Coming Soon, Thinking Back:

Cineplex Entertainment and Exhibition Practice in Transition

Charlotte Orzel

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2017

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Charlotte Orzel

Entitled: Coming Soon, Thinking Back: Cineplex Entertainment and Exhibition Practice in Transition

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Media Studies)

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Maurice Charland ____________ Chair

Fenwick McKelvey ____________ Examiner

Monika Gagnon ____________ Examiner

Charles Acland ____________ Supervisor

Approved by: ____________________

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

____

Dean of Faculty

Date: ____________________

ABSTRACT

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In the 2010s, the North American film exhibition industry is undergoing a significant transformation as exhibitors introduce several new initiatives, including technologically and service-based enhancements to theatre experiences, offered in branded packages and available at a premium price. Behind the scenes, consolidation of theatre chains, diversification of exhibitor assets and other shifts in exhibitor business strategy are restructuring the industry in dramatic ways. This thesis seeks to examine these developments and the way exhibitors have framed them discursively both within the film industry and to the public. It takes the Cineplex Entertainment theatre chain as a key example in this moment of reconfiguration, examining the exhibitor's implication in historical forces in the film industry and its investments in emerging exhibition practices in the present. Drawing from theoretical perspectives in cultural studies and scholarship on film exhibition and media industries, it examines trade publications, branding materials, press releases, and news sources to analyze the way contemporary movie theatres are being reconstituted through the formation and circulation of a new industry common sense about the cultural practice of cinemagoing. It interrogates how exhibitors imagine cinemagoing and cinemagoers and argues that, as they do so, they create cinema spaces and commodities organized around the perceived desires of the bourgeois audience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was enabled by the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Concordia University's Faculty of Arts and Science and Department of Communication Studies. The impact of these funds on my ability to carry out this research was immeasurable, and I thank these institutions and departments.

Thank you to my supervisor Charles Acland for his steadfast support and generous logistical and intellectual counsel. His perceptive notes provided me with much-needed guideposts as the project developed and our meetings brought me clarity and motivation when my enthusiasm was flagging. I'm grateful that I discovered *Screen Traffic* when I did; its theoretical contribution to this project is matched only by the impact of its author's mentorship.

I would also like to thank the other two members of my thesis committee, Monika Gagnon and Fenwick McKelvey, who have been immensely helpful as second and third readers.

My mentors at Queen's University and in the Kingston community have been hugely influential to the development of this thesis. Frank Burke was the academic advisor for its earliest, messiest iteration, and I am very appreciative that he trusted me to figure it out as I went along. Wendy Huot's thoughtful theatre management and personal guidance in exhibition culture is the reason this project exists.

The brilliant and giving members of my Master's cohort also deserve my gratitude. These colleagues created the rich intellectual environment where this project took shape, offered emotional and nutritional support at our many extracurricular get-togethers, and asked sharp questions about my work throughout. They are truly the best.

Garrett Barry gave me many kind words and moments of levity during my research, and hosted me for an essential week of respite and fun in the thick of figuring out the direction of the project. His friendship has been a source of warmth and reinforcement, even from afar.

Alison Houle, my friend of many years, has brought me boundless love and daily encouragement as I complete my Master's degree and navigate my life. Her constant support with my small questions, looming doubts, good news, irrational fears, and everything in between, is one of the most valuable and meaningful resources I have.

I must also thank my family for their abiding love. My brothers Christian and Julian have always encouraged me and their pride is something I treasure. My parents, Mark and Cheryl, have been my best teachers, my unfailing advocates, and my role models in work and life.

Finally, I thank my *babcia*, Lillian. Through her intelligence, strength, and inexhaustible generosity, she forged a path for her children and grandchildren to build happy and meaningful lives. In her 84 years, she set an indelible example a life lived in service to others. This thesis is dedicated to her.

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INTRODUCTION

When I lived in Kingston, Ontario during my studies at Queen's University from 2011 to 2015, I worked part-time at the local independent specialty cinema, The Screening Room. That job first drew my attention to the spaces, practices, and structures of film exhibition, not only at independent cinemas but mainstream multiplexes as well. One job perk was that I received free movie tickets, so, during the four years I was in Kingston, I seldom saw movies elsewhere. I mostly encountered large chain multiplexes when I visited my parents in suburban Ottawa, or, even more rarely, when I took a forty-minute bus ride outside Kingston's downtown core to one of the two megaplexes in town that played blockbuster films. My growing familiarity with the behind-the-scenes processes and cinema experiences of the small, idiosyncratic community theatre where I worked and saw several movies a week made the multiplex experience feel unfamiliar, even strange. Amplifying this feeling, it appeared as though multiplexes had changed each time I returned. The screens seemed bigger and the surround-sound louder than ever. There was reserved seating and chairs that tilted back, advertisements ran longer before the trailers, and new kinds of ticket premiums appeared that made choosing shows a more complicated process. Despite my affection for my community theatre, I generally saw these things as a unique part of the multiplex experience, rather than evidence of cultural impoverishment, corporate greed, or a spectacle over substance approach. Still, as I considered the role of film exhibition in my theatre job and between my classes, I wondered where these new developments came from and who they were for. My ongoing contact with an alternative kind of exhibition space at The Screening

Room also made me want to learn how and why mainstream film exhibition had taken its present form.

Since the inception of film as a mass medium, it has been deeply connected with a practice of public spectatorship. While film theorists and exhibitors have tended to recognize the technological capabilities of cinemas as their most distinguishing feature, either for defining the film medium or offering a measurable distinction from competing viewing options, Charles Acland proposes that public consumption provides a more generative point of identification.[1] Public film viewing was once the only option for the vast majority of film audiences, giving it a central role in cinema's historical development that is too rarely acknowledged. After the emergence of competing screening technologies, the privileged role of theatrical release windows in the lifecycle of film texts continues to give cinemagoing an important position in the consolidation of industrial resources and popular taste around new titles, even if these investments and impressions shift as films travel to other viewing contexts. Exhibitors have always needed to negotiate relationships with competing entertainment options, and their practices have changed significantly throughout film history. However, public spectatorship persists as a central feature of film culture, with movie theatres serving as important sites for film consumption, public gathering, revenue generation, and the physicalized enaction of industrial practice and promotion.

This thesis investigates the recent changes in exhibition practices I began to identify in my sporadic trips to the multiplex, situates them within the historical trajectory of mainstream film exhibition, and analyzes how they relate to prevailing industrial discourses. Recent years

[1] Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 71.

have seen major theatre chains in North America suffering from something of an identity crisis. In response to the threat, real or perceived, from expanding home entertainment options, internet piracy, and popular anxieties about the long-term viability of movie theatres, exhibitors have introduced a number of new initiatives. These involve new screening technologies, including 3D, IMAX, motion seating, more "immersive" surround sound, and 4DX multi-sensory effects. They also include options for increased comfort, refinement, and convenience, such as plush, reserved seating, alcoholic beverages, full lunch and dinner menus, and in-seat service. Behind the scenes, greater consolidation of theatre chains and the diversification of exhibitor assets are significantly restructuring the industry, opening the way for further change. The history of exhibitor anxiety about home technologies is at least as old as television, and turns towards technological innovation, upscaled atmospheres, and higher ticket prices are not wholly new reactions to such crises. However, what interests me is the transformation of exhibition spaces and practices at work in the contemporary moment, its articulation with concurrent forces in the film industry and cultural life, and, ultimately, its consequences for the future of cinema.

A significant challenge in approaching this topic is the lack of information concerning this historical period assembled to date in scholarly literature or detailed popular texts. While there is a small and robust set of scholarship concerning the exhibition industry, the majority of this material discusses historical exhibition forms prior to or leading into the 1980s, and not more recent developments in exhibition practice. A notable exception is Charles Acland's 2003 book *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture*, which deals with North American film exhibition during the period loosely bracketed by the years 1985 and 1998. This book provides a source of valuable historical context and methodological inspiration and has greatly informed the direction of this thesis. However, the exhibition industry has changed significantly in the fourteen years since its publication and even more since the 1998 endpoint of its study. Before this thesis can draw conclusions about the influence of emerging exhibition practices, I first must uncover what historical change has taken place in the interim. Gathering and synthesizing this historical information from industrial sources to create an account of the past fifteen years of mainstream film exhibition forms a significant part of the scholarly contribution of this thesis.

Interpretation of these historical movements requires an understanding not only of the economic forces affecting the trajectory of the exhibition industry, but the discourses that enable and promote shifts in industrial practice. While industry actors do make decisions based on financial rationales, these choices also materialize within discursive environments that open and foreclose opportunities for action, gather momentum around explanations and responses, and describe and validate industrial practice. Charting the emergence and circulation of exhibitor discourse is therefore a primary component in my analysis of recent exhibition history and directions of future change. In the exhibition industry, these discourses involve exhibitor theorizing about cinemagoing and their own role as purveyors of opportunities for public film consumption. Through exhibitors' articulation of their practices, their sense of audiences also emerges, revealing understandings and assumptions about cinemagoers and their desires. A central question for my analysis, then, is how exhibitors imagine cinemagoing and cinemagoers, and what forms of practice these visions bring into being.

This thesis studies Cineplex Entertainment, Canada's largest cinema chain, focusing on the period between 2001 and 2016. Viewed within a broader historical and industrial context, this study traces the development of Cineplex's exhibition practice from the chain's acquisition by the Onex corporation at the height of a widespread economic crisis in the exhibition industry to the emerging transformations of the contemporary moment. The crisis of the early 2000s marked a shift from a period of accelerated cinema construction and industry investment in new, upscaled cinema spaces, into a prolonged period of recovery and reconfiguration that has resulted in the emergence of significant changes in cinemagoing. In 2016, Cineplex has deepened its investment in emerging exhibition initiatives, and entered its first full year of a new, large-scale branding campaign that has demonstrated a significant shift away from the chain's previous marketing initiatives. My analysis examines the lingering impact of the economic crisis and resulting changes in Cineplex's exhibition practice. Of particular interest to this study is the proliferation, beginning in the early 2000s and accelerating noticeably since 2008, of new kinds of theatre experiences, centred on advanced presentation technology and enhanced amenities, offered as branded commodities for a premium ticket price. My examination of Cineplex's changing exhibition practices is complemented by an analysis of the marketing practices employed to legitimate these shifts and affirm Cineplex's brand identity to enable the expansion of its newest offerings in coming years. I focus on the case study of the chain's "See the Big Picture" brand campaign, launched in December 2015, which demonstrated both a larger financial investment than the chain's previous marketing initiatives and a shift away from appeals to the technological advantages of cinemagoing towards its personal and nostalgic dimensions. Examining these interlocking aspects of exhibitor practice, I trace the historical development of emerging currents in the exhibition industry and investigate what industrial discourses have shaped, catalyzed, and legitimized the circulation of these practices.

Despite ongoing proclamations of the impending end of cinemagoing, in recent years, Cineplex has been experiencing substantial successes. Since a series of significant acquisitions in the 2000s and 2010s, the chain has held a near monopoly in the Canadian exhibition industry, and currently possesses a 78.7% share of the Canadian theatrical market, giving it the power to set mainstream exhibition standards across the country.[2] 2015 saw the chain experience its strongest ever annual performance, with total revenue rising to $1.37-billion and box office reaching $711.1-million, both all-time records.[3] This success was due in part to the impact of *Star Wars: Episode VII — The Force Awakens* (2015), which also broke all-time opening weekend and total gross box office records. However, Cineplex's ability to capitalize on the draw of this film and other titles was also rooted in the chain's adoption and advancement of new forms of exhibition practice. Cineplex has historically led major changes in film exhibition, and, in the 2010s, is investing in an array of new initiatives both within and outside the theatrical environment. These include arcades; in-cinema restaurants; alternative theatrical programming; a loyalty program; an entertainment magazine; ticketing, showtime and trivia cellphone apps; DVD and digital film sales; digital signage for malls, fast-food chains, and other businesses; advertising services; online gaming platforms; vending and arcade equipment; and a restaurant and entertainment venue concept. These changes also include the introduction of technology and service-based exhibition commodities, available in branded packages at premium prices. At Cineplex, these include UltraAVX premium large format screenings, the Cineplex VIP dine-in

[2] Cineplex Entertainment, "Investor Fact Sheet as of December 31, 2016" (December 31, 2016), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/investors/factsheet/2016_Q4_Investor_Fact_Sheet_FINAL_r.PDF (accessed April 2, 2017).

[3] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report* (March 31, 2016), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2015/Cineplex-2015-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf (accessed January 30, 2017), 16, 33.

boutique cinema concept, IMAX, and RealD 3D presentations, D-BOX motion seating, Barco Escape three-panel wrap around screens, and 4DX multi-sensory effects. These recent investments in new kinds of exhibition practice and initiatives outside the exhibition sector identify Cineplex as a salient example of a major theatre chain reworking the traditional exhibition model to respond to contemporary concerns.

To investigate the historical development of these changes and their implication in patterns of exhibitor discourse, I consult a variety of trade materials drawn from exhibitors, trade publications, and popular press. Cineplex's substantial online archive of press releases and financial reports has been especially useful for tracing the activities of the exhibitor in greater detail than reported by most trade publications and for appraising Cineplex's self-reflexivity in its most promotional forms. Trade publications from within the film and exhibition industries, such as *Variety* and *Boxoffice*, have helped me situate Cineplex's practices within industry trends and identify how their actions have been received, framed, and publicized by industry actors outside the chain. Lastly, traditional news reports allow me to grasp those points where industrial publicity intersects with popular discourse about cinema, business, and consumer culture. On a practical level, these materials provide necessary historical information that helps me identify key moments in the development of emerging exhibition practices, since this period of exhibition history is largely undocumented by scholarly sources. My approach also responds to problems of access. While exhibitors and other industry actors possess an array of internal documents, private correspondence, and market research that speaks to the issues I address, these materials are unavailable to me, due to the barriers of both cost and the protection of corporate intellectual property. Beyond necessity, however, the materials I analyze have distinct value because they are publicly circulated, and contribute not only to the decision-making of individual exhibitors, but understandings of cinemagoing across the exhibition industry, in the film and media industries, and amongst the cinemagoing audience and wider public. While this thesis identifies forces of influence on exhibitors, its primary concern is how exhibitors consolidate, negotiate and circulate the ideas that enable business practice and put forth ideas about cinemagoing. I therefore give publicly available trade materials, especially those that intersect with other popular discourses, a central place in this analysis both as sources of information and objects for critical examination.

My primary methodology in processing these materials is a close analysis of the way exhibitor practice is articulated within them. This analysis focuses especially on sources produced within my period of study, 2001 to 2016, but also draws from outside these years where necessary to contextualize events and practices historically. I pay special attention to exhibitors' explanation of their practices, but I do not read these statements as straightforward expressions of causality, nor do I dismiss them as mere promotion. Instead, following John Thornton Caldwell's work on industrial cultures of film production, they are understood as indications of preferred narratives, which, though they are not necessarily false, are kept "in check" with historical and economic information and situated within broader industrial movements.[4] Advertising and branding materials produced by exhibitors are also prominent in this analysis, especially in the case study of Cineplex's branding practice in Chapter Four. These texts give a sense of exhibitors' imaginative relationship with cinemagoers and the practice of cinemagoing and offer an opportunity to examine the self-reflexive, self-promotional posture exhibitors adopt in direct communication with their audiences.

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[4] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

Organized into four chapters, this thesis investigates Cineplex's role in the North American exhibition industry's current moment of transition and the discourses they mobilize around their new initiatives in exhibition practice. Drawing from existing literatures on film exhibition, media industry studies, and cultural studies, Chapter One elaborates on the theoretical orientation from which I have developed my research methodology and framed the central issues animating my thesis. This chapter sets the scope of inquiry in subsequent chapters, and establishes the critical perspective from which I theorize the exhibition industry's heterogeneity. Chapter Two examines the industry-wide economic crisis of the early 2000s, investigating how Cineplex and the larger exhibition industry handled the immediate recovery period as well as how its impact can be seen in the long-term reconfigurations of exhibition structures and practices leading into the present. This chapter explains how the transition from the industrial environment of the 1980s and 90s to the industry's present status occurred. It also investigates what the nature of the recovery indicates about historical and economic forces influencing contemporary cinemagoing. Chapter Three traces the historical trajectory of new exhibition commodities, assesses their current status at Cineplex and across the industry, and examines the nature of their appeals. In addition to mapping the lineage of these practices, this chapter explains the exhibitor narratives that mobilize these emerging commodities and investigates what limitations they impose on audiences and cinema spaces. Shifting from business practice and theatre experiences to marketing, Chapter Four undertakes a case study of Cineplex's December 2015 "See the Big Picture" branding campaign. Investigating a shift in branding practice from a focus on theatre functionality and cinematic spectacle towards the personal, emotional, and nostalgic dimensions of cinemagoing, this chapter deals with the way exhibitors have altered their public-facing self-reflexivity in line with the historical changes in industry structure and practice described in preceding chapters.

We begin with Chapter One, which expands on the theoretical and methodological orientation of this project and places my work in conversation with existing scholarship. Articulating the intentions outlined in this introduction more thoroughly, this chapter theorizes my approach to issues of industry discourse, cultural production, and power relations in contemporary film exhibition.

CHAPTER ONE

Cinemagoing, Common Sense and Power in the Contemporary Film Industry

The transformations evident in the exhibition industry over the last fifteen years, including new kinds of theatrical experiences and less evident shifts in industrial structure, pose a challenge not only to traditional understandings of mainstream exhibitor practice but to prevailing methods of theorizing these practices. This chapter introduces the theoretical and methodological framework I use to approach this moment of industrial fluctuation. My study of Cineplex's practices between 2001 and 2016 is informed by film exhibition scholarship, guided by media industry studies, and grounded in cultural theory. In this chapter, I briefly outline three major streams in film exhibition scholarship: historical overviews, analyses of format and technology, and local studies. After identifying those ideas most salient for analyzing the state of contemporary exhibition, I expand on my methodological orientation by drawing on contemporary media industry studies that highlight the importance of industrial discourses in the development of mass media practice. Next, I situate this approach within understandings of culture, economy, and power as theorized in foundational scholarship from cultural studies. Finally, I explain why the practices of Cineplex Entertainment are an illuminating entry point into emerging exhibition practices by tracing its historical position in the exhibition landscape of the 1980s and 90s and describing its relevant contemporary operations.

Overarching historical treatments of the film industry are an important starting point for the scholarly study of cinemagoing. Douglas Gomery's *Shared Pleasures: A History of Moviegoing in the United States* and Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs's *Cinema Treasures: A*

New Look at Classic Theatres are two of the most comprehensive historical volumes. Both trace the growth of the American movie theatre from the first nickelodeons of the early 1900s to the rise of contemporary megaplexes in the late 1990s. Gomery begins slightly earlier, in the 1880s, with itinerant film projectionists, amusement park showings, and entrepreneurial attempts to transform the new technological curiosity into a vehicle of mass entertainment.[5] Similar in scope, Gregory A. Waller's edited collection *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* deals with the same extended period as Melnick, Fuchs, and Gomery. But Waller brings together the work of exhibition scholars with primary industry documents including advertisements, theatre programs, magazine articles, exhibitor trade journals and theatre manager handbooks, among many others, offering a more diverse, if less comprehensive, perspective on the development of cinemagoing.[6] In a more recent volume, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film*, William Paul examines cinema architecture and its influence on business practice and exhibition technology from early cinema until the end of the 1960s.[7] This type of broad historical work is less prominent in Canadian exhibition scholarship, but Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler's *Reel Time: Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986*, though focused on a regional rather than a national scale, provides insight into the development of the Canadian exhibition industry over a

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[5] Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theatres* (St. Paul, MN: MBI, 2004).

[6] Gregory A. Waller, ed., *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

[7] William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

similarly long period.[8] Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* is another example, one that deals more centrally with film distribution but touches extensively on exhibition. In the book, Pendakur provides an overarching account of the Canadian film industry's development from the early days of itinerant exhibition up to the date of its publication into the 1980s.[9]

The sweep of these volumes is useful not only for establishing historical context for specific exhibition practices, but, following Raymond Williams, for turning our attention to the dominant, residual, and emergent elements within the development of film exhibition.[10] These dynamics of change and persistence, power and opposition affect political economy and technology, as well as the recurring narratives that shape the practices of exhibitors and fuel the imaginations of the public. This thesis is considerably narrower in its historical scope, but, following these authors, the contemporary practices I analyze are understood as continuous with the history of the exhibition industry. While the comprehensiveness of these volumes shows us how movements in exhibition have unfolded over long periods, it also limits their ability to address industrial and cultural forces that appear marginal to a general history. This approach can also inhibit analysis of exhibition practice that may not decisively shape the development of the industry as a whole, but nonetheless influence the character and momentum of specific eras in cinemagoing. This thesis therefore seeks to examine a rich cross-section of contemporary

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[8] Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler, *Reel Time: Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2013).

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

[10] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-127.

exhibition practice, working from the understanding that while not all these practices may endure, each contributes to the historical environment from which they emerge.

Another prominent trend in film exhibition scholarship is the analysis of formats and technologies. John Belton, Sheldon Hall, and Steve Neale's edited book *Widescreen Worldwide* and Belton's earlier book *Widescreen Cinema* analyze the development, use, and aesthetics of widescreen technologies and investigate the effect of these formats on the formal qualities and industrial flows of cinema from the 1950s onward.[11] In *Cinematic Appeals: The Experience of New Movie Technologies*, Ariel Rogers takes a similar approach, addressing the continuities between historical forms of widescreen and 3D cinema technologies and their relationship to contemporary digital and 3D effects.[12] By examining presentation technology, these scholars address one of the most prominent features of the exhibition industry, which has long been championed by exhibitors as a defining feature of the movie theatre and its chief advantage over home film presentation. These works turn our attention to the way technology has historically altered aesthetic, social, and industrial conventions and shaped the experience of public cinema spectatorship. Presentation technology is one of many tools at exhibitors' disposal. It offers exhibitors advantages over competing entertainment options, but it also works discursively to buttress exhibitors' images and practices. And though technology forms an important part of film exhibition as a whole, it is also embedded in and impacted by historical, economic, and cultural forces in the film industry, some of which discrete technological studies can elide. Examining

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[11] John Belton, Sheldon Hall and Stephen Neale, eds., *Widescreen Worldwide* (New Barnet, U.K.: John Libbery, 2010). Paul McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," in *Widescreen Worldwide*, ed. Sheldon Hall, Steve Neale and John Belton (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2010).

[12] Ariel Rogers, *Cinematic Appeals: The Experience of New Movie Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

other exhibitor activities including service-based cinema initiatives, marketing practices, and non-theatrical holdings alongside the economic and historical context of the industry bring out distinct facets of technological operations that may not otherwise be apparent. Drawing from these scholars of cinema technology, I address the recent proliferation of new forms of cinema technology, including widescreen and 3D, and the influence of these innovations on public film presentation and the cinematic site. But I also place these technologies in conversation with other social forces and modes of industry practice to survey the larger cultural scene in which exhibitors act.

Finally, local studies have carved out a significant place in exhibition literatures, investigating cinemagoing in specific places and historical junctures and extrapolating from these circumstances to uncover more general understandings of film exhibition. Scholarship here includes Kathryn-Fuller Seely's edited book *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* and Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen's edited book *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, which assemble case studies on a variety of topics, rooted in several locations and historical periods, under the umbrella of scholarship sometimes called "new cinema history."[13] Similar to this research are more extended works, like Ross Melnick's *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry, 1908–1935*, which examines the life of the influential radio broadcaster and manager of one of New York's flagship cinemas, The Roxy Theatre.[14] Robert C. Allen and

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[13] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, ed., *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008). Richard Maltby, "New Cinema Histories," in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen, eds., *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* (Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

[14] Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Natasha Smith's digital humanities project *Going to the Show*, which documents moviegoing in North Carolina from the late 1880s until the end of the silent period in the 1930s, provides an especially interesting example of the new strategies some scholars have employed to study cinemagoing in local contexts.[15] By narrowing their research geographically and temporally, these scholars undertake more detailed research about the forces affecting cinemagoing in their chosen areas and periods of study. Local studies also enable the examination of phenomena which may not have national or global influence, but meaningfully shape local practices and situations. In some ways, my approach is similar. I adopt a narrow scope, limiting the bulk of my research to a fifteen-year period, 2001-2016, and the operations of a single theatre chain, Cineplex Entertainment, whose theatre holdings have been contained by Canada's borders during this period. However, the size and geographical spread of Cineplex also troubles any strictly local status. Though Cineplex is only one theatre chain in a global industry, its size, economic power, and implication in international flows of the exhibition industry make it an ideal example of broader changes in contemporary cinemagoing.

While these scholars all provide important insights into cinemagoing, they largely do not treat the exhibition industry as an assemblage of varied activities, interests, and dialogues that benefit from being studied in conversation with one another. There is also very little literature concerning the Canadian and American exhibition industries' activities after the mid-1980s, and still less that deals with changes in this period in a comprehensive way. To work within this gap, I draw on Charles Acland's 2003 book *Screen Traffic,* the most recent extended treatment of contemporary mainstream film exhibition. Covering changes in Canada and the United States

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[15] Robert C. Allen and Natasha Smith, "Going to the Show," *Documenting the American South* (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), http://gtts.oasis.unc.edu (accessed December 13, 2016).

from the re-entry of the major studios to the exhibition industry in 1986, through the rise of the megaplex as an industrial standard, until the beginnings of the industry's economic troubles in 1998, Acland provides an immediate historical context for the period studied in this thesis.[16] He takes a creative approach to the study of contemporary film exhibition, arguing that exhibitor discourses, while they do not necessarily convey essential truths about moviegoing and audiences, act as important forces in shaping the development of moviegoing as a cultural practice. "In the end, the practice of cinemagoing may be creative and expressive," he writes, "but it is also a product and reproducer of certain knowledge formations. Ultimately, the formation and circulation of cinemagoing knowledge molds patterns of attendance and lodges cinemagoing as a visible lifestyle expression, that is, as a visible boundary of social and cultural distinction."[17] This view of cinemagoing knowledge as a crucial influence on the development of the exhibition industry and its navigation by spectators is a compelling perspective that sees the contemporary movie theatre as interpenetrated by contending historical, economic, social and cultural forces. To approach this complexity, Acland draws on marketing materials, newspapers, trade journals, financial reports, and industrial and governmental statistics to assess the way exhibitor discourses, informed by economic and social realities, reproduced, shaped, and justified the industrial transformations of the 1980s and 90s.[18] Acland opens rich theoretical ground for future work on cinemagoing and provides a practical and effective methodological approach that reflects his attention to the intricacy of cultural life. This thesis is deeply indebted to his work.

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[16] Acland, *Screen Traffic*.

[17] Ibid., 81.

[18] Ibid., 21-22.

Acland's multifaceted view of the cinematic site echoes similar perspectives from industrial studies of the film industry. While focused mostly on Hollywood film production and marketing, these works nonetheless provides pertinent insights for the study of the exhibition industry. John Thornton Caldwell's *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* is one of these volumes. Caldwell contends that film scholars too frequently separate the labour of the film industry from film theory. Seeking to rectify this lapse, he looks at the way that the working practices of film and television practitioners involves forms of "collective theorizing," negotiated and expressed through industrial tools, artifacts and social practices.[19] Caldwell examines what he calls "critical industrial practices" to study these activities, a term which, he explains: "…signifies trade methods and conventions involving interpretive schemes (the 'critical' dimension) that are deployed within particular institutional contexts and relationships (the 'industrial' environment) when such activities are manifest during technical production tasks or professional interactions (labor and 'practice')."[20] This term encompasses a wide range of objects and practices, including advertising, trade press, entertainment journalism, trade shows and industry gatherings, public and educational events, and the everyday work activities of media practitioners from below-the-line workers to entertainment executives. Skeptical of the possibility of uncovering an "authentic" reality hidden in cordoned-off industry spaces, Caldwell understands the practices of the media industries as always constructed, and examines the social and discursive activities industry actors use to negotiate, explain, and fortify industrial structures and relationships.[21] Following Acland and

[19] Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, 7.

