Filmmaking at the margins: A brief study of filmmaking in Saint John

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Bachelor of Arts (Political Science and Information and Communication studies, 2007, UNBSJ)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

in the Graduate Academic Unit of Interdisciplinary Studies

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This thesis is accepted by the
Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

August, 2010

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-87647-3

Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-87647-3

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my daughter Sahar. If it weren't for her I'd probably have thrown in the towel in January.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some of the practices of a small group of filmmakers in Saint John, Brunswick. As a group of cultural producers working within Canada they exhibit many of the characteristics of cultural producers who have worked at the margins of cultural industries, including the independent film scene in America. This thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to research that includes an examination of some the patterns within the film industry in Canada and the United States along with the process of creativity and distribution, reflections on personal experience, and interviews with local film makers in order to situate filmmaking in Saint John within the existing structures of filmmaking.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of everyone in the faculty of Social Sciences at UNBSJ who have been my personal hell and solace for the past six years. To Marilyn, thank you for putting up with my nonsense and reassuring me that the photocopier breaks all the time (not just when I use it). To Dann Downes who taught me to take pleasure in things like pop culture and movies and that my opinion meant something and for inspiring the first draft and give shape to the final edit of this thesis. To Jason Childs, whose almost endless ire for pointless things like pop culture reminded me that my opinion and work didn't matter one bit. Dr Joseph Galbo, associate professor of sociology for helping me rewrite and edit the final draft of my thesis. Jonathan Simmons, whose almost encyclopedic knowledge of film was a constant place I could count on for inspiration when I was in a rut and for amusing me with his giant head. To everyone at CFMH, the campus radio station, thank you for housing my stupidity for the past 2 years. Nick Cameron, without whom I would've never picked up a camera (or ever wasted an entire day watching *The Wire)*. The works of John Keats and Bruce Springsteen, who kept me company during my moments of despair. To Nicole, thank you for making breakfast this morning and reassuring me that there was light at the end of the tunnel. And, my daughter Sahar for not pooping on Daddy's laptop this morning.

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Chapter 1

Diaspora, identity, and mediascape

Prior to beginning this research I watched Alexander MacDougall's documentary *Doon School Chronicles* (2000) to investigate the ways in which ethnographic film is constructed(Macdougall, 2000). Macdougall makes many observations about making an ethnographic film about the students at Doon school in his book *Film, Ethnography, and the Senses: The Corporeal Image*. He finds that ethnographic film typically seeks to "reveal one society to another. It may be concerned with the physical life of a people or with the nature of their social experience" (p. 17). *Doon School* is part of MacDougall's larger work within the field of visual anthropology, which is concerned with the production of ethnographic film among, and is distinguishable from other subdisciplines of anthropology by the specific form of data it uses (Fischer & Zeitlyn, 2003). My intention in viewing *Doon School Chronicles* was to watch an example of visual anthropology – the film's effect on me was much deeper.

Doon School took two years to make, and was the first of three documentaries MacDougall would go on to produce about the students at the Doon school during the late 1990s. In the films, he documents the lives of two sets of boys living together in a residential secondary school in the town of Dehra Dun (in the state of Uttarākhanḍ in the North Western part of India). MacDougall films his subjects by paying specific attention to their mode of dress and how their lives are structured around the aesthetics of their uniforms. He argues that the social aesthetics of uniform and place is never neutral or

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random[1]. The uniforms, coupled with the emphasis placed on them by teachers and prefects, was a starting point for understanding the social hierarchies imposed on the students at different stages in their school life. According to MacDougall, social aesthetics does not refer to notions of beauty, but rather to a "much wider range of culturally patterned sensory experience" (MacDougall, 2005, p.7), including "the rules of dormitory life, the organization of students' time, particular styles of speech and gesture, and the many rituals of everyday life that accompany such activities as eating, school gatherings, and sport (itself already a highly ritualized activity)" (MacDougall, 2005, p.7).

Rather than presenting the social hierarchies he identified as social criticism, MacDougall attempts to understand how they play into the everyday lives of the students and how students negotiate their place and status through them. He describes the sense of loss that sometimes accompanies this type of documentary filmmaking as an erosion of self-identity that comes from sharing "the worlds of others so intimately" (p. 137). This isn't just the case for filmmakers (both documentary and dramatic filmmakers), but audiences as well, and it is an experience particularly unique to film:

> Our consciousness comes alive in watching others' actions which resemble but differ from our own. We respond to the stimulus of familiarity, but also to the stimulus of difference. This is corporeal knowledge, only lightly mediated by thought (MacDougall, 2006, p. 145)

As I watched *Doon School Chronicles* I reflected on the social aesthetics of uniforms and hierarchies that colored my own experiences as an adolescent, boarding school student

[1] As MacDougall (2006) argues, the uniforms patterning creates forces and polarities with strong emotional effects. Then, ordinary objects which one comes into daily contact with take on a particular aura, and this aura is augmented by repetition and multiplication" (p. 111)

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even though the geography and social landscape were different. I grew up in Dubai in the Middle East, 2,456 km. from the Doon school. I was also separated from the experiences represented in the film by the fact that it had been a decade since I had left high school. This additional separation is at the heart of my interest in how we construct and display identity through the cultural commodities we create. The phenomena of separation played a crucial role in informing the theoretical framework of this thesis: MacDougall argues that the academic study of film needs to reflect an attitude that is both interdisciplinary and ethnographic; such an approach would help break down some of the barriers between the specialized knowledge of academia and the everyday processes involved in the creation and consumption of cultural products.

To examine the idea of "separation" within the context of interdisciplinary research (following MacDougall's lead), I chose to focus on filmmaking within the Canadian city of Saint John, New Brunswick. I was intrigued by the idea of local filmmakers inhabiting a geographic area that is relatively isolated from prominent economic and cultural centers, such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Halifax. Yet, physical separation is not the only kind of distance we observe in our relationships with cultural goods. The idea of separation consequently reappears under different local, geographical, imagined, and historical conditions than what was reflected in *Doon School Chronicles* or my own experiences as a student in Dubai. A significant part of my own self-identity is informed by ditance or separation. Living in Canada, my experience of popular culture is influenced by diasporic experience. The knitting together of national markets into a global one, inexpensive travel, and the internet have certainly brought billion of people together. Everybody, it seems, has access to the same American movies

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and music now, but the fact that everybody from Dubai, Brasilia, Jerusalem, or Bejin, wears the same Nike sneakers and knows songs from (Black Eyed Peas) does not mean that culture is the same everywhere. This was one of the guiding lessons of my own Diasporic experience. In Dubai, I was creating my own identity out of the bric-a-brac of consumer choices enabled by a globalizing force of communication and economic integration. I would learn later that the French structural anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, used the word "bricolage" for such inventive recombination of scraps of culture (Levi-Strauss 1966).[2] Bricolage, may be indeed the most dominant form of post-modernist identity creation, but those who stress the process often forget that such an identity is forged under local conditions and inflected with local meaning. Perhaps the ethnomusicological idea of the "glocal" is useful here. Popular music can be divided or placed on a continuum ranging from "local" expressions of music relevant to a particular cultural group situated in specific geographic, cultural, and historic conditions at oneend of the spectrum to a mass-produced and mass mediated "global" music scene that is constituted from the industrialized product of the global music industry. Sometimes, local musicians use the raw material (musical form, references, and influences) of the global industry to create new musics in cultural contexts foreign to the original music (Negus;1999: Becker, 1982)

Innovative local cultures often become the instrument to divide and differentiate communities and identities. The modern Diasporic contains an interesting paradox: that

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[2] Levi Strauss notion of bricoleur has had a lasting impact on cultural analysis. The effects of which are highlighted especially within the social sciences and humanities. Douglas Kellner(1995) in particular, argues that multiperspecitval approaches to research require the objects of inquiry to be situated historically. The approach informs a lot of contemporary cultural analysis(see Morowaski,1997; Blommaert,1997;Denzin,2000; Friedman,1998;Palmer,1996; Young and Yarbrough, 1993; Pryse, 1998; Varenne,1996; Dicks and Mason, 1998; Foster,1997; Karunaratne, 1997)

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the very same same globalizing forces that threaten to homoginize everything, also provide more and more people with the technological resources to decide for themselves who they are and how they choose to be known, seen, and distinquished from others, but of course there is more to this narrative.

The term "diaspora" was "explicitly intended for the Hellenic Jewish communities in Alexandria" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 1), but it quickly found currency in describing other displaced communities, such as the dispersal of West Africans through the slave trade (p. 2). Since then, diaspora has grown to encompass diverse groups, distancing it from the once "(presumed to be) clearly demarcated parameters of geography, national identity, and belonging" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 1). Academic discussions of identity construction amongst Diasporas have mostly been restricted to ethnic minorities marginalized or struggling to find their voices in Western countries. This, in addition to other factors not relevant to this thesis makes theorizations of diaspora a contested area of discourse in area, ethnic, and cultural studies (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 2). There is a danger in using "diaspora" as a catch-all phrase, broadening the concept to the point that it loses its critical value, and some scholars caution against straying too far from its roots. This warning is well worth taking seriously, but it is difficult to determine where the boundaries should be drawn given the current trends in globalist discourses. Identity, for example, plays an important role in diaspora studies, but it is discussed in such a way that ignores how fluid such concepts are.[3] Identity is not rigid, whether religious, ethnic, gendered, or national, but in critical formulations, such as in discussions of the African diaspora, individuals are treated as

[3] See, for example, Arjun Appadurai's discussion of the hybridity and socially-constructed nature of concepts as seemingly "natural" as "race." (Appadurai ,1996).

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being "linked by a common heritage, history, and racial descent" (Braziel & Mannur, p. 4, 2003). Gilroy argues that these "diasporic conceptions homogenize difference" and form a kind of "ethnic absolutism" (Gilroy, 2003,p. 6). This raises a question about diaspora's heuristic value, with some critics arguing that it is "methodologically indistinct and ahistorical" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p.6) or that it "fails to attend to historical conditions that produce diasporic subjectivities" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p.7)

It can be argued that the formation of any identity, even the identity of a creative film community in our globalized world emerges from an experience of either geographical or institutional separation. The effect of this separation is evidenced in the local culture being produced which identifies (often unconsciously) crucial ruptures, gaps and rifts in the larger society. Appadurai, in his conceptualization of the various global flows of people, money, technology, media and ideas that form the multi-faceted landscapes of global society, argues that "culture" increasingly appears in the cracks or "disjunctures" between these flows (Appadurai 1996). Culture, in this case the local culture of filmmakers, points towards those things around us which are unstable, changing, and shape the way we live. Local cultures help us reveal who we are to ourselves, often in ways we did not realize and in places we did not necessarily think to look. This is consistent with previous research done on Canadian filmmakers which frequently addresses how local and regional cultures interrupt and engage with national narratives (see, Leach, 2006). The concept of the diaspora is not limited to the displacement of communities, but ideologies as well, such as the Enlightenment worldview, which originally had an internal coherence that presupposed a "certain relationship between reading, representation, and the public sphere" (Lechner & Boli,

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2004, p. 104). This is no longer the case, and "the diaspora of these terms and images across the world, especially since the nineteenth century" has loosened this coherence, providing instead a fragile "synopticon of politics, in which different nation-states, as part of their evolution, have organized their political cultures around different keywords"(Ibid). Let us consider “mediascapes” as one of these key words. In the case of filmmaking the mediascape refers to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate, such as film-production studios, as well as the images of the world created by this media. These mediascapes provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world leaving both audiences and filmmakers scrambling to deal with the consequences of these complex and mixed experiences. The further away these audiences and filmmakers are away from the centers of power, such as the direct "experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic" (Ibid), and even fantastic objects.

With this mediascape in mind, I will be adopting MacDougall's emphasis on the process of identity construction within communities to establish a relationship between Saint John filmmakers and the struggles that have been associated with the diasporic experience of isolation and separation. Media scholars such as Todd Gitlin(2002) and Roger Silverstone(2007) make the case that the media sphere *is* the public realm, the place where an increasingly significant proportion of the world's population construct and perform their identities. Two themes emerge to situate the identity and subjectivity of diasporic groups: (1) the tension of “living here and remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford, 1997, p. 255) and (2) diasporic identity formation in response to immediate

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surroundings (Brodwin, 2003, p. 390). The relationship between these two themes highlights the complexities of negotiating between the local, national, global and glocal. I will argue that Saint John filmmakers are marked by "hybridity and heterogeneity" and are "defined by a traversal of the boundaries demarcating nation and diaspora" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 5), i.e., they feel the pressures of being at the margins, but override their marginal status through cultural creation.

In the interest of full disclosure

My interest in film began with Bollywood movies in the city of Dubai. In the 1990s, Dubai experienced unprecedented economic growth that led to it becoming a hub for European workers seeking a tax-free oasis bolstered by western liberal values. Dubai is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Arabian Gulf, thanks in large part to its expatriate South Asian population.[4] I attended an English school, had Indian friends, and listened to Rick Dees on the radio. My identity was shaped by heady mix of sources from the expatriate communities which were in a constant state of flux between homeland and hostland. My current work emerges from my involvement as a research assistant in two projects in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John (UNBSJ) over several years: a Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) funded project under Dr. Joseph Galbo, which examined filmmakers in Saint John, and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project under Dr. Dann Downes, researching Irish folk music in the province. Both projects sparked my

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[4] The global economic meltdown has caused a large number of foreign expatriates to leave the city since last year. The investments in the city have also dried up causing one of the country's largest construction companies to announce that it was 60 billion dollars in debt as of November, 2009. This sent stock market indexes around the world plummeting. See Davidson, 2005; Eelens, Schemers & Speckman, 1992; Kapiszeweski, 2001; and Pacione, 2005).

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interest in the theoretical roots of identity construction as well as influencing my commitment to the ethnographic tradition which seeks to examine how cultural identity is sustained, created, and performed, through prolonged contact and engagement with the cultural practices under investigation

Between 2007 and 2009 I worked with CultureHub (http://www.culturehub.ca/), an independent community website owned and operated by Nick Cameron, a student and resident of the city. Cameron's intentions were initially to film local events and showcase them to the community; however, in 2007 the content of CultureHub took on a political dimension in response to a report from the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. The commission was assigned to examine the problems of post-secondary education (PSE) in New Brunswick, and one of their many recommendations was to convert UNBSJ into a so-called polytechnic. Opposition to the report's recommendations included local university professors, students, and other community leaders, all of whom participated in rallies around the city and province. Cameron filmed many of the speeches and rallies and made them available on the CultureHub website, generating considerable interest and contributing to further community involvement. In a partnership with CFMH 107.3, the campus and community radio station, and local businesses, CultureHub filmed musicians in concert and made the resulting videos available to the community. Over the course of a year we filmed over fifty bands and provided public access to over twenty videos. Most of the equipment was either purchased by us or borrowed from the university. We did not receive any financial compensation for our efforts and the project was entirely self-funded and distributed. The website is licensed under the Creative Commons (Attribution-Noncommercial-No

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An interdisciplinary Approach to Studying local filmmakers

My experiences as a research assistant, community videographer, and contributor to CFHM 107.4 helped me understand that an analysis of local cultural production requires an interdisciplinary methodology: film production is a collaborative enterprise rooted in the histories of small creative communities sensitive to the politics of the local; the easiest way to understand how people create cultural products that comment on their personal and collective identities is to talk to those engaged in such activities. The film and folk research projects provided me with an opportunity to interview people involved in filmmaking and folk music in Saint John. Rather than approaching this task as a detached outsider, I chose to immerse myself in the processes of creation and to articulate my own feelings and reactions through a form of self-ethnography, the object of which is to find different ways of addressing important issues about knowledge and social inquiry. I was a participant observer in the work of many local filmmakers but I wanted to achieve a certain level of self-reflexivity about my own status as an outsider in a small community that is constantly under strain.

