative, skilled, and meaningful occupation with others contributed greatly to the participants' quality of life, personal welfare and social well-being.<sup>95</sup> The knitting group cannot be assumed as a perfect surrogate for the local film scene, but contributing factors such as face-to-face communication, group creativity, and group discussion about created artwork are observable in both activities. The local film scene activates members'

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<sup>92</sup> Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*," in *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume 1: 1907-1929*, ed. Robert Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 314-315.

<sup>93</sup> Jeffrey M. Zacks, "Précis of Flicker: Your Brain on Movies," *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 9.1 (2015): 6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Roger Ebert, "Ebert's Walk of Fame remarks," RogerEbert.com, accessed June 06, 2017, <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/eberts-walk-of-fame-remarks>.

<sup>95</sup> Jill Riley, Betsan Corkhill and Clare Morris, "The benefits of knitting for personal and social wellbeing in adulthood: findings from an international survey," *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 76.2 (2013): 53-55.



social skills, critical thinking, and empathy because of its unique creators, organizers, and audiences and their interaction about art within an allotted time in a specific place. While there are benefits to being creative in seclusion or posting creative works online, these acts do not encompass the full spectrum available to those who participate in the local film scene. The film scene is advantageous to the community as a social gathering activity and to the individual as a creative outlet.

### **Benefits of Creativity**

It is generally accepted that being creative is good for an individual, maybe as a method of relaxation or a way to improve one's mood. Important in their own right, simplistic pop-psychology notions like these pale in comparison to the wide array of neurological, physical, social, and mental benefits based on scientifically rigorous studies. Making a film engages with a multiplicity of skills associated with creativity.<sup>96</sup> Creators use interpersonal skills to interact with actors and other crew members, spatial skills when planning shots, kinesthetic skills during the actual process of holding a camera and filming, logical skills when scheduling shoots, intrapersonal skills when writing a script, and linguistic skills when editing a film to make a cohesive story or mood. Creative endeavors activate new pathways in the brain as individuals explore how to express specific ideas or themes using various techniques. The medical practice of art therapy uses the same concepts of creativity to rewire patients' brains and recover functions that have been lost as a result of injury or illness.<sup>97</sup> The *plasticity*<sup>98</sup> of the brain allows for patients to literally change their brain's operation in order to recover from their medical or psychiatric condition. The successfulness of art therapy is based on the concepts that:

- a) Patients learn to perceive their relationship with present emotions through body awareness
- b) Patients visibly see their emotions through their art as a more coherent image they can understand

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<sup>96</sup> Howard Gardner, *Multiple intelligence: the theory in practice*, (New York: Westview Press, 1993).

<sup>97</sup> Lukasz M. Konopka, "Where art meets neuroscience: a new horizon of art therapy," *Croatian Medical Journal* 55.1 (2014): 73-74.

<sup>98</sup> Refers to the ability of the brain to modify its own structure and function following changes in the body or external environment.

- c) Patients use art expression to experience difficult feelings and learn to effectively modulate emotional responses
- d) Patients learned to change their behavior by experiencing choice making in art creation
- e) Patients can better comprehend and put their emotions into words after creating art<sup>99</sup>

Understandably, art therapists agree that these concepts are also beneficial to non-patients. A recent study has shown that the temporal lobe activity is increased during creative practice, the same area of the brain that is concerned with language, emotion, and memory. In addition, the temporal lobe plays a role in experiencing spirituality such as connecting to a higher power, feeling a deep sense of peace, and experiencing a profound sense of meaning.<sup>100</sup> Researchers have posited that this is why people connect making art with transcendence, sacredness, and spiritual awareness. The production of visual art can also make the brain more psychologically resilient.<sup>101</sup> In other words, it can help the brain become better at handling outside stressors while also making it able to better communicate with itself. The ability of the brain to communicate between its own regions is vital in preventing chronic diseases in older adults. For example, people who participate in artistic activities throughout middle age and older are 73% less likely to have memory and thinking problems, while those who participate in craft-based activities are 45% less likely to encounter the same problems.<sup>102</sup> This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a small sample of how being creative is extremely beneficial for the individual. Taking into consideration the positive outcomes of creative work, it becomes a certainty that these types of outlets are vital for the well-being of individuals and societies.

Despite the importance of being creative, the current generation has become more and more consumption-oriented (especially in regards to media), as will be argued below. Generally, it is understood that our society consumes more media than in the past because of technological

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<sup>99</sup> Suzanne Haeyen, Susan Van Hooren and Giel Hutschemaekers, "Perceived effects of art therapy in the treatment of personality disorders, cluster B/C: A qualitative study," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 45 (2015): 1-10.

<sup>100</sup> Christopher M. Belkofer and Lukasz M. Konopka, "Conducting Art Therapy Research Using Quantitative EEG Measures," *Art Therapy* 25.2 (2008): 61-62.

<sup>101</sup> Anne Bolwerk et al., "Correction: How Art Changes Your Brain: Differential Effects of Visual Art Production and Cognitive Art Evaluation on Functional Brain Connectivity," *PLOS ONE* 9 9.7 (2014): 6-7.

<sup>102</sup> Rosebud O. Roberts et al., "Risk and Protective Factors for Cognitive Impairment in Persons Aged 85 Years and Older," *Neurology* 84.18 (2015): 1854-1861.

advances such as the internet and the smartphone. This is not to claim that the internet, smartphone and other technologies aren't creative tools. Social media posts are inherently creative and technologies provide access for creativity that was limited in the past. The tools themselves are creative but have been designed to limit a user's creativity through an overabundance of access to content. Countries and regions differ in media usage based on technological availability and cultural circumstances. However, an American-based data sample pinpoints a growing need for less consumption and more creation. Since 1980, American media consumption has increased by over 600%, yet this number pales in comparison to the increased mass of media that is now available to the average American. The *How Much Media? Consumer Report* calculated the supply and demand of media minutes for the average American home. In other words, for every minute of media a person consumes (or demands), what is the ratio of minutes of media available for consumption? In 1960, the supply and demand ratio of media minutes was 82:1, in contrast to 2005 where the ratio has increased to 884:1, an increase of over 1000%.<sup>103</sup> The average American today consumes considerably more media than the average American in the past fifty years, but even more daunting is the extreme growth in the amount of media available to them. The reasons for the increase are obvious and can be expected as part of the technological revolution, but the inevitability of change does not negate the inquiry into how this may cause a change in human nature.