[20] Ibid., 5-6.

[21] Ibid., 5.

Caldwell, I understand the mediated reflexivity of the exhibition industry as a prominent vector in the development of industry practices and their explanation amongst exhibitors and to the cinemagoing public. Exhibitors negotiate and consolidate common-sense understandings of cinemagoing not just in closed corporate meetings and private correspondence, but in the public forums of branding and advertising, trade publications, newspapers, financial reports, press releases, and pre-show entertainment packages, among many other venues. By examining these materials, I pry open these knowledge formations and investigate how exhibitor discourses influence industrial change and cinemagoing as a cultural practice.

Branding has become an important component of these critical industrial practices, as exhibitors seek to make themselves visible in a cluttered entertainment environment, define their brand identities against competing options, and forge emotional bonds with cinemagoers, business partners, and employees. Paul Grainge's book *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* incisively addresses the role of branding in Hollywood's "promotional culture of production," examining how branding has developed in the contemporary film and television industry in response to changing industrial conditions in the 1990s. Though he acknowledges its hegemonic operations, Grainge eschews the lens that sees Hollywood branding merely as evidence of cultural impoverishment and corporate dominance. Instead, he understands branding as a range of industrial strategies that emerge from economic, social and cultural forces and are worthy of focused study.[22] For Grainge, this analysis takes place on three levels: the "practice," "poetics," and "politics" of branding. "Practice" refers to the way branding strategy has been articulated by film and marketing practitioners. "Poetics" indicates the

[22] Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7-8.

aesthetics of branding operations, and the way these practices mobilize form, images, themes, and associations to suggest affective relationships between audiences and brands. “Politics” situates branding practices within the operations of the media industries and the economic and cultural concerns that have shaped their development.[23] Moving between these registers is crucial for addressing the critical industrial dimension of exhibitor branding, and allows us to view these activities as rich, varied and indicative of a specific historical and industrial context of production. Film exhibitors are currently facing significant industrial instability, as they deflect proclamations of their obsolescence, face perceived threats from home entertainment and internet piracy, and introduce a host of new services and viewing options. Branding, in this context, has taken on a renewed importance for solidifying the continued legitimacy of cinemagoing and establishing a lineage between new and old business practice.

Exhibitor branding and advertising takes place in an increasingly intertextual media environment; it seems as though the volume of media texts is growing exponentially, and, perhaps more significantly, that these texts continually draw from one another to expand their own meanings. In his book *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, Jonathan Gray uses the concept of the “paratext” to approach the highly complex textual environment of the contemporary film and television industries. Drawing from the work of literary theorist Gerard Genette, he defines paratexts as texts that operate as a “threshold” for other texts, either by preparing audiences for an encounter with a text or by inflecting the text’s meaning after consumption.[24] This definition echoes Genette’s explanation of paratexts as “an

[23] Ibid., 15-17.

[24] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 25-26.

airlock that helps the reader pass without too much difficulty from one world to the other, a sometimes delicate operation, especially when the second world is a fictional one."[25] In the film and television industries, these paratexts include hype in trade journals and popular press; interviews with filmmakers and actors; sneak-peeks, trailers, and advertisements; sequels, prequels, and spin-offs; merchandise, toys and video games; commentaries and bonus content; and fanworks and fan discussion. Gray contends that paratexts' key function is that they allow viewers to engage in "speculative consumption," developing impressions of what pleasures, information, and effects texts will offer before choosing to consume them.[26] Gray's analysis of paratexts draws our attention to the way texts are permeable and their meanings can be reworked in new contexts, providing discursive fuel to a variety of industrial operations.

In the exhibition industry, the most visible of these texts are frequently the films that move through theatre circuits. Blockbuster films, which can come to dominate screens, advertising spaces, and press discussions for weeks and months at a time, have attained a special position of influence. In a moment when these high-profile, hype-driven films prime audiences with expectations about what kinds of viewing experiences they can expect, exhibitors frequently draw on these mobile associations in their own marketing practices. For Thomas Elsaesser, an essential component of the semiotic and economic power of these films stems as much from the "micro-level" of "pleasure-oriented" audience connections as the "macro level" of economic linkages.[27] "After bringing together text production and social experience, capital and desire,

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[25] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 408.

[26] Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, 24.

[27] Thomas Elsaesser, "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes," in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13-14.

commodity and service," he writes, "the blockbuster generates recognition value and cultural capital. Yet as a generator of cultural-capital, it is not only a moneymaking but a meaning-making machine."[28] Elsaesser argues that an important component of the symbolic power these films command is their ability to mobilize time, specifically a dynamic connection between the past and future; blockbusters fuse these opposites into a "mythic 'now'" that powers a connection with audiences driven by recognition and anticipation.[29] As Charles Acland notes the meanings and associations attached to these films can also enable them to act as "technological tentpoles" that launch and expand presentation formats and hardware, "advanc[ing] a perpetually reconstructed cinematic apparatus as well as a wider audiovisual environment."[30] Investigation of the intertextual relationships of film texts is therefore an important component in examining which exhibitor practices current film offerings make intelligible and marketable.

At the heart of these scholars' attention to the discourses of the mainstream film industry are foundational ideas in cultural studies about the complexity of culture and its inseparability from economic forces. Raymond Williams's work on cultural processes is essential in this regard. For Williams, culture refers to both what is traditionally encompassed in "the arts," the conscious "creative effort" of individuals, and the circulated and negotiated "common meanings" through which we enact, navigate, and interpret social experience.[31] Objecting to the separation of culture from labour and capitalist production, Williams instead posits culture as implicated and inextricable from all processes of daily life. Here, the idea of a separable base and

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[28] Ibid., 19.

[29] Ibid., 19-21.

[30] Charles R. Acland, "The End of James Cameron's Quiet Years," in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies*, ed. Kelly Gates (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 20.

[31] Leonard Klady, "B.O. Tastes Yank-flavored," *Variety* 364, no. 5 (February 2, 1996): 42, 62.

superstructure with a fixed relationship that is prevalent in Marxist theory becomes a point of contention. This view, argues Williams, reduces culture to a mere "reflection" of economic conditions. It also misunderstands the fundamental variation in the processes of economic production and the expressions of culture, and the complex and flexible relationships through which each mutually limits, but does not strictly determine, the other.[32] Crucial to rectifying this oversimplification of social forces, Williams argues, is an expansion of the idea of what constitutes "production." Only by expanding our understanding beyond "material production" to the "productive forces" of human society can we grasp the intricacy and variability of cultural processes. These productive forces are "all and any of the means of the production and reproduction of real life," and encompass traditional understandings of economic production and the breadth and variability of culture as a "whole way of life." For Williams, all forms of human activity are creative and bound up in producing and reproducing the social world in which we live.[33] Returning to the film exhibition industry, and the media industries more generally, operating from this understanding illuminates the way exhibitors' and other industrial actors' discursive and economic practices are deeply intertwined, and how their practices serve both functions in some capacity. Analyzing exhibitor practices as simultaneously economic and cultural is the only way to fully examine the complex, heterogeneous operations of these practices, and grasp cinemagoing as an everyday social experience.

Seeing everyday life as a dynamic, productive process requires us to recognize the inherently creative and intellectual character of the common meanings these daily activities

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[32] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 79-82, 84-88, 94-97.

[33] Ibid., 90-94.

shape and circulate. Referring to the work of Marx and Engels, Williams expresses this idea in the concept of language as "practical consciousness." Williams sees human communication as constitutive of society, neither as the origins of social life nor a mere reflection of determining economic forces, but a dynamic process that is intertwined with other domains of social activity.[34] Williams draws on the work of the linguist Valentin Volishinov to explain this view, arguing that language is at once individual and profoundly social. It forms the ongoing, variable process through which social understandings are circulated, internalized, negotiated, and contested. The social dynamism and productive force of language and culture Williams defends resonates with Antonio Gramsci's insistence on the foundational role "common sense" plays in the formation of social life and the configurations of power. Gramscian common sense is not a form of false consciousness to be dismissed, but an intellectual activity, derived from experiences with philosophy, politics, culture, institutions, and daily life, through which ordinary people navigate and interpret hegemonic and counter-hegemonic realities.[35] Common sense, in this view, is not alienated from good sense or accurate insight into the social world. However, because it operates by borrowing from disparate arenas of social life, it can be contradictory, misleading, and resistant to critical self-examination. Common sense therefore forms "the locus of conflict, conformity and resistance," and is a crucial site for the analysis of social and cultural life.[36] Common sense appears prominently in "folklore," which in Gramscian theory, extends beyond popular oral representation, to the popular historical documentation of "a conception of the world and life." This view of folklore encompasses both popular and mass culture, among

[34] Ibid., 28-29.

[35] Marcia Landy, *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 78-79.

[36] Ibid., 79-82.

other potential areas of social expression.[37] I understand exhibition practices and industrial discourses as prominent forces in prevailing common-sense understandings of cinema. Industry talk negotiates understandings of cinemagoing that open and constrain the potential for exhibitor action and these activities in turn proposes a shifting set of options and relationships that audiences navigate in their encounters with the cinema. By analyzing how this common sense develops and circulates in exhibitor practice, I seek to map this diffuse but potent source of influence in the development of the exhibition industry.

Despite their insistence on the variability and dynamism of culture, Williams and Gramsci view it as neither autonomous nor completely liberatory, but as constrained by and intertwined with the operations of power. Both scholars gave hegemony, originally a Gramscian idea, prominent roles in their analysis of cultural processes. In contrast with the coercive, formal power of "rule," hegemony refers to the indirect power that permeates politics, institutions, culture and social relationships. Hegemony is distinct from ideology, with its rigid, monolithic connotations, because it is seen as fundamentally dynamic and flexible, inextricable from the active social process. Though the hegemonic may show broad patterns and contain formal elements, it is enacted by individuals in the process of daily living, through which it enforces and naturalizes relationships of domination and subordination. While this gives the hegemonic an insidious presence in social life, it is neither total nor inevitable. Resistant, oppositional, and independent elements persist, though they are always at risk of being co-opted or eradicated due to hegemony's adaptive character.[38] Like all cultural formations, the film and exhibition

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[37] Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 109-110.

[38] Landy, *Film, Politics, and Gramsci*, 23-27.

industries are intertwined with hegemonic operations. Industry discourses about cinemagoing are not neutral, but driven by the accumulation of capital and permeated by power relations. Following Gramsci and Williams, however, I approach the power wielded by the cultural industries as highly intricate, demanding close, contextual analysis. I seek to move beyond sweeping accounts of corporate power to examine industry discourse as a rich, contested, and dynamic activity that draws its capacity to maintain hegemonic relations from its complexity and adaptability.

A critical dimension in the study of hegemony's manifestations in the cultural industries is the development and mobilization of taste. Echoing Williams and Gramsci's insights on the complexity of power, Pierre Bourdieu's book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* provides a detailed, practical, and generative account of the role of class hierarchy in taste formation. Similar to Williams, Bourdieu's conception of cultural taste refers to orientations towards the established forms of "legitimate art" as well as dispositions made evident in daily living. "…One cannot fully understand cultural practices," he writes. "Unless 'culture' in the restrictive, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food."[39] Bourdieu argues that, though it is frequently misrecognized as aesthetic preference, cultural taste is the product of socialization and especially of education and class position. Apart from the costs of cultural consumption, cultural taste depends on individuals' acquired "cultural competencies," the knowledge formations acquired from social experience that allow people to interpret, perceive, and use cultural materials in

[39] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1.

socially legitimate ways. In contrast to the traditional view of these competencies as reducible to educational experience, Bourdieu contends that they are more thoroughly acquired through informal contact and implicit learning. This occurs only partially in formal institutions of education, and more frequently through direct social experience.[40] Because "legitimate" taste is associated with and determined by the bourgeois class, these processes function not just to create social divisions, but reproduce and reinforce class domination. "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier," Bourdieu argues. "Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed."[41] This process of distinction often occurs implicitly rather than overtly, as people develop predispositions for certain social and cultural activities, "naturally" gravitate to certain groups and professions, and develop a sense of who belongs or fails to belong in certain social fields. However, the veil of aesthetic preference mystifies and naturalizes these oppressive mechanisms, divorcing the class basis of taste formation from commonplace interpretations of culture.

Bourdieu's deconstruction of cultural taste is essential to a deep analysis of power operations in the exhibition industry, where the way exhibitors perceive, discuss and shape cinemagoing is deeply linked to how they imagine cinemagoers. As they develop new exhibition practices and marketing campaigns to further these initiatives, exhibitors make choices about which audiences they perceive as desirable and how best to cater their ventures to the tastes of these cinemagoers. The implicit processes of taste formation and taste classification allow

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[40] Ibid., 1-4.

[41] Ibid., 6.

exhibitors to conceal the classifying function of their practices as merely a matter of aesthetic preference or audiences' own appetites for refinement. For example, despite widespread complaints about the rising cost of movie tickets and concessions, exhibitors are often quick to point out that cinemagoing remains one of the cheapest options for public entertainment, compared with live music, theatre, and sporting events. These points are highlighted in annual reports to investors, which stress this affordability as an important factor for the industry's continued growth, and news reports justifying pricing changes and new premium cinema experiences, as in stories from October 2016 about a recent hike in Cineplex's base ticket prices.[42] While this portrayal may be accurate, especially assuming the purchase of a basic ticket and excluding concession prices and transportation costs, these discourses about cost obscure the much more insidious operations of taste. New screening options, expanded services, choices in architecture and interior decor, and marketing of chains and commodities all draw on cultural taste to create environments and discourses which make movie theatres suited to certain class dispositions and not others and, simultaneously, naturalize the process of classification. Similar operations create distinctions between audience members on the basis of race, gender, sexuality and ability, among other categories of social difference, as other scholars of film exhibition and the cultural industries have elucidated. Though my primary focus in this thesis is class, this category of experience is always interlocked with many others, and I draw on these theories to map pertinent areas of intersection. By analyzing how common-sense exhibitor discourse

[42] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 24. Leslie Young, "Cineplex Raising Ticket Prices: Your Next Trip to the Movies May Be More Expensive," *Global News* (Corus Entertainment Inc., October 3, 2016), http://globalnews.ca/news/2979728/cineplex-raising-ticket-prices-your-next-trip-to-the-movies-may-be-more-expensive/ (accessed October 7, 2016).

mobilizes the classifying operations of cultural taste, I seek to examine the way culture actively participates in the mechanisms of power.

To approach the concerns I have outlined, I analyze on the historical transformation of Cineplex Entertainment from the early 2000s into 2016, seeing the chain as an entry point for examining concurrent changes across the North American exhibition industry. Cineplex is an illustrative example because of its historical role in the formation of the exhibition industry and its present-day investments in emerging exhibition practices. The company has come to occupy a dominant position as one of the major theatre chains in North America, in Canada and (until recently) the United States. Founded by Nat Taylor and Garth Drabinsky, Cineplex opened its first theatre in April 1979, an eighteen-screen site at Toronto's Eaton Centre that was among the largest multiplexes in North America at the time. Initially, the chain lacked access to lucrative first-run films, due to the circuit's 16mm projectors and historical ties between major studios and Canada's two top exhibitors, Famous Players and Odeon Theatres. Instead, Cineplex played second-run, repertory, and foreign titles. Within only a few years, however, the chain would become one of the most powerful exhibitors in Canada and the United States. By September 1982, Cineplex had built twenty-three multi-screen sites comprising 146 screens, twenty in Canada and three in the United States, along with an additional three Canadian single-screen sites. The rapid expansion had left the chain with $20-million in debt by June 1982, a situation worsened by soaring Canadian interest rates that brought the debt to $24.6-million by the end of the year. After a disappointing public offering in 1982, a timely investment from the Bronfman family's CEMP Investments company stabilized the chain financially in 1983. The Odeon chain went up for sale, after the death of its longtime owner and CEO, and was acquired by Cineplex in

1984. Overnight, the company was the second-largest exhibitor in Canada with 383 screens at 143 sites, just behind Famous Players.[43]

A major acquisition scramble followed from 1985 to 1987. The largest of these deals was for the American Plitt circuit's 209 theatres, comprising 574 screens across twenty-one states, in August 1985. After acquiring RKO Century Warner Theatres, Septum, Essaness, Neighborhood and SRO Theatre Circuits, among several other chains, in April 1987 Cineplex controlled 1,501 screens at 478 theatres, making it the largest theatre chain in North America by number of sites.[44] These acquisitions were enabled in part by the influx of cash from the purchase of 49% of the company by the media conglomerate MCA/Universal for $159-million U.S. MCA agreed to the terms of the arrangement in January 1986 and the companies closed the deal that May.[45] This agreement marked the return of film distributors to the exhibition industry for the first time since the 1948 Paramount decrees, in which the United States Supreme Court ordered studios to separate their distribution and exhibition divisions and divest their exhibition holdings to reduce unfair competition in the market.[46] The deal, and a flurry of similar ones that followed in the late 1980s, bolstered distributors' influence over the exhibition industry. By the end of 1990, the top four studios owned 10.7% of U.S. screens, a figure that would grow again during the rest of the

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[43] Jaimie Hubbard, *Public Screening: The Battle for Cineplex Odeon* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1990), 35-37, 31-33. Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry*, 244-245.

[44] Ibid., 245-246.

[45] Hubbard, *Public Screening: The Battle for Cineplex Odeon*, 62-63.

[46] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 91. Anthony Slide, *The American Film Industry: A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 77.

decade.[47] By the end of this rapid transformation, Cineplex's large circuit and powerful partner had brought it significant clout in the Canadian and American industries.

During this period of influence, Cineplex was instrumental in spearheading upscaled theatre standards and promoting a new kind of exhibition space, one that prefigured the rise of megaplex theatres in the mid-1990s. From its first Eaton Centre location, Cineplex's primary innovation was the construction of a large number of smaller auditoria, which ranged from 60 to 130 seats, that gave them the flexibility to show films that drew smaller crowds or open up a title on multiple screens to accommodate a swell of customers. This model suited Cineplex's initial film product, and also meant films could run longer, increasing profits for the exhibitor when the distributor's cut fell from sixty to thirty percent of the box office after the first three weeks of a film's run.[48] Cineplex also made significant investments in upscaling the theatre space. In contrast with more functional and even minimalist theatres of the era, Cineplex made comfort, style, refinement and convenience key features of its approach. By staggering screening times, offering reserved seating, and stopping ticket sales after shows had started, theatres controlled the flow of crowds and minimized disruptions.[49] Celebrated architects were hired to design new cinemas, local artists' work was commissioned to hang in lobbies, and, in 1985, the chain even established its own in-house design firm. Lobbies featured marble, coordinated patterns in fabrics, ceilings and archways, and neon accents. Each geographical region of the chain was

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[47] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 97-99. Richard Gold, "No Exit? Studios Itch to Ditch Exhib Biz," *Variety* 340, no. 13 (October 8, 1990): 3, 84.

[48] Hubbard, *Public Screening: The Battle for Cineplex Odeon*, 18. Dave McNary, "Fox to Release 'Maze Runner' the Scorch Trials in Multi-Screen Format," *Variety* (Penske Business Media, April 21, 2015), http://variety.com/2015/film/news/fox-to-release-maze-runner-the-scorch-trials-in-multi-screen-format-1201476833/ (accessed August 6, 2016).

[49] Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 106.

assigned a signature theme and colour. Through extensive experimentation, the chain developed an "ideal" array of concession offerings, and some theatres had specialty cafés in their lobbies.[50] By the time distributors began to pressure exhibitors to improve theatre spaces at ShoWest 1986, Cineplex offered a model for what that improvement could look like.[51] While tracking the precise influence of the chain's practices on other exhibitors is difficult, Cineplex became an early and characteristic example of the transformations of the 1980s and 90s, which saw exhibitors across the industry building large, multi-screen sites and investing in design and upscaled theatre spaces and services.

Cineplex's industry position has changed significantly since the mid-1980s. In December 1989, after a struggle between CEO Garth Drabinsky and MCA for control of the chain, Drabinsky was ousted and Cineplex was left with a half-billion dollars in debt from its rapid expansion.[52] In 1990, the chain sold off a total of 345 screens for approximately $70.7-million U.S., including its much-publicized Universal City Cinema in Los Angeles.[53] According to *Boxoffice*'s yearly screencount rankings, Cineplex remained the second-largest exhibitor in North America until 1993, but its position fluctuated in the following years due to a massive construction and acquisition boom which reconfigured industry in this period, though it remained in the top six throughout the 1990s (See Table 1). After the financial crisis that rocked almost every major North American exhibitor in the early 2000s (the subject of the next chapter),

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[50] Ibid., 109-110.

[51] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 90-92.

[52] Will Tusher and Jim Robbins, "Garth Goes, Cineplex Owes," *Variety* 337, no. 9 (December 6, 1989): 3. A detailed account of this period and Cineplex's early days can be found in Jaimie Hubbard's business history *Public Screening: The Battle for Cineplex Odeon* and Manjunath Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry.*

[53] "Cineplex Agrees to Sell 18-screener in Universal City for $45-million," *Variety* 339, no. 13 (July 4, 1990): 6.

Table 1: Cineplex Odeon/Loews Cineplex Screen Count, 1989 to 1999

Year	Sites	Screens	North American Ranking
1989	-	1,872	2
1990	-	1,680	2
1991	-	1,688	2
1992	-	1,618	2
1993	362	1,609	4
1994	361	1,627	3
1995	329	1,535	4
1996	311	1,465	5
1997	327	1,740	6
1998	400	2,700	4
1999	405	3,000	2

Source: "Giants of Exhibition: The Sequel," *Boxoffice* 125, no. 12 (December 1989): 14. "Giants of Exhibition III: The Mini-Majors," *Boxoffice* 126, no. 12 (December 1990): 18. "Giants of Exhibition IV," *Boxoffice* 127, no. 12 (December 1991): 20. "Giants of Exhibition V," *Boxoffice* 128, no. 12 (December 1992): 16. "The Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 129, no. 12 (December 1993): 24. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 130, no. 12 (December 1994): 29. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 131, no. 12 (December 1995): 28. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 132, no. 12 (December 1996): 33. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 134, no. 1 (January 1998): 28. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 135, no. 1 (January 1999): 24. "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 1 (January 2000): 52.

Cineplex was purchased by Toronto investment firm Onex. Following significant restructuring, the chain had its American assets spun off and sold to a consortium of investors in June 2004.[54] Cineplex was left with its sizeable Canadian holdings and, in July 2005, acquired its long-time rival Famous Players, giving it ownership of an incredible 60% of the Canadian exhibition market.[55] After further acquisitions in the 2010s, the theatre now controls a 78.7% market share, with 165 theatres totalling 1,683 screens across ten provinces.[56] Though it no longer owns any theatres in the United States, its dominance of the Canadian market makes it the fourth largest chain in North America.[57] Cineplex's size also means that even if it no longer competes directly with American chains as it did in the 1980s and 90s, it continues to respond to the influences of these major players in its exhibition practices. In 2016, the chain is investing in new exhibition technologies, premium screening experiences, and alternative programming. This expanding range of cinema experiences has occurred alongside investments in more diverse theatrical amenities and an array of non-exhibition assets. Cineplex began as a quintessential exhibitor of the 1980s and 90s, putting forth new forms of exhibition practice and engaging in the economic risk-taking of the period as it solidified its position in the industry. To study the chain's contemporary operations is to examine how historical exhibition practices have altered between

[54] Jill Goldsmith, "Buyers High on Loews," *Daily Variety* 283, no. 55 (June 22, 2004): 1. "Onex Reaps Big Profit on Loews Sale," *Globe and Mail* (June 22, 2004): B1. Andrew Willis, "Onex Puts Loews Cineplex on Sales Block," *Globe and Mail* (March 13, 2004): B3.

[55] Richard Blackwell, "Cineplex Road to Viacom Ran Through Ottawa," *Globe and Mail* (June 25, 2005): B3. Cineplex Galaxy, "Cineplex Galaxy Completes Acquisition of Famous Players" (July 22, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/6cebda21-5ea1-4e91-8276-29cd6c2ecd54/2005-07-22--Cineplex_Galaxy_Completes_Acquisition_of_Famous_Players--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Brendan Kelly and Pamela McClintock, "Famous Faces Change: Viacom Sells Canadian Exhib Chain to Rival," *Daily Variety* 287, no. 52 (June 14, 2005): 4.

[56] Cineplex Entertainment, "Investor Fact Sheet as of December 31, 2016." Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis,* 3.

[57] "The Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 153, no. 2 (February 2017): 28-33.

then and the present and shaped the transformations at work in the industry today. Situating the chain in its historical and industrial context, I seek to investigate Cineplex's implication in the network of economic, social and discursive forces influencing this moment of industrial reconfiguration.

Through literatures on film exhibition, the media industries, and the dynamics of culture, I approach the transformations of the exhibition industry as an opportunity to examine the way industrial discourses structure the development of the media industries and are bound up with economic and social power. I understand the diverse practices of contemporary exhibitors as connected with one another, grounded in a social and geographic context, and shaped by a historical trajectory that leaves traces in the present. Informed by scholars in media industry studies, I see exhibitor discourses as a compelling and influential force for industrial change, through which exhibitors theorize about their own practices, craft brand identities, and draw from the meanings of other texts, objects, and activities to frame their initiatives. These discourses trouble strict divisions between culture and economy and express a dynamic, negotiated common sense that structures the ground on which exhibitor practices are enacted. Looking at Cineplex Entertainment as a key example of industrial change, I examine the theatre's emerging practices as activities informed by the history of the chain and the exhibition industry as a whole. As I investigate the specificities of the chain's economic and cultural position, the texture of these negotiations and lines of force will emerge more sharply. First, however, they must be contextualized within the industry's historical trajectory, which will be the work of the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Cineplex in the Twenty-First Century and the Reconfiguration of Mainstream Exhibition Practice

As discussed in the previous chapter, the 1980s and 1990s saw significant changes in the spaces and practices of mainstream film exhibition, with financial consequences for the industry which reverberate in the present. This chapter takes this moment of instability as a starting point for understanding changing theatre experiences and industry structures from the mid-2000s into the 2010s. After recapitulating the increased upscaling and theatre construction of the 80s and 90s, I explain the industrial volatility it instigated and examine how exhibitors recovered in the immediate aftermath of this period of crisis. Then, looking to the longer term reconfiguration of the industry, I identify key changes in exhibition practice that have shaped the exhibitors' trajectory into 2016. Focusing on the activities of Cineplex Entertainment during this period of transformation, I also contextualize its practices within wider movements across the North American exhibition industry during this time. I draw extensively from Cineplex's archived press releases which offer detailed, day-by-day documentation of the chain's activities and provide insights into the company's preferred explanations for its practices. But such sources rarely document failures and false starts, and their promotional function often leads them to elide the larger context of the exhibitor's actions. I therefore treat these materials critically, and, where possible, reference concurrent trade and popular press to cross-check exhibitor claims and provide a larger scope of influences to consider. Interrogating these industrial sources, I argue that, driven by concerns persisting from the events of the 1990s and early 2000s, exhibitors have shifted from an emphasis on creating cinematic spaces that seek to draw larger audiences and reignite dormant appetites for cinemagoing to a concerted effort to increase the profits that can be extracted from existing attendance levels and from new areas of economic activity. These trends are clearly discernible in Cineplex's shifting exhibition practices over the last fifteen years.

The 1980s and 1990s greatly reshaped the exhibition industry and the characteristics of the cinematic site. Most conspicuously, in the 1990s, major Canadian and American theatre chains rapidly constructed large, state-of-the-art cinemas across the continent. During that building boom, these theatres were called "megaplexes." This term, coined by *Variety* in 1994, emphasizes the difference in size of these sites, which had ten, twelve, twenty-four screens or more, from the smaller multiplexes that had previously been an industry standard[58]. Size was not their only distinguishing characteristic. Megaplexes offered larger screens, surround sound, expanded concessions, amenities like lounges and arcades, stadium seating, and more distinctive theatre design, qualities that set them apart from preceding theatre styles.[59] Charles Acland argues that defining the megaplex solely by size effaces other changes to theatre environments ushered in by this trend and the construction and renovation of smaller theatres during this time to conform with changing industry discourses about film exhibition.[60] Acland's book *Screen Traffic* traces the rise and fall of megaplexing as an industry practice from 1986 to 1998, giving an account of the cultural genesis of these new screening environments and the important historical landmarks of their development. He explains that megaplexing was driven by the

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[58] Adam Dawtrey, "Here Come the Megaplexes," *Variety* 356, no. 4 (August 22, 1994): 1, 66-67.