Through a combination of my participation within the film community and ethnography of local filmmakers, my intention is to analyze the social conditions of cultural production. There are few theoretical and methodological guides for doing this type of research, but one useful source has been the work of Donald E. Polkinghorne and his conceptualization of Participatory Action Research. Polkinghorne defines this as a method of contextualizing those experiences that contribute to social change

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(Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). Polkinghorne formulated a framework within which a researcher works through three different key areas: (1) first person action research, which fosters self-inquiry and an awareness of the researcher's own everyday life as the process being studied unfolds; (2) second-person action research, which focuses on interpersonal encounters and the researcher's ability to collaborate with others in their community of inquiry; and (3) third-person research activities, which extend the inquiry to a wider community with the researchers' intention to transform the politics of the issue.

My research method also has roots in grounded theory and complements an interdisciplinary orientation: research that is composite by its nature and combines ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, participant observation, personal reflections, theoretical meditations, as well as political/cultural intervention (see (Polkinghorne 1995: Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Grounded theory is a methodology that has long been associated with Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) who developed the theory in the late 60s. Empirical social research often starts with a theory to which data is applied, but one of the main goals of grounded theory is to help researchers generated theory from the data (Huehls, 2005); it is a general rather than purely qualitative method guided by a broad research question . For example, in the context of this project, I might ask: "how is the creative process of the Saint John film community helped by new technology?" While my orientation is not a pure grounded theory approach I was conscious to insure that patterns, themes, and categories of analysis originate from the data in order to build theory from such sources. As a result, the remix and mash-up culture that was evident in some aspects of the Saint John film community can be reflected within the medium of machinima.

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As early as the 1950s, sociologists identified some difficulties with the interview process: David Reisman (1956) problematized the interview explaining as a form of eliciting information it had become embedded within contemporary life and individual subjectivity. Many qualitative researchers find that even though the interview is supposed to be a marker of an authentic individual experience, it is instead a "rehearsed, routinized narrative" (Lee, 2008, p. 300). By placing myself within the creative culture of the subjects being interviewed, I was able to enlarge their narrative by contextualizing the responses in relation to my own thoughts and feelings. To summarize, by juxtaposing these different elements (participatory action research, grounded theory, interviews), a research project can provide a richly textured description and analysis of cultural activities. I will return to these methodological issues in the last chapter of the thesis with a discussion of some of the methodological challenges I encountered during my research and address limitations and suggestions for future research.

Local filmmakers and their communities – identifying sources for my work

In Saint John there are at most two-dozen people who would identify themselves as filmmakers and have seriously considered a career in the film industry. I have spoken with most of them over the course of two years, conducting interviews with the following directors, writers, and producers who have worked and continue to work in Saint John: Richard MacQueen, who had just finished making his first short feature when I met him; Steve Doiron, a local writer-director who was in the process of shooting his second short feature; the directors and producers that make up Hemmings House Pictures, a corporate

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film and documentary production house that started in Saint John and has since opened a branch in Halifax and Japan; Andrew Tidby (Tidby Productions), who, along with Greg Hemmings and Glen Ingersoll, started Hit Media, which was a local production house that specialized in corporate commercial projects; Jonathan Simmons, an aspiring filmmaker who had completed work on his second short film; and Gretchen Kelbaugh (Story First Productions), a local writer- director who had finished her first feature length film and was trying to get funding for a documentary (Ethics documentation for the above interviews are placed in Appendix I).

MacQueen spoke at length about how he went about making his short film *Dead to the World*, set in a post-apocalyptic future where Canada has been invaded by the United States. MacQueen found that local voluntary support was essential to getting his film made. Doiron found that the distance between Saint John and Fredericton, along with the lack of technical resources such as cameras and recording equipment in Saint John, meant that local filmmakers were forced to make a substantial personal investment in equipment or to borrow it from their acquaintances within the local film community. Some of the technical and structural issues Doiron and MacQueen talked about became clearer when I volunteered as a crew member on their short films. The crew included a mix of friends and volunteers who had been recruited through social networking websites or by word of mouth.

Blake Stilwell, a local sound engineer, found that the division of financial resources between the three largest cities in the province made finding and working on film sets within Saint John a challenge. There is however a core group of people who are interested in being a part of the film production process and local filmmakers rely on

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them to contribute their skills and experience. Stilwell muses that although there are a number of filmmakers in the city that take on producing and shooting films, they do it largely through utilizing their own skill sets and resources. By contrast, Fredericton's film community is far more organized due in part to the presence of the New Brunswick Film Co-op which helps bring filmmakers and industry professionals together to utilize each other's individual skill sets. The NB Film Co-op holds a film series at the UNB Fredericton campus and is involved in teaching film courses there. Stilwell argues that filmmakers in Saint John are often reluctant to make use of resources outside of their own circle of friends and acquaintances, training themselves to learn as many facets of filmmaking as possible.

My ethnography consists of observations and interviews with a mix of local directors, producers, and writers working within the Saint John film community. During this time I kept a diary of my involvement in which I occasionally reflected on my participation and what emerged repeatedly in my observations and commentary was the degree to which local film production in Saint John overlap with traditional folk-musical practices.

Local filmmaking as a techno-folk-culture

Given the collaborative nature of the Saint John film community, and its reliance on inexpensive media technology, it is important to make the connection between filmmaking and folk practices more obvious: folk music is produced through collaborative work that builds on a tradition of musical culture while incorporating the

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agency of the performers. A community then takes ownership of the repertoire, making it culture rather than product or property.[5] Concerns over ownership raises the tension between notions of culture as individual property, the heritage of a particular cultural group, or as part of commodity production of the "cultural industries" (Adorno, 1970, Smythe, 1981).[6] Our contemporary media environment however permits the creation of both cultural artifacts and commodities, sometimes from the same raw materials (Downes, 2005). As a result, local film cultures can be understood as producing a hybrid form: a collaborative folk art largely made possible through technology. Such communities are aware of a tradition and create work that is experimental and improvisational within a formal structure, thereby creating work that references earlier works. Local filmmakers, like folk musicians, work within the traditions available to them. The products artists make are sometimes, as in the case of film and music, versions of products that came before them but are also extensions of them. Just as Muddy Waters built on and broadened old blues standards that had passed through the hands of many musicians before him, many folk practices like film production follow the same trends depending on how they are situated. Contemporary film production has been facilitated by inexpensive digital technology and this has enhanced the ability of local filmmakers to transform existing genres. Filmmaking, rather than being defined as an industrial art form controlled by financiers, finally has the potential to embrace the long history of

[5] The romanticization of folk music uses the music's ability to resonate with audiences as something real or authentic, but we then complicate this historic reimagining of folk as both a cultural practice and a genre. See Connell and Gibson, 2004.

[6] Smythe(1981) follows the critique of mass culture articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer. He also adds the idea that peripheral cultures can become "dependent" on a larger culture for their literature, media, etc.

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appropriation in folk art.[7] There is already evidence of this occurring within video game culture which from its inception has embraced folk methods of production and collaboration even while facing the pressures of corporate convergence and debates over intellectual property. As I will argue, elements of this technological folk-culture are evident in the community of Saint John filmmakers. These elements are not necessarily the result of conscious choices nor are they necessarily desirable avenues for filmmaking. They are, however, the result of technological change, distance from the centers of the film industry and necessity – as filmmakers grapple with the problems of producing and distributing their work.

Ezra Pound considered it the duty of the modern artist to re-think the cultural traditions of the past and re-make them within their contemporary environment. In so doing, Pound managed to construct his own idiosyncratic tradition and cultural lineage that includes Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Sapho, Homer, Confucius, and the French Troubadours of the fourteenth century. This mode of representation also speaks to the heart of the call and response form of rhythm that is central to jazz music. Dizzy Gillespie once observed "when we borrowed from a standard we added and substituted so many chords that most people didn't know what song we were really playing (Gillespie & Fraser, 1979, p. 209 as cited in Toyts & Mcrea, 2009). And it is within terms of jazz that DJ cultures that theorist Paul Miller conceives of creativity as networked jazz:

> Sampling is a new way of doing that's been with us for a long time: with found objects ... The mix of the old associations. New contexts from old. The script gets flipped, gauges evolve and learn to speak new forms, new thoughts. The thought becomes legible again

[7] In the case of some filmmakers, who find themselves in communities like Saint John, this homeland is embodied in a kind of imagined and by extension, constructed place like genre film; for other communities of cultural producers this home is restricted to geography. Cultural diasporas use technology and cultural products to connect to their imagined cultural homeland; a condition that has been brought about through distance

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... [like] jazz, cybernetic jazz, nu-bop, ILLbient— a nameless formless, shapeless concept given structure by the rhythms (Miller 2004, p. 22 as cited in Harley, 2009).

This conception saw its way into the work of European avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s strategies of détournement and through William Burroughs's cut-up works of the 1960s (Harley, 2009). Even though these artistic practices posed little threat to the established hegemony of distribution and production in the film industry, in our connected digital media environment, they pose a significant challenge, what with our increased ability to sample, quote, and remix the context of the read-write world (Harley, 2009). Sometimes, even the seemingly immovable institutions of production have a tendency to unwittingly sanction this appropriation. This is most clear within the medium of machinima. Henry Lowood (2009) defines machinima as a way of making animated movies in real-time using software that is used to develop and play computer games. This new ability was pioneered in 1993 with the release of id Software's first person shooter *Doom*, which challenged the traditional notions of authorship by allowing for game-modifications (mods), third-party level design, and the creation of independently developed software tools. This approach referred to as the new cultural economy of game design (Lowood, 2009) where developers now provide software utilities for modifying their own games and usually include them in the packaged release of the game or soon after their release for downloading through their websites.

Lowood identifies three distinct themes that are emerging from the gaming medium: technologies of modification, subversion, and the growth of community-developed content. Id Software's decision to embrace mods(user-initiated software modifications to games) encouraged the development of tools for extending the medium

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into film: machinima filmmakers managed to subvert the game system altogether and turned it into a performance technology, generating an opportunity for gaming to move beyond competition and to encompass narrative and experimental filmmaking.

The early examples of machinima can be compared to the Lumière brothers footage of a train pulling into a station (1895) and Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902), in that they marked a significant step in the birth of a new narrative medium - pointing towards new possibilities of self expression. The evolution of this narrative medium has been sped up by the availability and rapid development of 3-D graphics software and hardware that is readily available on personal computers. Machinima presents creators with a transformation of traditional notions of how art and narratives are created. In doing so, this new conception of creativity and spectatorship pre-supposes not just the meanings of the texts but of how they are created as well.

The ready availability of cultural materials and tools used within machinima to help transform narratives within gaming can also be applied to film. The availability of digital technologies obviously heralds a change in production style, placing affordable tools in the hands of amateurs, but it's important not to forget the smaller, but not less significant changes that can be made in pre-production: the availability of screenplays and screenwriting software presents contemporary filmmakers the tools to gradually shift filmmaking's rigid structure to one that is more adaptable. Contemporary filmmakers like Zack Snyder and the Coen brothers actively rely on storyboards rather than screenplays during their productions. This gradual shift away from the traditional screenplay can be traced to John Cassavetes, who would famously write the screenplays of his films while filming them (Murphy, 2008, p. 44).

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The British film director Ken Loach directs his actors in his movies by simply setting up the scenes and asking them to improvise the dialogue. Similarly, Christopher Guest, director of *This is Spinal Tap* and *Waiting for Guffman*, relies on his actors to improvise the trajectory of the scene. Paul Greengrass, director of *The Bourne Ultimatum*, like Cassavetes before him, wrote the screenplay with a team of writers during filming. As Eduardo Navas puts it: "No matter what form it takes, the remix is always allegorical, meaning that the object of contemplation depends on recognition of a pre-existing cultural code. The audience is always expected to see within the object a trace of history" (Navas, 2008 as cited in Harley, 2009). Even though this act of borrowing forms an essential part of remixing, its basis is rooted in the dynamic dialogue taking place between audiences and producers across diverse historical and cultural frameworks (Amerika, 2009; Adema, 2008; Barth, 2000 as cited in Harley, 2009). These cultural re-mixers are then continually locked in a tension between the collective forgetting by "engaging in transformative acts that scratch away at collective memory" (Harley 2009).

Technology has always been used by cultural producers as a more efficient means to distribute art, and so the use of digital distribution can be harnessed to invite marginalized communities of artists, writers and filmmakers to be part of a larger conversation. This ongoing conversation has found its focal point within cultural and post-colonial studies. I will make the case that the practice of filmmaking in Saint John, like other marginalized groups of people, represent a kind of folk practice and as a result share some of the patterns and discourses over authenticity and essentialism within it. This thesis will focus on trying to use Saint John filmmakers as an extension of the

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independent film scene that emerged out of the 90's in America along with trying to understand filmmaking at the margins mimicking the processes of creativity and identity formation present with communities of diaspora around the world. To this end I wish to reinterpret Saint John filmmakers as bricoleurs at the margins: making film responding to the limited resources and access to institutions they face. This situation is made possible by the dramatic transformation and availability of film production and distribution technology. The opening up of the screenplay as a site for the reinterpretation of the production process within filmmaking is particularly important.

In the next chapter I will explore the history of filmmaking in Canada and the role that the fragmentation of national identity plays in fostering a techno-folk cultural relationship between local Saint John filmmakers and established channels of film production.

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Chapter 2

American Independent Cinema, Canadian National Cinema, and Filmmaking at the Canadian Margin

This chapter establishes the context for film in Saint John by placing it in the broader context of film in Canada. The development of commercial and independent film took different paths in Canada and the US. The reasons for their divergent patterns of development include: different economic policies, national agendas, and various initiatives taken by local film festivals and independent film co-operatives to create opportunities for films to find audiences. The chapter will explore, in broad strokes, various aspects of American and Canadian film history, particularly as they affected independent film production. I will then focus on regional filmmaking in New Brunswick and Saint John, paying special attention to the contemporary scene and how a small film community in Saint John makes its films as well as the tensions and frustrations experienced by young film-makers with their provincial-film organization, NB film.

The relative marginality of the Saint John film community has made its members more independent and creative in their adoption of new technology. This strategy has not resulted in any new commercial breakthroughs but it has given rise to practices of co-operation and experimentation (for example, sampling and mash-ups). In this specific sense, the practices of the Saint John film-community resemble those found in diasporic communities, but here the similarity ends. While diasporic communities are focused on the tasks associated with maintaining and creating a new collective identity, Saint John filmmakers are less invested in collective identity and more concerned about the

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processes of creation under specific local economic and cultural conditions. In the final sections of this chapter I explore the local circumstances and how young filmmakers draw on available connections in order to create their own independent films.

Independent Cinema in the US

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the Paramount Decision which ordered the Hollywood movie studios to sell their theater chains and to eliminate the anti-competitive practices of block booking. This decision effectively brought an end to the Hollywood studio system. On the heels of the Paramount case, film production in the U.S. was decentralized and many major studios shifted vertical integration of film production and distribution to the distribution of independently produced features, which by 1967 amounted to 51.1 percent of all features released (Jowett, 1976, p. 481). The U.S. is of course synonymous with large media conglomerates that have an economic strangle-hold on film production. While this economic narrative is generally true we should not discount that in the U.S. a lively independent and regional cinema operates alongside the economic media behemoths. Independent cinema explores the artistic territory that stands outside the classical Hollywood narrative and supplies many of the cinematic innovation and talent to the American film industry which is always eager to incorporate the independents as long as they make a profit. Today, independent film is a major source of talent and innovation for Hollywood and how independent film emerged and prospered is worth commenting upon since many of its struggles are similar to those of Canadian regional independent film.