The endless glut of media options and instant access has meant that more time is spent watching (or reading) in preference of activities that once filled an average person's day. It is well documented that physical exercise has been replaced with media consumption and significant decreases in physical activity are being reported across the globe.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the increase in media exposure has correlated to a decrease in creativity over the past thirty years.<sup>105</sup> Using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking as a creative rating system, research has shown a large decrease in Elaboration category scores across all age groups.<sup>106</sup> The lower scores represent

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<sup>103</sup> James E. Short, "How Much Media? 2013: Report on American Consumers," *Report, University of Southern California* (2013): 45-47.

<sup>104</sup> S. W. Ng and B. M. Popkin, "Time use and Physical Activity: A Shift Away from Movement Across the Globe," *Obesity Reviews* 13.8 (2012): 659-680.

<sup>105</sup> Kyung Hee Kim, "The Creativity Crisis: The Decrease in Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking," *Creativity Research Journal* 23, no. 4 (November 09, 2011): 292-93.

<sup>106</sup> The TTCT score is a strong predictor of future creative production based on longitudinal studies. B. Cramond et al., "A Report on the 40-Year Follow-Up of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking: Alive and Well in the New Millennium," *Gifted Child Quarterly* 49.4 (2005): 283-91.

individuals' lessened ability to elaborate on ideas, a lower capacity to think reflectively or critically, and diminished motivation to be creative. Research indicates reasons for these large scale changes, including over-dependence on technologies and, as a result, less encouragement to be creative in the home, school, and society. Obviously, these technologies can be used to promote and stimulate creativity, however, the data supports a less optimistic approach to creative technology. More often, technology can be observed as a hindrance to creativity because of its aptitude for solving our problems or filling our time. In fact, the more abundantly available resources are to an individual, the more they inhibit creativity, in turn deterring intellectual and spiritual growth.<sup>107</sup> Because there is an exorbitant amount of media content, it can seem like a person is never "caught up", always stuck in an endless stream of *MUST WATCH/MUST READ/MUST LISTEN* lists, consequently leaving little or no time for creative pursuits (or face-to-face discussion about watched content).

### **Less Media More Involvement**

In contrast, the local film scene can shrink an individual's media consumption diet by delivering fewer choices for viewing and devoting more time to film discussion. In the face of an endless stream of content and choices, this alternative can give audiences the opportunity to be exposed to alternative media. By not always being able to choose what they want to watch, an individual can embrace a variety of films. Alternative films can also work in opposition to the synchronous brain activity of mainstream films. Studies found that not all films affected viewers on a synchronous level, which can allow for more varied brain activity and film discussion.<sup>108</sup> If an individual forces their brain to use new areas by moving beyond favorite genres or directors, the brain will have to create new neural pathways. In contrast, as behaviors are repeated (watching the same type of film), existing neural pathways will become hardwired, making those behaviors easier to repeat while shunting an individual's capacity for growth and change.

A general audience may view the local film scene as diminished in comparison to cable television, multiplex cinemas and Netflix. Indeed, the local film will offer fewer explosions, lower production values, unrecognizable actors, smaller screens, and smaller audiences. These

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<sup>107</sup> Intellectual and spiritual growth are mentioned here in reference to the numerous benefits addressed in the previous paragraphs.

<sup>108</sup> Uri Hasson et al., "Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film," *Projections* 2.1 (2008): 13-15.

indicators of quality have been connected to mainstream cinema for decades and emphasize the glamour, charisma, and corporate culture of Hollywood filmmaking. If these indicators are used to evaluate both alternative and mainstream cinema, the latter will always be judged as superior. But, if the indicators of value are shifted to emphasize ethics associated with being neighborly, transgressive, self-expressive, independent, and local, then the local film scene can be considered as better than mainstream cinema. The local film represents unique communities, features untrained actors, is shot in familiar locations, gives access to filmmakers, and enables opportunities for personal storytelling. The principles of the scene do not perpetuate the myths of film creation that a good movie needs a big budget, big ideas, a film school degree, a large crew, celebrity actors and actresses, or acceptance into a film festival. In the same way that certain music scenes inspired new bands, the local film scene can breed a new type of filmmaker. The model for the local film scene is best summed up by Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner when he said, after seeing the Sex Pistols, they "destroyed the myth of being a pop star, of a musician being some kind of god that you had to worship."<sup>109</sup> The influence of that show was monumental for Joy Division; Peter Hook bought a bass guitar the next day and they formed their band. Instead of asking the question, "How did they do that?" the local film inspires the audience to say, "I can do that!" This model does not eclipse the need for other variant film distribution methods like film festivals or YouTube, but fills a void that is missing. A place where filmmakers can practice and receive feedback, where non-professionals can share in a community, and where beginners can be mentored and/or inspired by practicing artists. The local film scene is not meant for an artist who wants to make a living wage. It can provide a home for hobbyists, amateurs, beginning filmmakers, and possibly even be a stepping-stone for an individual who wants to be a professional filmmaker. Most importantly, it is what the organizers, creators, and audience members want it to be. The interdependence of the three groups allows for influence to be separated and balanced so the scene can constantly transform and change into the mold that works best for those members at that time.