[59] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 107-112.

[60] Ibid., 112.

consolidation of a new industry common sense about cinemagoing, underpinned by anxieties about home entertainment options, the consolidation of chains, and the renewed influence of film distributors within the exhibition industry. This burgeoning industry logic imagined the cramped space, plain appearance, and technical limitations of old-style multiplexes as a problem that demanded to be addressed.[61]

Spurred by this emerging consensus, U.S. exhibitors built new theatres rapidly from 1985 to 1987, adding 3,726 screens in just three years on top of steady growth in the number of screens in the early 1980s. Closures followed, but the screen count hit a new high of 23,689 in 1990. It had been only 17,590 at the end of 1980.[62] This initial building boom prompted complaints of "overscreening"—the crowding of theatres, particularly in key markets, that threatens profitability—as early as 1989.[63] The frenzy had cooled temporarily in 1991, when at the annual ShoWest exhibitor trade show, several chains announced they would be scaling back their ambitious construction plans.[64] But though exhibitors had built sites with more screens and increased focus on design, service, and amenities before the 1990s, the megaplex only began to emerge as a distinct, industry-wide trend in 1994.[65] Layered on top of the construction boom of the 1980s, the rush to—as one *Variety* report put it—"rescreen America" with new megaplex destinations pushed the screen count even higher.[66] By the end of 1999, the United States had

[61] Ibid., 90-95, 99-102.

[62] Will Tusher, "Nation's Screen Tally Reached a New High in '90," *Variety* 342, no. 3 (January 28, 1991): 3.

[63] Jim Robbins, "Exhibition's Future: Too Many Theaters, Little to Put in Them, Predict Tradesters at Cinetex," *Variety* 336, no. 11 (September 27, 1989): 3.

[64] Richard Gold, "U.S. Overscreened? Not for Mega-hits," *Variety* 342, no. 3 (January 28, 1991): 60.

[65] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 107-108.

[66] Martin Peers, "Exhibs Vexed by Wall St. Hex on Plex," *Variety* 369, no. 71 (January 26, 1998): 1, 83.

37,185 screens, an all-time high.[67] Constructing megaplexes was expensive, and collectively American theatre chains borrowed seven billion dollars for the expansion. But as the trend intensified, many exhibitors were forced to build new megaplex theatres or face having their business eroded by competitor chains, leading many of them to diminish their own profits by drawing customers away from older theatres within their circuits.[68] Reconsiderations of megaplexing began to appear by 1998, with overscreening again cited as a pressing concern.[69] Though theatre attendance had grown during the 1990s, the modest 24% increase in American admissions had been outstripped by a 56% increase in the number of screens.[70] The year 2000 saw seven American exhibitors—Carmike Cinemas, United Artists Theatres, General Cinemas, Edward Cinemas, Mann Theatres, Silver Cinemas and Resort Theatres—file for Chapter 11. Nearly every other North American exhibitor suffered from financial instability and rushed to close theatres and avoid bankruptcy themselves.[71] The industry was on the brink of a total meltdown, and most major exhibitors planned to close theatres. Bankruptcy filings assisted in this process, allowing the chains to break expensive leases and accelerate closures.[72]

In Canada, the situation was similar. The 1980s also saw expansion for the country's two major exhibitors, Cineplex Odeon and Famous Players. Cineplex announced its plan in 1986 to

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[67] Carl DiOrio, "The Road to Plexual Healing," *Daily Variety* 277, no. 3 (October 9, 2002): A1-A2.

[68] Daniela Deane, "Multiplexes Glut the American Marketplace," *Montreal Gazette* (September 30, 2000): D3.

[69] Peers, "Exhibs Vexed by Wall St. Hex on Plex."

[70] Deane, "Multiplexes Glut the American Marketplace."

[71] Francesca Dinglasan, "Lead Story: Carmike, Edwards File for Bankruptcy; Regal Next?," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 10 (October 2000): 42. Francesca Dinglasan, "Lead Story: General Cinema and Resort Theatres of America File for Bankruptcy," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 12 (December 2000): 42. Francesca Dinglasan, "Lead Story: UATC Files for Bankruptcy," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 11 (November 2000): 140.

[72] Keith Damsell, "Cineplex Closings Seen As Rebirth," *Globe and Mail* (February 19, 2001): B1, B5. Jill Goldsmith, "Exhibs Fishin' for Intermission," *Variety* 380, no. 2 (August 28, 2000): 9, 123.

add 200 screens in Canada by the end of 1988, alongside a 300-screen expansion to the chain's American circuit.[73] Famous Players' $50-million plan to add 40 screens to the greater Toronto area in 1988 was touted by its then-CEO as the "single largest construction project in the history of Canadian motion picture exhibition."[74] Douglas Gomery points out that Cineplex's theatres, from the 1980s on, were early, poignant examples of the potential of upscaling and megaplexing, with more screens, and greater attention to design, service, and expanded amenities.[75] But the bulk of the megaplex wave was still to come. After American exhibition giant AMC cast a threatening shadow on the Canadian duopoly in 1996 with plans to open 30 new megaplexes north of the border, Cineplex and Famous Players prepared for ambitious expansions.[76] By 1998, AMC had limited its projection to 152 screens at five sites, and had yet to break ground on a single theatre.[77] Meanwhile, between 1996 and 1999, Famous Players grew from 475 to 771 screens and Cineplex went from 621 to 800 screens.[78] Canada had long been considered underscreened in comparison with the United States, but some industry commentators questioned whether building patterns for the Canadian expansion were putting too much strain on major markets like Toronto and Montreal, neglecting mid-size cities.[79] Disaster was on the horizon. In

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73 Sid Adilman, "Cineplex Odeon Circuit to Add 200 Canadian Screens Thru '88," *Variety* 323, no. 30 (July 2, 1986): 6, 27.

74 "Famous Players Set $C50-Million Toronto Expansion," *Variety* 331, no. 4 (May 18, 1988): 39.

75 Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 105-114.

76 Brendan Kelly, "AMC Plans Canadian Expansion," *Variety* 364, no. 3 (August 19, 1996): 21. Brendan Kelly, "Bigger, Better Plexes," *Variety* 377, no. 3 (November 24, 1999): 35, 44. Tamsen Tillson, "Canada Is Building It but Will They Come?," *Variety* 370, no. 9 (April 13, 1998): 5, 9.

77 Genette, *Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation*, 3.

78 Kelly, "Bigger, Better Plexes," 35. Leo Rice-Barker, "Industry Banks on New Technology, Expanded Slates," *Playback* (May 6, 1996): 19-20.

79 Klady, "B.O. Tastes Yank-flavored," 42.

late 2000, both chains were in dire financial straits and planned sizeable closures.[80] Famous Players managed to skirt bankruptcy; according to CEO John Bailey, this was because the company built early, when theatres were smaller and costs were lower, targeted strategic markets, and had the financial support of owner Viacom during the crisis.[81] Cineplex was sold by its major shareholder, Sony/Universal, to Toronto-based investment firm Onex and partner Oaktree Capital. The chain filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States and Canada in February 2001 as part of the acquisition process.[82]

As major exhibitors suffered north and south of the border, a new player was rising in Canada. In early 1999, Galaxy Entertainment, with the Onex Corporation as its major shareholder and former Cineplex executives at the helm, acquired seven theatres from Ontario Theatre Group.[83] These theatres provided the means of "jump-starting" the company, but Galaxy soon announced plans to demolish or renovate them and build four new theatres, with an average of ten screens each, in Peterborough, Sault Ste.-Marie, Brantford and Cornwall. The company's goal was to build smaller but state-of-the-art theatres in midsize cities of 70,000 to 120,000 people, places neglected by the major Canadian exhibitors during the megaplex boom where

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[80] Damsell, "Cineplex Closings Seen As Rebirth." Keith Damsell, "Darkened Screens Loom for Cineplex Odeon," *Globe and Mail* (August 29, 2000): B1, B4. Deane, "Multiplexes Glut the American Marketplace." "Theatre of the Overextended," *Globe and Mail* (August 30, 2000): A14.

[81] Carolyn Giardina, "CinemaCon: Barco Escape Inks Multi-Picture Deals with Cross Creek, Fundamental Films," *The Hollywood Reporter* (The Hollywood Reporter, April 12, 2016), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/cinemacon-barco-escape-inks-multi-882981 (accessed August 6, 2016).

[82] Elizabeth Church, "Onex Aiming to Acquire Ailing Loews," *Globe and Mail* (November 13, 2001): B6. Damsell, "Cineplex Closings Seen As Rebirth." Tamsen Tillson, "Onex Annex of Loews Chain Gets Approval," *Daily Variety* 275, no. 40 (April 25, 2002): 42.

[83] Shlomo Schwartzberg, "New Galaxy Hopes to Make Big Bang in Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 135, no. 2 (February 1999): 48.

Galaxy could dominate the market.[84] The cities it targeted had "tired, old substandard facilities" that represented "huge opportunity" for the new company, according to Galaxy CEO Ellis Jacob. "We think giving the small-market person the same quality as a big-city experience makes sense," he commented, "We'll build them large enough to keep out the competition and small enough to make money."[85] Here, we can see an extension of industry common sense about megaplexing, framing older theatres as in need of improvement, but proceeding with a newfound caution about overscreened markets and excessive theatre size. The strategy proved successful, and by February 2003 the company had expanded to the fifth largest circuit in Canada, behind Cineplex, Famous Players, AMC, and Empire Theatres, with 15 locations and 125 screens.[86]

Meanwhile, Onex continued to seek exhibition holdings aggressively. In July 2001, a purchase of General Cinemas, which would have seen Onex controlling 10% of U.S. screens, was outbid by AMC just before the deal was set to close.[87] Another major purchase, of American chain Landmark Theatres, was thwarted by regulators in the U.S. Justice Department in January 2003.[88] There were preliminary talks of mergers with Cinemark in April 2002 and with AMC in November 2003, but both eventually fizzled.[89] While the crash had been devastating for existing

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[84] Keith Damsell, "Galaxy May Offer Winning Script for Ailing Movie Sector," *Globe and Mail* (April 13, 2001): B10. Gayle MacDonald, "Onex Partners Launch Cinema Chain to Show Flicks to the Sticks," *Globe and Mail* (September 15, 1999): B1, B4. Shlomo Schwartzberg, "Galaxy's Small Town Big Bang," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 1 (January 2000): 59.

[85] MacDonald, "Onex Partners Launch Cinema Chain to Show Flicks to the Sticks."

[86] Shlomo Schwartzberg, "Galaxy's Universe Unfolding As It Should," *Boxoffice* 139, no. 2 (February 2003): 54.

[87] Keith Damsell, "AMC Tops Onex Bid for GC Movie Chain," *Globe and Mail* (July 13, 2001): B3. Keith Damsell, "Onex Takes Reins of U.S. Cinema Chain," *Globe and Mail* (June 14, 2001): B1. Carl DiOrio, "Onex, Oaktree Join in General Buyout," *Variety* 383, no. 5 (June 18, 2001): 10.

[88] Carl DiOrio, "Onex Reaches for Landmark," *Daily Variety* 277, no. 27 (November 12, 2002): 1. "Onex Drops Plan for Cinema Merger," *Globe and Mail* (January 23, 2004): B2.

[89] Carl DiOrio, "AMC, Loews Mull Merger," *Daily Variety* 281, no. 34 (November 19, 2003): 2. Carl DiOrio, "Exhibs Talk Merger," *Daily Variety* 276, no. 14 (April 26, 2002): 4. "Onex Drops Plan for Cinema Merger."

exhibitors, for those in the financial industry, the plummeting prices of theatre chains presented the opportunity for huge profits. "There's such disarray in the industry, we feel it is a great time to consolidate," commented Onex CEO Gerald Schwartz ahead of the planned takeover of Loews Cineplex.[90] This statement reveals the way that industry discourse can change dramatically depending on the position of the speakers and the forces at work in a given historical moment. We might not usually consider the financial sector part of the exhibition or film industries, but Onex's role in Cineplex's recovery illustrates that these industries can intervene, sometimes dramatically, in the operations of film exhibition. Onex's consolidation of theatre chains into large assets it could later sell at a profit would significantly impact the landscape of the Canadian exhibition industry, as would similar actions by investors in the United States.

As it chased down potential acquisitions, Onex was in the process of streamlining Loews Cineplex. The company was one of the last exhibitors to emerge from bankruptcy in March 2002, having closed 120 theatres, around 700 screens, and reduced its debt by over $600-million.[91] In late 2003, Onex raised $200-million by spinning its Canadian theatre assets, Cineplex and Galaxy Entertainment, into a trust it named the Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, which represented 731 screens across 81 theatres.[92] Ellis Jacob, CEO of Galaxy and a former chief operating officer of Cineplex Odeon, was named CEO and director.[93] Onex announced the

[90] Church, "Onex Aiming to Acquire Ailing Loews."

[91] Jill Goldsmith, "Loews' New Topper in Exhibition Mode," *Daily Variety* 275, no. 26 (April 5, 2005): 8.

[92] Sinclair Stewart, "Onex Unveils Movie Assets Trust," *Globe and Mail* (October 4, 2003): B2. Sinclair Stewart and Marina Strauss, "Onex Seeks $200-million: Sources," *Globe and Mail* (October 3, 2003): B3. Andrew Willis, "Onex Bows to Reality on Cineplex Trust Deal: Streetwise," *Globe and Mail* (November 13, 2003): B15.

[93] Ibid.

$2-billion sale of Loews, its American, Mexican, Spanish and South Korean holdings, the following spring. The company closed the deal with a consortium of investment firms that June. Onex had invested $465-million into Loews-Cineplex, and received about $775-million for its portion of the sale, nearly tripling its investment in the chain between those profits and the $105-million valuation of Cineplex Galaxy.[94] Onex retained Cineplex Galaxy, reportedly because it saw greater potential in mid-size Canadian markets than in the more developed American exhibition landscape. In 2009, it would sell its 22% share in the business for $186-million.[95]

Consolidation and closures were a trend across the exhibition industry in the years that followed the economic crisis. As early as 1998, commentators had debated the benefits of consolidation following a mega-merger of Act III, Hicks, and Regal Cinemas that made Regal America's largest exhibitor, close to double the size of reigning giant Carmike Cinemas. Some argued that buying theatres was a risky move for an industry already showing signs of trouble, while others argued that buyouts offered decreased operating costs, reduced the need for competitive overbuilding, and provided stability public offerings couldn't during the rocky megaplex transition.[96] In 2002, *Variety*'s update from ShowEast on the industry's progress after the crash reported that acquisitions and reorganization had characterized the recovery period.[97] These included Onex's takeover of Loews, AMC's purchase of General Cinema, Philip Anchutz's merger of Regal Cinemas, United Artists, and Edwards theatres under the banner of Regal Entertainment, and Oaktree Capital's purchase of Silver Cinemas and subsidiary

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94 "Onex Reaps Big Profit on Loews Sale."

95 Grant Robertson and Boyd Erman, "Amid Box Office Records, Onex Sells Cineplex Stake," *Globe and Mail* (March 31, 2009): B3.

96 Peers, "Exhibs Vexed by Wall St. Hex on Plex," 4.

97 DiOrio, "The Road to Plexual Healing," A1.

Landmark theatres.[98] As chains emerged from bankruptcy, newly consolidated exhibitors began closing screens. Theatres continued to open between 2000 and the end of 2002, but in just three years, exhibitors across North America closed 908 sites totalling 4,849 screens. The U.S. screen count dipped from the 1999 height of 37,185 to 35,153 in 2001, and grew by only 617 screens by August 2002. Canada had 2,900 screens that summer, following closures in large markets, but midsize markets were still considered underscreened. Some commentators were concerned that the screen count was still too high, as many theatres had not been closed outright but merely sold to smaller regional chains. However, they did note that the number of closures was higher among the largest exhibitors.[99] With the industry recovering, theatres changed hands again as the financial sector sought to capitalize on its investments. In March 2004, a week before Onex announced its intention to sell Loews, Madison Dearborn Partners purchased Cinemark for $1-billion from the Cyprus Group, plus the assumption of $560-million in debt.[100] That July, AMC was sold to Marquee Holdings for $2-billion.[101] The crisis had settled, but not without a serious reconsideration of the megaplex model and a significant reorganization of the exhibition industry.

The merger of Cineplex Odeon and Galaxy Entertainment as the Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund and the sale of Loews Cineplex's American and international holdings marked a moment of dramatic reconfiguration for the chain. After shedding sites in the crowded American

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[98] Carl DiOrio, "Anschutz in Regal Spot," *Variety* 382, no. 7 (April 2, 2001): 12. Ibid., A2. Carl DiOrio and Jill Goldsmith, "Bargain Hunters Eye Movie Chains," *Variety* 381, no. 8 (January 15, 2001): 4. Dade Hayes and Carl DiOrio, "Oaktree Nabs Exhib Silver Cinemas," *Variety* 382, no. 11 (April 30, 2001): 77.

[99] DiOrio, "The Road to Plexual Healing," A1-A2.

[100] Goldsmith, "Buyers High on Loews," 1. Willis, "Onex Puts Loews Cineplex on Sales Block."

[101] Alexa Harrison, "Exhibs Shake Out Extra Coin," *Variety* 422, no. 7 (March 28, 2011): 14.

market and closing down underperforming theatres in large Canadian cities, Cineplex had become a leaner, simpler operation, but retained the market share and historical relationships that gave it clout with major distributors. Now solely based in Canada, Cineplex Galaxy was also no longer as closely tied to the fortunes of the American industry. The merger had combined Cineplex's size and bargaining power with Galaxy's burgeoning presence in mid-size markets and forward-looking strategies. Though Galaxy had only added 15 theatres totalling 148 screens to the circuit, about 20% of Cineplex Galaxy's holdings, the smaller chain's business practices exerted significant influence on the direction of Cineplex.[102] Galaxy CEO Ellis Jacob had been appointed head of the newly-formed company and Galaxy brand theatres would come to account for almost 40% of Cineplex's new constructions (see Table 2). It was clear that the Galaxy model of building scaled-down, state-of-the-art theatres in mid-size markets had been adopted as a key part of the Canadian solution to the woes of the megaplex years.[103] Now with access to Cineplex's footholds in large markets, former Galaxy executives could also see how their promotion tactics for medium-market theatres worked in major cities.

Less than a year after the formation of Cineplex Galaxy, Viacom, after losing $1.5-billion in the spinoff of a suffering Blockbuster Video, announced it was looking to put Cineplex's long-time rival Famous Players up for sale.[104] In July 2005, Cineplex Galaxy announced it had completed the acquisition of Famous Players' 787 screens, valued at $500-million.[105] The deal's

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[102] Stewart and Strauss, "Onex Seeks $200-million: Sources."

[103] Stewart, "Onex Unveils Movie Assets Trust."

[104] Richard Bloom, "Movie Theatre Industry Poised to Reel in Canadian Operations," *Globe and Mail* (February 22, 2005): B7. Michael Learmonth, "Spinoff Hits Viacom," *Daily Variety* 285, no. 20 (October 29, 2004): 5.

[105] Cineplex Galaxy, "Cineplex Galaxy Completes Acquisition of Famous Players." Kelly and McClintock, "Famous Faces Change: Viacom Sells Canadian Exhib Chain to Rival," 4.

Table 2: Cineplex Galaxy/Cineplex Entertainment Theatre Openings, 2004 to 2016

Date	Theatre	Screens
July 15, 2004	Galaxy Cinemas, Lethbridge, AB	10
November 5, 2004	Galaxy Cinemas, Orillia, ON	6
November 19, 2004	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Meadowtown Centre, Pitt Meadows, BC	10
October 21, 2005	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Barrhaven, ON	7
2005*	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Aurora, ON	10
June 30, 2006	Galaxy Cinemas, Milton, ON[a]	8
June 30, 2006	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Brossard, QC[b]	16
July 28, 2006	Galaxy Cinemas, Brockville, ON	6
September 1, 2006	Galaxy Cinemas, Saskatoon, SK[c]	12
December 1, 2006	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Oshawa, ON	10
May 11, 2007	Galaxy Cinemas, Collingwood, ON	7
December 7, 2007	SilverCity Cinemas, Oakville, ON[d]	12
March 18, 2008	Galaxy Cinemas, Red Deer, AB[e]	10
November 11, 2008	Galaxy Cinemas, Brantford, ON	8
December 5, 2008	SilverCity Cinemas, Fairview Mall, Toronto, ON	9
December 19, 2008	SilverCity Cinemas, Hamilton, ON	10
May 6, 2009	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Westmount Shopping Centre, London, ON	11
June 30, 2010	Silver City Cinemas and XSCAPE Entertainment Centre, CrossIron Mills, Calgary, AB	7
November 15, 2010	Galaxy Cinemas, Chilliwack, BC	8
July 15, 2011	Cineplex Odeon Cinemas, Westshore Town Centre, Langford, BC	7
December 9, 2011	Galaxy Cinemas, Chatham, ON	7
April 20, 2012	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Windermere, Edmonton, AB	11
December 14, 2012	Galaxy Cinemas, Pergola Commons, Guelph, ON	8
June 7, 2013	Galaxy Cinemas, Sarnia, ON	8
October 11, 2013	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Abbotsford, BC	11
April 11, 2014	Cineplex Cinemas, Manning Town Centre, Edmonton, AB	10
August 15, 2014	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Don Mills, Toronto, ON	5
March 27, 2015	Cineplex Cinemas and VIP, Lansdowne Park, Ottawa, ON	10

Date	Theatre	Screens
April 3, 2015	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Markham, ON	12
March 4, 2016	Cineplex Odeon and VIP, Marine Gateway, Vancouver, BC	11
July 26, 2016	Galaxy Cinemas, Barrie, ON	8
September 23, 2016	Cineplex Cinemas and VIP, Kitchener, ON	11
Total	**33 theatres, 296 screens**	

Source: Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *1 + 1 =: 2004 Annual Report* (2005), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2004/Annual_Report_2004_FINAL.pdf, 13. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Redefining Entertainment: 2005 Annual Report* (2006), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2005/Annual_Report_2005.pdf, 11. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Go Big: 2006 Annual Report* (2007), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2006/2006_Annual_Report.pdf, 3. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Beyond Movies: 2007 Annual Report* (2008), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2007/CineplexAR07_all.pdf, 2. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Escape with Us: 2008 Annual Report* (February 9, 2009), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2008/2008_annual_report_final.pdf, 10. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Annual Report 2009: Evolving the Entertainment Experience* (February 10, 2010), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2009/2009_annual_report_final.pdf, 10. Cineplex Entertainment, *2010 Annual Report: Destination Cineplex* (February 9, 2011), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2010/10412_cineplex_ar10_sedar-2.pdf, 12. Cineplex Entertainment, *Delivering a Premium Entertainment Experience: 2011 Annual Report* (February 8, 2012), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2011/cineplex-annual-report-2011-final.pdf, 15. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2012 Annual Report* (February 6, 2013), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2012/2012_Annual_Report_FINAL.pdf, 17. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2013 Annual Report* (February 10, 2014), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/investors/investorkit/2013AnnualReport.pdf, 14. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2014 Annual Report* (February 11, 2015), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2015/03-31-2015-Cineplex-2014-Annual-Report.pdf, 10. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report* (March 31, 2016), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2015/Cineplex-2015-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf, 17. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis* (February 14, 2017), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2017/CGX_MDA_2016_FINAL.pdf, 4.

* Opening date not found.
[a] Renamed Cineplex Cinemas.
[b] Expanded on December 12, 2012, to a total of 20 screens (+4 VIP screens).
[c] Expanded on January 16, 2012, to a total of 15 screens (+3 VIP screens), renamed Scotiabank Theatre and VIP.
[d] Renamed SilverCity and VIP Cinemas.
[e] Expanded on March 4, 2015 to a total of 11 screens (+1 UltraAVX screen).

pre-approval by the Canadian Competition Bureau required the chain to divest 34 theatres in 17 Canadian markets.[106] After fulfilling this obligation, selling theatres to Atlantic Canada's Empire Theatres and Quebec's Fortune Cinemas, Cineplex Galaxy had 129 theatres and 1269 screens, a 60% share of the Canadian market.[107] The deal made the company, renamed Cineplex Entertainment in 2006, Canada's most powerful exhibitor by an incredible margin.[108] Even with their own acquisitions doubling their holdings, number two chain Empire Theatres had only 55 theatres and 379 screens.[109] With this move alone, Cineplex's dominance of the Canadian exhibition landscape would hold into the present. But the 2010s also saw two more major acquisitions. In July 2012, Cineplex took ownership of four of AMC's Canadian theatres, totalling 86 screens, as the American exhibitor shed its Canadian operations to focus on other markets.[110] When Empire Theatres dissolved in the summer of 2013, Cineplex acquired 24 of the chain's 46 theatres, extending its reach to Atlantic Canada and gaining an additional 170

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[106] Blackwell, "Cineplex Road to Viacom Ran Through Ottawa."

[107] Ibid. Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Completes Sale of 7 Quebec Divestiture Theatres to Fortune Cinema Inc." (March 31, 2006), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/36365446-31d1-4052-beb3-22bf4ba1b2e7/2006-03-31--Sale_to_Fortune_Cinema_Inc_Complete--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Cineplex Galaxy, "Cineplex Galaxy Announces Sale of Theatres to Empire Theatres Limited" (August 22, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/0cee5299-d78a-434e-8ed8-61179e4df807/2005-08-22--%20Cineplex%20Galaxy%20Announces%20Sale%20of%20Theatres%20to%20Empire%20Theatres%20Limited--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Brendan Kelly, "Empire's Expansion," *Daily Variety* 288, no. 36 (August 23, 2005): 10.

[108] Cineplex Entertainment, "Introducing Cineplex Entertainment a New Name for Cineplex Galaxy LP" (October 3, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/fd77c06c-e232-4dde-baf9-085ef3e77c26/2005-10-03--Introducing%20Cineplex%20Entertainment%20a%20New%20Name%20for%20Cineplex%20Galaxy%20LP--.pdf (accessed July 18, 2016).

[109] Kelly, "Empire's Expansion," 10.

[110] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Completes Acquisition of Four AMC Theatres in Canada" (July 12, 2012), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/927c14cc-3240-4886-9113-d106bb04b112/AMC%20theatre%20acquisition%20-%20FINAL%20-%20English.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). "Industry Briefs," *Boxoffice* 148, no. 8 (August 2012): 4-6.

screens.[111] Cineplex was now a nationwide presence and had solidified its position at the top of Canadian film exhibition. At the end of 2016, the chain had an approximate 78.7% share of the Canadian market, and had ranked in the top 5 North American exhibitors for the past eight years (see Table 3).[112] Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 provide a snapshot of the industry-wide upheaval and consolidation between the megaplex period of the 1990s and the transformations of the 2000s and 2010s. Comparing the North America's top ten exhibitors from 1990, megaplexing's early days; 2000, the end of the megaplex period; 2005, the end of the immediate recovery from the economic crisis; and 2017's current ranking shows significant reconfiguration of exhibitors' size and relative power across these moments of historical pressure.