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Independent filmmaking in America can be traced back to 1908, at a time when a group filmmakers and producers who privileged the artistic integrity of films saw cinema being compromised by the intentions of the Edison Trust. At the time, the Trust held the patents for film equipment that were used in the processing of film equipment (including the patents of film production film cameras, projectors and raw film stock). Until that time the Edison Trust held the first oligopoly in the film industry. Independent filmmakers shunned the Edison Trust Corporation in order to make smaller, and more creative films in California. Louis B. Mayer, the Warner Brothers and all the other pioneers of the "big six" studios who fought Thomas Edison over his film patents all started out as independent filmmakers, fighting the very thing they would become: corporate filmmakers trying to control the film market (Hall, 2009: p. 45). By 1917 The Motion Picture Patents Company ceased to exist. There were several reasons for its demise, including a failure to gauge and predict the interests of consumers and a series of decisions by the Supreme Court in 1912 and 1915 that cancelled all of Edison's MPPC Patents. In 1917, The Sherman Anti-Trust Act put an end to Thomas Edison's control over the independent film industry.

Subsequently, throughout the 1920s and 1930s "film societies" began to spring up all over Europe. Films like *Un chien Andalu*, a sixteen minute 16mm film by early independent filmmakers Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí were the kinds of films these societies supported. These movies were also screened at small art-house theaters that were independently owned and operated. The filmmakers did not need to have large theaters packed with people every night to make their money back because of the modest budget of their films – made possible by the increasing ability of new filmmakers to gain

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access to production tools that included discarded film equipment. The display of their films was helped by the growth of the film festival circuit (Holmlund, 2004, p. 30).

The film festival concept has been around as long as the film industry itself, but it really started to become a full-fledged "circuit" by the 1960s. These new venues provided a new opportunity for filmmakers to display and distribute their films to wider audiences. In 1978 the Utah/U.S. Film Festival was established in Salt Lake City, Utah (Hulmlund, 2004: p. 49). The festival was a seven- daylong event that involved panel discussions, retrospective screenings of independent films and a film contest for unknown, talented American filmmakers. The overall goals for this film festival were to lure film production companies to the state to bring in more money and to showcase talented, but unknown American independent filmmakers. In 1985 Robert Redford and his Sundance Institute took over artistic management of the Utah/U.S. Film Festival. They changed the name to The Sundance Film, moved its location from Salt Lake City to Park City (a ski resort town in the mountains). The festival date was changed from September to January and the running time was changed from 7 days to 10 days. Major Hollywood film actors and studio executives also started to take notice of the festival. By the 1994, The Sundance festival was responsible for launching the careers of Jim Jarmusch, Kevin Smith, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino (Hall, 2009: p. 50).

Until about 1960, avant-garde independent films in North America were distributed by the same companies that distributed most commercial films. These distribution companies dealt with independent films in the same way that they dealt with commercial films: a distributor's tastes determined which films were distributable and which were not. Filmmakers then signed a long-term exclusive contract and received

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only a fraction of the profits. In the early sixties, Jonas Mekas, along with a group of independent filmmakers (including Shirley Clarke, Emile de Antonio, Gregory J. Markopoulos, Robert Frank, Adolfas Mekas, Harold Humes, Peter Bogdanovich, Ed Bland, and Lionel Rogosin) created the New American Cinema Group(NACG). One of the purposes of the NACG was to propose new methods of production and distribution. By 1962, the group had succeeded in creating their own cooperative film distribution center, the Filmmakers' Cooperative. The creation of this cooperative proved an event with significant impact on the development of independent film in America.

The cooperative gathered the filmmakers together, brought their work to the attention of the interested public, and provided the filmmakers with a limited, but in many cases crucial, income. These were the first generation of filmmakers for whom avant-garde film was no longer "an activity on the margins of their commercial work but their whole life direction" (Mekas, 2005:p. 39). Almost a decade earlier, the filmmakers who founded the cooperative had made their first attempts to gather themselves together into an organization, but the idea collapsed before it got off the ground. The main cause for the collapse (as noted by Jonas Mekas) was the filmmakers' attempt to mix both aesthetics and economics. While various members seemed to agree on the practical and economic needs of independent film production, they totally disagreed on aesthetic questions. Years later, when the New American Cinema Group was being formed, the lessons of the early nineteen-fifties were remembered. It was made clear from the very beginning that no aesthetic discussions would be entertained during the meetings or included in the organization's final program. Mekas credits this principle with much of the success of the Cinema Group and the cooperative. The only time that the cooperative

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was on the verge of collapse was in 1967 when it briefly abandoned its open-to-all principle to adopt a policy of selectivity. Mekas summarizes the lesson the cooperative learned: "The genuine avant-garde film and the genuine formal narrative film by their very natures are noncommercial and appeal to limited audiences only. To succeed with such films commercially one needs to embrace not only the commercial distribution methods but also, eventually, the content, the styles, the formulas of the commercial film" (Mekas,2005:p. 38).

The avant-garde filmmaker of the sixties thus by-passed the commercial system and created an alternative dissemination system. The effect of this movement was to shift the independent film from the Hollywood distribution outlets and circuits toward smaller, private, *and* community circuits of film presentation. According to figures from the Pacific Film Archive, there were 85,000 noncommercial film showcases in the United States in 1973. This figure includes film societies, universities and colleges, galleries, museums, and clubs (Mekas, 2004:p. 38).

The income filmmakers received from the cooperative was supplemented by the parallel growth of film departments in universities and colleges around North America. A 1977 survey by the American Film Institute found over 1,067 universities and colleges with film courses. These courses were aided by the presence of a body of critical writing on avant-garde film. This increased activity and interest in the realm of independent filmmaking resulted in increased rentals to the filmmakers, and it created a demand for appearances by filmmakers themselves, thus enlarging the filmmakers' income to the point where they could not only live from their films and lectures but could also continue

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new projects.

The final stage in the history of independent film started when colleges began to establish courses and chairs specifically devoted to the avant-garde independent film. In the last thirty years, the establishment of alternative exhibition spaces, the recognition of independent film in university curriculum, and the growth of independent film production, allowed innovative directors to cement a new kind of relationship between audiences and industry: an even wider distribution of film to smaller markets. This was facilitated by the ability of filmmakers to distribute their films to theatres directly.

The beginning of the Sundance Film festival in 1978 along with the availability of films through VHS opened up the process of filmmaking to audiences, eventually giving birth to viable regional, independent filmmaking (Hall, 2009). Today, due to the large volume of inexpensive, high end digital film equipment available at the consumer level, independent filmmakers are no longer dependent on major studios to provide them with the tools they need (as a condition of entry into Hollywood or by providing outdated, discarded equipment as in the past) to produce a film. Due to the falling cost of technology, thousands of small production companies like Stark Productions can obtain the resources they need to produce entertaining films at a fraction of the cost of the big Hollywood studios (Holmlund,2005). Post production has also been simplified by non-linear editing software that can be easily used in personal computers.

The increasing popularity and feasibility of low-budget films over the last 15 years has led to a vast increase in the number of aspiring filmmakers — people who have written "spec scripts" and who hope to find several million dollars to turn that script into a successful independent film like *Reservoir Dogs*, or *Little Miss Sunshine.*[8] Aspiring

[8] This work ethic and production strategy is best reflected by Robert Rodriguez, who filmed El Mariachi on

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filmmakers often work day-jobs while they pitch their scripts to independent film production companies, talent agents, and wealthy investors. Their dreams are much more attainable than they were before the independent film revolution because gaining the backing of a major studio is no longer needed in order for aspiring filmmakers to potentially access millions of dollars to make their film. Independent movie-making has also resulted in the proliferation of short films and short film festivals. Full-length films are often showcased at a variety of film festivals such as the Sundance, the Slamdance, the Raindance, or the South By Southwest Film Festivals. Ironically, award winners from these exhibitions are more likely to get picked up for distribution by major film studios.

Canadian Films and National Narratives: A Different History

In the March-April 1964 issue of *Canadian Cinematography*, an unsigned article was published with the title "Do We Expect Too Much Too Soon from the Film Industry?" The author of the article found that Canada's reputation for filmmaking had been established by the work done by NFB in the documentary and experimental fields. In the late 1950s, Québécois filmmakers at the NFB and the NFB Candid Eye series of films pioneered the documentary processes that became known as "direct cinema" or "cinema verite." Outside the NFB, only one or two directors had won recognition at international festivals. After this, the national scene was "made up primarily of television films and it is in this field that we stand or fall as an industry." It was television

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a shoe-string budget of $7500 U.S. In his acceptance speech for the lifetime achievement award Norman Jewison told aspiring filmmakers that it was the story – not the special effects, that made film possible. He implied that filmmakers make movies in spite of the mainstream movie business.

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production and the "Madison Avenue oriented TV commercial" in particular that constituted "the foundation that makes up the industry"(Canadian Cinematography 3, no. 3 (March-April 1964), 8. as cited in Dorland,1998;p185).

In the first half of the twentieth-century, Canada was one of the few industrial countries in the world with little legislation to support a national feature film industry. In 1938, the Canadian government invited John Grierson, a British film critic and film-maker, to study the state of the government's film production. His report became the basis for the *National Film Act* of 1939 and for the establishment of the National Film Board of Canada with John Grierson as its head. In part, the NFB was founded to create propaganda in support of the Second World War, and while the National Film Act of 1950 gave the NFB the mandate "to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations," for the most part, the post-war Canadian film industry had been stifled by economic and structural constraints(Ibid). Film distribution was controlled by foreign interests and constituted a structure with all the characteristics of a monopoly. For advocates of a Canadian cinema, public taste had clearly been deformed by the American monopoly in feature distribution and exhibition. According to the Association professionnelle des cinéaste (APC):

> We have called the result cultural colonialism ... hard words, I know and they will not please those who, in this country, earn their living in the film business .... Nations have died ... from the moment that they began to dream the dreams of others, from the moment that they have proved themselves unable to create their own mythology....We, in Canada, have often been ashamed of our own domestic heroes, and we have been quick to mimic the fads of other lands. And so, with the cinema, we have lived by proxy, for the last sixty years(APC, 1964;3. as cited in Dorland,1998;p. 119)

By the nineteen-sixties, Canada was beginning to stir from its cultural hibernation and significant turning points came with the creation of the Montreal International Film

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Festival (MIFF) in 1960 and the formation of Telefilm Canada in 1967. The Montreal International Film Festival contributed to the national narrative that Canadian films are essentially art films, while Telefilm established the template for government- sponsored film development which over the years has shifted dramatically, such that government rationale for supporting Canadian productions is increasingly economic rather than cultural. Here is one of the major contradictions of Canadian film and Canadian film policy. It aims at serving several contradictory, in fact, often incompatible demands: film as art, film as national narrative, and film as commerce. Canadian film has lived with these contradictory expectations ever since its awakening in the 1960s and it lives with them today. These tensions contribute to the richness and uniqueness of Canadian film and every new Canadian filmmaker who wants to have a career in film must learn to navigate this restless water.

The Montreal International Film Festival was initially non-competitive. Its organizers hoped to influence local distributor and exhibitor programming taste towards a more internationally influenced cinema by building cine-clubs (almost 345 in Quebec between 1960 and 1965). According to historian Yves Lever, by screening the award-winning films of other European festivals, the MIFF privileged the star filmmakers of the moment, like Godard, Antonioni, Satyajit Ray, Truffaut, and Kaneto Shindo(Lever, 1987;p 75). By orienting its choices toward the most dynamic of new cinema, the French New Wave and the young national cinemas of Eastern Europe, the festival helped foster the local production of similarly oriented projects. The avant-garde function of the Festival made it possible to watch new and quality films in Montreal (Dorland, 1998, p. 127).

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The festival however was increasingly criticized for becoming insulated from the needs of the "average" audience. The irony of course is that the creation of the festival in 1960 came about because "the elite had alerted public opinion [and] put pressure on the government and the monopolies that have distorted cinema here for fifty years"(Dorland, 1998; p127). By modifying its raison d'être on the false pretext of satisfying a large audience, the MIFF disappointed professionals and cinephiles who had supported it from the beginning; however, this same elitism made it possible, in 1964, for the canonization of Canadian cinema as a filmmaker's medium. In that year the organizing committee of the MIFF began working on what became the first retrospective on Canadian cinema.

Besides the festival's express intention of exposing Canadian films to larger, non-paying audiences in the context of the 1967 Centennial celebrations, the retrospective, particularly in the quantity of printed material it generated, provided a unique insight into the attempt by professional creators to essentialize Canadian cinema.

Essentialism, in the view of the retrospective's organizing committee, was necessary because of the need to "look at our production as a whole rather than as a collection of side issues" (NFB Archives).Oddly, this meant approaching the history of film in Canada in the form of a chronology: discrete and disconnected events marked in a linear continuum of time that began out of the blue in 1898 when Massey-Harris "introduce[d] the world's first sponsored film, shot on an Ontario farm by the Edison Studios" (NFB archives). The organizers found there were alternative approaches to recounting the history of Canadian film. Films could have been classified "according to schools of thought or artistic styles" (NFB archives), but -- such suggestions were rejected by the committee because it wanted to foreground a continuum of creativity.

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Eventually the attempt to establish a film industry caused many to take an oppositional stance against the festival. For example, Jacques Godbout contended that the "establishment of a feature film industry is a mirage in our desert" (Godbout, 1998 as cited in Dorland 1998, p. 125). It was a mirage in large part because of the contradictory discourses of filmmakers demanding a film industry while repudiating one of its essential elements, the mass audience. The critical discovery of feature filmmakers in Quebec and in English Canada by European film critics further blurred the line between art film and film commerce. The tension between film as industry and film as culture confused both the general public and the local institutions of film criticism. As film and communication scholar Michael Dorland observes:

> Not only is [Canadian film] given less coverage than foreign cinema, but it is generally classified in a separate category, the object of special or documentary issues. Paradoxically, when the journal did cover Canadian film, the tone of the discussion was less critical and more anecdotal. As if one did not take terribly seriously what was being said.(Dorland, 1998, p. 131).[9]

The criticism Dorland describes was characteristic of institutions of criticism in Canada, especially newspapers. He found that critics wanted Canadian films to be better than Hollywood films but demanded or expected that they be produced according to the industrialized model of Hollywood and to be as popular as Hollywood box-office hits. A unique, indigenous Canadian film style was, in many ways, set up to fail.

From the start the Canadian film industry reflected its bi-national character and contradictions: Francophones were able to express a creative and linguistic voice while Anglophones suffered from regional dispersion and the absence of a common cultural

[9] Michael Dorland (1998) conducted a content analysis of *Objectif* – one of the principal Quebec film publications of the nineteen-sixties.

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response to mainstream Hollywood. French-Canadian films are often more successful because the language difference and the political and cultural realities of Quebec, makes Quebec audiences much more receptive to French-Canadian-produced film. Often, the top-grossing Canadian film is a French-language film from Quebec.

Film in Canada developed not because of audience or market demands but as part of the emergence of cultural nationalism in which the Federal Government bought into the idea that film production could support a nation-building project. This was indeed a daunting task. Canada did not have its own national film industry and, in the nineteen-sixties, it had a population which that was just short of 19 million. The country was divided between two cultures and languages and shared a border with the U.S. which was the political and cultural colossus of the 20th century. Given this context, it was only with the intervention of the Federal Government that the necessary measures could be enacted for developing a Canadian film industry. Other technologies and media have been viewed the same way, from railways to radio, and even television, which was also supported as a tool for nation building (see Maurice Charland, "Technological Nationalism" 1986).

Canadian cinema provides a particularly cogent example of a sector in which private industry had been unable to establish itself because of economic obstacles that it could not overcome by itself. These obstacles included a small internal market, exhibition space that was controlled by foreign capital, the lack of Canadian risk capital for production, and competition with films from the United States, France and Britain (Conway, 2008; p. 65). The role of the state, then, was to facilitate "a new understanding between the public and private sectors of the economy," (Feldman, 1998 as cited in

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Conway, 2008, p. 63) and in particular, to limit the further extension of film production by the NFB and the CBC and to redirect the resources towards the development of a competitive private industry (see Feldman, 1998).