An active local film scene is almost non-existent, but, by analyzing a project with almost identical values, the benefits of such a creative community are quickly realized. Wapikoni Mobile is a ground-breaking program that uses a mobile studio as a place of gathering, mentoring, and filmmaking for First Nations youth (named in honor of a young woman who was working with

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<sup>109</sup> Jon Savage, "Joy Division: Someone Take These Dreams Away," *Mojo*, (1994).

director Manon Barbeau on a film when she died in a tragic car accident). Manon Barbeau co-founded the project in 2003 and developed the model. The mobile provides digital tools for First Nations youth to create short films and musical works while being mentored by filmmakers during the process.<sup>110</sup> The mobile creates about seventy short films and thirty musical recordings every year, the completed projects shown publicly to the members of the community.<sup>111</sup> The participants can graduate and become paid members of Wapikoni who mentor new participants and gradually achieve professional status. The Wapikoni project creates a breathing local film scene where alternative creators (First Nations Youth) are able to create films via the mobile space and then screen their works for the community at large (also at film festivals).

As discussed previously, the local film scene gives a voice to the alternative creator, allowing him/her to share creative work publicly and participate in a discourse that has been purposefully organized in direct contrast to online conversations. Important aspects of discussion, including face-to-face contact, comments and responses in real-time with filmmakers, and ownership of creations and critiques/comments, effectively work to create a social community around creativity. The benefits of such a community to itself, society, and the individual cannot be underestimated. The mutability of the scene can allow for the inclusion of different types of creative work, from the solitude of writing a script to the hands-on collaborative work of actually making a film (or a non-traditional creative process where the script is the work of a collaborative group). By embracing the interdependence and fluidity of the scene, the local film community can thrive by giving power to those who have been overlooked and underappreciated.

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<sup>110</sup> "History," Wapikoni Mobile, accessed June 06, 2017, <http://www.wapikoni.ca/about/who-are-we/history>.

<sup>111</sup> "Innovative approach," Wapikoni mobile, accessed June 06, 2017, <http://www.wapikoni.ca/about/who-are-we/innovative-approach>.

## **Chapter 4: Paraphernalia**

Commodities are the things purchased and sold that are associated with a scene and are represented by a wide variety of products and merchandise. For this study, I aim to extend my analysis to what I am labelling as paraphernalia. The term paraphernalia can be described as the furnishings of an event and, most importantly, not all paraphernalia are commodities. The term scene paraphernalia has been created for the sole purpose of studying the local film scene and therefore it must be clearly delineated. The term should not be conflated with styles and themes but is meant to be representative of physical items associated with the specific scenes. For example, the 1980s Chicago House scene was linked to the unmistakable sound of the Roland TR-808 and TR-909 drum machine.<sup>112</sup> A person can hold and use a Roland drum machine (paraphernalia), but the actual sound of the bass beat is better categorized as a style. This example designates the interconnectedness of a scene's style and paraphernalia.

For the intents of this chapter, it is postulated that commodities fall within the realm of scene paraphernalia as "equipment or apparatuses related to the particular activity." Paraphernalia can be any physical item related to the existence of a scene, but, more often than not, there are foundational paraphernalia that interact with the scene frequently. Foundational paraphernalia are seen as belonging to only one scene and are separated from the mainstream.

The logics of a scene determine that paraphernalia (often acting as commodities) circulate physically and temporally while also shifting in value and usage.<sup>113</sup> Considering the vastness of a scene's range of paraphernalia, it can be difficult to trace the changing worth of the entire catalog of commodities, equipment, furnishings and so on. Contrarily, a single commodity can be longitudinally analyzed to determine what kind of transformations occur to distinct parts of a scene. The commodity is more easily assessed because it is fixed to a price. Grunge was categorized by foundational paraphernalia consisting of items like albums, and peripheral paraphernalia, such as, drug use and fashion. The fashion of grunge was represented by plaid shirts, thermal underwear, and ripped jeans. The relatively anonymous fashion choices became extremely popular with the rise of grunge bands and have continued to move in and out of the

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<sup>112</sup> Rick Snoman, *Dance Music Manual: Tools, Toys, and Techniques* (Burlington, MA: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 231-250.

<sup>113</sup> Straw, "Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music," 374-375.

mainstream over the past 25 years.<sup>114</sup> Pre-ripped jeans are now commonplace in mainstream clothing stores but are not as readily associated with the grunge scene. The commodity has shifted in meaning to the point that its affiliated scene has little significance to its current existence. Paraphernalia may be inanimate but still should be viewed as entities that interact just like people do: ever-changing bodies that contain histories and desires.

The local film scene can intentionally produce paraphernalia that frames itself as an alternative to mainstream film paraphernalia, whose commodities and styles fluctuate according to the popular and profitable demands placed upon them. This reasoning falls in line with the similar approach made to people, places, and alternativity. The foundational commodity for mainstream film and local film scenes is the movie. Because movies are such a common part of the human experience, they often look or act a specific way based on popular interpretation. Responses to watching experimental film are often categorized by the remark, “That wasn’t a movie!” because of their perceived difference to the norm. Today, the mainstream film is most likely viewed in a theatre, purchased as a Blu-ray disc, downloaded from iTunes, or streamed from Netflix. The typical viewing pattern of the film has become so ingrained in society that change from the norm must be enacted by deliberate and motivated plans. Before a movie is streamed or downloaded, it must be filmed in a chosen format. The format of a film becomes important paraphernalia for the local film scene because of recent seismic shifts in mainstream films’ established choices in this realm. Previously, all films were exactly that - film - but even then there were different standards in regards to size and stock. These choices will effect how film looks and how it can be distributed.