Setting aside its acquisitions, Cineplex expanded modestly between 2003 and 2016. After taking over Famous Players in 2005, the chain's theatre count hovered around 130 for eight years, until the Empire acquisition pushed it to just over 160 in 2014. The screen count did grow afterwards, but slowly, from 1270 to 1437 between 2005 and 2013, approximately a 13% increase. It jumped again in 2014, mainly due to the 170 screens acquired from Empire (see Table 3). However, the chain was still building in these years, both smaller theatres in mid-size markets and upscale complexes in larger cities. Most of these theatres fell between seven and twelve screens, well under the size of the largest of the megaplexes, although most building in Canada during the megaplex period, barring AMC's twenty-plus screen complexes, had been

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[111] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Completes Acquisition of 24 Empire Theatres in Atlantic Canada" (October 24, 2013), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/cef449a0-7014-48f4-8fcc-47e621f336bf/Empire%20Acquisition%20Press%20Release%20102413.pdf (accessed July 20, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex receives Competition Bureau approval to acquire 24 Empire theatres in Atlantic Canada" (October 10, 2013), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/495a9313-0f42-443d-a3d7-81c0a196f2e8/Competition%20bureau%20approval%20press%20release.pdf (accessed March 25, 2016). Annlee Ellingson, "Exhibition Briefs: The Fall of Empire," *Boxoffice* 149, no. 8 (August 2013): 6.

[112] Cineplex Entertainment, "Investor Fact Sheet as of December 31, 2016."

Table 3: Cineplex Galaxy/Cineplex Entertainment Screen Count, 2004 to 2016

Year	Sites	Screens	North American Ranking
2004	86	775	9
2005	130	1,270	7
2006	133	1,319	6
2007	133	1,319	6
2008	130	1,328	6
2009	130	1,338	5
2010	131	1,362	5
2011	130	1,352	5
2012	133	1,437	5
2013	161	1,635	5
2014	161	1,635	5
2015*	162	1,655	5
2016	165	1,683	4

Source: "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 141, no. 1 (January 2005): 32. Francesca Dinglasan, "The 2007 Giants of Exhibition: A Directory of the Largest Domestic Circuits Ranked by Screen Count," *Boxoffice* 143, no. 2 (February 2007): 30. "The 2008 Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 144, no. 2 (February 2008): 25. Eric Brach, "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 145, no. 2 (February 2009): 28-29. "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 146, no. 2 (February 2010): 27. "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 147, no. 2 (February 2011): 28. "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 148, no. 1 (January 2012): 24. "2013 Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 149, no. 1 (January 2013): 27. "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 150, no. 1 (January 2014): 19. Daniel Loria, "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 151, no. 2 (February 2015): 48. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 16. "Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 152, no. 2 (February 2016): 32. "The Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 153, no. 2 (February 2017): 29-30.

* 2015 figures from Cineplex annual report due to error in *Boxoffice* reporting.

Table 4: Top Ten North American Theatre Chains, December 1990

Ranking	Chain	Screens
1	United Artists	2,699
2	Cineplex Odeon	1,680
3	American Multi-Cinema (AMC)	1,604
4	General Cinema	1,488
5	Carmike	963
6	Cinemark	867
7	Loews	837
8	Act III	651
9	National Amusements	650
10	Mann	517

Source: "Giants of Exhibition III: The Mini-Majors," *Boxoffice* 126, no. 12 (December 1990): 18.

Table 5: Top Ten North American Theatre Chains, January 2000

Ranking	Chain	Sites	Screens
1	Regal Cinemas	438	4,474
2	Loews Cineplex Entertainment	405	3,000
3	AMC Entertainment	203	2,844
4	Carmike Cinemas	456	2,822
5	Cinemark USA	256	2,733
6	United Artists Theatre Circuit	291	2,036
7	National Amusements	125	1,354
8	General Cinema Theatres	169	1,260
9	Hoyts Cinemas	114	970
10	Famous Players	114	832

Source: "The Fabulous Fifty," Boxoffice 136, no. 1 (January 2000): 52.

Table 6: Top Ten North American Theatre Chains, January 2005

Ranking	Chain	Sites	Screens
1	Regal Entertainment Group	560	6,251
2	AMC Entertainment	230	3,548
3	Cinemark USA	304	3,257
4	Loews Cineplex Entertainment	200	2,176
5	Carmike Cinemas	282	2,175
6	National Amusements	115	1,415
7	Century Theatres	78	1,000
8	Famous Players	84	794
9	Cineplex Galaxy	86	775
10	Kerasotes Showplace Theatres	75	572

Source: "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 141, no. 1 (January 2005): 32.

Table 7: Top Ten North American Theatre Chains, February 2017

Ranking	Chain	Sites	Screens
1	AMC Theatres	659	8,218
2	Regal Entertainment Group	565	7,310
3	Cinemark	339	4,542
4	Cineplex	165	1,683
5	Marcus Theatres	68	883
6	Harkins Theatres	33	501
7	Southern Theatres LLC	44	499
8	B & B Theatres	50	401
9	National Amusements Inc.	29	392
10	Malco Theatres Inc.	34	341

Source: "The Giants of Exhibition," *Boxoffice* 153, no. 2 (February 2017): 28-31.

within this range.[113] Data on theatre closures is more difficult to find, but the steady theatre count in this period suggests the company was closing theatres as it built, likely a result of painful lessons from the still recent years of megaplex mania. However, a slower construction pace was also made easier by Cineplex's dominance of the Canadian market, which dampened the urgency to engage in competitive building.

The combination of Cineplex, Galaxy and Famous Players' holdings created another new characteristic of the Cineplex circuit: the presence of multiple cinema brands under a single theatre chain. This practice is not unique to Cineplex; in the late 1990s, Famous Players inaugurated a similar concept with its SilverCity, Paramount, Coliseum, and Colossus locations.[114] When Cineplex and Galaxy combined their circuits to form Cineplex Galaxy, the two names continued as distinct theatre brands and reflected the difference in the theatres' relative size, markets, and strategies. With the acquisition of Famous Players, however, the number of distinctions multiplied. Coliseum, Colossus, and Paramount theatres eventually had their banners discontinued. Coliseum and Colossus later became Cineplex Cinemas, while the flagship Paramount theatres in downtown Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver, and the West Edmonton Mall were renamed Scotiabank Theatres in 2007, after Cineplex sold the cinemas' naming rights.[115] But Cineplex retained the SilverCity and Famous Players theatre names as part

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[113] Klady, "B.O. Tastes Yank-flavored," 42.

[114] Shlomo Schwartzberg, "Major Players," *Boxoffice* 135, no. 5 (May 1999): 34-35, 37.

[115] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment and Scotiabank Launch First-Ever Canadian Entertainment Loyalty Rewards Program and Rename Paramount Toronto Theatre to Scotiabank Theatre Toronto" (January 24, 2007), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/26d130db-cf48-4d88-b260-3398cdf4b554/2007-01-24--Cineplex_Entertainment_and_Scotiabank_Launch_First-Ever_Canadian_Entertainment_Loyalty_Rewards_Program.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Announces Naming Rights Available for Four Paramount Theatres" (January 31, 2006), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/ec18bc6d-70e0-48f0-8378-f68d3bc2dcef/2006-01-31--Naming_Rights--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

of its circuit, even building four SilverCity theatres of its own after acquiring Famous Players. "You always [hear] the criticism that Famous theatres cater to kids and Cineplex Odeon theatres cater to adults," Ellis Jacob had once commented as CEO of Galaxy. "So if you're the only game in town, you have to cater to everybody. What we've done is divide our theatres into zones—zones that are for kids and zones that are for adults."[116] The associations Jacob draws out suggest that part of the reason Cineplex held onto Famous Players' branding was its appeal for specific audiences. In particular, the decision to retain the SilverCity moniker seems to reflect an interest in maintaining a discursive division between those theatres that are more family-oriented and the rest of the chain. Cineplex's decision to open their first XSCAPE Entertainment Centre, their full-size arcade concept which includes video games, party rooms, and a full-service licensed lounge, at the SilverCity Newmarket in 2009, and the newly constructed SilverCity CrossIron Mills in 2010, appears to confirm this impression.[117]

While the distinctions between each branded cinema concept are murky, each concept does seem to loosely denote a specific kind of theatre and market: Scotiabank Theatres for flagship regional locations in city centres, SilverCity for family-oriented entertainment, Cineplex Cinemas for more adult environments, and all-ages Galaxy Cinemas for midsize markets with a limited number of nearby theatres. The actual difference between each theatre, however, is less important than Cineplex's attempt to draw distinctions between its theatres, markets, and

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[116] Shlomo Schwartzberg, "Showcanada Extra: Exhibition Profile, Galaxy Quest," *Boxoffice* 137, no. 5 (May 2001): 34-35.

[117] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment announces new entertainment complex at CrossIron Mills in Alberta" (July 23, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/9194781a-2c22-4d17-943f-0d8439bad93f/07%2023%2009%20Cross%20Iron%20Mills%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Escape with us at SilverCity Newmarket Cinemas' New XSCAPE Entertainment Centre" (April 16, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/9194781a-2c22-4d17-943f-0d8439bad93f/07%2023%2009%20Cross%20Iron%20Mills%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016).

audiences. In line with the industry push towards marketing cinemagoing as an activity, Famous Players' attempts to use branded names and decor to distinguish their theatres from competitors in the early 1990s period of megaplex building helped create memorable destinations that buttressed Famous Players' brand position.[118] Cineplex's own emphasis on distinctive, upscaled sites during this period can be seen as a similar attempt at cinema branding. Cineplex's decision to retain some of these theatre brands after amalgamating the chains in 2005 suggests that these branding activities offered a form of distinction that resonated with audiences to further Cineplex's business objectives.

The company's dominance in the Canadian market might also explain this phenomenon. Unlike the period of the duopoly, where a chain could focus on one or a few sectors of the audience for its most visible initiatives, Cineplex is in the position of trying to cultivate an appeal for all audiences, across age brackets and vastly different city and regional markets. By drawing on audience associations accumulated in the 1990s and modified through the 2000s and 2010s, Cineplex provides cinemagoers with cues about what films, amenities, and experiences they can expect from their trip to the theatre. These distinctions also gain meaning within specific markets, where differences between theatre decor, programming, services, and use of technology can be organized through contrasting branding. Though the features offered by Cineplex's cinema brands are not always consistent across markets, branding offers the chain the opportunity to bring differences between theatres into being and provide signposts to audiences as they navigate their cinemagoing options. Simultaneously, Cineplex's cinema brands also

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[118] Schwartzberg, "Major Players," 34-37.

create the appearance of variety, affirming the larger Cineplex brand as an "all-purpose" theatre chain and legitimizing its market dominance.

Acquisitions and branding were not the only ways Cineplex sought to rebuild the chain and regain profitability after the crisis of the early 2000s. Now more cautious about construction, the chain instead turned to diversifying its holdings in the push to increase profits and spread out its business risks. In February 2005, Cineplex launched its first digital pre-show advertisements, enabled by the expansion of digital projection from 23 to 228 screens in its circuit.[119] These digital projectors were for advertising and a limited number of pay-per-view and corporate events, rather than feature films. However, digital projection reduced production costs for advertisers and enabled the chain to play more advertisements with greater flexibility than the traditional slide program.[120] In November, after the acquisition of Famous Players, Cineplex announced the creation of a new media division that would unite Famous Players' advertising department, Cineplex's in-house advertising sales team, and Famous Players' in-theatre entertainment magazine (which would later become *Cineplex Magazine*).[121] The acquisition brought new talent and resources, and allowed Cineplex to expand its digital advertising network to the former Famous Players locations. It also gave the company leverage to sell its advertising services to other Canadian chains.[122] When the chain divested theatres during the acquisition process, Cineplex made arrangements with Empire Theatres and Fortune Cinemas to continue to

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119 Cineplex Galaxy, "Cineplex Galaxy Announces the Launch of a New Digital Pre-show Cinema Network for Toronto and Southern Ontario" (February 24, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/bd2eeb93-d88d-4ae9-872f-3e621618a7b9/2005-02-24--Digital_Pre-show_Launch--.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016).

120 Ibid.

121 Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Creates New Cinema Media Division" (November 1, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/35e6e177-c2b7-4666-b676-5209cc79f72f/2005-11-01--Cineplex%20Creates%20New%20Cinema%20Media%20Division--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

122 Richard Blackwell, "Movie Marriage Promises Blockbuster Savings," *Globe and Mail* (June 22, 2005): B3.

act as an advertising sales agent for the 34 sold locations.[123] In 2008, the chain also signed an agreement with Landmark Cinemas to provide digital, 35mm and poster advertisements for the chain, extending its advertising reach to 90% of Canada's cinemas.[124] Cinema advertising was also becoming a major revenue stream in the United States, where the advertising activities of the three largest exhibitors, AMC, Regal Entertainment, and Cinemark, had become so extensive that they were spun off into a joint advertising arm, National CineMedia, in a 2005 public offering.[125] For Cineplex, advertising provided a source of revenue not dependent on box office or concession purchases and higher profit margins, of up to 95% compared with the approximately 80% margins of concessions and lower, more variable box office margins.[126]

Cinema advertising is only the first of several ways the chain has sought to diversify its business beyond box office and concessions in recent years. Since 2008, Cineplex has hosted an online store where customers can buy DVDs and BluRay discs of new releases and catalogue titles, and, later on, digital copies for rental or permanent download.[127] Customers also can redeem their SCENE customer loyalty points towards these purchases.[128] In 2013, Cineplex

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[123] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Completes Sale of 7 Quebec Divestiture Theatres to Fortune Cinema Inc." Cineplex Galaxy, "Cineplex Galaxy Announces Sale of Theatres to Empire Theatres Limited.".

[124] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Signs Cinema Advertising Coverage and Pre-show Program Agreement with Landmark Cinemas" (April 9, 2008), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/5d1e5c19-d436-4299-9c0e-ae9e18502ba8/04%2009%2008%20Cineplex%20Media%20-%20Landmark%20Annoucement%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

[125] Shirley Won, "Cineplex Wins Rave Reviews," *Globe and Mail* (April 23, 2007): B14.

[126] Richard Blackwell, "Cineplex Coy on Famous Players Deal," *Globe and Mail* (May 20, 2005): B3.

[127] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Launches E-commerce Site, The Cineplex Store is Now Open at www.cineplex.com" (December 12, 2008), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/7553a23c-8721-4e32-bc43-57fa65e41eb2/12%2012%2008%20Cplx%20Store%20Release%20FINAL.pdf (accessed October 8, 2016).

[128] Cineplex Entertainment, "The Cineplex Store Is Your Source for Value This Fall" (September 1, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/49dc4284-cfd7-4814-9daf-9e5f468b80ed/09%2001%2009%20Cplx%20Store%201b4-5%20Release%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

launched its SuperTicket program, which allows customers to purchase a bundle including a movie ticket and an UltraViolet digital download of the film, a first-of-its kind initiative.[129]

The company has invested in digital signage, not only for lobby and concession stand displays but those seen in banks, malls, fast-food restaurants, sports stadiums, and other public venues. These initiatives began in May 2009 when Cineplex acquired digital signage company, Onsite Media Network Inc. for $1.7-million. This acquisition was followed by the $3.5-million purchase of Digital Display and Communications Inc. in July 2010, which the company combined with Onsite to form Cineplex Digital Solutions.[130] In August 2013 Cineplex acquired another digital signage company, EK3 Technologies, which operates in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Middle East, for an initial payment of $39-million and $39-million in performance-based payments, renaming the company Cineplex Digital Networks.[131] Between these divisions, Cineplex operates digital signage for several prominent North American retailers, including Tim Hortons, Dairy Queen, McDonald's, Scotiabank, RBC,

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[129] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex launches SuperTicket " (June 20, 2013), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/a5e88b19-3e73-4327-ba9b-2e198ec9a851/06%2019%2013%20SuperTicket%20Press%20Announcement%20-%20Embargoed%20-%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Annlee Ellingson, "Exhibition Briefs: It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a SuperTicket!," *Boxoffice* 149, no. 8 (August 2013): 8.

[130] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Completes Acquisition of Digital Display & Communications Inc." (July 5, 2010), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/03f6f3ce-3de2-46d1-bb2d-def0b6510cd9/07%2005%2010%20CPX%20Completes%20DDC%20Acquisition.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Introducing Cineplex Digital Solutions, A New Name for Digital Display and Communications Inc." (February 18, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/decdaa7b-fd53-4f5b-adba-00c2dee67816/02%2018%2011%20Cineplex%20Digital%20Solutions%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

[131] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Completes Acquisition of EK3 Technologies Inc." (August 30, 2013), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/d50cf712-e48a-4e1b-87e1-43a9d51464e4/08%2030%2013%20Cineplex%20Completes%20Acquisition%20of%20EK3.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

Scotiabank, and OnRoute as well as in elevators and concourses at Oxford Properties and Brookfield buildings.[132]

Cineplex has also invested in arcade games and vending equipment. In 2011, it acquired the $3.3-million New Way Sales Games Ltd. The chain invested $4.5-million to unify the subsidiary with the amusement game and vending divisions of Starburst Coin Machines Inc., to form Cineplex Starburst Inc., jointly owned by Cineplex Entertainment and Starburst, in 2012.[133] In 2015, Cineplex Starburst acquired Brady Distributing Company, a distributor and service-provider for amusement and vending equipment.[134] Cineplex purchased the remainder of Cineplex Starburst for $17.5-million later that year.[135] In September 2016, Cineplex Starburst acquired Tricorp Amusements Inc., an American company specializing in interactive video and arcade games, and family entertainment destinations such as bowling, laser tag, mini golf and amusement parks.[136] That November, the company amalgamated the four previously separate branches of its business— Cineplex Starburst, Brady Starburst, Tricorp Amusements, and

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[132] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Completes Acquisition of EK3 Technologies Inc." Andrew Willis, "Cineplex's Media Division Makes Magic Behind the Scenes," *Globe and Mail* (August 10, 2016): B2.

[133] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment to Acquire New Way Sales Games Ltd." (April 26, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/81281fe2-a494-426c-a69b-486dda71c0b3/Cineplex%20to%20Acquire%20New%20Way%20Games%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, *New Way Games Sales Ltd. And Starburst Coin Machines Inc. Merge to Create New Amusement Games Business*.

[134] Cineplex Starburst, "A New Game in Town with Brady and Cineplex Starburst Joining Together" (March 19, 2015), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/a1d52cd5-4992-4da8-9bab-7ac815d1fed8/03%2019%2015%20Brady%20Starburst%20Inc%20announcement%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016).

[135] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Announces Closing of Cineplex Starburst Inc. Acquisition" (October 1, 2015), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/44a08855-95a6-4924-bd66-0dd911764ff9/Starburst%20Inc%20Closing%20Announcement%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016).

[136] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Announces Strategic Acquisitions of Tricorp Amusements Inc." (September 23, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%20Tricorp%20Acquisition%20Announcement%20Final_20160921133857_0.pdf (accessed October 8, 2016).

Premier Amusements—into a single company, Player One Amusement Group.[137] It also added SAW, an American provider of coin-operated rides, vending equipment, and amusement games, to its holdings at this time.[138]

In early 2015, Cineplex announced it would be premiering a new kind of social entertainment destination, The Rec Room, which includes arcade and recreational games, live entertainment, high definition televisions and digital displays for sports and other live events, and an "upscale casual" dining environment.[139] The first location, at Edmonton's South Edmonton Common, opened September 19, 2016. Rec Room locations have also been planned at Calgary's Deerfoot City, Toronto's Roundhouse Park, London's new Masonville Place shopping centre, and the West Edmonton Mall.[140] Cineplex intends to open between ten and fifteen new locations over the next few years.[141]

Finally, Cineplex has moved into the area of competitive gaming. In 2015, the company acquired the operational assets of World Gaming, an online gaming platform which facilitates

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[137] Cineplex Entertainment, "The Game Just Changed: Cineplex Starburst Inc. Becomes 'Player One Amusement Group'" (November 9, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Player%20One%20Amusement%20Group%20Press%20Release%20FINAL_20161110141739_0.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017).

[138] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Strengthens US Entertainment and Amusement Gaming Business with Another Strategic Acquisition" (November 10, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%20SAW%20Acquisition%20Release%20Final_20161110142006_0.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017).

[139] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex introduces The Rec Room: Canada's premier social entertainment destination" (January 26, 2015), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/728da39d-8513-46a0-acb4-49ddc74350bd/The%20Rec%20Room%20Press%20Release%20-%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

[140] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Announces Two Additional Locations of the Rec Room" (January 5, 2017), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/TRR%20WEM%20and%20Masonville%20Release%20FINAL_20170105143034_0.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017).

[141] Cineplex Entertainment, "The Rec Room Opens Monday! A Night Out in Edmonton Will Never Be the Same" (September 15, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/TRR%20South%20Ed%20Grand%20Opening%20-%20FINAL_20160915130434_0.pdf (accessed October 8, 2016).

video game competitions and other gaming activities, called eSports, for $10-million. The chain also invested $5-million to expand the business model to incorporate in-theatre tournament experiences, including national tournaments, local tournaments, and league play.[142] In January 2016, Cineplex signed a deal with Sony PlayStation to launch a series of video game tournaments, featuring PlayStation titles, in which online qualifiers would be produced through the WorldGaming platform, and regional and Canada-wide finals would be hosted at Cineplex theatres.[143] To date, the chain has held three such tournaments and awarded nearly $200,000 in cash and prizes.[144]

These diverse activities illustrate the eagerness of the company to branch out from exhibition into parallel areas of interest, and, in the case of The Rec Room and eSports concepts, repurpose or reimagine aspects of the cinema environment for different uses and contexts. They also require an expanded understanding of what constitutes the exhibition and film industries. Since joining with Galaxy Entertainment in 2003, the mix of Cineplex's revenues generated by box office, concessions, and other ventures has shifted substantially. In 2003, box office accounted for 67.5% of the chain's total revenue, with concessions and other revenues

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[142] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Transforms eSports in Canada with Strategic Acquisition" (September 18, 2015), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/4a0c4e70-3511-419b-a67e-9593d482cd91/09%2016%202015%20NEWCO%20eSports%20press%20release%20FINAL%20ENG.pdf (accessed September 11, 2016). Willis, "Cineplex's Media Division Makes Magic Behind the Scenes."

[143] Cineplex Entertainment, "Game On: Cineplex and WorldGaming Sign Comprehensive Deal with Sony Computer Entertainment Canada (PlayStation)" (January 11, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/ae9fbe71-ab67-45f5-a648-44b86f7ae35e/Cineplex%20WG%20COD%20Tournament%20Release%20FINAL%20ENG.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017).

[144] Cineplex Entertainment, "WorldGaming and Cineplex Launch 2017 Canadian Championship Season with Call of Duty" (January 10, 2017), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%20WG%20COD%20Tournament%20Release%20FINAL_20170110144818_0.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017).

comprising 26.8% and 5.7%, respectively.[145] By 2016, box office revenues represented only 48.2% of the total, with concessions accounting for 28.7% and the media division and other revenues constituting 11.6% and 11.5%.[146] This made 2016 the first year that Cineplex's box office made up less than half of the chain's total revenues (see Table 8). These changes require us to rethink not only our understanding of the structure of the exhibition business, but what we mean when we identify exhibition practices.[147]

A final significant shift in Cineplex's business model concerns its engagement with its audiences. In 2007, Cineplex partnered with Scotiabank as part of the sale of naming rights to its Paramount theatres to create a nation-wide loyalty program, SCENE. Through the program, customers received a discount on concessions and could earn points towards future ticket and concession purchases. It also offered access to contests and special offers. The program included SCENE ScotiaCard debit cards and SCENE VISA and SCENE Student VISA credit cards, which in addition to regular SCENE benefits, let customers to earn points from everyday purchases.[148] The deal let Scotiabank advertise directly to the youth market and entice them to sign up for banking services. For Cineplex, the loyalty program not only sought to encourage more frequent attendance, but enabled the exhibitor to collect data about moviegoing behaviour and access

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[145] Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund 2003 Annual Report* (2004), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/reportsandfilings/annuallyquarterlyreports/2003/CGIF%202003%20Income%20Fund.pdf (accessed February 15, 2017), 12.

[146] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 16.

[147] Willis, "Cineplex's Media Division Makes Magic Behind the Scenes."

[148] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment and Scotiabank Launch First National Canadian Entertainment Loyalty Rewards Program and Rename Three Major Cineplex Theatres" (May 2, 2007), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/8f71991c-b5c7-4500-bdbc-852d846d8643/2007-05-02--Cineplex_Entertainment_and_Scotiabank_Launch_First_National_Canadian_Entertainment_Loyalty_Program--.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Shirley Won, "New Cineplex-Scotiabank Deal: Eat Popcorn, Earn Some Points," *Globe and Mail* (November 3, 2006): B1.

Table 8: Cineplex Galaxy/Cineplex Entertainment Revenue Mix, 2003-2016

Year	Box Office	Food Service	Media	Other	Combined Media and Other
2003	67.5%	26.8%	-	-	5.7%
2004	66.5%	27.0%	-	-	6.4%
2005	63.0%	28.0%	-	-	9.0%
2006	62.0%	28.8%	-	-	9.2%
2007	60.7%	29.2%	7.0%	3.1%	10.1%
2008	60.1%	29.6%	7.1%	3.2%	10.3%
2009	60.3%	29.9%	6.9%	2.9%	9.8%
2010	59.5%	29.3%	8.1%	3.1%	11.2%
2011	57.9%	29.2%	9.1%	3.8%	12.9%
2012	58.5%	30.1%	7.7%	3.6%	11.3%
2013	56.8%	29.9%	9.4%	3.9%	13.3%
2014	54.5%	30.4%	10.9%	4.2%	15.1%
2015	51.9%	30.5%	11.2%	6.4%	17.6%
2016	48.2%	28.7%	11.6%	11.5%	23.1%

Source: Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund 2003 Annual Report*, 12. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *1 + 1 =: 2004 Annual Report*, 15-17. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Redefining Entertainment*, 22, 24-25. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Go Big*, 11, 14. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Beyond Movies*, 10, 18. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Escape with Us*, 13, 15, 19. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Annual Report 2009*, 5, 16-17. Cineplex Entertainment, *2010 Annual Report*, 11, 18, 20. Cineplex Entertainment, *Delivering a Premium Entertainment Experience*, 15-16, 23. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2012 Annual Report*, 16-17, 26. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2013 Annual Report*, 13-14, 27. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2014 Annual Report*, 19. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 130. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 16.

customer email addresses for direct promotion.[149] By 2016, the program counted more than eight million members, and the SCENE app, which offers users access to showtimes, trailers, movie news, the Cineplex online store, and *Cineplex Magazine* had been downloaded more than sixteen million times.[150] The reach of the chain's theatres, coupled with widespread adoption of the loyalty program meant that Cineplex now had more detailed information about Canadian cinemagoing than had ever been available to an exhibitor before. "You could almost call them a data company," the president of Facebook Canada commented in a news article praising the company for its innovations.[151] This data can be used to increase the profits of its theatres and give advertisers comprehensive information about its customers and markets. For Cineplex, dominance in the marketplace is no longer just a matter of screens and real estate, but data that can be leveraged for film exhibition and its parallel initiatives.

These activities—acquisitions, branding, diversification, and data collection—demonstrate shifts away from earlier forms of practice, but it is important that we continue to read them in conversation with historical formations. Though distinct from the environment and activities of the megaplex period, these shifts in exhibitor practice nonetheless carry forward the legacy of that era's successes and failures. The shift in the 2000s and 2010s towards greater consolidation in the industry accelerates activities that took place during the 1980s and 90s, which saw the top eight exhibitors, Cineplex among them, increase their share of

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 5-6.

[151] Steve Ladurantaye, "Cineplex's Next Role: Building on Its Big-screen Success," *Globe and Mail* (December 22, 2011): B7.

North American screens from 25% in 1983 to 57% in 1998.[152] Branding practices, then used to create destination sites that sold cinemagoing as an activity and reinforced exhibitor brand recognition, have been repurposed for the needs of contemporary exhibitors. These exhibitors still seek to draw and direct flows of audiences to their theatres through branding, as consolidation and new building strategies have again altered the landscape of theatre circuits. Simultaneously, anxieties borne from the crisis of the early 2000s have moderated aggressive building, and pushed exhibitors to choose diversification of their assets instead of theatre construction as a main means of growth. Underneath the temptation to gather larger amounts of detailed data about cinemagoers also likely lies fears of repeating the miscalculations of the megaplex years. Recovery from the crisis has incorporated persistence and reconsideration of exhibitor common sense about how to ensure industry stability and create conditions for growth. The residue of these historical configurations seeps into the present, shaping the environment in which new practices emerge.