In 1976, Telefilm Canada, the agency responsible for film production in Canada, was founded and within the first two years it had "doled out about $21.25 million, but had never mastered the art of recovering revenues," which caused the corporation to "[get] serious about its role as a cultural banker and [begin] demanding returns on its investments" (Ayscough, as cited in Conway, 2008, p. 64). Canada's tax policy moreover, encouraged making films merely to obtain a significant tax credit. The result was the "tax-credit quicky": unimportant and unimaginative films, such as *Porky's*, that had little connection to Canada and were produced merely for tax purposes. By 1990, Canadian films had made significant gains in box office receipts though they still struggled to produce enough revenue for Telefilm Canada to break even, thanks of course to the persistent influence Hollywood cinema (Conway, 2008; p. 65). In English-speaking Canada, only 4 percent of the total films screened were Canadian, whereas 88 percent were American, and 8 percent were from countries other than the United States or Canada (Conway, 2008; p.65). Given the desire to increase the audience for Canadian made film, Telefilm Canada has instituted policies that have placed further pressure on filmmakers to create films that can guarantee box office success. By 2001, Telefilm Canada "introduced changes to its Canadian Feature Film Fund by creating so-called performance envelopes, which ensure that producers with box-office success will be guaranteed further funding-and less government intervention"; by 2002, "fifty percent of Telefilm's investments were tied to box-office performance" (Oumet R10 as cited in

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Conway 2008, p. 65).

Sharing a common border (and at least one official language) with the Americans proved to be a mixed blessing when it came to film production. Within the past twenty years the two countries have been involved in the production of media on Canadian soil, thanks to lower shooting costs and generous tax subsidies. In 2006 film and television production reached a $5 billion a year business and Vancouver became the third largest film and television production center after Los Angeles and New York. This increased activity is due to the efforts of the Canadian government to outline cultural policies that support and encourage a domestic media market that can pull in advertising money through viewership (Gasher, 2002). The results have not been especially satisfying. The first strategy used by provincial governments was to loosen the restrictions on what might be considered a Canadian production. Film projects qualifying as "Canadian productions" are entitled to substantial federal and provincial tax credits on labor expenses. The new policies allow for partnering with the US and other foreign production investors, as long as Canadians make up the majority of the labor force on a given project (Telefilm Canada, 2006, p.4).

The combination of domestic tax credits and a weak Canadian dollar in the 1990s resulted in astronomical growth in film and television production in Canada, particularly in centers like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The result was an unsustainable boom and bust film economy that is relatively healthy when the Canadian dollar is weak and American productions come for the benefits of its lower costs, and devastating when the Canadian dollar soars and American production and capital moves for greener pastures elsewhere out of Canada. This has been particularly evident in the emerging New

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Brunswick film economy.

New Brunswick Film & Local Film Production

In New Brunswick, film is perceived by the regional government as a lucrative economic engine and the role of government is seen as promoting jobs and skills training in the fledgling regional film industry. Though there is an occasional nod to the importance of film in promoting local history, stories and artistic creation, the dominant message found in the rhetoric of governmental policy (see Salmone, 1993) is that film is a business. Therefore, the type of skills and ideas being promoted in the NB film industry tend to be the conventional business ones that prepare people to take advantage of the five billion dollar Canadian media production industry.

When I first started research on this thesis in the spring of 2007 I attended a meeting of New Brunswick Film(NBF), the provincial body responsible for the promotion of the local film and cable industry. NBF is a relatively new regional organization that over the last decade has had some success in attracting media production to the province. One of the advantages of New Brunswick to outside investors is its bilingual culture. As many as 80% of its film crews are bilingual, which allows the province to draw from the francophone film market. According to NBF sources, there were 163 professional film and television production in the province over the past 10 years, worth more than $205 million and creating an economic spin-off of more than $415 million. Beginning in the first decade of the 2000s, there were an estimated 2,820 direct and 4,513 indirect jobs created in New Brunswick (Cheung, 2006).

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The last time that a major film was shot in Saint John was back in 1986 with *Children of a Lesser God*, starring Marlee Matlin (who won an Oscar for her role in that film) and William Hurt. After a long decade of draught and very little film-production occurring in the province, the provincial government decided in 1996 to found NBF which started a vigorous promotion of the local film and television production industry. NBF provides services and support to the film and television industry by giving financial assistance to New Brunswick residents, but another aim of the agency is to increase opportunities for New Brunswick residents working in the film and television industry to obtain skills development, employment, creative expression, and international marketing of their film products. The cities of Fredericton, Saint John, and Moncton have benefited in different ways from the emerging film and cable production industry, attracting a number of film and television productions that filmed using local talent and staff.

Saint John benefited from the NBF initiative largely because the city can easily double for parts of Boston or New York. As Sam Grana, the first executive director of Film New Brunswick, and now the head of a production company in Moncton, stated to the *Telegraph Journal*: "Saint John is one of the most cinematographic cities in New Brunswick, bar none" (Davis, 2006). The incentive for filming in New Brunswick can be very high for production companies, who usually receive equity investment and mentorship money from the province, as well as a 40 percent tax credit (now increased to 50%) for every New Brunswicker hired on the crew. Due to of the generous incentives, film-production began trickling in to the city and film and television production companies generally tend to coalesce around large cities requiring a relatively young

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workforce willing to put in grueling 12 to 13 hours days who are paid handsomely between $20 to $30 an hour.

Ironically, some of the of the earlier film shot in Saint John during the spike of film production involved two stars involved in *Children of a Lesser God.* Marlee Matlin returned in 1998 to film *In Her Defense*, a mystery about a deaf women accused of murdering her wealthy husband. While William Hurt returned a year later in 1999 to film the thriller mystery, *The Fourth Floor* with Juliette Lewis. These two films marked the beginning of a mini-boom in film-shooting in Saint John. The American based Blue Hill Productions filmed another project in Saint John about drug dealers in Boston. Soon thereafter in 2002, Daniel Baldwin starred in a US production called *When Irish Eyes Are Crying*, a film that follows the lives of two brothers through the mean streets of Boston from the 1950s to the present. The story focuses on the story of an Irish American dock worker who is killed by an Italian mob hit while his two sons look on. In predictable Hollywood fashion, one of the boys grows up to be a lawyer who locks up Mafia hoods while the other rises to the top of the Irish underworld.

Other more memorable films shot in Saint John drew their stories from real events. One was the 2007 film called *Stuck* starring, Mena Suvari and Stephen Rea. A second movie was also made in 2007 and was called *Sticks & Stones* (Davis, 2006). The movie was based on another real event that happened in Montreal at the beginning of the second Iraq war, when the bus of a pee-wee hockey team from Massachusetts was overwhelmed by anti-Iraq war protesters in Montreal. The mob insulted, taunted and yelled at the young players while burning American flags. Horrified by the treatment of the players, two Fredericton hockey dads organized a tournament in Fredericton, New

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Brunswick, called the Friendship Series, and invited the invited the American hockey team and their families to return to Canada.

The flurry of activity in film shoots in the city of Saint John was however reaching a turning point. In 2008, at another industry meeting I attended, this time in Fredericton, there was already grumbling that the Canadian dollar was too high, making it difficult to attract productions. At present the Canadian dollar is almost at par with the U.S. dollar, and despite a recent increase in tax credits from 40% to 50%, the production companies from away are difficult to attract; yet between 1999 and 2009, just before the financial economic meltdown, New Brunswick experienced a mini-boom in film production lured here by tax incentives and the low Canadian dollar. It was fun while it lasted, and it created opportunities for a number of young filmmakers to be involved in legitimate industry productions. Yet there was something very different about working in these industry projects that rankled some of the young filmmakers in Saint John. That "something" was identified rather glaringly by Hermenegilde Chiasson. Chiasson is an award-winning Acadian writer, filmmaker, visual artist, and former Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick. The heavy emphasis on film as a business and as a money-maker for the province worried Chiasson. In an interview with the *Telegraph Journal* he noted that drawing productions from the outside is limited: "There is always that goal to bring people from the outside, as if it is the Gospel," he said. "We need an equilibrium in what generates from inside and what comes from outside the province. But the film industry was mainly the work of artists. Now it has become the work of businessmen" (Davis, 2006).

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In October of 2007 I signed up to be an extra on a television film produced by CTV called *Sticks and Stones.* I was hired as to be part of a large mob of protestors on a street in Saint John that was disguised as a street in old Montreal. The film was a dramatization about a pee-wee hockey team from Brockton Massachusetts whose bus was mobbed by anti-Iraq war protestors in Montreal in 2003. This incident helped spark the starting of the annual Friendship series in Fredericton. The scene was filmed on a Saturday afternoon in may 2007 on Prince William located in the downtown core of Saint John. There were police vans on the street that were made to look like Quebec police vans. Most of the extras on the set were people I had seen around the city. I spent most of the 12 -- hour shoot horsing around with friends from the university. The rest of the time was spent re-shooting the same scene under different lighting conditions, using different angles from multiple cameras setup at different parts of the street. We spent a lot of our time waiting around for the shots to be set up. The shoot was constantly being disrupted towards the middle of the afternoon with the sounds of loud shots ringing though the street. I later found out that the sounds were coming from the set of a short film being shot by a couple of local filmmakers who were shooting a genre western just up the street from us.

The experience of working on *Sticks and Stones* was very different from my previous experience with working on local productions around the city. The sets on the local productions felt a lot more intimate and friendly. I'd worked on the set of local filmmaker Richard Macqueen's film as an extra. But while on the set I also helped out with some of the other aspects of the filmmaking process like the lighting and sound. As a result the local film sets were a lot more relaxed and hence made being a novice on the

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set feel a lot less like being a nameless face in a crowd of clueless extras and more like an active contributor to a project. While I was on the set of *Sticks and Stones*, I was reminded of something Macqueen had told me in an interview in response to a question I had asked him about co-productions that came and shot in the city:"Every time I see them, I think, sarcastically, well thanks for coming to the city and making use of the lucrative tax benefit. And then just leaving after you're done. I guess I can't fault them for doing it, I guess its kind of like the call centre model of doing business" (Macqueen interview with the author July 2007).

Macqueen's concerns with this model of film production relates to Hollywood production practices and the backlash against an issue called runaway film production. The phrase was coined by the U.S. film industry to describe the outsourcing of film work from Hollywood to cheaper foreign locations like Canada. As a result the cases of alleged runaway productions have been common fodder for U.S. film labour interests since the late 1940s.

Johnson-Yale identifies three narratives linked to runaway film productions namely, cultural imperialism, pro-globalization and emancipation. The first finds these productions collectively representing the homogenization of English Canadian film-culture (N. Zquez, 2000; p338) . From this perspective, the overabundance of content from the U.S. renders Canadian stories marginal or obsolete. Narratives of pro-globalization build on Marwan Kraidy's (2005) description of "corporate transculturalism" (p. 90). From this perspective, hybrid identities and increasingly porous cultural borders are used for the specific purpose of cosmopolitan capitalism. The

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practice is viewed as questionable because it eventually reinforces the needs of -- a neoliberal economic order that respects no borders and harbors no prejudice for cultural and ethnic difference (p..90). If filmmaking is a cultural process then many of the discourses supporting pro-globalization within Canadian filmmaking signal the breaking away of filmmaking as an activity intrinsically bounded to geography.

Finally, narratives of emancipation run counter to those of imperialism and pro-globalization. Canadian producers and filmmakers credit the ability to make small, thoughtful, introspective films as a counter to Hollywood films. Their success as thoughtful introspective films mirrors the models of the American independent film. This is perhaps because both Canadian films and American independent films emerged out of -- similar conditions of marginality from the major studios. The dwindling profits reaped by the studios by the end of the 1960s found studios like United Artists -- MGM and Fox actively seeking young auteurs who were influenced not just by classic Hollywood studio films, but by foreign film directors like Kurosawa, Antonioni and Satyajit Ray. The studios willingness to do so was mostly related with an effort to appeal to younger audiences, who themselves were shaped by the very same influences. But their willingness to do so helped bring about a new sensibility amongst both filmmakers and audiences who were now able to deal with complex subject matter that was considered taboo within the old studio system. The ability of films to tackle these themes was a result of the directors being given complete control of their films without the interference of studio executives.

Canada has, of course, a different history but similar lessons can be drawn between the powerful centralizing forces of business and the more decentralizing forces

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of independent cinema. The "tax shelter quickies" that were produced in Canada during 70s and early 80s have been regarded as the nadir of Canadian film industry and symptomatic of an increasingly invisible national cinema. This view came from a slew of films which although successful, had rarely anything to do with Canadian cinema, besides being subsidized using government money, involved Canadian actors and crews and being shot on Canadian locations. The almost universal reviling of these movies by Canadian film critics was considered important in negatively defining the identity of Canadian cinema. Yet even if we condemn the economic thrust of film production in Canada, the cultural support of film has been a comparative failure as well.

State funding and policies meant to encourage provincial and national film production have certainly in Canada produced their own set of problems. Hal Niedzviecki calls the main problem with arts funding in Canada ABA- Arts Bureaucracy Angst. According to Niedzviecki:

> [T]hink of it as an intangible, unquanitifiable factor that figures into the artistic calculations of this country from creation to execution to public presentation. This angst isn't about whether or not arts funding is good or bad or well dispensed. What I'm talking about here should be understood as a force in artistic creation, one of the many streams that flow together to become the river that is the creative act. ABA is the unstated,unheard undercurrent of conflicting paradigms-hope and despair- by which the arts function in this country. It is the cloud under which we create. It is invisible, unnoticed, ever present. It is characterized by angst, anxiety, insecurity, resignation and finally, defiance\(Niedzviecki, 2000, p. 255).

The debate over what kind of content the national and provincial arts council choose to fund has been a constant point of contention within the Canadian press -- with arguments and counter-arguments over what constitutes art. This eventually ends up

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hurting the creative abilities of the artists that apply for their funding mainly because they are under continuing pressure to validate their work according to the arbitrary standards made by these very councils. Under such conditions the filmmakers take active steps to produce films outside of the established conventions of narrative and production practices.

I attended the 10th anniversary of NB Film held in Fredericton Oct. 2nd 2008, titled "The State of the Industry," and I was surprised at a state of alarm amongst many production companies in New Brunswick as to how to draw in audiences to the theatres. The consensus seemed to be that the future of filmmaking in the province involved luring in international co-productions that would serve as a training ground for industry professionals within the province. However, there was little discussion about how local film communities could come together and establish themselves through shared interests.

The film sets of the productions I worked on were always relaxed because of the sense of community that was genuinely trying to make film out of some limiting conditions. This means that the directors and everyone on the set has to try that much harder to make the production work. The conditions that many of the filmmakers in Saint John face reflect the conditions of localized film-communities through which the independent film movement in America in the 90's came about. The directors that came out of the American independent film movement are now commonly able to overcome budgetary restrictions to deliver films that are timely and socially relevant, emphasizing characters over caricatures and psychology over spectacle. The presence of such a localized community of filmmakers in Saint John is important for exactly these reasons. Their separation from the hegemonic institutional narratives of production and

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distribution practices presents them with the same freedom achieved by American independent filmmakers. It is left to the Saint John film scene to establish a unique and distinctive filmic identity.

For the provincial government film is not so much a creative process but a business, a creative business to be sure, but a business first and foremost. If you look around at the people involved in local film creation you find a rather different professional profile with a different set of underlying values. John Marshall, for instance, has been interested in film and graduated in 2002 from UNB Fredericton Film certificate program. In 2007 he stepped in as festival director of the Continental Drift International Short Film Festival in Saint John, which has exhibited local and international films since its inception in 2003. Marshall is from Hampton, a small community roughly 60km from Saint John and there he manages a beef farm for his family and pursues wood sculpting as an assistant for local art legend Fred Ross (Davis, 2007)

Young filmmakers in the Saint John area are a decidedly heterogeneous group. Most importantly, they're self-motivated do-it-yourself types who, in addition to filmmaking, are also involved in theatre, wood sculpting, pottery, and writing. This community has always had a precarious existence but, like folk musicians, they are also part of a larger network of shared ideas and resources, passing on their knowledge and insights to others. Alternative film and media spaces in Saint John are extremely limited but they are also highly cherished. I would argue that he alternative circuits of creation and promotion and exhibition survive, in rather fugitive and ephemeral way, because over generations it has been necessary to leapfrog the dominant regional media.