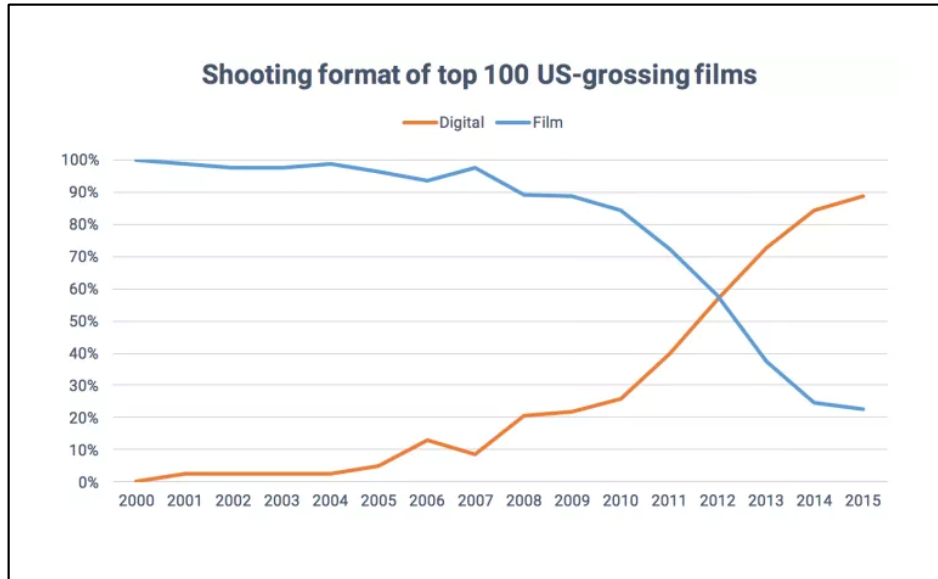
### **Alternative Formats**

The shooting format of a film can be broadly categorized as either digital, video or film. Digital cameras are still a very recent trend with 2012 being first year that more feature films were shot on digital cameras rather than film.

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<sup>114</sup> Nathalie Atkinson, “Kurt Cobain’s fashion choices were never about what to wear, but rather how to wear items on hand,” *National Post*, April 5, 2014, <http://news.nationalpost.com/life/fashion-beauty/kurt-cobains-fashion-choices-were-never-about-what-to-wear-but-rather-how-to-wear-items-on-hand>.





**Fig. 8** Source: <https://stephenfollows.com/film-vs-digital/>.

The change in format affected the distribution model of movies and the majority of theatres have had to update from film to digital projectors. Projection system conversions have been comprehensive on a worldwide scale with a reported 98.2% of screens being digitized as of 2017.<sup>115</sup> The rarity of film projection has increased interest in watching movies in their original format and there are even websites entirely dedicated to listing theatres that still use film reels and projectors.<sup>116</sup> Montreal clubs like Cinema 1999 and Le Cinéclub have made it their motto to only play films on celluloid. These groups corroborate the data that supports an analog resurgence for LPs and film viewing. Local film scenes can also benefit from the burgeoning enthusiasm for analog formats and projection by supporting and encouraging cheap analog alternatives like Super 8mm. A recent breakdown estimates the cost of making a Super 8mm short at \$380 including the camera, film, developing cost, and telecine.<sup>117</sup> If a filmmaker wanted to go completely analog, the cost of an editor and a viewer would be about the same as the cost for telecine. The cost is much cheaper than buying (or even renting) a comparable digital setup<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> David Hancock, “The global digital conversion of cinemas is almost over,” *IHS Markit*, last modified May 3, 2016, <https://technology.ihs.com/577835/the-global-digital-conversion-of-cinemas-is-almost-over>.

<sup>116</sup> “List of analog film exhibitors,” Sprocket School, accessed June 13, 2017, [http://www.sprocketschool.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_analog\\_film\\_exhibitors](http://www.sprocketschool.org/wiki/List_of_analog_film_exhibitors).

<sup>117</sup> Oakley Anderson-Moore, “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Shooting on Super 8mm,” *No Film School*, last modified October 21, 2015, <http://nofilmschool.com/2015/10/everything-you-ever-wanted-know-shoot-super-8mm>.

<sup>118</sup> Of course, the quality of the image is completely different, but that is the main reason for shooting on Super 8mm.

and is completely unique in its image. The only other cost associated with the setup is the 8mm projector. A quick search on eBay reveals many working models priced under \$100. Local film scenes can take back some of what was freely given away during the digital filmmaking revolution. The cost effectiveness and singular image of Super 8mm proves that there is still good reason to embrace analog filmmaking techniques. Analog filmmaking is aesthetically relevant today because it functions as an alternative to the mainstream. But if digital filmmaking is favored by professionals and talented artists, why not embrace this new future?

The conversion to digital has been supported by the rhetoric of *democratizing filmmaking*, and the digital medium can provide the means for anyone to make a movie. It is a fallacy to assume that home digital filmmaking equipment is the same as professional equivalents. Digital consumer video equipment is relatively high quality, but, when compared with premiere digital cameras, it pales in comparison. High-end digital cameras have much higher dynamic range, capture images that are more flexible in post-production and recreate colors more accurately.<sup>119</sup> The most popular digital camera, the Arri Alexa, sells for anywhere between \$30,000-\$60,000 depending on the model. This is just for the body of the camera which still needs a lens, a rig, and other accessories. It becomes evident that professional filmmaking is still an exclusive club and you cannot purchase the same equipment at your local electronics store. You cannot make a mainstream film with the equipment that is not used on mainstream films, so it is unproductive to try and recreate this film on a local level. Digital cameras have provided an alternative to the mainstream filmmaking process and must be embraced as such. The digital camera does not democratize filmmaking of this order, but allows for reinvention based on new alternative modes of creating.