While this group of activities may initially seem loosely connected, viewed in the context of the crisis of the early 2000s, they operate according to a similar logic. The crash that closed the megaplex period marked a moment of failure, or at least significant reassessment, of the idea that building and advertising state-of-the-art megaplexes on a massive scale would correspond with a dramatic increase in theatre admissions. If reigniting mass moviegoing remains a dream for exhibitors, this dream has been tempered by the reality that the habits of the moviegoing public are not so easily controlled. Recent reconfigurations in exhibition practice reflect the understanding that attempting to expand the size of the audience is a risky proposition, and

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[152] "The Fabulous Fifty," *Boxoffice* 135, no. 1 (January 1999): 24. Barry R. Litman and Anne M. Hoag, "Merger Madness," in *The Motion Picture Mega-industry*, ed. Barry R. Litman (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998).

cannot be the sole strategy for maintaining the profitability of the industry. Through consolidation, major theatre chains and financiers have sought to increase profits by carving out a larger slice of existing theatre admissions and capitalizing on the efficiencies of economies of scale. Strategically designing cinemas and their amenities according to their markets and making these alterations visible through cinema brands attempts to keep circuits streamlined and channel audiences to the theatres that best cater to them. Diversification has expanded sources of profit for exhibitors beyond admissions and concessions to new sectors, sheltering them from the short-term instabilities traditionally built into the exhibition industry through inconsistent film product and seasonal lulls in the release calendar. Data collection has enabled exhibitors to amass and leverage information about their existing customers, to encourage attendance, inform business strategy, and offer more detailed information to advertisers and other partners about the audiences exhibitors can provide access to.

These structural changes in the exhibition industry may be less obvious to regular theatre audiences, but a similar logic underpins the most conspicuous transformation of contemporary moviegoing in the 2000s and 2010s: the appearance, over the last ten years, of new kinds of theatrical experiences at the box office. These options are based on new or reimagined forms of technological spectacle, luxury, comfort and convenience at the theatre, available at a premium price. Emerging in a reconfigured exhibition industry, in the wake of significant historical change, new exhibition commodities similarly reflect a turn away from the hope of expanding the regular moviegoing public and towards increasing the profits that can be extracted from its existing customer base. The following chapter examines the development of emerging exhibition commodities and investigates what their proliferation suggests about the state of the exhibition industry in the 2010s and directions of future change.

CHAPTER THREE

Branded Premium Experiences, Total Cinema, and Social Stratification at the Multiplex

Beginning as early as 1998 but accelerating considerably since 2008, new kinds of screening options have begun to appear at major North American cinema chains. These initiatives, which I will refer to as branded premium experiences, include a wide range of appeals, available at premiums ranging from a few dollars to twice the price of a regular movie ticket. Features of these new and reimagined commodities include technological innovations, such as wide-format IMAX screens, 3D presentations, motion seating (chairs which vibrate, sway, and otherwise imitate onscreen movement), panoramic screens (which use multiple panels to extend the frame or collage images) and multi-sensory effects (seats outfitted with fans, water sprayers, and other devices to echo a variety of onscreen action and environments). Others are convenience or service-based options, bundled in boutique cinema concepts, which include more comfortable, reserved seating, in-seat service, full lunch and dinner menus, and alcoholic beverages. There are also offerings, like premium large format concepts, which combine these functions: auditoria with larger screens and cutting-edge sound and projection, paired with the comfort and convenience of rocker-back chairs and reserved seating. Branded premium experiences are connected by their extension and fragmentation of the traditional cinema experience. Where all screens were once available at a single price and shared presentation standard, these new options have created a system of tiered commodities that divide sites and even auditoria into zones where enhancements of the standard cinema experience can be had for a premium cost. I have chosen the term branded premium experiences to encompass the distinct features of these commodities: “branded,” because they are organized into branded packages, whose names feature prominently in marketing as shorthand for their features; “premium” to include the ticket premiums that facilitate exhibitors’ economic strategies and reorganize audiences’ encounters with the cinema; and “experiences” to highlight the ephemerality of the enhancements and services they offer. Between 2008 and 2016, the percentage of Cineplex’s box office brought in by branded premium experiences has risen dramatically from 3.5% to 46.1%, reflecting the chain’s sizeable investments in these developments over the last several years and their increasing importance to Cineplex’s overall business strategy (see Table 9).[153]

As with the recent changes in exhibition practice described in the previous chapter, branded premium experiences have been structured by the megaplex construction boom in the 1990s and the resulting crisis of the early 2000s. As a result of these historical forces, exhibitors are using branded premium experiences to increase profits without relying solely on growing theatre admissions. These commodities allow exhibitors to make more money from their existing audience members by offering a range of expanded features to legitimize new pricing scales. Such strategies differ from using traditional theatre upscaling and technological upgrades to justify higher standard ticket prices, since branded premium experiences and their ticket premiums are ostensibly opt-in. Exhibitors can now retain those audience members that would be driven away by increased ticket prices, while simultaneously enabling patrons willing to pay for expanded services to buy movie tickets for up to twice their regular price. And, since these commodities cover many enhancements as well as a wide price range, they offer several enticements for moviegoers interested in some services or price points but not others.

[153] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 21. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Annual Report 2009*, 20.

Table 9: Cineplex Entertainment Box Office from Premium Offerings, 2008 to 2016

Year	Total Box Office (in millions)	Percentage of Box Office from Premium Offerings*
2008	$510.9	3.5%
2009	$581.1	14.4%
2010	$601.1	29.0%
2011	$577.3	29.4%
2012	$638.3	30.9%
2013	$665.3	38.7%
2014	$672.7	37.8%
2015	$711.1	38.9%
2016	$712.4	46.1%

Source: Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Annual Report 2009*, 20. Cineplex Entertainment, *2010 Annual Report*, 23. Cineplex Entertainment, *Delivering a Premium Entertainment Experience*, 27. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2012 Annual Report*, 30. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2013 Annual Report*, 32. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2014 Annual Report*, 23. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 34. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 20.

*Includes UltraAVX, 3D, IMAX, and D-BOX for applicable years.

While each of these commodities has a distinct history, I wish to identify the conversion to digital projection as a significant moment for their proliferation. A discussion of the historical development of digital projection is regrettably beyond the scope of this work. Briefly, however, Cineplex's conversion to digital projection began in 2007, with its first digital projection installation at its newly opened SilverCity Oakville location, and, by the end of 2008, the chain listed 84 digital screens in its end-of-year report.[154] In 2011, the chain partnered with Empire Theatres to implement the Canadian conversion to digital projection, and the two chains secured the financing for an eighteen-month rollout of new Christie digital systems in June of 2011.[155] The conversion was nearly complete by the end of 2012, when Cineplex reported that 99% of its screens were now digital-enabled.[156] In the United States, the rollout occurred over a similar timeframe, and by June 2013, almost 83% of American screens had been converted to digital projection.[157] This moment of greater technological fluidity is key to understanding the historical conditions that have made branded premium experiences possible. The flexibility brought about by the introduction of digital prints has created an opening for greater experimentation and

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[154] Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Beyond Movies*, 2. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Escape with Us*, 2.

[155] Canadian Digital Cinema Partnership, "Canadian Digital Cinema Partnership Announces Completion of $115 Million Financing for Digital Cinema Conversion" (June 21, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/cf6ee1f0-42a5-43b8-85f5-cc3bdb028ea4/06%2021%2011%20Cpx%20and%20Empire%20Financing%20for%20CDCP%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Canadian Digital Cinema Partnership, "Cineplex Entertainment and Empire Theatres Create New Partnership To Manage the Conversion to Digital Cinema" (April 14, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/2c96c42c-8a01-4a33-ba0a-ba4cf1a3f3c4/04%2014%2011%20Cineplex%20Entertainment%20and%20Empire%20Theatres%20Create%20New%20Partnership%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Selects Christie and Doremi Cinema as Exclusive Projector and Digital Cinema Playback Server Vendors" (June 22, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/6ddd948c-933c-4c7c-8da3-e275c11073e0/Cineplex%20Entertainment%20Selects%20Digital%20Cinema%20Projector%20and%20Digital%20Cinema%20Playback%20Server%20Vendors%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

[156] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2012 Annual Report*, 15.

[157] Leo Barraclough, "Digital Cinema Conversion Nears End Game," *Variety* (Penske Business Media, June 23, 2013), http://variety.com/2013/film/global/digital-cinema-conversion-nears-end-game-1200500975/ (accessed October 11, 2016).

unpredictability within the industry and led to new forms of contestation over the standards of the cinematic apparatus. The interoperability of digital cinema files means that wide formats, 3D, immersive sound formats, codes for motion seating and data about multi-sensory effects can be encoded directly into the digital projection file for a film, making these enhancements easier for exhibitors to implement and cheaper for film distributors and technology proprietors to disseminate. Though projecting these technologically-enhanced films still requires purpose-built equipment, that individual films no longer require specialized prints, as expanded cinema options like IMAX once did, offers cost savings for exhibitors for the prints themselves and for the labour required to project them. These savings make it easier to rationalize investing in new forms of presentation. This technology also facilitates expanded use of the cinema space for nontraditional purposes. Extended pre-show advertising, corporate presentations, prerecorded opera, theatre, and dance performances, virtual museum tours, event television screenings, and video game tournaments can now make use of cinemas screens and spaces, expanding revenue streams for exhibitors. Even for convenience and service-centred initiatives, which do not require data from the digital projection file, the proliferation of new technological exhibition commodities spurred by digital technology has normalized the presence of premium pricing and segmented screening experiences.

In this chapter, I trace the historical genesis of branded premium experiences offered by Cineplex and the status of these initiatives in the broader North American film industry. Table 10 tracks Cineplex's adoption of these commodities between 2008 and 2016, giving an overview of the rhythms of their expansions which I will elaborate on in my explanation of their individual trajectories. I begin this analysis by accounting for the historical development of each of the

Table 10: Cineplex Entertainment Premium Offerings, 2008 to 2016

Year	Theatres	Screens	3D Digital Screens	UltraAVX Screens	IMAX Screens	VIP Screens	D-BOX Locations
2008	130	1,331	49	0	9	0	0
2009	129	1,329	190	0	9	3	1
2010	131	1,362	366	11	9	3	3
2011	130	1,352	396	23	14	15	11
2012	134	1,449	545	39	17	25	20
2013	161	1,630	723	55	20	28	21
2014	161	1,639	767	66	20	43	25
2015	162	1,655	783	80	23	56	43
2016	165	1,683	801	85	23	63	77

Source: Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Escape with Us*, 7, 10. Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund, *Annual Report 2009*, 10. Cineplex Entertainment, *2010 Annual Report*, 3-4, 11. Cineplex Entertainment, *Delivering a Premium Entertainment Experience*, 4, 16. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2012 Annual Report*, 15, 22-23. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2013 Annual Report*, 12. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2014 Annual Report*, 9. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 16. Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3.

branded premium experiences Cineplex has adopted as of 2016. I follow this section with an investigation of the overarching discourses that animate these commodities and contribute to their ability to reorganize cinema spaces and cinemagoers.

IMAX

Cineplex's initial foray into IMAX screenings came with its acquisition of eight IMAX screens from Famous Players' circuit during its 2005 purchase of the chain. These screens were the result of deal between Famous Players and IMAX in 1998 to construct ten IMAX 3D screens in Canada over the subsequent five years.[158] The deal was made possible by IMAX's 1997 development of the 15/70 IMAX 3D SR system, a smaller version of its full-size system designed for multiplex theatres.[159] With this new system, IMAX hoped to expand its operations to Hollywood feature film, and escape from a bind that had limited the company's growth throughout the format's commercial life: a shortage of IMAX venues meant that Hollywood production companies had little interest in making content for IMAX screens, and the lack of content made exhibitors reluctant to lease IMAX equipment.[160] The cost of leasing elaborate projection systems and the construction of specialized theatres had been a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of the unproven system by multiplex exhibitors, and Hollywood's appetite to shoot titles in the format was also hampered by expensive IMAX shoots and film prints. The size of screens and the proximity of viewers to the screen in traditional IMAX

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[158] Robert Brehl, "Famous Players Signs Up for 10 Imax 3-D Theatres," *Globe and Mail* (February 5, 1998): B8.

[159] Ibid. McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 46. Tamsen Tillson, "Imax Beefs Up Network with Eye on Hollywood," *Variety* 370, no. 2 (February 23, 1998): 30.

[160] Brehl, "Famous Players Signs Up for 10 Imax 3-D Theatres." McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 46. Tillson, "Imax Beefs Up Network with Eye on Hollywood," 30.

theatres also impeded the use of certain filmic conventions, including close-ups and shorter edits, throwing off the emotional and temporal rhythms of traditional narrative filmmaking.[161] With its lower cost and smaller image size, the IMAX 3D SR system allayed some of these concerns. Thanks to its development, IMAX was able to expand its network of screens by striking deals with major exhibitors including Famous Players, Regal, Cinemark, and Edwards Theatres, with twelve exhibitors in Canada, the United States, and Europe signing IMAX contracts by the spring of 1998.[162] IMAX had expanded to 159 screens in 22 countries that year, with 77 deals to build screens ongoing.[163]

In 2002, remastering existing 35mm films for 15/70 IMAX stock became possible when IMAX introduced its DMR computer program.[164] This move reduced the cost of producing an IMAX film significantly. It also circumvented issues with camera noise that had interfered with dialogue at close range and limited the aesthetic options of the format, creating the distinctive but restricting shooting style of earlier IMAX films.[165] This development was followed with DMR editions of *Beauty and The Beast* (1991), *The Lion King* (1994), *Apollo 13* (1995), *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Spider-man 2* (2004), and *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), among several others. However, *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) marked the first time a large format title was given a day-and-date release with its 35mm version. Warner Brothers was an

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[161] Tana Wollen, "The Bigger the Better: From CinemaScope to Imax," in *Future Visions: New Technologies of the Screen*, ed. Phillip Hayward and Tana Wollen (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 18-19, 22-24.

[162] McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 46. Tillson, "Imax Beefs Up Network with Eye on Hollywood," 30.

[163] Tillson, "Imax Beefs Up Network with Eye on Hollywood," 30.

[164] McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 50. Archie Thomas, "Bigscreen Bang for the Buck," *Variety* 399, no. 6 (June 27, 2005): B8.

[165] Wollen, "The Bigger the Better: From CinemaScope to Imax," 23-24.

early IMAX adopter, following the *The Matrix Revolutions* with day-and-date releases for *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Batman Begins* (2004), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005).[166] *The Polar Express*, another Warner Brothers film, became the first IMAX 3D title to get a day-and-date release with its 35mm counterpart in 2004.[167] Just after the release of *The Matrix Revolutions* in 2003, *Variety* reported that the number of IMAX screens was evenly split between institutional and commercial theatres, but 90% of the company's pending screen deals were with commercial exhibitors.[168]

IMAX differs from exhibitor-driven premium large formats (PLFs), which would begin to flourish in the 2010s, and studio 3D conversions due to its highly standardized conversion process for picture and sound.[169] Picture conversion involves expanding the picture, smoothing noise, brightening and saturating the image, and, in some cases, conversion to the 1.43:1 IMAX picture ratio. Sound is uncompressed and re-edited to "make it as visceral as possible."[170] The company also monitors screening conditions in IMAX theatres worldwide, making sure volume and picture settings remain consistent.[171] Quality control in conversion and exhibition is a point that the company continues to champion in its self-promotion, especially since the proliferation of comparatively less standardized exhibitor PLFs in recent years. This attention to presentation

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[166] McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 52-53.

[167] Daniel Loria, "The Big Bucks Behind the Big Screens," *Boxoffice* 151, no. 3 (March 2015): 32-33. McDonald, "IMAX: The Hollywood Experience," 52.

[168] Tamsen Tillson, "Large-format Grosses Grow," *Variety* 391, no. 12 (August 11, 2003): 13.

[169] Karen Idelson, "Conversion to the 'Max," *Variety* 422, no. 1 (February 14, 2011): 9. Mark de Quervain, "Premium Cinema: The Future," *Boxoffice* 152, no. 4 (April 2016).

[170] Idelson, "Conversion to the 'Max," 9.

[171] Brent Lang, "The Big Picture for IMAX," *Variety* 325, no. 12 (October 28, 2014): 50-53.

has also helped the company in its quest to cultivate relationships with blockbuster auteurs like Christopher Nolan and J.J. Abrams, who in turn lend publicity and legitimacy to the format. These relationships are a further point of differentiation for IMAX from other large formats and emerging screening technologies.[172] However, shooting with IMAX equipment remains problematic since the cameras are large and loud, still more suitable for onscreen action than for intimate dialogue sequences. Hollywood films seldom shoot more than a few scenes in IMAX, and even IMAX evangelist Nolan's *Interstellar* (2010) included only an hour of IMAX-shot footage in its nearly three-hour runtime.[173] While IMAX's large format and higher sound quality are features it shares with some exhibitor PLFs, its presentation standards, filmmaker relationships, and the name recognition of its brand continues to position it within the industry as a standard unto itself. Many exhibitors, Cineplex included, even continue to operate both their own PLFs and IMAX screens.[174]

The format has been expanding aggressively since its first Hollywood titles, increasing its presence to 550 venues in 48 countries in 2012.[175] By April 2016, IMAX had 1,061 screens worldwide, with another 372 slated for future installation.[176] Cineplex continued to operate its inherited IMAX screens, but for a six-year period had made no new arrangements of its own with IMAX. In 2011, Cineplex signed two agreements with IMAX to upgrade seven existing

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172 Ibid., 53.

173 Ibid., 53.

174 Daniel Loria, "Large Screen, Premium Experience," *Boxoffice* 152, no. 3 (March 2016): 30-34.

175 Nick Vivarelli, "Maximizing IMAX," *Variety* 426, no. 9 (April 9, 2012): 1, 10.

176 de Quervain, "Premium Cinema: The Future," 64.

IMAX screens to IMAX's digital system, and add five new IMAX digital screens to its circuit.[177] Though it has added IMAX screens since this time, Cineplex seems to have tapered off its adoption of IMAX, in comparison with other emerging exhibition technology like 3D and motion seating. This is likely due in part to the company's partnership with RealD for 3D projection, beginning in 2005, and the development of its own proprietary PLF, UltraAVX, in 2010.[178] At the end of 2016, Cineplex operated twenty-three IMAX screens, for a premium ranging from $6 to $7.[179]

3D

In 2004, the IMAX 3D release of *Polar Express* had generated $45-million in profit and curiosity in the industry about the potential for a revival of 3D in Hollywood filmmaking. Filmmakers including James Cameron and George Lucas championed the format at ShoWest 2005, while IMAX and the newly formed RealD made modest projections for expansion of their versions of 3D technology.[180] In November 2005, Disney and RealD collaborated on the first day-and-date release of a digital 3D movie with *Chicken Little*, which opened on 84 3D screens. By the end of

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[177] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment to Add Three New IMAX Digital Systems and Upgrade Seven Existing IMAX Film Theatres to IMAX Digital" (May 16, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/abf4cb88-3f2b-4ed3-8256-f093c41ef86a/Cineplex_IMAX_Announcement_5_16_11_FINALR.pdf (accessed September 12, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment to Add Two New IMAX Digital Systems" (September 20, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/5fc68126-e952-4d08-8b21-f480999295fa/IMAX%20Cineplex%20Release%20FINAL.pdf (accessed September 12, 2016).

[178] Cineplex Entertainment, "Canadian Exclusive for Toronto Moviegoers! Disney's 'Chicken Little' in Disney Digital 3D Only at Cineplex Entertainment Theatres" (November 4, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/0ce5b133-f441-4bf9-88b4-564c574f3ff2/2005-11-04--Chicken_Little_in_Disney_Digital_3D--.pdf (accessed August 8, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "A New Entertainment Experience — Cineplex UltraAVX Premieres at Two Cineplex Entertainment Theatres on Wednesday, June 30th" (June 16, 2010), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/a18adc3e-85bb-4f04-9263-dfecc6df612e/06%2016%2010%20UltraAVX%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

[179] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3.

[180] Jonathan Bing, "Will Gizmos Give Biz New Juice?," *Variety* 398, no. 5 (March 21, 2005): 10.

2006, these numbers were already growing; RealD had installed 225 screens in less than two years.[181] RealD and digital 3D competitors Dolby and NuVision each offered slightly different standards and pricing for projection, 3D glasses and revenue-sharing agreements in their jockeying for North American screens. Though IMAX also offered its own 3D technology, its refusal to split this technology off from its large format screens positioned it as an outsider to the competition to establish a standard.[182] However, the major barrier for digital 3D technology partners remained a lack of digital projection at most multiplexes. Slow conversion times also stalled the progress of adding new titles to the roster of 3D releases.[183]

While films including *Monster House* (2006), *Superman Returns* (2006), *Meet the Robinsons* (2007), and *Beowulf* (2007) were released in 3D over the next few years, James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) was the decisive moment for the format. Cameron's status as a "technological auteur" capable of delivering highly lucrative blockbusters and early hype about the film's unprecedented, artistic use of 3D pushed exhibitors to adopt the format so they could reap the box office rewards of a tentpole movie crafted with 3D in mind. The film proved a massive success, becoming the highest grossing film of all time and generating $750-million at the domestic box office and $2.73-billion worldwide.[184] *Avatar*'s financial success spurred studios to accelerate their production of 3D films, and even led to the conversion of a number of

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181 Paul Kagan, "3D Means Business," *Boxoffice* 142, no. 12 (December 2006): 96.

182 Bing, "Will Gizmos Give Biz New Juice?," 10. David S. Cohen, "Three-way Battle Over 3-D Starts to Heat Up," *Variety* 411, no. 5 (June 16, 2008): A1, A4.

183 Annlee Ellingson, "Digital to the Power of 3D," *Boxoffice* 143, no. 1 (January 2007): 60-63.

184 Acland, "The End of James Cameron's Quiet Years," 4-9. Chuck Tryon, "Breaking Through the Screen: 3D, 'Avatar,' and the Future of Moviegoing," in *On-Demand Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 79-80.

live-action movies already in post-production; 2010 saw the release of twenty-two films in 3D.[185] Between the windfall of *Avatar* receipts and the promise of continued 3D product, exhibitors had strong incentives to continue the format's expansion. By 2015, RealD, by far the dominant provider of the format worldwide, had 26,000 screens in 73 countries.[186]

Disney's *Chicken Little* (2005) was the first Hollywood film to be shown at Cineplex in digital RealD 3D, at two Toronto theatres, SilverCity Mississauga and Colossus Woodbridge. In September of 2005, Cineplex had also shown the IMAX documentary *Magnificent Desolation: Walking on the Moon* in IMAX 3D at its then seven IMAX locations.[187] But it was RealD that Cineplex partnered with for its expansion of the format, installing 41 of the 3D systems over the next few years, and, in July 2008, signing an agreement to install 175 new systems. This agreement was contingent on Cineplex beginning the process of converting its circuit to digital projection technology.[188] In May 2009, this agreement would be expanded by another 31 3D systems.[189] By the release of *Avatar*, Cineplex was able to play the film on 75 RealD and 9 IMAX 3D screens.[190] In February of 2012, RealD and Cineplex agreed to install 100 new

185 Todd Gilchrist, "What a Difference a Year Makes," *Boxoffice* 147, no. 3 (March 2011): 20-21. Tryon, "Breaking Through the Screen: 3D, 'Avatar,' and the Future of Moviegoing."

186 Daniel Loria, "Another Dimension: The Future of 3D Lies Beyond the Box Office," *Boxoffice* 151, no. 3 (March 2015): 24-25.

187 Cineplex Galaxy, "Magnificent Desolation: Walking on the Moon 3D to Open at Cineplex Galaxy IMAX locations across Canada" (September 20, 2005), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/0dd0c9f9-4dc8-4f9e-91f5-8a23780e20ee/2005-09-20--Magnificent_Desolation_to_open_at_Cineplex_Galaxy_IMAX--.pdf (accessed July 29, 2016).

188 Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment and RealD Sign Major Agreement for 175 3D Installations " (July 22, 2008), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/d15bf4ec-f13a-413e-8e66-d48cd9306bcb/7%2022%2008%20Cineplex%20RealD%20Press%20Release%20FINAL.pdf (accessed August 8, 2016).

189 Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Adds 31 3D Projectors" (April 22, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/051a4682-7cf5-4eee-8105-a92308fd71e3/04%2022%2009%20Digital%203D%20Expansion%20FINAL.pdf (accessed August 8, 2016).

190 Cineplex Entertainment, "Be the First to See James Cameron's Avatar at Cineplex Entertainment Theatres" (December 2, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/aaea8d0d-a1d6-4339-bc22-a67d686eb862/12%2002%2009%20Avatar%20Advisory%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

systems, which brought 3D projection to a total of 500 of Cineplex's screens and 40% of the circuit's locations.[191] By the end of 2016, Cineplex operated 801 RealD 3D screens along with its twenty-three 3D-enabled IMAX screens and charged a $3 premium for 3D presentations.[192]

UltraAVX

Cineplex launched its UltraAVX (Audiovisual Experience) premium large format (PLF) concept in June of 2010, at the Cineplex Odeon Queensway Cinemas in Toronto and SilverCity CrossIron Mills in Calgary.[193] At its launch, the format featured larger screen sizes, Dolby digital surround sound, digital projection, reserved stadium seating, high-back rocker chairs, and RealD 3D technology for select showings.[194] Since then, presentation at newly constructed and renovated UltraAVX auditoriums has been upgraded to 4K digital projection and Dolby Atmos sound, though older UltraAVX theatres retain the original technology.[195] The development of the concept coincided with AMC's launch of its ETX (Enhanced Theatre Experience) premium large format in the United States earlier in 2010, which offered similarly advanced audiovisual presentation, but not special seating.[196] "What we're trying to do is raise the bar even above that

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[191] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment to Add 100 RealD Systems" (February 8, 2012), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/d8f7f836-437b-40db-9614-0380a397e895/02%2008%2012%20RealD%20Expansion%20FINAL.pdf (accessed August 8, 2016).

[192] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3.

[193] Cineplex Entertainment, "A New Entertainment Experience — Cineplex UltraAVX Premieres at Two Cineplex Entertainment Theatres on Wednesday, June 30th."

[194] Ibid.

[195] Cineplex Entertainment, "UltraAVX and D-BOX Enhance Movie-Watching at Cineplex Odeon Aberdeen Mall Cinemas" (June 24, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/UltraAVX%20Aberdeen%20-%20Press%20Release%20-%20June%2024_20160624131011_0.pdf (accessed October 5, 2016).

[196] AMC Entertainment, "AMC Theatres Offers ETX, an Enhanced Theatre Experience for Guests of AMC Pleasure Island 24 at Walt Disney World Resort" (March 3, 2010), http://investor.amctheatres.com/Cache/1001181529.PDF?Y=&O=PDF&D=&FID=1001181529&T=&IID=4171292 (accessed October 5, 2016).