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Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how in the United States, film has been understood as a source of entertainment that was characterized by script-based narratives, mostly made by studios, and reliant on distribution through corporate channels. This model gradually moved towards decentralization, favoring regional filmmaking and eventually what came to be the independent filmmaking movement towards the end of 1980s. In Canada, film was initially used as a means for nation-building, but was then refashioned as a medium for the individual auteur, which oddly became the national narrative for Canadian filmmaking. Increasingly, however, film production both regionally and nationally has been more market oriented, relying on co-productions and tax incentives contributing to its own bust boom economic cycles. Small filmmakers, and especially young ones at the margins, weave in and out of regional productions. It is inconstant work and the experience is often limited, so they are left working within a small group experimenting with technology and learning their craft through trial and error. This then is what marks the small community of filmmakers like the one found in Saint John; faced with a marginal existence they do what creative filmmakers have done since the beginning, they make films on their own terms.

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Chapter 3

Technological Practices of Local Filmmaking

The previous chapter's historical overview sets the stage for what I will explore in this chapter. I have discussed the role of industry and nation building in shaping filmic practices and will now turn to the creative social processes that require constant re-negotiation in lieu of these external constraints. In the last chapter I mentioned the "tradition" of independent filmmakers adopting new technologies and cultural practices in order to practice their craft. Let us now turn to some examples.

Kellner (1995) describes Richard Linklater's *Slacker* (1990) as the "quintessential cinematic dissection of the plight of the twenty-something post-1960s generation of disaffected youth" (p. 139). This reading is fitting for a scholar born in the early 1940s, but having grown up in the '90s, I hesitated to concede that "disaffected" is the best term to use. Having previously discussed how diaspora can refer to ideas (mediascapes), the longing that Kellner identifies is perhaps more akin to that sense of nostalgia experienced by displaced communities than the rebelliousness of apathetic youth. It is true, that the youth portrayed in *Slacker* (and the filmmakers themselves) were, at the time of the production, living at the margins, but their disempowerment does not emerge from economic circumstances (many of them were middle-to-upper class), but rather from a sense of disconnection from society based on the gap (perceived or real) between the reality of their lives and what they were promised through media images. Kellner goes on to suggest that that the *slackers* "pursue off-beat lifestyles, refusing to play the game of academic success, career, marriage, and family espoused in the mainstream" (p. 139). This too is a narrow reading, as it's not so much an active refusal to participate, but an

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acknowledgement that the ways they want to participate are not available through the normal channels. Despite the generation gap, it's surprising that Kellner didn't identify this subtle, but relevant distinction, as he later goes on to observe that the young slackers "are in a totally media-saturated society in which the product of media culture provide the basis of their conversations, fantasies, and lives" and that they "appropriate [this] media culture for their own ends, turning articles from conservative media sources into material for radical social and political critique, while using media technology for their own purposes" (p. 140). Kellner reveals his own political persuasions in his analysis, but his optimism is welcome given how *Slacker* was produced and Linklater's own goals as a filmmaker with few resources.

The creative process associated with filmmaking is particularly sensitive to the use of new media technologies which have made the production and distribution of film more accessible. Saint John filmmakers struggle to exploit these opportunities while managing the demands of genre expectation associated with mainstream films.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the screenwriting conventions of regional filmmaking are necessarily strained by the efforts of disadvantaged filmmakers to find a voice and construct an identity when they are positioned, like many diasporic groups, at the margins. Marginal groups often use whatever materials are at hand to express themselves and to construct and maintain their particular social reality. Marginal groups often engage in bricolage. However, when the raw materials are media images, tools and conventions, such groups come into a particularly postmodern relationship with mainstream society and the cultural industries. The effects of this postmodern condition are worth unpacking.

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In his controversial 1984 article, "Postmodernism," the literary critic Fredric Jameson (1991) argues that postmodernism represents the cultural logic of late capitalism such that aesthetic production has been integrated into commodity production:

> [t]he frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods from clothing to airplanes, at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasing essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation (Jameson, online).[10]

As Jameson suggests, the culture of consumption, far from being inconsistent with Marx's analysis of nineteenth-century capitalism, in fact constitutes the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, affecting every aspect of human life including our conceptions of Nature and the unconscious. Plato's notion of the *simulacrum* or the identical copy for which no original has ever existed identifies the cultural logic of postmodernity. The "culture of the simulacrum" comes to life, writes Jameson, in a society where exchange value permeates the culture to such a degree that the very memory of use-value is erased and the image becomes the final form of commodity reification (Mackay, 1994).

Most people who talk about simulacra and simulations rely on Jean Baudrillard's definition of the concepts and use such terms to mean that the image masks and perverts a basic reality; however, Jameson is ill at ease with adopting Baudrillard's nihilistic perspective where representation and images have completely taken over reality. Jameson insists that we challenge the reality/illusion binary and concentrate on how our constructed reality is often made through the symbols and images of our culture and our

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[10] Available at : http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/jameson.htm

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illusions. In this sense, Jameson is far closer to the Lacanian marxist theorist Slavoj Žižek, who, in his entertaining and rather flamboyant documentary A *Pervert's Guide to Cinema,* uses *The Matrix* (1999) to illustrate how the contemporary media environment splits reality and image.

In *The Matrix*, the protagonist Neo is presented with a choice between swallowing two pills: the red pill will return him to his familiar mundane life while the blue pill will show him reality. Putting aside whether or not *The Matrix* represents a fictional commentary on our reality, Žižek takes the film seriously, resisting the dichotomy and arguing for a third pill. He finds that the choice between the blue and red pill is not a choice between fiction and reality because our reality is partially structured by fictions. The removal of the fictions would deny us access to reality itself. The third pill then would enable us to perceive the reality within the fictions. We can read Jameson and Žižek as characters like Hamm and Clov in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, spinning out exchanges about the end of nature, and the loss of meaning and reality. Ultimately, what keeps the characters going is the very act of speaking, and of trying to find a voice in such confusing circumstances and knowing that to be silent is not an option.

Filmmakers know quite well that they work within an imperfect world, a world suffused and corrupted by commodities, genre, formulas, and clichés, yet they, as do most creative people, feel a need to speak creatively through these forms because they are the only ones available to us.

From the romantic perspective, creativity is stimulated by the muse or some divine inspiration (Plato, 1971; Sternberg & Lubar, 1999). This romantic view of creativity has been countered by the perspective that creative production is best explained

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through an investigation which focuses on institutional structures.[11] Particularly relevant here is the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1994) who speaks of creativity as a product of a complex system of interactions between three spheres: the individual, a field of experts, and a domain or body of knowledge about a particular culture(see Csikszentmihalyi, 1988,1994) For an example of this in action, a screenwriter (cultural producer) would draw on a pre-existing body of knowledge about screenplays and screenwriting as well as the criteria of selection or the preferences of the field in order to produce a screenplay considered creative by a field of screenwriting experts. A screenplay is considered creative if it joins the existing body of knowledge. Csikszentmihalyi found that any study relying solely on the producer is limited in scope and requires the interaction of all three systems (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994, p.147-8). I would argue, moreover, that it makes a substantial difference if the creative producer is positioned at the periphery of the centers of cultural production, and there is a risk that the closer you are to the periphery the more oppressive the influences of the established conventions will be.

Once meant to fuel creativity and experimentation, screenwriting has become a way of indicating a severe and immovable formula; as a result, many scholars argue that perhaps the format of the screenplay needs to change (see Jenkins and Thoburn, 2003; Marlow, 2007; Stam 2000; & Korman, 2005). Rather than relying solely on text there are alternative approaches which may involve sound and pictures to help everyone within the production process realize the screenplay.[12] I have argued that within the Canadian

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[11] For a more complete look into creativity see Bailin, 1988; Weisberg, 1993; and Mayer, 1999

[12] Acclaimed writers and filmmakers, including Gus Van Sant, Jim Jarmusch, Tony Grisoni, Michael Winterbottom, Wong Kar Wai, Wim Wenders, and Chantal Ackerman have all developed methods of

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context there has been a long-standing assumption, shared not just by film critics but also by the state, that film is above all a way of amplifying a national narrative. The voice that was institutionalized was the English-speaking voice of the state as a discourse of power in a cinema which, as Jean Pierre Lefebvre puts it emphatically, was "the property of the state, its political, social and cultural mode of communication by which to act on Canadians and Quebecers" (as cited in Dorland, 1998,p. 128). This was the voice which, furthermore, maintained institutional control over its filmmakers, through funding and screenplay development. This changed in the 1960s and the 1970s, but the influence of conventional screenwriting continues to be felt by many independent filmmakers in Canada and certainly in Saint John.

The experiences of the Danish film industry towards the late 1960s are a good starting point for rethinking the use of the screenplay within the filmmaking process. The period of 1930 -1960 found Danish film being dominated by the studio system within which a number of production companies worked with regular film teams and directors, with about 30 writers handling the writing of over 200 films (Reval, 2009, p.70). The changes in the film culture in Europe and the U.S saw modernism within literature and the French New Wave within film lead to a focus on the individual artist and the privileging of the director in the production process (Ibid). The formation of a film school in Denmark and later a screenwriting program was intended to provide access to film equipment and to teach the basics of screenwriting, but as a consequence, teaching screenwriting meant having to present concrete modes and tools while also creating a

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moving between writing and production, working with both words and images. These writers and filmmakers embrace *cinematic* scriptwriting. Some of the terms used to describe the resulting story designs include the road map, the open screenplay, the visual scenario, and the *ars combinataria* screenplay (Millard 2006). J.J. Murphy suggests "real innovation in screenwriting [...] comes not from ignorance of narrative film conventions but from being able to see beyond their limitations" (Murphy 2007, p. 266).

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shared language for communication about stories, a process that became acceptable within contemporary mainstream filmmaking with the use of storyboarding and comic books as substitutes for a traditional screenplay. This atmosphere of experimentation and free play has re-emerged with digital technologies, allowing for intertextuality throughout the production process, and thus challenging the common assumption that screenplays are unchangeable. The screenplay, then, can be understood as a site for change in the independent film community – change initiated by the use of new technologies in the creative process and by challenging the established process of screenwriting.

Transformative film technologies and local empowerment

In the 2000 issue of *Scientific American*, Peter Broderick, former president of the now-defunct Next Wave Films, discussed the possibilities of advancing video technology as a digital revolution: "New digital tools—from cameras to editing software—are changing not only how movies are made but also which movies are made and who makes them" Broderick, 2000, p. 61). Broderick describes the process through which new digital technologies reshaped the process of filmmaking in the late 1990s and 2000s: the constantly falling costs coupled with the ever-increasing capabilities of home computers played a significant role in changing the structure of the film industry. Digital video production reduced the number of steps involved between the production and postproduction stages and filmmakers working with video found they did not have make a transfer from the negative to telecine to videotape in order to perform their initial edit,

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nor did they have to physically cut the film negative or make release prints. This eventually made production less expensive which led to new approaches to financing possible: rather than first writing a screenplay and then locating investors (who might demand varying degrees of creative control in order to better recoup their investment), filmmakers had the option of fashioning their screenplay to their resources while retaining creative control. They were also given more freedom in where they set their films, as mini-DV cameras could be made less conspicuous than cameras using film. Broderick argues that "instead of having to shoot a movie during a single period, digital moviemakers can shoot and edit , write new scenes, and keep shooting," which "allows the movie to evolve in an organic way—the director can discard the worst material and build on the best" (as cited in Conway 2008, p.. 62).

Despite the rapid advances in technology, studios were slow to adapt to digital video. Perhaps this fact is not surprising given that they have an "institutional investment in a production process that has been the standard for decades" (Broderick, 2008, p.. 67). As a result of the reluctance of major studios to adopt digital video, theatres were also slow to embrace digital projection formats. Many independent theatres and other exhibitors were skittish about spending large amounts of money to install digital equipment and wait for one movie a year. There were some directors, most notably George Lucas, who broke this trend by shooting big-budget feature films on digital video. Even Lucas's considerable industry clout was not enough to convince theatre owners to project *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002) in its digital format, and only 51 out of 3,131 theatres in the United States and Canada screened the film digitally when it was released (Conway, 2008,p. 62). Independent filmmakers using digital video

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formats had to work outside the established distribution networks because it was prohibitively expensive to transfer DV to film. Broderick points out that the greater portability of video tape as compared with celluloid helped open up the possibilities for distribution within festival circuits and the format also made it possible for filmmakers to distribute their movies over the internet. Even though the situation has changed with the growth of modern video-sharing websites like YouTube and Vimeo, early online distribution was not without its problems. In the 1990s potential viewers had to sift through vast quantities of "derivative and dull" content and then, depending on their internet connection, watch what they found on a tiny screen within a screen over a congested connection (Conway, 2008; p. 63). Such limitations for both traditional and internet based forms of distribution led one commentator to warn that "if independents don't create new distribution mechanisms, they could be marginalized. Although it will be easier for them to make features than in analog times, it will be harder to get those features seen in theatres" (Broderick 2000, p 65).

The problems of distribution and access are highlighted within a city like Saint John where there is limited access to funding and peer-distribution in comparison to other, larger cities. Greg Hemmings has become a brand of his own in Saint John with Hemmings House Pictures. He, along with his writing partner, co-director, and friend Andrew Tidby started Hit! Media back in 1995 with the help of Glen Ingersoll. They decided to use Ingersoll's newly purchased documentary film kit to shoot a bluegrass festival as one of their first projects. They started out, by their own admission, a little naive about the industry which was at the time just starting to find its footing in the province. Hemmings and Tidby graduated from a film college in Ontario and were

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mainly looking to break into the industry, but after working on a number of productions in Canada and the US as an editor, grip, sound technician, Hemmings felt the need to make his own work: "I had worked some of the worst, most grueling jobs in the industry. I was just ready to make my own stuff, you know, and not have to answer to anyone." The concern over creative control is vitally important in the creative industries. Hemmings' former partner Glen Ingersoll argues that having control over one's own intellectual property is central to the creation of a real and sustainable living in the "cultural industries." He also conjectures that the physical distance of Saint John from Fredericton and Moncton, both of which have more opportunities for film financing and equipment, has an effect on how filmmakers within the city operate. According to Ingersoll:

> Most of the filmmakers that are around in the city (and I know a lot of them) operate independently of one another. They all know of each other, but do not often collaborate on projects together. It's almost like, as if because they're in a situation where they have to be independent, they see that as an indication that the entire process of film production must be conducted independently (Ingersoll, interview with author July 2007).

Ingersoll's comments suggest that establishing a common identity as Saint John filmmakers is hampered by the competitive need to be "independent" both creatively and as business people. Yet, the challenges filmmakers face in terms of access to production and funding structures forces them to change the ways in which they make their films. Their DIY attitude exists mainly because of this limited access to resources partly to their distance from film centers of the province, nation, and continent. The physical distance

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that filmmakers in Saint John face is reflective of an experience of distances within cultural production itself. In the words of Stuart Hall :

> Films are only form of appearance of the cinemas they organize. All models of filmic distinctions, and especially all formalist models that propose distinctions between an alternative film style and the codes of the feature industry, must then be doubled to include the social determinants of each; they must be returned to social practice. And any alternative practice may be understood as a response to the other three spheres of activity: the alternative social group, the dominant society, and the hegemonic cinema (Hall 1989, p. 250)

The independent film movement in the United States arose out of many of the same conditions that filmmakers in Saint John face, mainly because the filmmakers existed outside the cultural center of Hollywood (Lessig 2006, p. 54; Sczelkun, 2002; Holmlund, 2005; Daniels, 2008). Many of these American filmmakers were able to experiment with form and narrative without the constraints of having to adhere to formulas or certain notions of aesthetics (ibid, Holmlund, 2005, p. 25). The NB Film Co-op in conjunction with the UNB Fredericton campus is host to a weekly film series that showcases small independent films that do not get screened at the major cineplex in the city. This venue has provided a place for budding amateur filmmakers to meet each other and gain access to the film cooperative programs and equipment by providing a consistent and reliable place they can share their interests . The series was started by John Peterson (a former Film- Coop member and filmmaker) who bought a 35mm projector and set up a production company specializing in developing films within the 35mm format. In addition to buying film reels he also purchased projectors to screen them. The Film Co-op initially set up a film series showcasing these films at local French community centre. They eventually ended up collaborated with the university who allowed them to use one of the lecture theatres to screen their films. The partnership with the university allowed

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them to screen the movies at a subsidized price rather than having to pay upwards of four hundred dollars to screen them at the local Cineplex.