Alternative filmmakers can embrace the wide range of digital products by experimenting with the increased amount of control it gives them over their image. Films can easily be shot with unfamiliar or changing aspect ratios, expanded storage allows for filmmakers to shoot documentaries without ever putting the camera down, smaller cameras can be used to get shots not possible on professional cameras, and low-light capability can make previously hard to

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<sup>119</sup> Joe Marine, "Can You Tell the Difference Between the ARRI Alexa and Canon C300 in This 'Game of Thrones' Test?," *No Film School*, last modified April 9, 2012, <http://nofilmschool.com/2012/04/shane-hurlbut-compares-arri-alex-a-canon-c300>.

capture areas more visible. If the digital image is treated as something unique from film, it can open up possibilities that were previously unimagined.

Beyond the practice of digital filmmaking, there are even more possibilities for local filmmakers. The endless stream of content on the Internet provides opportunities for archival filmmaking practices. Editing and effects software has made experimental filmmaking available through digital manipulation of images. When exploring the alternative to mainstream film product, the possibilities are endless. Commodities like VHS tapes are also sources of inspiration and can be used for a cultivated look that reinforces the themes of a local film. Archival footage from or depicting the local area can be used in a similar method to Thom Anderson's film *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. The film gathers footage from hundreds of movies shot in L.A. and is repurposed to tell a story and history that is about the city. The local film commodity supports both old and new techniques by reimagining what a movie can or has to be.

### **Restructuring the Film Industry**

The digital transition of filmmaking has been compared to the music industry's recent restructure. Digital recording programs, better computers, and online distribution have made it so artists can record and sell their albums without involving record companies. It was assumed that a similar restructuring might infiltrate the film industry, but the change has been much slighter in its effect.<sup>120</sup> These predictions ignore the vital differences between the music and film industry. Namely, that big budget films require large crews and even larger groups of digital effects artists to render their creations, whereas music was always made by smaller groups that could easily be transitioned from the studio to the home. The financial backing for an album was used to pay for studio time, producers, and mixers. The movement of recording into the home studio has decreased the high cost of recording in past years. Digital filmmaking similarly moves the editing process to the home computer, but, conversely, this does not eliminate a large portion of production costs for a film. Digital filmmaking does not change the business model of big budget mainstream filmmaking where the majority of costs are used for actors, crewmembers, food, props, and locations. A significantly large proportion of the budget is used for advertising and

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<sup>120</sup> Jeff Steele, "Power to the People: The Democratization of Film," *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-steele/power-to-the-people-the-d\\_1\\_b\\_829303.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-steele/power-to-the-people-the-d_1_b_829303.html).

continues to increase; from 2014 to 2015 the media value of movie advertising on U.S. national television rose by 39% to a total of \$2.63 billion. New online markets actually add to the costs of advertising for films, the prime placement for a movie trailer on YouTube's home page costs about \$725,000 per day in the US.<sup>121</sup> Digital technologies will not drastically change the business model for mainstream filmmaking in the same way the music industry changed because the models are vastly different in terms of production, advertising, and distribution.

A bigger change attributed to the internet has been crowdsource funding with websites like Kickstarter. These websites allow the filmmaker to receive small sums of money from a, hopefully, large group of individuals so he/she can finance his or her projects. In addition, new forms of online distribution have been created to support smaller filmmakers, for instance Vimeo's option to make films available through a VOD model. While these new developments have reshaped the way a film is made and distributed, they have achieved relatively little in restructuring the mainstream film industry. These changes cannot be compared to the massive shift that occurred within the music industry and highlight the need for new methods of film creation and distribution. The local film scene does not try to restructure or change the film industry, but exists as its own entity, free from the capitalist and corporate economy of mainstream film.

2016 marked the first year when streaming sales eclipsed those of disc sales in the United States. From this data, it can be assumed that North American audiences are streaming more and more of their films rather than buying DVDs or Blu-rays. Services like Netflix, are extremely convenient for the viewer because they offer ample amounts of content instantly to their home, phone, or computer. Netflix has increased its subscriber base from 7.48 million in 2007 to 86.74 million in 2016.<sup>122</sup> This constant access to thousands of movies and shows has blinded the consumer to the imperfections of the system and made valuable local film places extinct. The ground-breaking service ignores some of the most desired aspects of renting or owning a physical copy of a film. First of all, streaming films do not have special features. Thus, viewers and local filmmakers miss out on the benefits of these features, which include interviews and footage that

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<sup>121</sup> James Rainey, "The Perils of Promotion: Pricey TV Campaigns, Fear of Change Shackles Movie Spending," *Variety*, accessed August 20, 2017, <http://variety.com/2016/film/features/movie-marketing-advertising-tv-campaigns-1201724468/>.

<sup>122</sup> Jeff Dunn, "Netflix is booming on the back of subscribers outside of the US," *Business Insider*, October 18, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/netflix-subscribers-us-international-chart-2016-10>.