[ETX],” commented Ellis Jacob at the announcement of Cineplex’s new format in May 2010.[197] AMC’s ETX PLF may have encouraged Cineplex to launch a similar initiative to maintain competition with the American giant’s Canadian locations, since, at the time, the exhibitor was still a competitor in Canada. The format expanded rapidly in the years following the launch, notably announcing twelve UltraAVX expansions at once in January 2012.[198] At the end of 2016, the chain operated 85 UltraAVX screens, at a premium of $3 for regular screenings and $5 for 3D screenings.[199] Cineplex has also introduced another premium seating option, Prime Seats, which allows customers to reserve select seating in more comfortable chairs for regular and 3D screenings. At the end of 2016, Cineplex operated its Prime Seats program at 25 of its locations for premiums of $2 for regular screenings and $5 for 3D screenings.[200]

AMC and Cineplex are not the only exhibitors who have debuted premium large formats. Before the chain’s closure in 2013, Empire operated its Empire Extra format in Canada, which has since become Landmark’s Extra Experience after Landmark took over several of these locations from the now-dissolved Empire. This PLF offers reserved seating, larger curved screens, 2K Barco projection, Barco surround sound and 3D, while Landmark’s Xtreme PLF provides these features with Barco Auro sound.[201] In the United States, major exhibitor PLFs include AMC’s ETX, Regal’s RPX (Regal Premium Experience), Carmike’s BigD and MuviXL,

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[197] “Cineplex Plans Bigger Screens, Enhanced Sound,” *Globe and Mail* (May 20, 2010): B7.

[198] Cineplex Entertainment, “Cineplex to Offer UltraAVX in 12 Additional Theatres Across Canada” (January 26, 2012), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/23b15a6a-42cb-4262-a000-afd2bf36de43/01%2026%2012%20UltaAVX%20Expansion%20FINAL.pdf (accessed October 5, 2016).

[199] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3.

[200] Cineplex Entertainment, “Prime Seats,” *Cineplex.com*, http://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/PrimeSeats (accessed January 1, 2017).

[201] Landmark Cinemas, “The Xtreme Experience,” *Landmark Cinemas*, https://www.landmarkcinemas.com/xtreme-west-kelowna/experiences/experiences-detail?event=XtremeExperience (accessed October 5, 2016).

Cinemark's XD, and National Amusements' Showcase XPlus. In addition to exhibitor formats, RealD offers its Luxe format and Dolby has launched Dolby Cinema, which also runs under AMC's AMC Prime banner. Both technological providers hope to create a more consistent standard across PLFs and profit from its widespread adoption.[202] Despite potential benefits of brand recognition offered by RealD, Dolby, and IMAX, the advantage of house blend PLFs for exhibitors is that they can keep more of the additional profits from the premium ticket price, rather than losing a portion to revenue-sharing agreements.[203] One issue with exhibitor PLFs, however, is that they create greater potential for a gap between theatre capability and final presentation, since some films shown in premium formats are not shot to the technical standards of the theatre, having not been shot in 4K or mixed in the highest available sound formats, for example.[204] As RealD and Dolby have hoped to correct, there is also the issue of inconsistency between exhibitor formats, and even within exhibitor PLFs, as is the case with UltraAVX's variable projection and audio standards.[205] Despite these lingering issues, PLFs continue to proliferate, particularly in Canada and the United States; in 2015, there were 926 exhibitor PLF screens worldwide.[206]

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[202] Annlee Ellingson, "Luxe Is the RealD Deal," *Boxoffice* 149, no. 8 (August 2013): 9. Laura Silver, "Dolby Goes Premium As Atmos Continues Its International Expansion," *Boxoffice* 151, no. 1 (January 2015): 7-8.

[203] Loria, "Large Screen, Premium Experience," 31-32.

[204] de Quervain, "Premium Cinema: The Future," 62.

[205] Ibid., 62.

[206] Ibid., 60.

Cineplex VIP

Cineplex was an early adopter of premium boutique cinema concepts, opening its first VIP cinemas at Toronto's Varsity theatre in 1998, where the chain had installed four VIP screens. For $12, a $3 premium on the regular ticket price, patrons would be treated to reserved seating, concierge service, a coat-check, plush, high-backed chairs and in-seat snack service. The cinemas also shared a lounge which in addition to seating, private bathrooms, and upscale decor, offered alcoholic beverages. Liquor license restrictions limited the VIP area to adults and meant that alcohol had to be consumed before entering the theatre. Each VIP screen was significantly smaller than a regular auditorium, between 24 and 36 seats, but equipped with "state of the art sound and screen." These cinemas were also available for rental for social and corporate events for $600.[207] The launch of VIP at Cineplex's Varsity coincided with the debut of General Cinema's Premium Cinema concept at Chicago's Yorktown theatre that month. General Cinema's concept included leather chairs, a separate entrance, valet parking, free popcorn, in-seat service, and an attached bistro, in a similarly upscale style. The two premium cinema concepts were the first of their kind in North America, but echoed earlier initiatives in Australia and the United Kingdom.[208]

Following the opening of the Varsity VIP screens, Cineplex's VIP concept remained dormant until May 2009, when the chain opened its Cineplex Odeon Westmount and VIP in London, Ontario.[209] The long delay in expanding on this idea at the Cineplex chain and among

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[207] Jane Gadd, "Patrons Can View Movies in High Style," *Globe and Mail* (April 3, 1998): A12.

[208] Gadd, "Patrons Can View Movies in High Style." Chris Jones, "General Cinema Targets High End," *Variety* 370, no. 9 (April 13, 1998): 9.

[209] Cineplex Entertainment, "Be a VIP at Cineplex Odeon Westmount and VIP Cinemas New Theatre Opens Friday, May 8th" (April 28, 2009).

American exhibitors was likely related to the crisis of the early 2000s in intervening years and subsequent skittishness about risky projects, especially those involving upscale megaplexes. Expansion of the concept has accelerated in the years following the opening of the Westmount cinema, with 15 VIP locations opening as either new constructions or renovations between 2009 and 2016.[210] In addition to the amenities offered at the flagship Varsity theatre, these new locations have added full lunch and dinner menus to their options for in-seat snack service. Notably, these new VIP cinemas include Cineplex's first adults-only, exclusively VIP site, at Cadillac Fairview's Shops at Don Mills in Toronto, opened in August 2014. The five-screen theatre provided the full range of ordinary VIP amenities, as well as extras including faux-leather recliners in two auditoria and valet parking.[211]

Cineplex's return to the VIP concept parallels similar developments among American exhibitors during this time. Like exhibitor PLFs, the lack of a shared standard around which luxury cinemas developed means that the services and features of these concepts vary from exhibitor to exhibitor. Cinéopolis, a Mexico-based exhibitor that has expanded into the United States; iPic, a small boutique cinema chain; and Alamo Drafthouse, a specialty cult and arthouse circuit based in Texas, were early American adopters of dine-in services and other premium options.[212] But large American chains including AMC, Cinemark, Carmike and Regal have begun to introduce their own premium concepts in recent years, incorporating both dine-in

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[210] Cineplex Entertainment, "VIP Cinemas," *Cineplex.com*, https://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/VIP (accessed January 1, 2017).

[211] Linda Barnard, "Cineplex VIP Cinemas Don Mills: Canada' First Adults-only Multiplex Opens Friday," *TheStar.com* (Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., August 15, 2015), https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2014/08/15/cineplex_vip_cinemas_don_mills_canadas_first_adultsonly_multiplex_opens_friday.html (accessed October 5, 2016).

[212] Michael White, "Going in Style," *Boxoffice* 150, no. 8 (August 2014): 18-23.

options and luxury seating.[213] Of these large American exhibitors, AMC was one of the first to experiment with the concept, converting its first theatre in 2008.[214] As with the UltraAVX PLF, Cineplex's return to VIP in 2009 and subsequent acceleration of the concept's expansion may have been encouraged by AMC's forays into premium dine-in screenings and fear of losing competitive advantage. At the end of 2016, Cineplex operated sixteen VIP locations on a total of 63 screens. The premium for the service ranges from $8 to $12, in some cases with separate costs for regular and 3D VIP screenings.[215]

Dolby Atmos

Dolby Atmos was unveiled with the June 2012 release of Pixar's *Brave*.[216] The new audio format was a nearly unprecedented transformation of theatrical sound; while previous format Dolby 7.1 had five sound regions, coming from speakers behind the screen, on the left and right walls, and both sides of back walls, Atmos allows sound to be controlled in up to 64 individual speakers, including some mounted on auditorium ceilings.[217] The effect, called object-based sound, offers more precise sound control and a more even dispersion of sound around the auditorium than multichannel audio. Proponents of Atmos argue this makes the auditory experience more naturalistic and immersive than older iterations of surround sound.[218] In the first year after its

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[213] Daniel Loria, "Leaving the Living Room Behind," *Boxoffice* 150, no. 12 (December 2014): 39-41. Ibid., 19-22.

[214] White, "Going in Style," 22.

[215] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3. Cineplex Entertainment, "VIP Cinemas."

[216] Amy Nicholson, "Making Reality a Reality," *Boxoffice* 148, no. 7 (July 2012): 29-32.

[217] Ibid., 29.

[218] Ibid., 29. Julian Pinn, "Is Immersive Audio the Saviour of Digital Sound?," *Boxoffice* 150, no. 6 (June 2014): 28-32.

launch, Atmos opened at more than 150 screens and released 30 titles in the new audio format.[219] By 2015, the format had been installed at more than 900 screens worldwide.[220] Cineplex first adopted Atmos for *Brave* in the summer of 2012 at its Yonge-Eglinton location.[221] Since then, the chain has incorporated the audio system into its UltraAVX PLF, though not all UltraAVX theatres have been retrofitted with Atmos. This choice is in line with similar moves by major American exhibitors to include Atmos and other cutting-edge sound formats in their PLF packages rather than charging a separate premium for sound.[222] At the end of 2016, Cineplex offered Dolby Atmos at 24 of its theatres as part of the UltraAVX experience, around 34% of its UltraAVX locations.[223]

Dolby Atmos is not the only newly developed audio format promising more immersive cinema sound. Belgian cinema technology company Barco launched its own "three-dimensional" audio format, Auro, in 2012 with the premiere of *Red Tails*. Unlike Atmos, Auro is an 11.1 multichannel format, whose claim to immersion derives from its ability to convey sounds at multiple heights. The system uses three height layers along the side walls of the theatre to create vertical sound variation.[224] Barco also acquired object-based sound company IOSONO in 2014, who introduced its own format in 2009 but failed to be adopted by exhibitors and distributors to

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[219] Annlee Ellingson, "Breaking the 3D Sound Barrier," *Boxoffice* 149, no. 7 (July 2013): 30.

[220] Silver, "Dolby Goes Premium As Atmos Continues Its International Expansion," 7-8.

[221] Dolby Laboratories, "Dolby Reveals List of First Dolby Atmos Global Locations" (June 8, 2012), http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/DLB/2976923208x0x576548/3DDCBC0C-BEEE-4EE4-923B-0B171E306F92/DLB_News_2012_6_8_Press_Releases.pdf (accessed October 7, 2016).

[222] Jerry Pierce, "Immersive Sound," *Boxoffice* 150, no. 9 (September 2014): 10-12.

[223] Cineplex Entertainment, "Dolby Atmos," *Cineplex.com*, http://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/DolbyAtmos (accessed January 1, 2017). Cineplex Entertainment, "UltraAVX," *Cineplex.com*, http://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/UltraAVX (accessed January 1, 2016).

[224] Pinn, "Is Immersive Audio the Saviour of Digital Sound?," 29-30.

the same extent as Atmos or Auro.[225] As of 2014, exhibitors worldwide had installed or planned to install 450 Auro systems.[226] Atmos and Auro are backward compatible with 5.1 and 7.1 surround sound systems, but the split between the two new audio formats has led to calls for a single immersive audio standard.[227] In 2014, the SMPTE (Society of Motion Picture Theatre Engineers) created a working group to approach the issue of standardized DCI (Digital Cinema Initiatives) specifications for immersive audio, a process that was still underway in 2016.[228] In the absence of this standard, a single digital projection file might contain 5.1 compatible audio track as well as tracks for the 11.1 Auro and the object-based Atmos.[229]

D-BOX

D-BOX motion seating was first adopted at Cineplex in June 2009, when the chain installed a test row of the chairs at its Cineplex Odeon Queensway Cinemas in Etobicoke, Ontario.[230] The technology had begun as a motion simulator for home theatres, developed in 1999 and first marketed in 2001 as a $30,000 device meant to be installed underneath a couch or recliner.[231] By

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[225] Barco, "Barco gains the team and expertise from IOSONO GmbH to further enhance the immersive sound experience in cinemas worldwide" (September 24, 2014), http://www.barco.com/en/News/Press-releases/Barco-gains-the-team-and-expertise-from-IOSONO-GmbH-to-further-enhance-the-immersive-sound-experienc.aspx (accessed October 6, 2016). Amy Nicholson, "A Difference You Can Hear," *Boxoffice* 145, no. 7 (July 2009): 22.

[226] Pierce, "Immersive Sound."

[227] Pinn, "Is Immersive Audio the Saviour of Digital Sound?," 29-31.

[228] Ibid., 30.

[229] Ibid., 31.

[230] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Welcomes D-BOX Motion Code Technology to Toronto" (June 18, 2009), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/68915789-8d73-454e-a9d8-d4d60a590d68/06%2018%2009%20Cineplex%20Entertainment%20welcomes%20D-BOX%20Motion%20Code%20Technology%20to%20Toronto.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Susan Krashinsky, "Will D-Box Be Cineplex's Next Big Thing?," *Globe and Mail* (July 20, 2009): B3.

[231] Bertrand Marotte, "D-Box Aiming to Crank Home Theatres Up a Notch," *Globe and Mail* (March 15, 2004): B3.

2006, the home technology had been refined into a recliner chair, retailing at $8,000.[232] At the movie theatre, D-BOX seating is controlled by a motion code embedded in the film's digital projection file. According to D-BOX, the motion seeks to immerse spectators in the film through subtle movements, rather than evoking the jolts of a theme park ride.[233] Movement is not constant throughout the film, but usually operates from a third up to half of the runtime.[234] The motions are generally based on the perspective of the camera, and encoded separately for each film by D-BOX technicians, who sometimes even create new motion effects for specific films.[235] Seats are generally not installed for entire auditoria, but a few rows in regular cinemas, and so are a more modest investment for exhibitors than converting an entire screen to IMAX or a new sound format, for example, and are much easier to test and expand gradually. Installation is free for exhibitors, with costs instead covered through long-term revenue sharing agreements.[236]

In November 2010, Cineplex signed an agreement to install D-BOX seating at ten new theatres, and, by December 2011, the chain had expanded that agreement to an additional ten locations.[237] Cineplex expanded the deal again by twenty locations in October 2014 and twenty-three in March 2016. At the end of 2016, the chain operated D-BOX at 77 of its locations, at

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232 "D-BOX, FOX Bring Movie Action to the Seat of Your Pants," *Globe and Mail* (August 3, 2006): B7.

233 Harrison, "Exhibs Shake Out Extra Coin," 14. Krashinsky, "Will D-Box Be Cineplex's Next Big Thing?." "What's Shakin'?," *Boxoffice* 146, no. 4 (April 2010): 46-47.

234 "What's Shakin'?," 47.

235 Harrison, "Exhibs Shake Out Extra Coin," 14. Krashinsky, "Will D-Box Be Cineplex's Next Big Thing?."

236 Harrison, "Exhibs Shake Out Extra Coin," 14.

237 Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Expands Relationship with D-BOX Technologies adding 250 MFX Seats to 10 Theatres" (December 22, 2011), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/c8d748ba-f5be-415d-a752-61b077254cb5/EV%20Final%20Cineplex%20Option.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016). Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Signs Agreement with D-BOX to add its Motion Systems to 10 Theatres" (November 9, 2010), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/b7972b68-3fc9-42e5-82f1-15bc94511a22/11%2009%2010%20D-BOX-Cineplex%20Agreement_FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

premiums between $5 and $8 for regular screenings, $8 and $11 for UltraAVX screenings, and $11 for 3D screenings.[238] As of July 2016, D-BOX technology has also been installed in more than 170 screens in the United States.[239] D-BOX has several competitors in motion seating, including Moving Image Technology's Cine-Sation, RedSeat Entertainment's TremorFX, and Dolphin Seating's VIB seat addition. Unlike D-BOX's encoding process, TremorFX and the VIB addition rely on realtime information from a film's audio track to generate a vibration effect.[240] These options are cheaper for exhibitors to install, but lack the quality control and variety of motion options built into D-BOX's design. To date, these alternative options seem to be less widely adopted than D-BOX.[241]

Barco Escape

At CinemaCon 2014, Barco unveiled a new ultra-widescreen format, a three-screen panorama, equipped with a 4K laser projector for the central screen and 2K projectors for the side screens, which it called Barco Escape. The new system was demonstrated with clips from *The Maze Runner*, which became the format's first release, opening in Escape in September 2014 on five Cinemark screens in the United States and two Barco screens in Belgium.[242] Escape's side screens can be used to either extend the frame of the central screen or to create a collage effect

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[238] Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3.

[239] "New D-BOX Screens in Texas and California," *Boxoffice* 152, no. 7 (July 2016): 12.

[240] Loria, "Leaving the Living Room Behind," 41.

[241] Ibid., 41.

[242] Giardina, "CinemaCon: Barco Escape Inks Multi-Picture Deals with Cross Creek, Fundamental Films."

with additional content.[243] This effect is so far not used throughout the film but only for specific scenes, which can be converted in post-production or shot specifically for the format.[244] Though the technology extends the frame, it can be installed in most existing multiplex screens.[245] In 2015, Fox agreed to a five-year deal for Escape releases, beginning with the follow-up *The Maze-Runner: The Scorch Trials* (2015). 2016 saw Barco sign agreements for new releases in the format with Cross Creek Pictures and Shanghai-based Fundamental Films through 2018, as well as a deal for Paramount's *Star Trek Beyond* (2016).[246] In the summer of 2016, Cineplex announced plans to unveil its first Barco Escape screens at its Scotiabank Theatre locations in Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto in time for *Star Trek Beyond*'s opening weekend, charging a $5 premium.[247] *Star Trek Beyond* opened on 30 Barco Escape screens worldwide, featuring 20 minutes of Escape footage.[248] Though the format is still in its early stages, Barco hopes to open one hundred Escape screens worldwide by the end of 2016, and three thousand in the next three to five years.[249]

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243 Cohen, *Variety*. Carolyn Giardina, "CinemaCon: Barco Introduces Tri-Screen Theater Configuration; Plans Install at Fox's Zanuck Theater," *The Hollywood Reporter* (The Hollywood Reporter, March 25, 2014), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/print/691206 (accessed August 6, 2016).

244 Giardina, "CinemaCon: Barco Introduces Tri-Screen Theater Configuration; Plans Install at Fox's Zanuck Theater."

245 Cohen, "CinemaCon: Barco Unveils 'Wraparound' Screen System."

246 Giardina, *The Hollywood Reporter*. McNary, *Variety*.

247 Cineplex Entertainment, "Barco Escape Coming Soon to Three Cineplex Theatres" (July 7, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%20Barco%20Escape%20Release%20FINAL_20160707142333_0.pdf (accessed July 18, 2016). Linda Barnard, "Cineplex Opening Three Barco Escape Theatres in Canada," *TheStar.com* (Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., July 7, 2016), https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2016/07/07/cineplex-opening-three-barco-escape-theatres-in-canada.html (accessed April 13, 2017).

248 Carolyn Giardina, "'Star Trek Beyond': The Nail-Biting Rush to Get It to the New Wide-Screen Theater," *The Hollywood Reporter* (The Hollywood Reporter, July 22, 2016), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/star-trek-beyond-barco-escape-912679 (accessed August 6, 2016).

249 Giardina, "CinemaCon: Barco Escape Inks Multi-Picture Deals with Cross Creek, Fundamental Films." Giardina, "'Star Trek Beyond': The Nail-Biting Rush to Get It to the New Wide-Screen Theater."

4DX

In April 2016, Cineplex announced plans to install a 4DX multi-sensory experience at its Cineplex Cinemas Yonge-Dundas and VIP location in Toronto. On November 4 of that year, the cinema opened its eighty-seat auditorium, charging an $8.50 premium for 2D screenings and an $11.50 premium for 3D screenings.[250] 4DX, owned by Korea-based conglomerate CJ, offers 3D projection paired with motion seating equipped to produce a range of effects: water spray, mist, rain, snow, fog, wind, shots of air, light flashes, bubbles, scents, and tickling.[251] The first 4DX system in North America was installed at Regal Entertainment's L.A. Live theatre.[252] But the format has existed in Korea since the release of a 4D version of *Avatar* in 2010 and also has strong footholds in China and Mexico; in December 2016, 4DX operated on more than 300 screens in 42 countries.[253] Following the opening of 4DX at the Regal L.A. Live, Marcus Theatres signed its own agreement to install 4DX at its Gurnee Cinema in Chicago by late 2015.[254] In August 2016, Regal signed the most extensive North American agreement with CJ to date, committing to open seventeen 4DX screens in the United States by 2018. With Regal's

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250 Cineplex Entertainment, "Canada's First 4DX Auditorium Opens this Friday at Cineplex Cinemas Yonge-Dundas and VIP" (November 1, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%204DX%20Opening%20Release%20FINAL_20161101164601_0.PDF (accessed January 12, 2017). Sammy Hudes, "Effects You Can See, Feel and Smell at Canada's First 4DX Cinema," *TheStar.com* (Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., November 4, 2016), https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2016/11/04/effects-you-can-see-feel-and-smell-at-canadas-first-4dx-cinema.html (accessed April 13, 2017).

251 Cineplex Entertainment, "Canada's Only 4DX Experience," *Cineplex.com*, http://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/4DX (accessed October 9, 2016).

252 Carolyn Giardina, "L.A. Live's New '4DX' Theater Has a Whole Lot of Shaking Going on," *The Hollywood Reporter* (The Hollywood Reporter, June 30, 2014), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/la-lives-new-4dx-theater-715599 (accessed August 6, 2016).

253 "CJ 4DPLEX: 4DX Screens in Operation Passes 300 in 42 Countries," *Boxoffice* 152, no. 12 (December 2016): 8.

254 Carolyn Giardina, "4DX 4D Movie Theater Planned in Chicago," *The Hollywood Reporter* (The Hollywood Reporter, September 1, 2015), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/4dx-4d-movie-theater-planned-819349 (accessed August 6, 2016). Giardina, "L.A. Live's New '4DX' Theater Has a Whole Lot of Shaking Going on."

existing 4DX theatres in Los Angeles and New York and Marcus Theatre's Gurnee Cinema 4DX screen, this deal would bring the American 4DX screen count to twenty when fulfilled.[255]

While branded premium experiences offer a diverse range of features and appeals, they also emerge within overarching movements in exhibitor practices. In their points of convergence, these commodities mobilize ideas about what cinema is and should be and chart trajectories for future exhibitor investments. The remainder of this chapter tracks these areas of connectivity and investigates how branded premium experiences have reorganized audiences' encounters with cinematic sites.

Animating the technological advances of branded premium experiences is an escalated investment, among exhibitors and third-party technology partners, in increased immersive realism, or what Andre Bazin called "the myth of total cinema." Bazin argued that the major structuring force around the technological development of the cinematic apparatus is the idea of producing a "perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, colour, and relief," in other words, of a technology that could represent reality as completely as our own lived experience. For Bazin, this myth is a central, ongoing force in cinema's development. He goes so far as to claim that cinema "has not yet been invented," arguing that cinematic technology continues to approach but fails to attain this core ideal.[256] In his analysis of institutional and commercial use of IMAX at museums, theme parks, and shopping malls during the 1990s, Charles Acland argues that the

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[255] Carolyn Giardina, "Regal Inks Deal with CJ 4DPLEX to Bring More Motion-Activated Seats to Its Theatres," *The Hollywood Reporter* (August 1, 2016), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/regal-cj-4dplex-deal-bring-916183 (accessed August 6, 2016).

[256] André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, ed. Hugh Gray, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 20-21.

format is marked by its investment in the idea Bazin identifies: the hope of creating cinema capable of transporting its spectators elsewhere and simulating the experience of "being there." With this concept fuelling IMAX's development and promotion of technological immersion, IMAX establishes its own technology, rather than cinematic or narrative technique, as the source of the format's realism and the rationale for continued investment. "Only IMAX film systems can create IMAX film realism," Acland writes, summarizing the circular logic of the brand's self-presentation.[257]

Branded premium experiences also draw on the narrative of "total cinema," promising a more immersive and realistic experience as a result of technological enhancement to screen size, visuals, sound, and an array of sensory effects. As in Bazin's formulation, in which the cinematic medium is organized around enhanced realism, a common feature of exhibitor advertising for these technologically-driven commodities is that they offer a more truly "cinematic" experience; for instance, Cineplex's tag for UltraAVX proclaims that "movies were made for this."[258] Similar to the dynamic Acland describes taking place with IMAX in the 1990s, brand names are essential to this process, acting as markers of the distinct immersive features of their associated cinema technologies. The names IMAX, Dolby, UltraAVX, D-BOX, Barco, and 4DX are featured prominently in exhibitor marketing, where they summarize the features on offer and provide guarantees of the quality and realism of the experiences they stand for. Tapping into the idea of total cinema to promote these commodities, exhibitors centre the technological provision of immersive realism as the quintessential use value of public film exhibition.

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[257] Charles R. Acland, "IMAX Technology and the Tourist Gaze," *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (1998): doi: 10.1080/095023898335492.

[258] Cineplex Entertainment, "UltraAVX."

This emphasis on greater realism through technological immersion enables cinematic vision that promises a combination of wonder and visual control for spectators. Acland argues that IMAX's financial and discursive investments in the concept of "total cinema" are intertwined with its promise of a particular subjective experience he calls the "tourist gaze," citing John Urry. According to Acland, the tourist gaze enabled by IMAX offers the effect of "movement without moving, tourism without travel," produced by the interlocking relationships between IMAX's distinct cinematic technology, shooting style, institutional locations, and documentary subject matter. It promises, through its technological apparatus, an "encounter with distant lives and places, but always through a set of ordering and structuring principles,"[259] eliciting amazement and a sense of visual mastery for the spectator over the faraway, remarkable locations and people brought close by IMAX's technological wizardry.[260]

The pleasures offered by branded premium experiences are more heterogenous than the ones Acland describes due to the wider range of technologies they employ and the different theatrical setting, subject matter, and cinematic style in which they operate at the contemporary multiplex. However, marketing by exhibitors and third-party technology partners continues to organize these commodities around their potential for simulating transportation and immersion into fantastic cinematic environments. Common in these trade discourses is an emphasis on subtlety and increased naturalism over more obtrusive effects. In her comparative study of historical and contemporary 3D, Ariel Rogers distinguishes between "emergence" effects of 1950s 3D, which created the appearance of objects protruding into the audience space, and the

[259] Acland, "IMAX Technology and the Tourist Gaze," 436.

[260] Ibid., 438-439.

emphasis in contemporary 3D effects of creating the appearance of greater depth behind the screen. This focus on creating the impression of a more naturalistic “window on the world,” Rogers argues, was in part was driven by the desire to create linkages between this more subtle application of 3D and “quality” filmmaking to distance new 3D technologies from the failures of older forms.[261] D-BOX motion seating makes similar appeals. “We’re not trying to jolt people around,” comments a D-BOX marketing representative in one trade report. “We’re trying to replicate how it would feel in real life. It’s all about the subtleties and refinements of the movement. And it’s really hard to explain it to somebody who has never tried it, because the only comparison people have is theme park rides.”[262] Trade articles about immersive sound formats Barco Auro and Dolby Atmos also highlight the understated but sophisticated effect their technologies have for spectators. The invisibility of these sound technologies, though they pose a challenge for exhibitors and partners in marketing the formats, is often framed as evidence of their success: “In the movie theatre sound has to do three things: be clear, be immersive, and be powerful,” writes Amy Nicholson in a *Boxoffice* feature on Atmos. “And if a sound system succeeds in all three, it’s paid the ultimate compliment: it’s so natural, audiences forget it’s even there.”[263] This emphasis on subtlety and naturalism has exceptions—4DX, for instance, has been criticized by some commentators for promising immersion and delivering a distracting and uncomfortable results—but less important here than the actual experience of audiences are the

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[261] Rogers, *Cinematic Appeals*, 181-189.

[262] Harrison, “Exhibs Shake Out Extra Coin,” 14.