The film series sold memberships for approximately forty dollars. However each screening cost three dollars to attend. The Film Co-op took over the film series after it had been abandoned due to budgetary restrictions. The Film-Co-op were able to fund the maintenance of the projectors along with the cost of hiring of projectionists to run them. This was made a little easier due to the availability of a couple from the neighboring city of Oromocto who worked as paramedics but also worked part-time as projectionists. The film series also included short films made locally that were shown before the start of each film. Tony Merzetti, executive director of the NB Film Coop, describes the impact that the film series had on the film-going audience in Fredericton:

> [P]eople would come up you know, when you were working at the box office, oh thank you so much for bringing this series back you know we just love it, it's a wonderful program, and we look forward to it each week (Tony Merzetti, interview with Joe Galbo, May 2007).

This small film series eventually helped pave the way for the start of Silver Wave film festival. By 2007, Silver Wave was drawing crowds of approximately five hundred people. The growth of the number of people interested in the film series compelled the film coop to have screenings at multiple locations around the city. In addition to showing smaller, contemporary independent features, the film coop also showed older features from the 70s. Merzetti describes the event taking on a significant profile within the city's event calendar:

> I mean its weird because at our festival, the one year we had some of the cast members from Trailer Park Boys. And, another time we had David Suzuki. These were big events that brought in like, five thousand dollars on those screenings. All other screenings you'd show documentaries in the afternoon, you'd show documentaries in the afternoon, you'd

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show feature films. Canadian feature films at night. You're bringing in maybe four hundred, five hundred, six hundred bucks, stuff like that. It's like one screening, would account for thirty percent of your total revenues out of twenty screenings (Tony Merzetti, interview author May 2007).

Greg Hemmings credits the University of New Brunswick in Saint John for helping bring some much needed attention and education to the local filmmakers of Saint John; however the Co-op, rather than encouraging this experimentation, reinforces the hegemony I have been discussing, particularly through their training workshops which encourage aspiring writers to adhere to traditional screenwriting conventions. The instructor, who had worked on a number of comedic Canadian television shows frequently repeated the mantra that in order for screenplays to be picked up for wide distribution they had to follow the three act narrative formula as elucidated by screenwriting gurus such as Robert McKee and Syd Field. This is problematic because the participants in these workshops do not benefit from, and may even be disadvantaged by the established production standards that drive mainstream filmmaking. Rather than empowering marginalized artists, encouraging the kinds of experimentation that foster creative growth this reinforces the unattainability of hobbyist filmmaking, driving a wedge between already isolated filmmakers.

Gretchen Kelbaugh discussed how the process of review and rewriting through film development corporations slowed and watered down her screenplays, primarily because of this insistence on format and story convention.[13] Screenplays and projects are often selected on the basis of originality and innovation only to have those very qualities

[13] The contemporary screenplay is mired in many narrative and presentation conventions; it must be presented in Courier 12-point font, which was designed in the 1950s, a period described by Thomas Hines as the *Populexe* era of architecture in the United States between 1955-65 where the design of everyday spaces and consumer goods aimed at a combination of populism and luxury.

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systematically minimized through work shopping and the screenplay-development process (Millard, 2009, p. 45). The need for a completely collaborative and flexible process has intensified with digital technologies and the working methods they enable. These technologies can allow for the addition of images and sound that could eventually help screenwriters use a more visual language to communicate their ideas to everyone in the production process (Murphy, 2009).

Katherine Monk (2001) argues the reason Canadian film was associated with a distinct aesthetic tradition is related to how these films are made. She refers to it (not entirely ironically) as a socialist-model of filmmaking that is characterized by self-loathing and a continuous re-negotiation of boundaries, stressing that Canadian filmmaking's long-standing association with nationalistic narratives has meant that it continues to attach a static notion of authenticity usually associated with fine art to its film culture. This distance from the collaborative and experimental nature of popular art is subverted by the proliferation of new technologies. This opportunity has some implications for filmmaking in New Brunswick: a report conducted by the Canada Council for the Arts in 2004 found that the Atlantic Provinces were the only region unserved by a regionally based distributor. Rather than having the distributor in the form of another theatre, the Canada Arts Council report recommended joining existing production houses with existing distributors to avoid heavy administrative infrastructures. The report on distribution trends within Canada found two complementary trends: toward the very large and the very small (Krosnick 2004). The standards for wide scale distribution are set by prolific distribution companies with significant resources. At the same time there is an increasingly popular trend of self-distribution by independent

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artists, but the organizations that represent these small artists are more organized and focused in Europe than they are in North America.

The distributors funded by the Canada council are too small to compete with the larger distributors and too large and democratically inclusive to serve the demands of individual artists. Each distributor identifies itself as unique with specialized problems, and they see other distributors as competitors rather than partners. The different histories and cultures of art film serve to maintain this distance, though the distinctions are understood to be weakening over time and are perceived as relatively meaningless by emerging filmmakers. The strong tradition of artistic autonomy and unsuccessful attempts at collaboration make these distributors suspicious of partnerships that extend beyond individual projects, which is troubling because the problems they face are interlinked: they serve the same markets, deal with the same clients, face the same technological challenges, and often work with the same artists.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that filmmakers at the margins share a geographical as well as a cognitive separation from the centers of filmmaking. The geographical separation manifests itself in the limited access to physical and monetary resources but their cognitive separation presents the filmmakers with a the opportunity to create alternate narratives and modes of distribution that suit them. These present an interesting addition to the many themes they incorporate within their systems of creativity. I've used Csikszentmihalyi's systems of creativity to conceptualize creativity in a particular manner; the process is a complex system that incorporates the many personal

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characteristics of the creator along with the characteristics of the institutions and forms she operates within. Within filmmaking, this form is usually the screenplay, which is the way many aspiring filmmakers choose to enter the industry. As with any institution and form, the screenplay has been associated with number of structural rules and patterns. The structure and format of the screenplay has changed all through the history of filmmaking. The changes in its forms also signal a change in narrative styles. Hence, the teaching of certain structures of screenplays to the exclusion of others limits the number of styles of narratives available to new filmmakers. These filmmakers require an alternative to these new kinds of narratives precisely because they might be operating at the physical and cognitive margins of filmmaking. Such alternatives present themselves in the form of technology that makes the access to the learning of the skills of screenwriting more accessible. This accessibility consequently presents opportunities to amateur filmmakers with more opportunities to make their films.

Saint John, from this perspective, can be seen as representative of a kind of marginalized filmmakers. Saint John filmmakers share with the prominent filmmakers of the independent American film movement a separation from established structures of filmmaking. And it is this separation that dictates their production practices and which eventually affect their stories and narratives. The changes in the way these films are *made* correlates to a need for an alternative method of *distribution*. In the next chapter I will discuss some possible solutions to this divisive relationship as part of a case study on microcinemas.

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Chapter 4:

An Alternate Model of Display and Distribution

This chapter focuses on the current realities and future opportunities for Saint John filmmakers. I interviewed a number of local filmmakers about the challenges they faced in making their first films and defining themselves as aspiring, if not actual filmmakers. Aside from some production exposure in high school, whatever knowledge they garnered has been either self-taught or acquired collaboratively through working on their friends' film projects. This process of training has been the norm in Saint John due to a lack of public or private resources with which to sustain or promote an independent production industry. A persistent issue re-emerged in my interviews: the personal desire of ach filmmaker to overcome this local handicap. Most Saint John filmmakers are poster children for the DIY aesthetic of the punk movement of the 1970s. They approach the form with few illusions about institutional support or public help; they want to make movies, but few of them are in a position to fulfill their uniquely personal vision. Instead most of them work within established genres and struggle to learn the acceptable forms and techniques of film narrative, though the challenges can be daunting.

I will now explore how local filmmakers might benefit from public policies regarding investment in local film-production and exhibition. There are a number of options available, but one that struck a chord with me was the establishment of a microcinema cell in Saint John. The term "microcinema" was coined in 1991 with the naming of Rebecca Barten and David Sherman's Total Mobile Home Microcinema (Alston, 2002). The term has come to define a wide-range of small screening spaces that

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specialize in short, experimental and feature-length films that fail to get wide-scale distribution to theatres. One of the most important features of microcinemas is their ability to thrive best on the discussions between filmmakers and their audiences. As a result microcinemas are a location of community building. Microcinemas have had a notable impact on numerous other areas of local film-production around North America. I will cover some of its history and speculate about how microcinema can help Saint John filmmaking flourish.

Gretchen Kelbaugh owns all of her filming and editing equipment, but her interest in film was sparked through screenwriting. She was an author, a journalist, and a teacher for seven years prior to picking up her camera and writing her first screenplay: "In writing a biography of my great aunt who was a militant suffragette, I kept seeing her, my aunty Gertrude, on the screen having fisticuff fights with the Scotland Yard thugs. So I thought who better to write it than me?" (Kelbaugh, interview with author May 2007).

After contacting the NB Film Co-op she decided to take some courses at the Canadian Screen Training Centre's Summer Institute of Film and Television (SIFT).[14] Her entry into filmmaking, as is so often the case with many filmmakers, came through screenwriting. Her course with SIFT helped her with the process of converting a biography into a full-fledged screenplay, which eventually evolved into a commentary on the Suffragette movement in Scotland. The screenplay won a number of provincial competitions which allowed her to get other screenplays turned into shorts with the help of funding from the CBC and the NB Film Co-op. These early successes however did not translate into industrial recognition, or at least not in terms of offers for further funding.

[14] http://www.cstc.ca/sift/sift.asp

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Her story about Gertrude Harding and the suffragette movement did not receive the funding needed to shoot it, forcing Kelbaugh to consider changing the format of her story into a documentary:

I knew that my screenplay about her would be a very expensive period piece, and the chances are (sic) they wouldn't go with a rookie writer to make an expensive co production between Britain and Canada. So I thought if I could make a documentary about her that could still work. I took lots of workshops at the Filmmakers coop because I wanted to know and understand all aspects of camera work, lighting, producing, etc. and after of about six or seven years of just presenting myself as a screenwriter and having only one thing made for television, I decided purely out of frustration to invest in a camera and shoot my own damn film (Kelbaugh, interview with author May 2007).

Much of Kelbaugh's training in film came from the classes she took at the NB Film Co-op and SIFT. Her motivation to study all aspects of the process of filmmaking is indicative of the film industry in New Brunswick at the time: "it was predominantly self-motivated with small budgets and borrowed equipment and a volunteer crew." Kelbaugh also wrote a fictional screenplay titled *Margret and Deidre,* which was mostly shot in Saint John using local actors and talent. Though Gretchen had made films using professional talent before, the realities and scarcities of distribution and funding that plague many filmmakers within the city took its toll:

So I decided to make a feature film. I had actors saying they'd work for free and I used to be against that kind of no-budget independent filmmaking where you have to rely on your friends and the crew and I know that's what happens at the filmmakers coop, you know, working for free and hoping you'll make it. I believed in working in the union and paying fare wages, but I got worn down though the reality of the situation in the city, that I was never going to have something else that I had written get made. I was tired of waiting. I had some experience with these shorts. So I'd never directed a drama. So it was a bit of a leap. I was lucky to get the two leads. Most of the co-stars were professional or semi professional (Ibid).

Kelbaugh invested her own money in the equipment required to produce and direct her film, as access to equipment and software is a common challenge faced by many local

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filmmakers. Even though the NB Film Co-op is mandated to serve all of New Brunswick, it operates in Fredericton without any corresponding branches in other New Brunswick cities, Saint John in particular. For Kelbaugh this has proved to be particularly troublesome:

It's a bit of a touchy subject, from my house it's at least an hour's drive and the fact is that to be called a film co-op, they have to serve all of New Brunswick, but borrowing equipment like lights became problematic because I would have had to drive back and forth that weekend to return them. Because of that distance, so many of us bought our own cameras and we have no film co-op centered here. If we had a film co-op here we'd be more apt to sharing equipment (Ibid).

When I spoke to Tony Merzetti, executive director of the NBFilm Coop in Fredericton, he saw a distinct difference in the filmmaking culture between Fredericton, Saint John and Moncton:

I don't think having a physical space and having equipment pool and stuff like that in Saint John, would work as well as it has in Fredericton. The way productions happen in the city is different. The one difference that we've noted is that the people in Moncton tend to want to work together as a group as opposed to working as individuals. In Saint John, people are more entrepreneurial where they have their own companies and they have their own projects and people are sort of working in cells, like by themselves and the collaborative process where people are like, hey let's all get together and do something isn't in the same as it is in Moncton. I don't know why it developed that way, but a lot of people are really fiercely independent in Saint John and trying to get people to come together as a group to work collaboratively is a challenge I think because I think that's going to be necessary for them to move forward for the community to move forward and develop things and stuff like that (Merzetti, interview).

In the absence of a branch of the Film Co-op many filmmakers including Kelbaugh relied on her own informal network of collaborators that use each other's equipment.

Kelbaugh's experiences mirror those of Richard MacQueen, who took an interest in film while he was studying at UNBSJ pursuing an Arts degree. Much of his film education was self-obtained:

I had interest in film about 9 years ago but was a little discouraged because I thought, I'm from Saint John what am I going to do. But then I found a book on screen writing that

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helped me learn the format. I always wrote short stories, and I ended up writing two feature screenplays as practice and sent them to an agent, and I'm waiting to hear from them and I found a program in Fredericton called the film certificate program. So I thought I'm not really doing much with arts so I'll do more fine arts up there. The program got me to pick up a camera more. But for the most part that program was more of a theoretical program. We had one screenwriting class and a couple of production classes. But for the most part what I got out of that was learning about movies and silent films and the history of film and then I came back to school after that. His was at UNBF called the film certificate program. I shot a film in China and then scrounged and begged and borrowed some equipment (Macqueen, interview with author June 2007).

Much like Kelbaugh, MacQueen found that borrowing equipment from friends was a lot easier and cheaper than driving to the film co-op in Fredericton to do it. MacQueen was also able to borrow equipment from local production houses like Hit! Media. The company was jointly owned by Greg Hemmings, Andrew Tidby and Glen Ingersoll. Their partnership was initially forged because of the relatively small but intricate networks of artists and musicians within the city. Ingersoll, Hemmings and Tidby met at a time when Ingersoll invested in a documentary film package:

I'd gone out and bought a documentary film package and I strangely enough found out that people twenty years younger to me had done that as well, independently of each other. And one day I got a call from one of them: Greg Hemmings. He said Andrew Tidby and I are here and we just pulled off the road in Memramcook and there's this bluegrass festival and we're going to document it and we need sound equipment 'cus they knew I had it. Why don't you come on down and shoot it with us and bring the kids...So away we went, we went to a bluegrass festival and we started shooting a documentary on the bluegrass scene. During the course of doing that project a couple of more projects came up. And between the three of us we worked pretty well and had three cameras. Everything we needed to start a company (Ingersoll, interview with author June 2007).

After they found out that there was only one other production company operating in the city, Ingersoll, Tidby, and Hemmings decided to form a partnership based on their mutual love of music and film. Their goal was initially to be able to earn enough to make a living in a city where the creative industries at the time were barely visible (Statistics Canada

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2002). The lack of a centralized film community means that local filmmakers have had to try even harder to juggle their artistic aspirations with the realities of making a living:

> We thought if we don't do this now we'll be waiting another 9 months just to get work on someone else's project. Why not start our own project and just make our own projects even if they're corporate ones. Really, if you're in New Brunswick you have no other choice. If you wait around for other people to call you, you're going to be very poor (Ingersoll, interview with author June 2007).