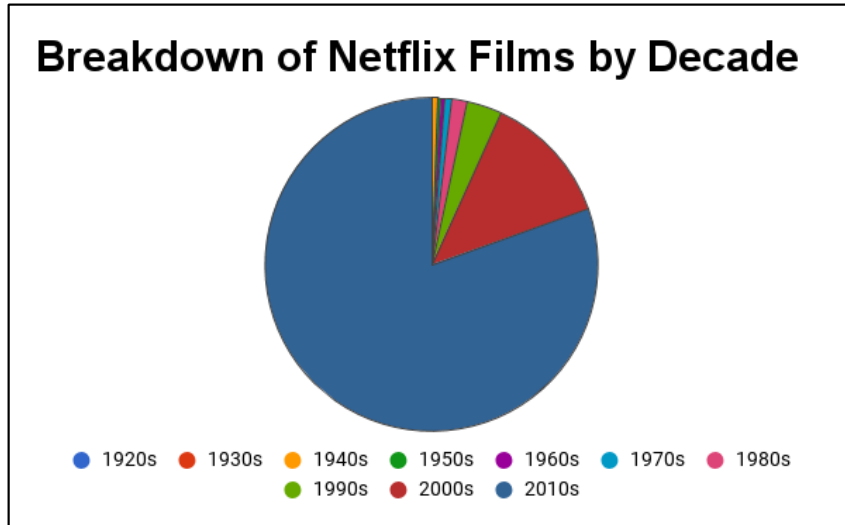
show how past films were made outside of the blockbuster business model of today. Netflix prides itself on having a large amount of films and TV shows available to subscribers. American Netflix currently has 4,055 movies, 2,795 seasons of TV shows, and 1,417 limited series. This pales in comparison to one of the most prominent movie rental stores still in operation. Vulcan Video is an independently owned video rental store located in Austin, TX and has two locations that boast a catalog of 72,273 movies.<sup>123</sup> The store usually has a DVD and Blu-ray version of each film included in this count, but, even if this were applied to every movie in the store, they would still have over 36,000 titles available for rental.<sup>124</sup> The amount of content available on Netflix is puny in comparison, making up less than one third of Vulcan Video's estimated catalog total. For this reason, people are still going to Vulcan Video on a regular basis. On the other hand, the long forgotten DVD service Netflix provides still exists and can ship DVDs to United States locations in about two business days. This collection totals about 93,000 titles.<sup>125</sup> The convenience of streaming is accompanied by a lack of special features and the shunning of thousands and thousands of titles. A local filmmaker may want to watch Yasujiro Ozu films and analyze how he created an alternative to mainstream cinema in the 1950s. They will find zero of his films on Netflix, but there are sixteen available through their mail service. Recently, I wanted to watch Montgomery Clift titles, but discovered there were none available on streaming sites and even VOD options on Amazon.ca returned nothing. The only option was to purchase the films from online distributors for about \$20-30. For the dedicated film viewer the acceptance of streaming and (death of physical rentals) has homogenized the viewing experience.

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<sup>123</sup> "Vulcan Video Catalog Search," Vulcan Video, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://www.vulcanvideo.com/catalog/catalog.cgi>.

<sup>124</sup> Each individual TV season is listed as one item in the catalog.

<sup>125</sup> Emily Steel, "Netflix Refines Its DVD Business, Even as Streaming Unit Booms," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/business/while-its-streaming-service-booms-netflix-streamlines-old-business.html>.



**Fig. 9** Source: <http://instantwatcher.com/>

Yes, titles are available instantly but are often limited in scope, time period, and genre. Out of the 4,000 plus films on Netflix over 80% were released in the last 7 years. Even more glaring is the decrease of available films in relation to earlier release dates as evidenced by Figure 7. Streaming services provide value to the casual watcher looking for a quick fix but inhibit the more adventuresome film viewer and the expansiveness of movie watching previously associated with the local video store. The local film scene acts as a desired, alternative commodity because of its actual inconvenience. The difficulty in watching local films makes them rarer and, in turn, more valuable when compared with the dearth of streaming options. The presence of filmmaker Q&As at screenings represent an increased value that is akin to the special features of a DVD.

### **Cassettes, VHS, and Physical Commodities**

When the music industry experienced the same streaming boom via Spotify, local bands responded in creative ways to embrace the rarity and physicality of their music. Instead of releasing their new music online or on streaming sites, bands began to release tapes and CDs in limited quantities. A new movement was launched that highlighted rarity of music as represented by limited physical commodities, which increased the desirability of someone to own these copies. United Cassettes is a website dedicated to the promotion and distribution of tapes. Their credo reads as follows:

United Cassettes is a cassette movement trying to change the game.  
United Cassettes is a platform for cassette labels to show their work.  
United Cassettes is a world map of small independent labels.  
United Cassettes is a place for cassette collectors.  
United Cassettes is a Brave New Cassette World.<sup>126</sup>

Most of the time, if someone wants to purchase a tape from a band they like, they have to go to one of the band's shows and buy the release from the merchandise table. The band has created new appeal for their product while also encouraging more participation in the scene from audiences. The audience can collect tape releases to increase their cultural cachet or hipness while participating in a form of media that is underground. Local filmmakers can imitate tape releases by releasing films in a similar pattern. By embracing older technologies like VHS and DVDs and avoiding online sites like YouTube and Vimeo, a local filmmaker can create a product that is rare and precious. A screening that is showing films that are already available online is much easier to skip; the film can be watched anywhere, anytime and possibly even for free. By making local film output into commodified limited release physical objects, anticipation and excitement for public screenings builds. In effect, the screening is recreating the same sort of liveness that makes a music show desirable to attend. If the audience does not attend, they might not be able to see the film—ever. The system hearkens back to theatrical distribution before *The Godfather*, *Jaws*, and the summer blockbuster, when films were slowly rolled out from city to city.<sup>127</sup> When the film finally came to someone's town it was an event that had to be attended because it was only available for a limited amount of time and then would move on to the next city.<sup>128</sup> This type of strategy also recreates the VHS and DVD booms of the 1980s and 90s when friends could swap and trade tapes so they could see rare gems or hard to find movies. The local film commodity reclaims the rarity of movies that has been somewhat obliterated by wide release strategies and film streaming services.

The physicality of the film commodity also changes the way one watches film and therefore how one responds to said film. There is a correlation between streaming film services and increased viewing of films and TV shows on laptops, tablets, and mobile phones. In 2015, the viewership for movies and TV decreased by 13% for television while the viewership

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<sup>126</sup> "United Cassettes About," United Cassettes, accessed June 13, 2017, <http://map.unitedcassettes.com/>.

<sup>127</sup> "jaws – the monster that ate Hollywood," Frontline PBS, accessed June 13, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/hollywood/business/jaws.html>.