[263] Nicholson, “Making Reality a Reality,” 29.

discourses mobilized by exhibitors around these commodities.[264] Technology-driven branded premium experiences promise immersive, seamless transportation that opens the world of the film through subtle technological craft and fragments it into a new upscale commodity. Unlike the tourist gaze in 90s IMAX presentations, audiences travel to and experience mastery over representations of a fantasy world rather than a real one. However, this discursive positioning of technological systems similarly promises a form of visual control for the spectator by bringing the fictional world onscreen within reach, an experience inflected by power relations and class position in particular.

Service-based branded premium experiences offer a more straightforward justification for their premium pricing, justifying their increased value through expanded forms of refinement and convenience, including reserved seating, rocker-back chairs, and dine-in service. Beyond these new amenities, they also offer the opportunity for separation from other audience members. Reserved seating demonstrates a milder version of this principle, allowing cinemagoers to select prime seats before the show and arrive whenever they like, without having to worry about the social friction resulting from someone occupying their preferred place. Cineplex VIP offers a more intensified version of the phenomenon, with VIP screens and licensed lounges restricted to premium-paying adults only. In its early marketing of the VIP concept, Cineplex drew comparisons to movie executives' private screening rooms, first class airline tickets, and exclusive boxes for sporting events, goods drawing from a similarly restrictive principle for their appeal.[265] While ticket premiums are one factor erecting barriers for patrons, as Willie Osterweil

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[264] Kaitlyn Tiffany, "The Batman V Superman 4DX Experience Is Brutish, Unapologetic Capitalism Sprayed Directly in Your Face," *The Verge* (April 1, 2016), http://www.theverge.com/2016/4/1/11347528/batman-v-superman-movie-4dx-experience-torture (accessed February 3, 2017).

[265] Gadd, "Patrons Can View Movies in High Style."

points out in a *New Inquiry* essay about the forced flight of teenagers from upscaling theatres, "more service always also means more surveillance," an observation pertinent for other audience members being shut out from or policed within these cinema spaces.[266]

This fragmentation of separate, upscaled commodities at the theatre extends to technologically-driven branded premium experiences as well. While some, like D-BOX motion seating, create separate sections of the auditorium, most of these technological commodities command separate screens and showtimes, which exhibitors are free to allocate to prime timeslots. This spatial and experiential segmentation means that purchasing branded premium experiences is not merely an upgrade on a regular movie ticket, but a separate experience that moves customers through the cinema space in a different way than those who purchase basic tickets. As much as the features of the experiences themselves, this segmentation marks them as more refined goods. Both technologically-driven and service-based branded premium experiences fragment cinemagoing into a set of tiered commodities that not only create higher costs for access, but become markers of distinction for audiences imagined in exclusionary class terms. Such movements intensify the upscaling of theatres observed in the 1980s and 1990s, erecting barriers to access and enjoyment of certain cinematic experiences within the cinema as much as at its doors.

Branded premium experiences and their restrictive implications for audiences are one of the most conspicuous aspects of emerging exhibition practice, promising an improved cinematic experience, based on a logic of increased refinement through immersive realism, visual power, and social separation. These discourses are expressed not only in new exhibition commodities,

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266 Willie Osterweil, "Not for You," *The New Inquiry* (July 22, 2016), http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/not-for-you/ (accessed October 7, 2016).

but through the marketing practices of exhibitors. In the next chapter, I examine these trends as they manifest in exhibitor branding, addressing the way these initiatives have sought to justify the historical transformations at work during the 2000s and 2010s while they gesture to exhibitors' deepening investments in the bourgeois audience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exhibitor Branding and Cinemagoing Nostalgia in a Changing Industry

While new theatre experiences and commodities are crucial to understanding the emerging changes in the exhibition environment of the 2000s and 2010s, equally important is an understanding of how exhibitors have altered their branding and marketing practices to align with the industry's conditions in this moment of transition. Branding is informed by and produces the conditions under which other forms of business practice take place. It also provides a key space for a highly visible expression of the ideas, meanings, and values that underlie these practices. This chapter takes Cineplex's December 2015 "See the Big Picture" brand campaign as an example of how the exhibitor has altered its branding practices in relation to corresponding transformations in the company's structure, holdings, operations and products in recent years. This branding initiative indicated a renewed focus on marketing for Cineplex, requiring both greater financial investment and more complex strategies than previous campaigns. It also exploited the release of *Star Wars: Episode VII — The Force Awakens* (2015) to create one of the most visible advertising efforts in Canadian exhibition history, benefitting from the exceptional size of the audience it drew and its potent evocation of nostalgia and cross-generational narratives. I argue that the campaign deepened the audience fragmentation and upscaling of branded premium experiences by privileging white bourgeois audiences as Cineplex's preferred cinemagoers through the campaign's modes of address.

In the megaplex period, exhibitor branding practice shifted away from the marketing of individual films and towards a model "where the selling of an entertainment environment [in this case, the movie theatre] is ongoing, an activity punctuated by new commodity texts," what Charles Acland calls the film industry's "permanent marketing campaign."[267] A $22-million effort put forth in 1986 by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and NATO's (National Association of Theatre Owners) joint Exhibitor/Distributor Council to "sell moviegoing as a whole" was the most direct evidence of this effort.[268] But this dynamic also took place in the services and spaces of movie theatres. The upscaling practices of the megaplex model themselves acted as a form of branding, linking cinemagoing activity, at least at the major theatre chains, with the values of bourgeois refinement and middle class consumption. A renewed focus on decor, customer service, upscale amenities, expanded concession offerings, and "total entertainment" created spaces designed for upper and middle class spectators, or at least, those segments of the audience able to readily identify with the image of the ideal consumer. The offerings of the megaplex were also contained within an environment that emphasized security and played off anxieties about the dangers of city streets and their inhabitants. In his discussion of these often racially-inflected discourses of safety at the megaplex, Acland introduces a salient comparison: the megaplex as "gated community." He argues that through megaplexing, exhibitors created environments of public leisure that sought to replicate the pleasures of the city within a contained environment, using cinema admissions as their form of regulation.[269] These practices, despite exhibitors' aspirations to draw a mass audience, focused on the desires of white bourgeois cinemagoers. The idea of "selling moviegoing" was, through its application, targeted

[267] Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 77, 92.

[268] Ibid., 92.

[269] Ibid., 146-150.

at a specific class and race segment of the potential moviegoing audience, even as it continued to frame the megaplex and its appeals as universal ones.

Despite the economic failures of the megaplex period, the exhibition industry has deepened its commitment to upscaling as a practice and the white, bourgeois audiences that such practices target as it pursues new forms of growth. Structural changes in the industry over the last fifteen years and the introduction of new exhibition commodities have allowed exhibitors to spread out their business risks, leverage audiences and resources in different ways, and reap greater profits. But they have also created a challenge for exhibitors: new practices and commodities must be sold to audiences and integrated with customers' existing perceptions of cinemagoing and cinema chains. These practices require exhibitors not only to market enhancements to theatre spaces and services, as they did for megaplexes, but consolidate critical segments of their audiences around new commodities like large formats, 3D, motion seating, multi-sensory effects, and comfort- and service-based amenities like reserved seating and luxury cinema concepts. As the number of commodities on offer multiplies, branding has become an increasingly important tool for exhibitors to package these products for their audiences. But branding also provides a mechanism through which exhibitors produce and reify these groupings among audience members, encouraging some cinemagoers to identify with given spaces, commodities, and activities, while excluding and marginalizing others. Despite the widespread use of market research and demographics in crafting branding initiatives, marketing activities do not simply appeal to pre-existing categories of the population, but actively create and reproduce these categories. Examining exhibitor branding reveals the strategies which shape emerging exhibition practices and the common-sense ideas that exhibitors hold about the cultural practice of cinemagoing and the cinemagoers they wish to serve.

On December 15th, 2015, Cineplex Entertainment launched a new "integrated brand platform" organized around the brand slogan "See the Big Picture" and replacing its previous tag, "Escape with Us." This major branding overhaul came just three days before the December 18th release of *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens*, the first instalment of the much-anticipated new Star Wars trilogy and its associated spin-offs, capitalizing on the event status of the film to increase the visibility of its own initiative. The centrepiece of the new branding's launch was an animated short film, *Lily and the Snowman*, designed for the Cineplex's trailer lineup as a feature presentation tag during the busy holiday release season.[270] The short tells the story of a young girl, Lily, who builds a snowman that comes to life and performs shadow puppet shows for her on her back fence. When spring comes, the girl puts her friend in a garage refrigerator to protect him from the heat, and returns the next winter to let him out so they can play together again. As the years go by, however, the girl grows up and forgets her playmate. Now an adult, Lily is working late in a deserted office building when a chance accident with a desk lamp and a snow globe reminds her of her forgotten friend. Rushing home, she finds the snowman right where she left him, and she and her young daughter enjoy a shadow puppet show in the backyard. The film closes by panning away to the starry sky, overlaid by the phrase "Make time for what you love," followed by the Cineplex logo, with "See the Big Picture" appearing underneath. The story is told without dialogue, and a reimagined acoustic cover of Genesis's

[270] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Calls On Canadians to 'See The Big Picture'" (December 15, 2015), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/c891949f-2690-43b5-b746-e1d1347065f2/Cineplex%20See%20The%20Big%20Picture%20Launch-%20Final%20ENG.pdf (accessed March 26, 2016).

1978 song “Follow You, Follow Me” by Canadian singers Adaline (in the English version) and Julie Crochetière (in the French version) sets a sentimental tone.[271] In addition to replacing the feature presentation trailer with the short during its trailer lineup throughout December 2015, and January and February 2016, Cineplex promoted it on the brand’s social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Across the web, the video attracted more than 60-million views.[272] Cineplex also featured the short on its sponsored new release section in AirCanada’s enRoute in-flight entertainment system.[273]

The broader ad campaign campaign involved investment in advertising mastheads on Youtube, MSN, and Yahoo from December to mid-February and paid embedded social media content on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.[274] Though the campaign cost less than $1-million, these media buys were much more extensive and involved a larger investment than its previous efforts for the “Escape with Us” campaign, marking a renewed focus on branding for the chain.[275] A four-minute version of the song featured in the short was made available on iTunes, Google Play, and Spotify, with proceeds benefitting Cineplex’s national charity partner, Free the Children, and even made rounds on Canadian radio stations.[276] The brand announced that “See

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[271] Cineplex Entertainment, “Cineplex Calls On Canadians to 'See The Big Picture'.” cineplexmovies, Abdo and Patterson, *Lily & The Snowman*.

[272] Susan Krashinsky, “Captive Audience,” *Globe and Mail* (December 16, 2016): B1.

[273] Cineplex Entertainment, “Cineplex Calls On Canadians to 'See The Big Picture'.”

[274] Ibid. Sonya Fatah, “Why Cineplex Has a New Brand Platform,” *Media in Canada* (Brunico Communications, December 16, 2015), http://mediaincanada.com/2015/12/16/why-cineplex-has-a-new-brand-platform/ (accessed March 28, 2016).

[275] Ibid. Krashinsky, “Captive Audience.”

[276] Cineplex Entertainment, “Cineplex Calls On Canadians to 'See The Big Picture'.” Cineplex Entertainment, “Cineplex's 'A Balloon for Ben' Inspires Canadians to 'See the Big Picture'” (December 8, 2016), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/press-releases/Cineplex%20A%20Balloon%20for%20Ben%20Launch%20Release%20-%20ENG_20161208144946_0.pdf (accessed December 9, 2016).

the Big Picture" would be part of its activities with the charity going forward. Cineplex also stated that the slogan would be used internally, as a central part of its "employee engagement activities and strategies" for theatre-level and corporate staff.[277] Following the end of *Lily and the Snowman*'s holiday run in February, the rebranding initiative continued, replacing the short with a new feature presentation trailer that animated Cineplex's amphitheatre logo and closed with the new slogan. In the press release outlining its plans for the brand platform, Cineplex wrote that *Lily and the Snowman* is the first in a series of short films organized around the "See the Big Picture" strategy, and that future iterations will involve calls-to-create and user-generated content integration alongside standard social media promotion and paid embedded advertising. Though the user-generated dimension of the social media campaign has yet to materialize, these projections speak to Cineplex's commitment to continuing this branding strategy over the long term.[278]

The "See the Big Picture" brand campaign is a useful case study for examining the way exhibitors have sought to frame cinemagoing as a cultural activity following their pursuit of new exhibition commodities and dramatic changes in their business model. It comes at a moment when Cineplex has demonstrated an aggressive pursuit of diversified holdings and a significant investment in a broad set of upscale exhibition commodities. In addition to the historically significant moment of its emergence, the co-articulation of the campaign with the release of *The Force Awakens* also led to a high water-mark for the visibility of such an exhibitor-led initiative in Canada. Despite playing for only fourteen days in the fourth quarter of 2015, the film

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[277] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Calls On Canadians to 'See The Big Picture'."

[278] Ibid.

accounted for 22% of the quarter's $196-million box office revenue, which drove Cineplex to record fourth-quarter and annual profits.[279] In the first quarter of 2016, the film's revenues comprised 13% of the quarter's $193-million box-office returns, which broke first quarter records for the company.[280] Though *Lily and the Snowman* played ahead of every film screened at Cineplex during December 2015 and January and February 2016, the draw of *The Force Awakens* ensured that it was viewed by a much larger audience than even the usual holiday crowds. Cineplex provides attendance data on a quarterly, rather than a monthly basis, so the precise audience count for the initial campaign is difficult to determine. However, combined attendance in the fourth quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 was 41 million patrons, each quarter breaking all-time quarterly highs, likely due in large part to the influence of *The Force Awakens*. Linking *Lily and the Snowman* with the release of *The Force Awakens* went beyond merely harnessing the film's event status to lend greater exposure to the new branding platform. Cineplex's short and the associated branding campaign also forged a paratextual relationship with the blockbuster, relying on its nostalgic and inter-generational associations among audience members to shore up the campaign's meanings and link these values with the Cineplex brand. The "See the Big Picture" campaign demonstrates a much stronger emphasis on branding by Cineplex in terms of financial investment, visibility, and sophisticated strategy. The campaign draws on properties and discourses outside its direct control to reinforce its vision of cinemagoing and effectively communicate those ideas to a large segment of its audience. It also

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[279] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Inc. Reports Record Fourth Quarter and Annual Results" (February 9, 2016), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/Attachments/NewItems/Q1%202016%20Press%20Release-%20FINAL_20160503124531_0.pdf (accessed November 14, 2016).

[280] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Inc. Reports Record First Quarter Results, Announces Dividend Increase and Amended Credit Facilities" (May 3, 2016), http://irfiles.cineplex.com/Attachments/NewItems/Q1%202016%20Press%20Release-%20FINAL_20160503124531_0.pdf (accessed November 14, 2016).

seizes on these marketing strategies at a key moment in its overall trajectory as a film exhibitor, as a means of championing changes in its business while incorporating this change into a narrative of continuity and stability for audiences.

In trade press about the launch of "See the Big Picture," Cineplex explained the campaign and new tag as a necessary step to create a brand identity that accounted for its most recent diversification efforts. The company's representatives argued that Cineplex's previous slogan, "Escape with Us," no longer reflected the chain's holdings in disc and digital film sales, digital signage, vending and arcade equipment, online video games and The Rec Room restaurant and entertainment venues. Seeking to establish a new "brand promise" that reflected the company's current activities and appealed to the perceived needs of a contemporary audience, Cineplex surveyed Canadians, with the help of an outside market research firm, about "their relationship to entertainment and the Cineplex brand."[281] The new slogan would need to function internally, at the level of promoting the business and its practices to employees and partners. It would also need to work externally, framing traditional exhibition practice and new entertainment offerings to existing and potential audience members. In November 2015, Cineplex hired Canadian public relations agency Hill+Knowlton, its first national PR agency of record, after a competitive process. This decision was also framed in trade press as a necessary step in managing its newest initiatives, in particular The Rec Room and newly-acquired World Gaming online gaming assets.[282] The agency went on to provide communications support for the "See the Big Picture" campaign. The new slogan was chosen by the Toronto-based advertising agency Zula Alpha

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[281] Fatah, "Why Cineplex Has a New Brand Platform."

[282] Danny Kucharsky, "Cineplex Selects Hill+Knowlton As PR Agency of Record," *Marketing Magazine* (Rogers Media Inc., November 5, 2016), http://www.marketingmag.ca/brands/cineplex-selects-hillknowlton-as-pr-agency-of-record-160770 (accessed November 14, 2016).

Kilo, who created the campaign in collaboration with Cineplex's internal advertising team, after consulting the results of Cineplex's market research.[283] Explaining the rationale behind the new slogan, VP of Communications Pat Marshall commented: "'See the Big Picture' worked well for Cineplex because it reinforced the messaging that came out loud and clear in our research, that as Canadians we do need to take a step back…to prioritize joy and entertainment in our lives."[284] The gesture to market research here elides the constructed nature of market surveys and the campaign itself, presenting the latter as a natural outgrowth of the essential truth uncovered by the former. Whatever the data showed, *Lily and the Snowman* reflects Cineplex's stated approach, in its depiction of a working mother who discovers the need to return to her own childlike enjoyment of cinema and share these values with her child. "See the Big Picture" as a slogan leaves the door open to a future mobilization of these ideas in service of the company's other burgeoning entertainment properties, and could also easily encompass a variety of new diversification efforts in coming years.

Despite the flexibility of the "See the Big Picture" slogan, the campaign's initial form centred on cinemagoing and its meaning and value in everyday life. In this examination, it differed significantly from the previous "Escape with Us" slogan and the *100 Years of Movies* clip that *Lily and the Snowman* replaced as a feature presentation trailer. Through the campaign's departure from previous branding initiatives, a disjuncture between the official explanation for the "See the Big Picture" campaign and the complexity of its operations begins to emerge. As a slogan, the "Escape with Us" tag evokes cinema's long-championed power to enable viewers to

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[283] Josh Kolm, "Cineplex Looks at the Big Picture," *Strategy* (Brunico Communications, December 15, 2015), http://strategyonline.ca/2015/12/15/cineplex-looks-at-the-big-picture/ (accessed March 28, 2016).

[284] Fatah, "Why Cineplex Has a New Brand Platform."

escape from the discomforts and difficulties of daily life and immerse themselves in the world of entertainment. This escape is enabled emotionally, through narrative craft and filmmaking techniques; technologically, through the use of advanced presentation equipment; and experientially, through the separation of the cinematic site from the spaces of everyday life. The slogan emphasizes the unique qualities of the movie theatre and signals the individualistic, escapist pleasures it might offer the viewer. Though the slogan also raises the question of what the cinemagoer might need to escape from, its focus rests on the cinematic space and apparatus, advocating for their unique qualities in a vague but familiar manner.

The *100 Years of Movies* clip that *Lily and the Snowman* replaced also draws on the technological power and spectacle of cinema and its capacity to offer audiences immersive experiences. The clip premiered as part of Cineplex's 2012 celebration of the 100-year anniversary of the Famous Players chain, and linked the history of cinema technology to the development of aviation in a celebration of technological advancement.[285] *100 Years of Movies* begins with a flickering, black and white image of an early plane taking flight, treated in postproduction to look like primitive film stock. As the plane moves through the clouds, it transforms into increasingly advanced models and soars ever-higher, as the film shifts into colour and through 16mm and 35mm-like effects towards the clarity of modern digital projection. Finally, a high-powered fighter jet breaks through the Earth's atmosphere entirely before taking the form of a space shuttle. The shuttle soars past us, until we see only its engines thrusting forward into the stars, which streak before our eyes as it accelerates. There's a burst of light and

[285] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex Entertainment Celebrates 100 Years of Movie Memories" (January 18, 2012), http://mediafiles.cineplex.com/_att/85c80af8-2b74-4da1-98ab-56a45d7a1c61/01%2018%2012%20100%20Years%20FINAL.pdf (accessed July 19, 2016).

an explosive sound, and the shuttle disappears, leaving behind the Cineplex logo, with a banner reading "100 Years of Movie Memories" hanging below, fringed by a glowing blue and purple nebula and surrounded by floating asteroids. The clip was produced in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional versions, further underscoring its showcase of cinema's technological advancements.[286] By linking cinema to aviation, the clip centres the advancement of cinema technology as the medium's most enduring and meaningful feature, and places Cineplex at the cutting edge of new forms of presentation. It also champions the ability of this technology to bring us deeper into the frame and provide more sophisticated thrills, in its use of successively more powerful aircraft and through its shifting point-of-view, which brings us closer to a first-person perspective as the clip goes on. *100 Years of Movies* presents cinema as an awe-inspiring technological juggernaut, accelerating into the future with Cineplex at the helm.

In contrast to the connotations of the "Escape with Us" slogan and their more emphatic expression in the *100 Years of Movies* feature presentation clip, the "See the Big Picture" slogan emphasizes the personal and emotional over the technological and spectacular. The "See the Big Picture" tag situates cinema as a part of an everyday life experience, through which consumers are called not to escape reality, but reflect on what is truly important in their lives. Playing off contemporary issues of "work-life balance," it suggests the importance of a temporary withdrawal from the stress and disorder of daily life to care for the self and seek clarity, refreshment, and purpose. Though the play on "big picture" still evokes the large screen of the cinema and the experience it stands for, the appeal of the "See the Big Picture" slogan is notably more emotionally-driven than the escapist call of the chain's previous tag. Here, the focus is on

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[286] Spy Films,. *Cineplex: 100 Years of Movies*, directed by Arev Manoukian (2012; Vimeo, last modified December 17, 2012), Online video, 0:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUhCMT0fxhM (accessed November 17, 2016).

the viewer and their needs; while there is a reference to the unique characteristics of cinema, the slogan situates these characteristics as the solution to the more central problem of the viewer's everyday stresses and anxieties.

These ideas manifest more forcefully in the *Lily and the Snowman* short film, which operates in a much different register than the spectacular technological celebration of *100 Years of Movies* which it replaced. *Lily and the Snowman* uses a narrative storyline and the evocation of nostalgic emotions to frame cinemagoing as a mental and emotional respite from the stresses of everyday life. By beginning in Lily's childhood, the most obvious emotional work the film accomplishes is reminding the audience both of their own "inner child" which still needs the "magic" of cinema, connecting that impulse to a duty to return to cinemagoing and share those experiences with younger viewers. To accomplish this, *Lily and the Snowman* positions the cinematic apparatus, in the figure of the snowman, not as an awe-inspiring technological force, but as an intimate, yet magical friend capable of making the ordinary extraordinary. Coupling its story with an acoustic version a 1978 Genesis song and forgoing dialogue further underscores the nostalgic mood of the short. The music also generates longing for an imagined past by substantially reworking the original song with string instruments and a female vocalist, heightening its sentimentality. The emphasis on relationships and childhood is also reinforced by the Christmas timing of the campaign, during which sentimental narratives have a more resonance and, practically, parents generally have additional time away from work to spend with their children. The investment in a spot on Air Canada's enRoute in-flight entertainment system further benefits from the campaign's timing, presumably seeking to spark cinematic nostalgia among passengers visiting loved ones for the holidays. By depicting cinema as a vessel for relationships, the film ultimately encourages viewers to view cinemagoing as not only a pleasurable form of entertainment, but as a moral duty.

As Lily grows up, her socializing as a young adult and work obligations as grown woman are positioned as distractions that interfere with the purity of Lily's connection with her childhood friend the snowman, and by extension, her own sense of wonder and joy. Importantly, those distractions are linked to specific technologies: the cellphone and the computer. As a young adult, Lily is depicted as too busy talking animatedly on her phone to notice her playmate, and later, working late at night at her desktop computer as an adult, she seems to have forgotten him completely. These moments position the new technologies, frequently cited in popular discourses about cinemagoing's demise, as a threat to the exhibition business. They are also shown as interfering the retreat and reflection championed by the campaign, becoming tools of either frivolous distraction or unpleasant drudgery. Here, it is not entertainment in general, but cinemagoing in particular, that brings Lily such happiness as a child and allows her to return to the clarifying feelings and renewing bonds which she temporarily loses access to as an overworked mother. The focus on technological spectacle that characterized *100 Years of Movies* has been eclipsed by *Lily and the Snowman*'s emotional appeals, but is repurposed in the service of the short's focus on a more relational, emotional connection to cinema. This is seen most clearly in those sequences that show the simple shadow puppets on Lily's backyard fence becoming fully realized, illuminated cinematic figures: an eagle soaring over a magnificent canyon; a cowboy's daring leap across the expanse; and a couple meeting in a crowd of umbrellas, surrounded by lights as they embrace. Cinema is still granted a transportive, immersive power, but, unlike in *100 Years of Movies*, that power is not sheer technological prowess but the potent emotional connection moviegoing engenders with the images onscreen, loved ones, and the ritual of cinemagoing itself.

Key to *Lily and the Snowman*'s ability to make this emotional appeal is that, in contrast to *100 Years of Movies*, it depicts cinemagoers in specific terms. *100 Years of Movies* acts as a display of figurative technological power to which the viewer stands as an impersonal witness. In contrast, *Lily and the Snowman*'s representation of Lily taps into gendered narratives about motherhood and working women to ground its nostalgic call for a renewed focus on personal relationships and pleasure over work. Lily begins the story as a child who is free and imaginative, happily building a snowman in her backyard and unconcerned with anything but play. As she grows into early adulthood and forgets her friend, her animated phone conversation shows her newly distracted state as both a seeming inevitability of growing older and as a minor tragedy. When the short skips ahead to Lily's adulthood, Lily has completed this transformation; she is now a career woman, in a dark suit and pulled back hair, working late in her cubicle in an otherwise empty workspace. Though here work is treated as a necessary, inevitable stressor rather than something to straightforwardly condemn, Lily is also shown to be overworked in comparison with her absent coworkers. The reveal, upon her return home, that Lily is now a mother, transforms her abandonment of cinemagoing and the pleasures of childhood from a personal crisis to a parenting lapse. The cyclical narrative this shift sets up, through which Lily's daughter is both her child and a metaphor for her younger self, extends the duties of parenting into an obligation to tend to one's own emotional and familial needs. This softens implications that Lily's work means she is failing as a mother. Instead, it sympathizes with the demands of professional life, while offering a reminder that Lily and her child need her to let go of workplace obligation and reconnect with family through the magic of movies. Picking up on the cultural narrative of women struggling to "have it all," the short ultimately places the onus on women to "make time," while couching its demands in the message that childcare is synonymous with self-care.[287] But Lily's mothering also offers an imaginative retreat from the demands of daily life into familial bonding and cinematic fantasy, particularly for those viewers who do not see the short through the lens of parenthood. Through the Lily's growth from carefree child to overworked mother, the viewer comes to identify with Lily's forgotten childhood and professional stresses, but also with the child she eventually embraces in the glow of the screen.

A final, significant point of contrast between *100 Years of Movies* and *Lily and the Snowman* is the way the shorts situate their appeals geographically. The events of *100 Years of Movies* literally float above any identifiable regional or national setting and eschew geographically marked aircraft. The clip's implicit promise is to use the power of cinema technology to deliver the viewer from their narrow individual experience to a global view—seen literally in the view of the Earth's curvature visible behind the departing space shuttle—and even to a place beyond it all. In *Lily and the Snowman*, emplacing the narrative is a crucial aspect of grounding its concerns in the realm of everyday life and nostalgic emotion. The short is vague about the story's regional setting, save for a possible glimpse of the Canada Life Building's weather beacon shining green in the city skyline, in line with the chain's need to identify with viewers across the national spread of its holdings. However, the snowy setting and glimpses of maple leaf posters and a canoe in Lily's garage place the stories' events firmly in Canada. These

[287] A critique of the narrative of "having it all" as an animating logic of neoliberal feminism, which ultimately co-opts internal critique of gender relations in Western liberal democracy and reframes these persistent problems as the responsibility of individual women, can be found in Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2013): doi:10.1080/09502386.2013.857361.

intratextual geographic markers are reinforced by the short's use of Canadian singers for its reworking of the popular Genesis track and its featuring of those artists in "making of" and "behind the song" videos about the short on its YouTube channel.[288] Here, Cineplex taps into widespread cultural memories and general narratives of childhood nostalgia and movie magic, while bringing them into the here and now of a more local experience for which the audience can fill in the regional blanks.