This forced Blake Stilwell, a local sound engineer and camera operator, to put his aspirations of working as a director on hold. Blake first pursued his interest at the high school level and was educated at UNB through the film certificate program and the film program at Woodstock NB. As with many local filmmakers he had to take the initiative to get any of his work made, and so, with the help of a friend and local filmmaker Steve Doiron, he rented an apartment in the uptown area of the city to make a short film with good production values:

> We made the decision to fund it ourselves. We rented an apartment on Duke Street and we lived on the set for the whole summer and shot it. We figured that was not the way to do things at all. Even though it did turn out well; I didn't have any money at the end of the summer (Stilwell, interview with author May 2007).

Since then, Stilwell has been involved with helping out many local filmmakers around the city in addition to working on corporate projects for local production companies. He has worked with Glen Ingersoll at Hit! Media along with Richard MacQueen on his short films as well. MacQueen, at the time of my interview, had just finished filming a pilot for his now CBC syndicated, *Dead to the World* (Macqueen, interview). After my interview with him I was recruited as an extra on a short he was shooting. The film was set in an old abandoned house in the North end of the city. The production was supported by a mix of MacQueen's friends and acquaintances that all

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chipped in to help him. All of the costumes were discards from thrift stores and the props were hand-crafted from scraps of wood by his friend Phil Savage. Despite frigid temperatures, the mood on set was relaxed and inviting.

Like MacQueen and other local filmmakers I interacted with, the university is a common source for encouraging filmmaking aspiration. Jonathan Simmons, who is still enrolled at UNBSJ, initially came to filmmaking as an extension of his theatre experiences at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He made his first short film in a media production class on the Saint John campus and he recruited me to play the lead. We shot it in my apartment and at the campus bar. We had to film it while the bar was open and sometimes people would walk into his shot as they were trying to get service. Simmons had just wrapped up the filming and editing of his second short[15] when I interviewed him. He found the juggling of school work and his creative work challenging:

> You know, in film school, you can have all of your energies of you and your peers directed towards filmmaking. But here you've got to do everything yourself. Hell, you're forced to do everything yourself. I think I value the experience itself but hated it while I was doing it. (Simmons, interview with author May 2007).

Many of the challenges he experienced with his second short film were the result of organizational details such as scheduling, screenplay monitoring, and continuity. He financed and produced both shorts, so concerns over the distance to the co-op and equipment access were marginal compared to the other filmmakers I interviewed. His concerns surrounded the development of a more grass-roots organization or collection of

[15] Simmons, Jonathan. (2009, April). *Actors*. Video posted to: http://www.vimeo.com/4203990

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film enthusiasts, which he suggests might alleviate some of the problems of distance and geographical separation found by the city of Saint John:

> I'd much rather see a grass-roots gathering of like-minded people that come together to watch and make films. This way it's a whole lot less formal and you don't have to worry about stepping on anyone toes when it comes to funding (Simmons, interview with author February 2009).

The need for local exhibitors was expressed by other filmmakers as well. In May of 2009, Michael McDonald took it upon himself to bring attention to the now abandoned Paramount theatre, situated in downtown Saint John.[16] It was built in 1958, and had once been the centre of commercial film exhibition in the city. By 2002 it had been purchased by Famous Players, one of the major theatrical film distributors in the country. Under this ownership the Paramount operated as a second-run theatre, which was in direct contrast Empire Theatres, the main distributor and exhibitor of films in Saint John.

As a second-run theatre, the Paramount was limited by its size: it had only two screens and a total seating of approximately 200. The films that were exhibited there were mainly films that had not received wide distribution (like independently produced films) or had already played at Empire Theatres. The stories of a lineup at the ticket counter for films like the first Star Wars says something about the heyday of film culture in the city. The theatre is now boarded up and sits unoccupied. In an interview with the CBC, Michael McDonald had estimated that it would take a little over a million dollars to restore the building to its fully functioning state.[17] An alternative to big theatres and franchised theatre chains are microcinemas, which I will examine through the Kino

[16] Macdonald, Michael. (2009, June). *Michael Mcdonald and the Paramount Theatre Project:* Video posted to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPy8lhkOWIU

[17] One of the conditions of sale when the Paramount close was that the building could no longer be used as a movie theatre . In what follows we will make the distinction between commercial movie houses and a place where small and independent films might be exhibited

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microcinema project which is a site of collaborative, experimental film making, and a possible solution to the continued problems of distribution faced by many filmmakers. The Kino microcinema group was founded in Montreal in 1999 by Christian Laurence and Jericho Jeudy as a response to the frustrations felt by recent film school graduates trying to break into Quebec's film industry. This situation resulted from a mix of issues having to do with the nature of state-funded film production within the province and Telefilm's previously discussed performance. Filmmakers like Martin Fregon feared the French-speaking province's auteurist tradition was being replaced by a system that privileged profit-driven producers over creatively-oriented directors. In an article in the 2003 Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir*, Frigon complained that Telefilm Canada was:

> [U]sing public funds taken straight from the state (which is its mission), but privatizing the profits (which flow to a couple large production and distribution companies). In the long run, these policies risk causing the cinéma d'auteur to disappear by favoring an increasingly commercial cinema, following the same logic that has led to the 'dumbing down' of national television in its disturbing race for ratings and the lowest common denominator (as cited in Conway, 2008, p. 65).

This trend is further complicated by Quebec cinema being primarily state-funded (Rousseau, 2002 as cited in Conway,2008, p.65). As a result, Quebecois films do not need to attract any sort of audience to be successful, mainly because each stage of a film's production is subsidized by the state, meaning that the only people taking a risk are those that are involved in exhibition. Theater operators are consequently apprehensive about screening a Quebec-made film that might attract an audience of fifteen when they could use the same screen to attract a full house for the Hollywood blockbuster. The freshness of Kino's approach has helped spawn the creation of Kino "cells" around the world. By 2003, there were twenty-five cells worldwide from Paris, Helsinki, St.

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Petersburg, and Madison, Wisconsin with Kino Montreal serving as a central point for coordinating exchanges of Kino films and filmmakers (Conway, 2008, p. 65). By 2005, there were over fifty new cells in places like Reunion Island and Buffalo, New York. The immense quantity of Kino cells makes the movement itself difficult to describe in general terms, not unlike the larger microcinema movement.

As a site of open-access, the Kino microcinema's approach is the organization's institutionalized disregard for filmmaker status. Their members articulate this idea in their belief that "cinema belongs to everyone … that every work has the right to exist and be shown, that the public remains the only judge of a work's value" (as cited in Conway, 2008, p. 66). As it grew, Kino opened up monthly screenings to allow all of its filmmakers to screen their films once their names were put on a list. Films were screened on a first-come, first-serve basis. This policy resulted in the screening of films of uneven quality. Rousseau observed that "most of the people participating in Kino haven't thought much about the consequences of the act of filming. They are also the product of an educational system that privileges expression over mastery of the means of expression" (ibid). Despite these criticisms, Kino has managed to provide channels of access to encourage new filmmakers to develop their skills and help them work with more accomplished members. Conway contends that they have managed to do this in two ways: (1) new Kino cells provide more accessible entry points for newer filmmakers, bringing together young filmmakers and students that attend university and (2) more accomplished directors serve as models for those who are just starting out.

Laurence argues "I really believe in the power of emulation. I really believe that the more you show good films, the more people want to make good films, and the better

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they get" (as cited in Conway, 2008, p. 65). This is complemented by a spirit and enthusiasm for collaboration that is infused in all of the Kino cells. Even though it has been described by Rousseau as "an art without great means of production," it is also one where "resourcefulness and mutual support (sharing editing stations) are the norm" ("Kino" 69 as cited in Conway, 2008, p. 60). This collaboration takes a number of different forms, like collaboration in the actual filmmaking process, discussion of films during or after screenings and internet-based forums where filmmakers and audience members discuss films that Kino members have made.

The Kino cells around the world have distinguished themselves from other forms of small media by expanding their distribution network. Kino cells exchange compilations, using Kino Montreal as an intermediary, to distribute and sell DVDs of films made during a given year in addition to maintaining websites where selected Kino films can be viewed. In 2004, for instance the Madison, Wisconsin Kino cell sent films to Paris to be included in a program called Les Films Faits a la Maison ("homemade movies") that aired on the French television network Canal+, and in 2005, the group brought a Kino Film Revolution series featuring films from around the world to the Wisconsin Film Festival. Kino Montreal has helped facilitate exchanges by serving as a central point through which other Kino cells from around the world can find compilations (Conway, 2008, p. 68). There is diversity in the mandates and locations of the different microcinemas around North America. The Other Cinema in San Francisco[18] is completely funded by a 5 dollar admission ticket and is located in the fashionable Mission District in the down town core of San Francisco. The cinema mainly displays

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[18] http://www.othercinema.com/

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local projects, experimental documentaries, and media archaeology pieces, in older formats like Pixel Vision, regular 8, super 8, and small-gauge work(Alston, online). The Aurora Picture Show in Houston Texas in housed in a former church.[19] Rooftop Films in Brooklyn New York displays their films on the rooftop of an apartment building in the city. [20]

Conway argues that Kino and other microcinemas are characterized by some of the institutional criteria" that Jurgen Habermas identifies as the defining traits of sites such as eighteenth-century English coffee houses where something resembling a public sphere was historically achieved (Habermas: 1990). The two traits are the institutionalization of equality among speakers (or filmmakers, in Kino's case) and open access granted to all participants.

The biggest challenge facing micro cinemas is one of distribution. They also face the logistical issues of finding suitable projection equipment, space, and communities of people to support them (Bachar and Lagos cited in Conway 2008). Subsequently, microcinemas are heterogeneous by nature (Conway 46-50). They are also numerous: the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers listed over a thousand in 2002 in its Film and Video Exhibitors Guide (Alston and Peters,2002, p. 32). The discussion of microcinemas in general terms has usually tended towards describing them as providing forums for filmmakers who would not otherwise be able to screen their films. The screenings in the popular press and in scholarly articles also tended to emphasize the intimate atmosphere that they seek to foster, often making a connection between the

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[19] www.aurorapictureshow.org.

[20] http://rooftopfilms.com/

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setting, the open forum and independent filmmakers' cultivation of their craft. David King, for example, addressing independent filmmakers in 2004 issue of the Australian film journal *Metro*, cites microcinema operator Peter Wells, who states that because his venue "is a small bar ... people seem more free to discuss the film as they watch it, and generally stick around to discuss the film after its finished, leading Wells to advise that "screening your film or video at a microcinema could be more rewarding , or at least enlightening, than screening at a festival where audience members tend to confine their discussion to those they know" (as cited in Conway 2008, p. 70). The absence of a centralized place for filmmakers in Saint John then presents the microcinema as an attractive alternative to providing a place for film distribution and production within the city.

The Paramount theatre in Saint John could potentially serve as a place through which a microcinema and film collective could be built in Saint John. In a brief submitted by Uptown Saint John as part of urban planning measures titled "District wealth creation for Saint John," examining the creation of cultural wealth through the building of shared spaces through which creativity can be fostered; it identified many challenges to the stimulation for diversity and investment in the uptown area.[21] The report highlighted weak networks and inadequate access to production expertise that help support the creative and cultural sector, namely in the absence of creative hubs and spaces where cultural industries can innovate and flourish.[22] The building of a

[21] Uptown Saint John: district Wealth creation strategy for Saint John: http://propelict.com/files/file-480f73155a2af-Summary_April15_ver3.pdf

[22] This idea is related to Habermas' ideas of communicative action. Although Habermas, made a clear distinction between different forms of art, he found that communicating within open formats allowed for the most interaction and flourishing of new ideas.

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microcinema could potentially serve local filmmakers who need access to distribution channels.

In my interviews with Saint John filmmakers a number of themes pertaining to this thesis were demonstrated.

Distance

A sense of physical (and more importantly psychological) distance exists between Saint John filmmakers and the film industry and the provincial centre in Fredericton. As well as to the film training programs which are dispersed around the province (Fredericton and Woodstock being two centers). This distance has created a need for self-reliance and independence among the Saint John filmmakers. This self-reliance has been misunderstood (perhaps conveniently) by people in other parts of the province as deliberate or as part of a Saint John "psyche" rather than as a necessary response to the economic and cultural realities of filmmaking in the province. A solution to this problem of distance would be the deliberate fostering of a "New Brunswick" identity in the arts that could suture the province together instead of fragmenting the cultural community through the decentralization of equipment, training, and opportunities. Saint John filmmakers exist in a state of "virtual diaspora" – separated from the cultural resources that would help them establish a community of common purpose and meet their individual creative needs. To breach the restraints of distance, members of diasporic communities use modern technology to overcome the limitations that result from it(see Appadurai:1996, Karim :1998, Giddens:1999). Those instances of diasporic communities like the Jewish and Indian diasporas in England contain examples filmmakers from different diasporas making films that have a deep and intimate connection with (often

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conflicting) ideas of homeland. Most times communities of diasporas are associated with either racial or ethnic minorities. And so it is assumed that this process of construction of an imagined homeland is one restricted to their particular socio-political situations.

But this idea can be broadened to include many cultural communities and contexts .The imagined homeland idea can be applied to the "invented tradition" of Saint John as an Irish city. While the Irish played an important role in the history of the city, few today self-identify as Irish (for example in the 2006 census). However it is precisely the "imagined" ethnicity of the cultural diaspora that concerns us here. This sometimes results in the creation of a nostalgic, idealized, constructed and anti-modernist myth.[23] In doing so even after the focus of the nostalgia disperses it creates a sense of disconnect from a larger more prominent structure, culture, homeland and an ideal.

This sense of nostalgia is also seen with many films made by filmmakers of ethnic diasporas in the West.[24] They use the practices of filmmaking and in the case of some musicians (like folk music) as a means to reconnect with their past. This process of cultural production finds its voice being informed by the means through which it was created. The ability to access and distribute content helps the process of making and reinterpreting that distance.

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[23] Ian Mckay levels his attacks against Helen Creighton for exactly this reason (Mckay;1992, p. 22). .Mckay's critique of Creighton came from her tacit creation of a myth of an authentic folk identity rooted in anti-modernism. Her construction of an idealized folk came from her own as well as her audiences' need to reconnect with those roots. She commoditized the folk through an essentialized idea of Nova Scotia's past and in so doing helped to create a tourism industry that is basically centered on an idealized past. This need came from a form nostalgia, no matter how constructed or essentialized it was packaged to be.

[24] Psychologists have found nostalgia to be a coping mechanism the brain uses when faced with feelings of anxiety and depression. The effects of nostalgia result in an increase in social bonding self-regard-and therefore acts as a natural anti-depressant. These feelings of distance and depression may come from a mix of circumstances -- like separation as a result of being moved away from a home (as may be the case with diasporic filmmakers) or being within a city that is lacking the financial and structural resources to support its filmmakers, as may be the case with filmmakers in Saint John (see Waldschut et al. 2006; Juslin et al. 2008, Leboe, 2006. et al).

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The use of the accessible digital technology to access and distribute cultural products has allowed for a restructuring of the traditional display and distribution structures. Filmmakers in Saint John can be considered an economic diaspora in that they are separated from the cultural centers of filmmaking in the province. This does not really make them any different from other diasporas because those people are separated geographically. In examining cultural production the products themselves exist outside of the structures that are used to display and distribute them.

Film as folk – techno – culture.