<sup>128</sup> J.A. Aberdeen, "Distribution: States Rights or Road Show," *Hollywood Renegades Archive*, accessed June 13, 2017, [http://www.cobbles.com/simpp\\_archive/statesrights.htm](http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/statesrights.htm).

increased by 9% for the laptop, 4% for the tablet, and 3% for the mobile phone.<sup>129</sup> The affect and effect of movie watching can be easily distinguished between these different media. A personal anecdote highlights some of the problems facing film commodities' new viewership formats. A colleague mentioned to me they were not very impressed with *Gravity* and I responded with my own reaction to the film, but noted that I had seen it in on a giant screen in 3D with Dolby Atmos surround sound. He agreed that those circumstances might change his mind about the movie and conceded that he had watched it on his smartphone while riding public transportation! When a viewer watches movies at home, on the bus, on a phone, on a desktop computer, or on a laptop, he/she often combines this activity with persistent multitasking activities. Netflix recently introduced a picture in picture mode on their iPad app to allow for easier multitasking.<sup>130</sup> Streaming content can allow users to not only watch their shows but also complete daily tasks at the same time, making their time more effective. This multitasking ability has come into question and studies have shown that, in the case of independent and low redundancy activities or tasks, it is actually impossible for parallel processing. The spreading of a viewer's attention across multiple activities actually diminishes the understanding and performance of the person thereby making them more ineffective.<sup>131</sup> Because the local film commodity works in opposition to the mainstream repetition of products, it is advantageous for viewings to be in distraction-free areas that concentrate the audience's attention. The local film does not want to be easily accessible and breezily consumed, but demands purposeful consideration and reflection from the observer. The local film is meant to be experienced with an audience not only for post-screening discussion, but also because group contexts amplify the overall experience. The scene is based around shared experiences and studies have found that group attention increases emotional intensity relative to alone viewings.<sup>132</sup> The local film commodity is an alternative to online content that has increasingly become filler in one's daily activities. While there is a place for this content, the local film product uses a classical approach that has been sidelined in favor of streaming and

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<sup>129</sup> "Digital Video and the Connected Consumer," Accenture Consulting, accessed June 12, 2017, <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-digital-video-connected-consumer>.

<sup>130</sup> Chris Welch, "Netflix's iPad app now supports Picture in Picture multitasking," *The Verge*, June 14, 2016, <https://www.theverge.com/2016/6/14/11935970/netflix-ipad-picture-in-picture-announced>.

<sup>131</sup> William H. Gladstones, Michael A. Regan and Robert B. Lee, "Division of attention: The single-channel hypothesis revisited," *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 41.1 (2007): 15-16.

<sup>132</sup> Garriy Shteynberg et al., "Feeling more together: Group attention intensifies emotion," *Emotion*, 14.6 (2014): 1111-1113.



downloads. The classical approach emphasizes rarity, physicality, and group experiences over convenience and accessibility.

### **Online Distribution and Film Festivals**

The conditions for comparing streaming services to physical distribution assume that a local filmmaker can upload their films and have an audience willing to stream their content. The immense popularity of YouTube is more closely linked to music videos, vloggers, gamers, and comedians than short films. Of the top fifty most subscribed channels on YouTube, there are zero dedicated to making short films.<sup>133</sup> Discounting music videos, the most viewed videos on YouTube are a mix of toy unboxings, nursery rhymes, and viral videos.<sup>134</sup> How-to articles about making a YouTube channel popular focus on branding, video length, and social media sharing, but rarely discuss the quality of the content being uploaded as a factor in success.<sup>135</sup> The streaming site is more appropriate for viral videos than challenging or experimental short films. The local film is not typically made for YouTube success. A site like Vimeo is more closely aligned with sharing short films, experimental aesthetic films and animated films, but the difficulty of attracting viewers remains the same. Unless your video is featured on the Staff Picks (454K followers) or one of the other top twenty channels (between 46K and 133K followers), there is little hope of gaining a sizeable following. The surplus of content on streaming sites makes it almost impossible for a filmmaker to distinguish himself/herself without the support of content curating channels or websites. Oftentimes, channel picks on Vimeo have already played a gamut of film festivals and the Vimeo release is just the final part of a much larger release strategy.

If the online sphere cannot offer meaningful viewership for the local filmmaker, festival circuits may be another avenue for them to share their content. The cost-effectiveness of digital filmmaking has greatly expanded the amount of films being made each year, but film festivals are still programming the same amount of films. Every year, this process leaves thousands of

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<sup>133</sup> "List of most subscribed users on YouTube," Wikipedia, accessed June 15, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most\\_subscribed\\_users\\_on\\_YouTube](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_subscribed_users_on_YouTube).

<sup>134</sup> "20 of the most viewed videos on YouTube that are not music videos," Reddit, last modified June 6, 2015, [https://www.reddit.com/r/dataisbeautiful/comments/38rqr/20\\_of\\_the\\_most\\_viewed\\_videos\\_on\\_youtube\\_that\\_are/](https://www.reddit.com/r/dataisbeautiful/comments/38rqr/20_of_the_most_viewed_videos_on_youtube_that_are/).

<sup>135</sup> Lionel Luigi Lopez, "10 Ways to Create a Popular YouTube Channel," accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/technology/10-ways-create-popular-youtube-channel.html>.

completed films without distribution or publicity<sup>136</sup> and the odds of being accepted to a major film festival grow worse each year. In 1992, Sundance Film Festival received 250 feature length submissions and screened 134 films (the same year *Reservoir Dogs* premiered). By 1996, the number had risen to 750 feature submissions with 184 screened, but, by 2000, the number of submissions had doubled to 1,650 with 197 films screened. In the next decade and a half, that number reached 4,057 submitted films and 186 screened films. In 24 years, the number of submissions has increased 1600%, while the number of screening slots has gone up by only 28%.<sup>137</sup> In other words, 1992 saw about half of all films submitted selected for the festival, while 2017 saw 4 out of every 100 submissions accepted. The argument can be made that an increase in film festivals has aligned with the amount of feature films being made, but many festivals reprogram the same movies that are circulating through the festival circuit. Since premiering at Sundance in January of 2017, *Patti Cake\$* has played at SXSW Film Festival, New Directors/New Films, Wisconsin Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival, Independent Film Festival of Boston, Nashville Film Festival, Montclair Film Festival, Seattle International Film Festival, Berkshire International Film Festival, Los Angeles Film Festival, and Nantucket Film Festival which are all located in the United States. This reprogramming culture greatly increases the difficulty for films to be selected for smaller film festivals. The local film can find a more appropriate and supportive home in the local film scene, a place where the commodity is respected and considered as a piece of artwork that takes time, effort, and sacrifice to come to fruition.