To explore the metaphor of the diaspora in the context of Saint John filmmaking, I want to draw on some examples of another kind of cultural practice where this issue has been more explicitly explained; namely folk culture and folk music. And in doing so discuss Saint John film communities as a kind of folk culture. For instance their DIY approach to filmmaking echoes many characteristics of folk and musical practice. Saint John filmmakers make their films using the resources (technological, economic and human) at hand. The Kino system of film performance could very well further the sense of expressiveness and cultural depth that a community like Saint John seems to struggle with in other artistic fields. Of particular similarity are the continuous links between conflicting ideas of authenticity and cultural production.The link between the Irish diaspora and musicality was consolidated by the end of the Victorian era at the height of the British imperial project (Curtis 1971, Busteed 1998). Irish music had by that point been constructed as a specific ethnic category based on the assumption that there was an identifiably Irish musical style that existed as an authentic expression of its people and a

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reflection of their innate feelings and sensibilities (McLoone and McLaughlin, p. 181, 2000).

Musically, the essentialist notions that are behind the dominant ideas of ' Irishness'(and those that get continually applied to Irish traditional music) can be seen on the one hand as ideologically conservative and analytically restrictive, privileging 'nature' over culture and alluding to a deep essence of Irishness that withstands historical change. This feeling of essentialism seems to be reflected in the often flawed perception of the Saint John filmmaking community by those within and outside it.

The need to mark difference, especially in the global discourse of popular music, might also require the 'strategic' mobilisation of aspects of this 'Irishness' precisely to identify its significance against any imperialising and homogenising threats posed by the English at the time. The imperialising presence now can be extended in cultural terms from global capitalism to the USA, 'the cultural electronic Goliath of the universe' (Schiller 1998, p. 161). But if post-colonial theory has turned its perspective onto the narratives of resistance from within the colonised, prising open the supposed closed spaces of essentialist nationalism, it has also suggested a more complex relationship between the centre and the periphery than is offered by a 'cultural imperialism' paradigm. Mcloone and Mclaughlin argue then that the conservative Ireland 1930's -50's of Ireland saw the images and pleasures of popular American cinema or the urban rhythms of jazz music as liberating. The power of global culture was instrumental then opening the cultural sterility from an overly essentialist national culture. Contemporary global capitalism works not just by 'homogenising' world culture but through 'niche marketing' and the marketing of difference. As Sharma et al have found, 'the coolie has

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become cool' (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, p. 1). This process collectively makes local cultures and local energies dormant under the weight of a nationalist hegemony. In Canada, folk music was supported by the federal government during the 1960's. Just like film, and for the same nation-building reasons.[25] Within film, the discourses at the APC were tensions over how best to use film as a tool for cultural nationalism. As a result film critics in the 60's found that having film assigned this purpose had a negative effect on the quality of the films themselves thus causing a drop in audience numbers (see Dorland, 1998, p.120).

Critics argued that audiences were not being entertained by films any more because there was a separation between two differing ideas of the purposes through which film was to be used. The debates came as a result came from a discussion over what constituted good film (and by extension good art) and a growing gap between mainstream filmmaking, considered as central to the filmmaking industry and independent filmmaking that is considered as peripheral to it. There is however a new relationship developing between the centre and the periphery (also the local and the global) where the "local should be seen as a fluid and relational space, constituted only in and through its relationship to the global" (Robins 1991, p..35). When peripheral cultures inhabit this space, as in the case of folk music or independent cinema, they do so in complex and contradictory ways that feed into the global in a manner that is mutually sustaining even if the power relationship is weighted against them.

[25] Of particular relevance is Anna Kearney Guigne's work on folk music's appropriation by museums and government institutions (see Guigne,2008).

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So the potential for a culture of resistance that can challenge the definition of identity (and by extension, provide a challenge to existing power relationships) does not lie in a retreat back into essentialist narratives that have been part of the oppression in the first place but in the exploitation of the site of contact between the local and global(Mclaughlin and Mcloone, 2000, p. 183). In doing so it marks a shift in analyzing the texts themselves in favour of a more nuanced approach to their processes rather than the products of hybridity.

The 'points of contact' that McLoone and McLaughlin(amongst other post-colonialists) argue for, are ones that grow out of the 'liminal spaces' that are provided at this intersection that offer a critical perspective on both. These spaces are the place where this identity is performed. In the case of Irish folk musicians these places might be town halls or pubs. These were places where the emphasis on skill (so chiefly regarded within classical music) was disregarded.   By arguing for hybridity within certain forms of cultural production emerging from the movement of shifting populations and more fluid information movement -- we can find a theoretical connection between creativity and its connection to geography and place. The filmmakers within the city, because of their distance from the centers of distribution of filmmaking are compelled to see the learning of film techniques as a choice between two styles of filmmaking. But the truth is, they are making use of the structures of film institutions themselves to teach themselves about their craft.

These places might be geographical ones as in the case of Irish music made in Canada or genre movies made in Saint John, which are hybrids in that they are peripheral to their cultural centres-namely Ireland and Hollywood, but are continually informed and

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contradicted by them until they become the centre themselves, at which point they will affect some other periphery. These processes also are reflective of diasporas and how their identity is constructed from the interactions with their adopted homes and how they are affected by their perceptions of their historical homes. Those distances and interactions have an affect on how identities much like cultural products are created.

To this end, Kenneth Frampton's concept of "critical regionalism", originally used to describe recurring characteristics of Irish film in the 90's helps in arguing for a "cinema of national questioning" (Mcloone 1994, 168-9; Frampton 1985). The ideas about thinking of films and music (as notions of "critical regionalism" suggest) allows in making a distinction between the local culture that aims to blandly celebrate national difference (and argue for a essentialist definition of this) and one that sets out to critique, interrogate and extend the local/national in way that understands the need for local specificity within its global context, rather than outside and independent of it (Mcloone 1994, p. 153). Critical regionalism and further its critical localities could be seen as an emergent characteristic of the filmmakers in Saint John.

The framework in using film narratives in this manner builds on post-colonial studies done in the United States and England. For instance, E. Anna Claydon uses many of the overlapping themes that Martin Mcloone found in the cinemas of Ireland and Europe and applies them to the films of emerging of the East Indian diaspora in England in the late 90s. She argues that the interrogation of identity, religion, place and history within films about South Asian communities in Britain are just as essentially 'English' as English films from the 50's and 60's . Their need to explore identities of the coloniser

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and its relationship with the colonized, speak to the hybrid nature of the English societies they represented. By linking these familiar themes with Mcloone's arguments about Irish cinema, Claydon takes the position of arguing for a cinema that goes beyond the essentialist narratives that go along with any cinema. And further, argues for a nationalism that is essentialized precisely because of its absence.

In Canada, film critics perpetuated the essentialist myths about the country and the industry. The absence of a clear narrative of a Canadian identity within the commercial mainstream films made between 1974-1983 in Canada (popularly called the 'tax shelter years') was blamed by many film critics as the reason why Canadian filmmakers have seen themselves as marginal to mainstream Hollywood filmmaking. A similar trend happened in folk music with regards to the authenticity of the folk and who they really were (see Mckay 1994).In Saint John, the absence of a clear geographic and industrial presence of a film community has resulted in the perception that its filmmakers voluntarily wish to make films without any support from anyone. Their invisibility is heightened by the fact that the city serves as cheap filming location for larger production companies. The conditions of filmmaking in Saint John over the past two decades have forced its filmmakers to adopt their DIY aesthetic. The concept of "critical regionalism" discussed earlier explains (in part) the desire of marginal or peripheral groups to tell their own stories in their own cinemas. The microcinema movement provides Saint John with such a place for the much needed contacts between the cultural creators of the city to find and interact with their audiences. And in doing so they are also help build a whole new crop of cultural producers.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion and how I got here

This thesis took a long time to write. In retrospect, I think my ambitions for what I was trying to achieve were a bit naïve. But a large part of what I was trying to do involved infusing my experiences as an international student and film buff into my academic work. I knew the ideas of identity and narrative and their effects on structures and institutions surrounding cultural production were subject to constant renewal and change. And so, I had intended my thesis to take a similar kind of shape: to criss-cross through the experience of being a graduate student, an international student and a film and music buff. My approach to researching this thesis then involved considering all of these experiences. I initially started to research the history of Canadian film industry and the problems with state funding and the resulting associations of nationalistic discourse that have been linked with cultural production. This led to my research into the conflicting ideas of nationalism and nation. These research interests were fuelled by my involvement with Dr Dann Downes' work with Irish identity and its connection to folk music within Saint John. Much of this work also examined the discourse of aesthetic authenticity and their links with cultural production. This work also led me to some discourse over copyright regulation and the implications of current copyright legislation's effects on the production and distribution of film all which collectively spoke to some of my core interests when I began this project. I was interested in how we create and distribute culture. These interests were heightened by my experiences of the place I have lived in over the past ten years.

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Saint John is one of the largest cities in New Brunswick with a rich history and vibrant community of artists. But often times these artists have become invisible because the conditions necessary to support them can seem impossibly distant. I attempted to use the metaphor of the diaspora as a way to explain the manner in which marginalized groups use their distance from the homeland in creating their own cultural products. In the case of Saint John this homeland comes in the form of either an essentialized idea of mainstream filmmaking or the cultural centers of production being located in the other cities the province and around Canada.

The process of this research took an unusual form with my need to embed myself in all levels of the process of production. To this end, I organized film clubs at the university for three years and promoted them through my work and volunteering at the campus radio station. This practical work informed my research of alternative distribution methods and the promotion of microcinemas as a way to tackle the nagging problems of visibility when it comes to the display of films within marginalized cities.

I also worked as a director and producer on a local website that was committed to showcasing musical performances around the city and the province. I also learned some of the basics of screenwriting through an informal group of novice screenwriting circles consisting of some of my close friends. Each week we would write short scripts based on different exercises which we would conjure up. One week we would try and write a screenplay based on a magazine article, other times we'd assign scenarios from different genres to see what we could come up with. I also organized a film series on the university

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campus for 3 years. In our final year, we held the series at the New Brunswick museum located in a mall in the downtown core of the city.

The problem with using these experiences as a method of research was that it took place sporadically and did not share any kind of uniform pattern. My work with Culture hub and the campus radio station involved a similar kind work process to that of the Saint John film community: most of our resources came through borrowed equipment or was self-funded.

The problems of writing this thesis emerged from a similar place. There were many factors and variables to consider when analyzing how film and further how any cultural production) emerges from a specific place. I had originally wanted to equate the ideas of diasporic identity formation, to its connection with geographical separation as a device to explain how film production in small cities takes place as well. Much of this discourse seemed to fit because these communities of people live with a geographical separation from the country of their origin. These have unique consequences in the films and culture they create because they draw from the well of the cultural myths, symbols and genres and merge them with those of their adopted countries to create a kind of hybrid narrative, indicative of a hybrid identity. Such a hybrid narrative then would require us to rethink the form their narratives take. This has opened up the ability for us to refresh the manner in which they are distributed, through microcinemas, and also in how they are created through the restructuring of the rules of screenplays.

This pattern seemed similar to the ideas of separation that were prominent amongst English Canadian filmmaking. I considered this to be an indication that this

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metaphorical longing would find itself within the processes that filmmakers within Saint John view filmmaking. However, while I can make the case intellectually, my actual experience (along with my interviews) of the Saint John film community tells a more complex story. The filmmakers within the city do not create their work in terms of a longing or in comparison to mainstream or independent films. Instead, their films emerge through a wide range of experiences that could not be generalized to ones that merely result from marginality and distance from larger cities. At the time of this writing, one of the oldest theatres in the city (and the country), the Paramount stands a good chance of being torn down to make way for a parking lot (*Telegraph-Journal*, 2010, c3). The theatre has been at the centre of lot of concern about how the city chooses to use its cultural spaces. This crisis has caused a massive outpouring of support and concern from within the community as to how best to utilize the space. In addition to using the space as a performing arts venue, there have been suggestions that the theatre could be used as a microcinema or a second-run theatre. Using the theatre in this manner would provide the city with a space for the city's artists, filmmakers and audiences to come together within the downtown core. It hearkens back to the history of cinema which had always been a medium through which communities within cities have been entertained and have come together (see Sczelkun, 2002; Holmund, 2005; Conway, 2008).The successes of the Fredericton Film Cooperative in bringing members of the community along with potential filmmakers together through their film series is evidence of the potential for the Paramount to do the same for Saint John. In a very real sense, a concrete place to house creative work in the city might create the "space" for the film and arts culture to inhabit.

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In addition to speaking to local filmmakers and industry professionals about their experiences with making film within the city and within the province, I was surprised at how many people within the city were making films with little or no support from government funding. Their involvement with film came as a result of having to create work within a city that for the longest time was considered marginal to the numerous other cultural centers of the province and the country. Their involvement came from being able to create their work from spare resources, and within a city that encourages collaborative work. As a result the distribution of work created in this manner is best served when the access to it are their least restricted.

I equated the conditions that filmmakers in Saint John faced reflective of some of the same conditions that independent (or indie) filmmakers have faced since the start of filmmaking. In recent years, independent film, whose name spoke to the production practices, funding structures , narratives and themes adopted by filmmakers to break free of the constraints of popular filmmaking, at one time equated with the Edison company but then later to the studio system. By 2009, indie film finds itself in a situation where the films aesthetic has been co-opted by mainstream filmmaking to prove itself as distinct and interesting. A condition made all the more necessary by the volume of films green-lit by movie studios. The films made by these filmmakers were usually made by directors whom both critics and audiences saw as auteurs and whose films consisted of either challenging narratives or challenging subject matter. The success of these filmmakers has created a situation where indie film has been turned into a genre. And the marketing of difference and quirk was seen as a way for films to find a definite markets and audience.

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The challenges of filmmakers who were at the helm of the indie film movement and by extension English Canadian film, identified distribution as one of the primary problems facing them and other filmmakers within marginalized cities. This has led to a situation where film distribution companies have increasingly relied on the internet and viral marketing as the best way to solve this problem of access and distribution. In the last two years I visited the many film conferences that were held by the NBFilm Coop in Saint John and Fredericton. The conferences were concerned about how best to attract foreign productions and alternative digital modes of distribution to target smaller and smaller niche markets.

These trends within film production and distribution, are usually seen as a contrast between independent and mainstream films. The alternative distribution structures of indie films were seen as a way to reach target markets rather than simply a means to create conditions for films to be unhampered by the expectations of studios regarding the kinds of business it does on opening weekend. The narrative emerging from film conferences I attended focused on the marketing of films before production and through alternative methods of delivery, through streaming video, mobile phones and digital theatres. In response to this appropriation of indie cinema, producer Mike Ryan argues that this new shift and prioritizing of distribution has led to an alarming valuing of the marketing of films over the conditions of their actual creation. He argues:

> There is a problem with independent film today, but it's not that filmmakers don't have access to the marketing tools they need. If we create strong innovative work audiences will come, and in turn, new forms of profit will evolve. But if we start by encouraging filmmakers to please as wide an audience as possible then we will destroy what is alive and essential about alternative cinema. New distribution strategies are inevitable, but we should not allow our search for new platforms to dilute the content or crush the dreams of our next generation of auteurs....Perhaps it's not the youth audience's fault, though. Even if they are looking for it, young people today actually aren't able to associate outsider

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perspectives with most current independent cinema. Market forces are so shaping independent content that we have castrated the whole reason indie got started in the first place. "Independent" alt culture helped kill itself by distracting its audience with the petty bourgeois aesthetics emboldened by a decade-long onslaught of overpriced Sundance-launched quirk. We need to get back to the heart and soul of what it means to be independent and stop chasing the mainstream dragon; it was a pipe dream to begin with. We need less sweating over what we think the audience wants and to focus more on the people who could care less and are busy right now marching to their own fucked-up, out-of-time drummers. The indie film industry as it has been defined since *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* is dead. Hallelujah. Let the inmates run free (Ryan, online).

Hence by thinking of the filmmakers in Saint John as setting their own standards and trends when it comes to remixing and renewal of the production and distribution avenues through which art is created, I argue that the filmmakers of the city are faced with the significant challenges of the access to proper funding and the absence of alternative distribution channels to create their work. They use every resource available to them to make their work. They use the wealth of their experiences of living and loving their city to try and build their own distinct place in the world.

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