### **The Cost of Commodities**

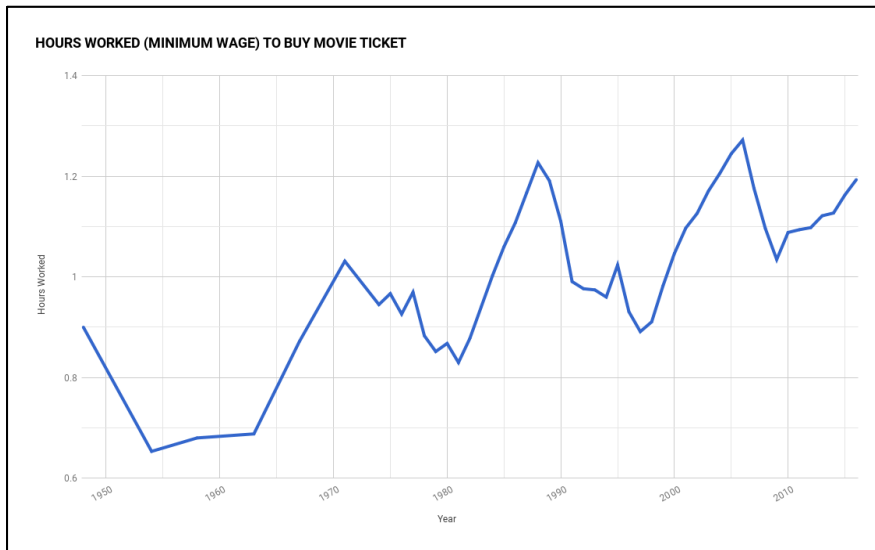
Commodities of a scene are intrinsically linked to cost. In the United States, the average movie ticket costs about \$8.84 and a New Release Blu-ray ranges in price from \$20-30. These prices are affordable for the middle class, but the affordability of mainstream film commodities has significantly increased for lower earning Americans. By correlating the national minimum wage and the average movie ticket price, a new set of data points can be created. These indicate how many hours must be worked by a minimum wage employee to purchase a movie ticket. Since the

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<sup>136</sup> The remaining option is a digital release outlined in the previous paragraph.

<sup>137</sup> “33 years of sundance film festival,” Sundance Institute, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.sundance.org/festivalhistory>.

1950s, there has been a gradual but distinct overall increase based upon these data points. The dips in the graph represent years when the minimum wage was raised, but even these dips have seen continued increases over the past seventy years. The financial cost of attending movie screenings continues to rise for the low income earners.



**Fig. 10** Sources: <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/chart.htm>, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/adjuster.htm>.

The local film product is alternative in its pricing and affordability. The cost for attending screenings is either very low or based on donations. Commodity prices are determined by local filmmakers, but are rarely charged so artists can make profit. More often, they are valued at price points that will allow for the creator to cover costs of physical authoring of media. The local artist is more concerned with creating a following and sharing their art, so products are priced for easy consumption. The artist does not profit monetarily in the same way as a mainstream filmmaker, but gains cultural recognition and capital in return.

The local film commodity is the connecting force for the scene. The theory of scenes develops from the idea that people gather together around a certain cultural commodity or activity, whether it is dancing, music, or film. Local film paraphernalia follows the examples of place and people by providing an alternative to the popular mainstream. The alternative paraphernalia can take the form of different formats, viewing patterns or lower costs, but, more importantly, it must belong to a hip cultural niche that provides access to an unorthodox world.

## Conclusion

Film collectives and microcinemas operate as parts of what the local film scene would look like as a whole. The collective supports creators in the development of their art with workshops and access to camera equipment. At the same time, these collectives only have the rare screenings dedicated to local work, if they have any at all. The Montreal film collectives that do have screenings for locals schedule them monthly or biannually. Microcinemas operating out of bars and warehouses often provide places for audiences to meet and discuss their passion for alternative films, but rarely do they screen work from local filmmakers. Most often they bring in obscure content from foreign filmmakers to highlight their dedication to showing unconventional film. The fact that these types of organizations can operate and thrive in an urban center proves that there is a need and a desire for the local film scene.

By using places, people, and paraphernalia as a framework, the local film scene can be developed and nurtured as a creative community group. While the task of building a scene from the ground up can be overwhelming, the culmination of this research highlights a desperate need for these types of organizations. Places where people can come together in support of paraphernalia that represents the authenticity of their own reality. One that is consistently overlooked and misrepresented by mainstream media.

The argument for a local film scene is equally based on the present and the past. One that asks what difference there might be when someone views a film on a large screen in a room full of people in contrast to watching it at alone at home on a computer screen. Or, that tries to determine how digital technology changes the local filmmakers creative process and in turn how the creator can stretch the boundaries of filmmaking that have been set by the mainstream. The research determines the best use of new and old materials so the local film scene can benefit as many community members as possible. The local film scene must be organized in order to salvage beneficial art practices from the past while embracing the opportunities that only modern technologies can provide. My thesis is mainly conceptual but purposefully resists the label of wish-making. It exists as an essential document for the creation of new local film scenes and the reinvigoration of existing film scenes, collectives, viewing groups, and film clubs to include

more local paraphernalia. The hope for the local film scene is that it can be critiqued, analyzed, put into practice, fail, and succeed as it becomes more than just a term but a useable materiality.

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