The intratextual meanings of *Lily and the Snowman* are enhanced by the short's paratextual relationship with *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens*. Gerard Genette defines paratexts as secondary texts which serve as the "thresholds" that span the space between the inside and outside of a primary text.[289] In the film and television industry, these texts take many forms: advertisements and trailers; press coverage and reviews; industry hype; branded merchandise; fanworks and fan discussion; sequels, prequels, and spinoffs; video games; author interviews and appearances; and even more intangible "texts" like genre.[290] Jonathan Gray argues that these paratexts allow viewers to engage in a process of "speculative consumption," through which they develop a set of ideas about what pleasures, information and effects a text will offer before consuming it.[291] Gray divides paratexts into two broad analytic categories: "entryway paratexts" which condition our initial approach to a text, and "in medias res

[288] cineplexmovies, *Behind the Song: Lily and the Snowman* (2015; YouTube, last modified December 22, 2015), Online video, 0:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcBMZb_MRfc (accessed October 26, 2016). cineplexmovies, *The Making of 'Lily & the Snowman'* (2015; YouTube, last modified December 15, 2015), Online video, 2:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqBFodeflpM (accessed October 26, 2016).

[289] Genette and Lewin, *Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation*, 3.

[290] Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, 4-6.

[291] Ibid., 24.

paratexts," which "inflect or redirect" our experience with a text after viewing it.[292] By placing *Lily and the Snowman* in a relationship with the *The Force Awakens*, through the timing of the campaign's launch and the short's presence immediately ahead of its screening in theatres, Cineplex has created both a standalone text and a paratext for the blockbuster film.

Lily and the Snowman functions somewhat abnormally as a paratext. Appearing before what is ostensibly the primary text, *The Force Awakens*, the short prepares the audience to receive the feature film by echoing its emphasis on intergenerational cultural experience. The goal of the short is not solely to prepare viewers for the primary text by increasing anticipation or championing a reading of the film. Instead it heightens the audience's attention to *The Force Awakens* as a *cinemagoing experience* as well as a text, and encourages them to associate that experience with their earlier memories of cinemagoing. In this way, *Lily and the Snowman* works to redirect the experience of *The Force Awakens*' primary text back towards the promotion of cinemagoing and of Cineplex. Simultaneously, in the manner of an "in media res paratext," the short relies on viewers having prior knowledge about *The Force Awakens,* received through the speculative consumption of other paratexts, including advertisements, marketing and industry "buzz." The meanings absorbed through these paratexts have primed the audience for a relationship with the moviegoing experience rooted in nostalgia for the earlier films in the franchise and heightened expectations of spectacle, wonder, and enjoyment. By creating this paratextual branded short, Cineplex benefits indirectly from the wide-reaching and expensive marketing campaign for the blockbuster and makes the chain's own branding most visible at the moment of audiences' highest levels of anticipation for the film. Mining connections between the

[292] Ibid., 35.

new branding campaign and *The Force Awakens*, Cineplex also draws from the cultural associations of Star Wars to forge an emotional, nostalgic connection with those segments of its audience attached to the franchise's previous instalments. Simultaneously, the chain heightens and personalizes this connection by placing its nostalgic narratives in a local and personal context, bringing the emotions elicited by the global blockbuster into contact with everyday experience.

Examining the textual resonances of *Lily and the Snowman* and the "See the Big Picture" campaign in comparison with Cineplex's earlier branding initiatives exposes more complicated implications of the campaign than the chain's official explanation makes obvious. While the new slogan does seem to reflect the wider umbrella that Cineplex executives argue the chain needs to encompass its newest ventures, the way the slogan and the branding campaign frame cinemagoing also marks a significant break from Cineplex's previous marketing activities. The "Escape with Us" slogan and 2012's *100 Years of Movies* clip highlight the unique experiential and technological qualities of cinemagoing and its potential for escapist pleasures, which stand in stark contrast to the more personalized, nostalgic, and emotional appeal of the "See the Big Picture" campaign. That these changes come about to reflect the company's recent diversification efforts is true, but the simplicity of the explanation obscures the shift's more complex underpinnings. While the earlier slogan and clip emphasize cinema's unique mode of presentation and its potential for escapism as the key factor of differentiation for cinemagoing, the broader range of products offered by Cineplex does call for a different, more malleable mode of appeal. Even solely in its cinemagoing ventures, the range of new exhibition commodities offer a more complex set of pleasures. Some of these appeals still includes technology-driven modes that ostensibly offer more "immersive" cinemagoing experiences. But they also include thrills, spectacle, and service-based appeals, ones that are difficult to reconcile in a cohesive message about a single mode of viewing. The departure of these changes from traditional exhibition practice also requires Cineplex to situate them within audiences' understandings of moviegoing to make these changes intelligible and acceptable to cinemagoers. The shift evidenced by the "See the Big Picture" campaign towards the nostalgic, emotional, and personal solves this problem by appealing not to a singular type of spectatorship, but a connection with its core audience's existing memories and associations with Cineplex. This approach requires Cineplex to make more specific claims about how cinemagoing as an activity and which audiences the company hopes to forge these connections with. Drawing on nostalgic themes and remembered and anticipated cinematic experiences, and grounding them in the experiences of everyday problems, familiar gendered narratives, and a more localized geographic context, Cineplex also inadvertently reveals its common-sense understandings of what cinemagoers desire and which cinemagoers are desirable.

Though *Lily and the Snowman* trades in the widely familiar themes of childhood memories and movie magic, the short aims to connect with an audience experience that is actually quite narrow. Relying on the assumed generalizability of the white, suburban, middle class family and its perspectives, *Lily and the Snowman* and the "See the Big Picture" slogan ultimately renders those who do not identify with its values as inessential or invisible. Lily and her daughter's suburban context mark them out as decidedly middle class, and Lily's urban, white collar job also indicates a middle class existence and its associated lifestyle. While Cineplex may be correct that the majority of its patrons do align with the white suburban middle class depicted in the short, there were undoubtedly also a significant number of the campaign's viewers who did not remember having a backyard in which they could play freely, or who have little familiarity with white collar urban work environments. But beyond this straightforward reading of the characters' class backgrounds, the issue of "work-life balance" raised by the short and the "See the Big Picture" slogan also directs itself at a limited class segment of the cinemagoing audience. This idea is underpinned by what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "fun ethic," the cultural shift among the "new petite bourgeoisie" that promotes the "morality of pleasure as duty." "This doctrine," Bourdieu writes, "makes it a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to 'have fun'…pleasure is not only permitted but demanded, on ethical as much as on scientific grounds." The fun ethic emerges in the arenas of mental and physical health, childrearing, sexuality, work, and cultural consumption among many others. It functions to create a guiding principle for cultural practice that distinguishes the new petite bourgeoisie from lower classes and previous generations of their own class and reflects their aspirations to the financial and social freedoms of the upper classes.[293] In *Lily and the Snowman*, the nostalgia for childhood joy becomes a call towards the duty of pleasure, and a subtle threat of lost status for failing to comply. Moreover, the short advocates that this freedom for fun must be conveyed to the younger generation, positing the magic of cinemagoing as a kind of bourgeois inheritance.

A similar address is present in the "See the Big Picture" feature presentation trailer that came to replace *Lily and the Snowman* in Cineplex's trailer lineup in March 2016. The trailer is an animation of Cineplex's amphitheatre logo which shows the circular rows of a Roman-style amphitheatre, revealed under faint spotlights against a dark background. The clip shows the rows

[293] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 367-371.

of benches being covered first in wood, then stone, then metal, before opening up and revealing a rapidly shifting amphitheatre covered in light and gold. As we move out from the amphitheatre, it takes on the stable shape of the Cineplex logo as the instrumental music crescendoes. "Cineplex" appears underneath, followed by "See the Big Picture." In his analysis of corporate logos, Paul Grainge argues that the shifting corporate allegiances, conglomeration, and more complex structures of ownership that emerged in the 1990s lead to a renewed focus on logos as sources of meaning.[294] For Grainge, this meaning comes from logos' function as a "signature" at the "intersection of recollection and expectation," tapping into viewers' memories of cinema experiences as well as the anticipated pleasures promised by the mechanisms of corporate-driven industry hype.[295] Grainge links the emphasis on studio logos, particularly their projection into blockbuster films in complex animation sequences, to the impulse, given accelerated global flows of media texts and complex hierarchies of ownership, to "sign" media properties, at once conferring status and claiming authorship.[296] In Cineplex's logo animation, the brand claims authorship over both the present space of the theatre experience, through the "feature presentation" it introduces, and an imagined collective past: the place of public storytelling stretching back to the classical age of the Roman amphitheatre. Much like *100 Years of Movies*, the trailer works to situate Cineplex in a linear history of cinema's development. However unlike the older trailer, the operation at work in this short clip is not one of technological advancement and more effective transportation into the world of the film, but a process of refinement and purification of the setting of viewing. The mobilization of Cineplex's brand signature comes at a

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[294] Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, 69-71.

[295] Ibid., 79.

[296] Ibid., 84.

moment of increased uncertainty in the exhibition industry and within Cineplex itself about what cinemagoing is and means. By linking itself to the history of not only cinemagoing but public storytelling, the "See the Big Picture" clip establishes Cineplex's continuity with the imagined past while laying claim the future, creating its own dynamics of memory and hype in the cinema space. Simultaneously, by presenting that lineage as one of increasing luxury in these spaces of public gathering, Cineplex indicates that greater refinement of the cinematic site is an inevitability, underscoring the upscaling at work in its theatres.

The nostalgia activated by *Lily and The Snowman* and the new "See the Big Picture" feature presentation clip establishes a personal and historical lineage for the Cineplex brand and legitimizes its continued presence in the face of a shifting entertainment and exhibition industry. Through emotional gestures towards childhood wonder and play, reimaginations of beloved songs, the intertextual presence of a new *Star Wars* film, and the archetypal symbol of the Roman ampitheatre, these branded clips seek to activate audiences' desire for an imaginative vision of the past. Simultaneously, this desire is made specific and intelligible through the depiction of everyday work and social challenges, geographic markers, and the Cineplex brand name itself. These operations implicate us in what Thomas Elsaesser describes as the "enfolding" activity through which contemporary blockbusters organize and mobilize temporality. "Such films systematically 'double' the levels of their referentiality," he writes, "making us aware that we exist in two places at once: watching a movie and remembering ourselves watching a movie. … The folding movement is…emotional and cognitive, in that it joins anticipation with repetition, and mimesis with memory." For Elsaesser, this results in the fusion of past and present into a "mythic 'now'" that makes these films potent emotional touchstones open to continual mining by the film industry. In seeking to become a nexus for capital, Elsaesser argues that "between past and future, between childhood and parenthood, mainstream cinema has found its cultural function as the world's time machine, with the blockbuster the 'engine' that simultaneously raises expectations, stirs memories, and unites us with our previous selves."[297] Cineplex's recent branding activities echo these motives, constructing the chain as the purveyor of cinematic memories—explicitly equated with childhood itself—past, present and future. "See the Big Picture" becomes not only a slogan that encourages us to pay attention to our relational and emotional needs by purchasing a movie ticket, but one that prompts us to project the whole of our lives through the lens of cinemagoing and the Cineplex brand, and, the company hopes, return over and over again.

The nostalgic appeal of Cineplex's "See the Big Picture" campaign and *Lily and the Snowman* echoes the temporal transportation Anne Friedberg describes as an important aspect of what she calls the "virtual mobilized gaze." For Friedberg, this gaze "depend[s] on the immobility of the spectator, a stasis rewarded by the imaginary mobilities that such fixity provid[es]." This gaze is a primary characteristic of cinema spectatorship, and in postmodernity, has become a fundamental feature of everyday life in consumer culture. Through the virtual mobilized gaze, consumers and spectators engage in a kind of virtual travel that grants imaginary access to other places, through the "commodity-experiences" offered in the mall, the theme park, and the movie theatre.[298] Like the tourist gaze described in the previous chapter, the virtual mobility provided by this form of spectatorship is spatial, but it is also temporal, particularly in

[297] Elsaesser, "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes," 22.

[298] Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 37-38.

the setting of the cinema. Friedberg argues that cinema has restructured our relationship with time, offering the ability to re-experience the past in the form of a commodity-experience, one inflected with the same bourgeois characteristics as the suburban shopping mall. This temporal dimension of cinema spectatorship plants the roots of our desire for cinemagoing in nostalgia.[299] If, for Friedberg, this feature is an element of all cinematic experiences, Cineplex uses its "See the Big Picture" branding campaign to bring these appeals to the surface and more firmly connect this kind of nostalgia to a bourgeois subjectivity.

Ultimately, Cineplex's branding practices seek to appeal primarily to the white bourgeois audience and to encourage these audience members to view themselves as entitled to the pleasures of cinemagoing and the range of new products offered in these spaces. Diversification, branded premium experiences, and lingering threats from piracy and domestic forms of entertainment have provided the impetus for this renewed focus on branding activities by Cineplex. They have also likely stoked anxieties about securing the viewership of what Cineplex perceives to be its core moviegoing audience as the company's activities multiply and its status becomes uncertain. Despite the changes brought about by the crisis of the early 2000s, these ideas about desirable audiences and related branding practices have a clear lineage with the upscaling initiatives of the megaplex period. The proliferation of new commodities requires exhibitors to solicit those audiences they perceive as most willing and able to pay not only the cost of admission, but premiums that can be as high as twice the cost of an ordinary ticket. Beyond this simplistic reading of market segmentation and business strategy, however, there is a deeper system of enculturation at work. Bourdieu argues that just as people develop unconscious

[299] Ibid., 185-189.

tastes for those goods and activities aligned with their class, commodities come to be associated with the groups who consume them.[300] Championing the desires of the white bourgeois audience, then, becomes a way of elevating the status of Cineplex's new commodities. Simultaneously, the historical focus of exhibitors on similar audience segments makes this audience seem like the natural group for exhibitors to pursue. While cinemas ostensibly remains open to anyone willing and able to purchase a regular movie ticket, these branding practices mould spaces and commodities for the desires and pleasures of one audience segment over all others.

Branding initiatives are not just an outgrowth of the significant shifts in the structure and offerings of the mainstream exhibition industry in the 2000s and 2010s, but actively constitute these practices. This marketing practice informs which activities and products become possible and suggests and constrains their potential meanings for exhibitors and audiences. Diversification, new exhibition commodities and perceived threats to the viability of the exhibition business have created conditions of uncertainty as exhibitors enter this moment of historical transition. Branding enables Cineplex and other exhibitors to smooth over this transition point by consolidating their core audience around their newest properties and products while assuring cinemagoers of the continuity between these emerging commodities and cinemagoing's past. Cineplex has responded to the challenge posed by the industry's present indeterminacy by appealing more personally to moviegoers, using sophisticated branding strategy to connect viewers with their memories of cinemagoing. In personalizing its address, Cineplex has made revealing claims about its view of cinemagoing and audiences. Its "See the Big Picture" brand campaign positions cinemagoing as an activity primarily for white bourgeois

[300] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 246-249.

audiences by relying on classed appeals towards the duty of pleasure and situating Cineplex within a nostalgic, linear conception of cinemagoing's imagined trajectory of increasing refinement and luxury. These branding initiatives not only create a restrictive, exclusionary vision of who exhibitors serve, but help constitute the continued upscaling and fragmentation of cinematic spaces. Though the "See the Big Picture" campaign is in some ways Cineplex's response to its newest practices, it will also shape and constrain new ones, situating them within its established network of values. The interplay between branded premium experiences and recent branding practices ultimately works in tandem, reinforcing the shift towards upscaled cinematic sites and restricting the audiences these spaces serve.

CONCLUSION

Since the industry-wide economic crisis of the early 2000s, the North American film exhibition industry has transformed itself through new kinds of theatre experiences and structural shifts towards greater consolidation and diversification. Through these changes, the residues of past formations and the scars of previous failures have left their mark, pushing exhibitors away from the pursuit of larger theatre audiences and towards maximizing the profit to be gained from existing cinemagoers. These movements have also privileged the comfort, convenience and perceived desires of bourgeois cinemagoers, who are willing and able to pay for expanded amenities and possess the cultural capital exhibitors wish to associate with their goods and services. At Cineplex, these priorities have been demonstrated in the proliferation of branded premium experiences and the introduction of a more personal and nostalgic address in the exhibitor's branding materials. These shifts in exhibitor practice have intensified the exclusivity of cinema spaces, particularly those spaces devoted to new premium viewing experiences, but they have also been underpinned by unique discourses that suggest trajectories for future movements in the exhibition industry.

This thesis takes the Cineplex Entertainment theatre chain as an important example of these contemporary changes in the exhibition industry and especially the emergence of branded premium experiences. In Chapter One, I provide the theoretical framework through which my later analysis of exhibition practices takes shape, synthesizing the approaches of theorists of film exhibition and the media industries and situating their work within currents of cultural studies. Finding both insights and gaps in the approaches of existing literatures on film exhibition, I draw from work on the historical, technological, and local dimensions of cinemagoing, but ultimately privilege research that focuses on its industrial facets and sees the forces that affect moments of industrial flux as negotiated and multifarious. Supplementing this work with research from media industry studies, I argue that the exhibition industry engages in both symbolic and economic activity, and that a significant force influencing emerging exhibition practice is the consolidation and circulation of industrial discourses about cinemagoing. Central to this approach is Antonio Gramsci's concept of "common sense," the idea that ordinary people engage in intellectual activity through the navigation, negotiation, and interpretation of everyday life. This common sense is expressed in the activities of daily living as well as in circulating texts and discourses. Framing exhibitor discourses as common sense allows us to recognize the interpretive activity they perform, without disregarding their capacity for misrecognition, contradiction, and misrepresentation, and indeed, seeing these elements as rich sites for critical analysis.

Following the theoretical orientation of Chapter One, Chapters Two and Three introduce the immediate historical trajectory of current reconfigurations in the exhibition industry and identify the origins and implications of the new commodities that are the most visible evidence of these shifts. Taking the industry-wide crisis of the early 2000s as an influential moment for the exhibition industry's historical transformation into the 2010s, Chapter Two traces Cineplex's recovery from the crisis. This return to growth has been marked by movements towards greater consolidation, more distinctive theatre branding, diversification of holdings in non-exhibition assets, and efforts to collect and mobilize data about cinemagoers. This diverse range of practices demonstrates the turn, in the last fifteen years, from upscaling and cinema construction intended to dramatically expand the cinemagoing audience to efforts to increase the profit generated from current attendance levels as the primary means of growth in the industry.

Chapter Three documents another facet of this trend, examining new exhibition commodities based on technological and service-based enhancements and tracing the origins of their contemporary proliferation. Contributing to Cineplex's ability to maximize profits without having to expand theatre attendance, these branded premium experiences also indicate a social and symbolic shift in Cineplex's exhibition practice. Echoing Andre Bazin's "myth of total cinema," 3D, IMAX and other large formats, immersive audio, motion seating, and multi-sensory effects champion immersive realism as a key feature of cinemagoing. The exhibitor discourses surrounding these experiences rely on the promise of spatial transportation and visual mastery, creating commodities centred on a bourgeois subjectivity. In concert with the mode of spectatorship they promise, service-based and technology-driven branded premium experiences create fragmented cinema spaces which rely on social separation to mark them as upscale goods.

Cineplex's representation of cinemagoing is taken up more centrally in Chapter Four. This chapter examines their recent "See the Big Picture" branding campaign and its divergence from previous brand strategies. The branding campaign, especially in the short films that are central to its presentation, demonstrates a turn towards the personal, emotional, and nostalgic in Cineplex's branding practice. "See the Big Picture," in its slogan and its associated marketing materials, centres on the idea that through the magic of movies and Cineplex, cinemagoers can withdraw from busy work lives to renew relationships and rediscover the wonder, passion, and joy of their own childhood experiences with moviegoing. In doing so, it taps into class-inflected discourses of the "fun ethic," making Cineplex's investment in pursuing the bourgeois cinemagoing audience more apparent. This nostalgic turn positions Cineplex and its newest activities in an imagined lineage with previous exhibition practice, allowing the chain to legitimize its newest offerings and its continued importance as a centre for public cultural life.

This thesis has explored Cineplex's introduction of new commodities and its divergence from previous business strategy, but it is equally important to note instances of persistence in the historical movements and formations of film exhibition. While the 2000s and 2010s have seen accelerated consolidation across the exhibition industry, these trends were already present in the 1980s and 90s and were more deeply entrenched by the economic crisis of the early 2000s. Similarly, the upscaling practices associated with megaplexing have found a more forceful iteration in branded premium experiences and newly constructed theatres, even if the building practices and discourses associated with these older exhibition models have given way to other strategies. These upscale commodities and the branding activities that validate them demonstrate exhibitors' deepening investments in the bourgeois viewers that have historically been perceived as the core cinemagoing audience. As exhibitors' revenue streams expand to other uses of cinema spaces and to new sectors, feature films and concessions still provide the largest portion of exhibitors' profits and support their experimentation with newer practices. The ongoing centrality of feature films to the broader exhibition industry is especially true of blockbuster movies and franchises, whose position as points of consolidation for capital and meaning continues to be harnessed by exhibitors to draw greater profits and further new initiatives. These points of continuity suggest that the moment of flux studied in this thesis is best understood as a reconfiguration of exhibitor practice, rather than a sharp break from its historical forms.

Nonetheless, new commodities, strategies, and discourses are emerging, and their appearance will have consequences for cinemagoing in the future.

If you went to see *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) this past December at a Cineplex theatre, like me, you might have experienced a moment of *déjà vu* during the trailers. In the place of Cineplex's logo animation announcing the feature presentation, the chain played a wintry short film that spoke to nostalgic and relational power of cinemagoing through a narrative centred on parent-child bonding. This time, the story, titled *A Balloon for Ben*, features a young boy name Ben and his father, a busy snowplow driver. In the world of the short, movies take the form of light-filled balloons which play when popped. Ben's father takes him to a magical workshop, where films are made by feeding a light-filled marble through a film projector. Though Ben is excited to watch the movie as soon as they arrive home, his father gets a call and has to go back out to plow the roads, leaving them both disappointed. Time passes, and we watch the balloon slowly deflate as life at home and calls to work prevent Ben and his father from watching the movie together. One night, Ben's father returns home late in his snowplow to see Ben sleeping, holding the deflating balloon. The balloon falls to the ground, and, rushing to grab it, Ben's father peers under his son's bed, where he discovers a hand-drawn picture of himself and Ben smiling and holding a large golden balloon together. When he pulls the drawing away, Ben's father uncovers a box of deflated balloons whose lights are flickering out. Eyes misting, he has an idea. He pulls home a giant balloon with his plow, and he and Ben watch the film together in their yard, the light from the movie illuminating the entire house. "Make time for what you love," appears over the warm image, followed by the Cineplex logo and "See the Big Picture." A reworked acoustic cover of Fleetwood Mac's 1987 song "Everywhere" that accompanies the short, performed by Emily Patrick (in the English version) and Stephanie Lapointe (in the French version) again uses a repackaged older song to build up the story's sentimentality and capitalize on audience nostalgia. Written by Zulu Alpha Kilo, the advertising agency Cineplex employed for *Lily and the Snowman*, the short appeared in the trailer sequence at Cineplex theatres on December 8, 2016, in time for the busy holiday cinema season, and just eight days before the release of *Rogue One* on December 16th.[301]

Linked to the same blockbuster franchise and covering similar thematic and narrative territory, *A Balloon for Ben* has the feeling of a sequel hoping to borrow from *Lily and the Snowman*'s success last December. In a "making of" video for the short, which appeared in full on Cineplex's official YouTube channel and in part in the pre-show package at cinemas, commentators frame the two shorts in conversation with one another. They refer to the intimidating positive response to the first campaign and the desire to follow the "path" of *Lily and the Snowman* while finding a unique look, feel, and story for the newest instalment.[302] Narratives of *Lily and the Snowman*'s success also appear in press releases, trade publications, and popular coverage of *A Balloon for Ben*. Though Cineplex's claims about the outcomes of the original short are often vague, the press release for *A Balloon for Ben* cites the original film's 60 million views across the web and international awards recognition at Cannes Lions, One Show, and Webby's, as well as Marketing, AToMIC and CMA awards in Canada.[303] Most interestingly, some reports on the new campaign referred to a poll of about one thousand Canadians conducted

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[301] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex's 'A Balloon for Ben' Inspires Canadians to 'See the Big Picture'." cineplexmovies, *A Balloon for Ben*, directed by Yves Gelvin (2016; Youtube, last modified December 8, 2016), Online video, 2:18, A Balloon for Ben (accessed December 9, 2016).

[302] cineplexmovies, *The Making of 'A Balloon for Ben'* (2016; YouTube, last modified December 8, 2016), Online video, 2:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG5K4g3g5pc (accessed December 9, 2016).

[303] Cineplex Entertainment, "Cineplex's 'A Balloon for Ben' Inspires Canadians to 'See the Big Picture'."

for Cineplex by Britain-based multinational research firm Millward Brown. This poll showed increases in scores concerned with the brand's "affinity," the positive customer feelings it generates, and "saliency," the degree to which its product is considered by a customer in a buying situation. Affinity for the brand rose from 16% to 22% between November 2015, before the short's release, and February 2016, when it stopped running in Cineplex theatres. Reportedly, the increase was especially notable in the 25 to 39 age group, Cineplex's "core customers," but viewers aged 14 to 24 also expressed higher affinity levels. "Even Millward Brown said they don't usually see jumps like that with one campaign," Sarah Van Lange, Cineplex's director of communications, commented on the effectiveness of the new strategy.[304] While measuring the success of a branding campaign is more dubious art than exact science, especially when box office revenues are still tied to the appeal of film titles at least as much as customer loyalty, it seems clear from these comments and the newest iteration of the "See the Big Picture" campaign that Cineplex is seeing results it finds encouraging. It also indicates that the shift Cineplex has demonstrated towards nostalgic, emotional advertising for its cinema offerings is becoming a long-term strategy.

Advertising hasn't been Cineplex's only source of success in 2016. Since its record-breaking year in 2015, for which Cineplex reported a total revenue of $1.37-billion and a box office return of $711.1-million, Cineplex's growth has continued apace and reflected its ongoing investment in premium options and diversified revenue streams.[305] In 2016, revenues hit $1.47-

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304 Krashinsky, "Captive Audience." Chris Powell, "Cineplex Follows 'Lily' with Ben and His Balloons," *Marketing Magazine* (December 8, 2016), http://www.marketingmag.ca/advertising/cineplex-follows-lily-with-ben-and-his-balloons-187464 (accessed January 18, 2017).

305 Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex 2015 Annual Report*, 16, 33.

billion and its box office returns reached $712.4-million.[306] Despite the growth, however, the chain's attendance figures for the year fell by more than two million admissions, in part because of the strong influence of the opening of *The Force Awakens* on 2015's attendance figures.[307] This disconnect between climbing box office revenue and falling admissions is explained by the increasing share of Cineplex box office that stems from premium tickets. In the last year, the percentage of box office that comes from 3D, UltraAVX, Cineplex VIP, and IMAX tickets has risen from 38.9% in 2015 to 46.1% by the end of 2016.[308] Another contribution to the chain's rising revenues is the increased role of Cineplex's media and non-exhibition holdings in the chain's overall revenue mix. Cineplex's media revenues, which refer to its combined Cineplex Media advertising services and its Cineplex Digital Media signage ventures, generated an additional $17-million for the chain in 2016 compared with the previous year, and accounted for 11.6% of the chain's total revenues.[309] The category of profits Cineplex refers to as "Other"—which include in-theatre and Rec Room gaming, its Cineplex Starburst vending and gaming holdings, World Gaming assets, Cineplex Store film purchases, as well as various guest-services and events revenues—generated $171.2-million for the chain in 2016, compared with 2015's $87.7-million in profits, 11.5% of the total revenue for 2016. The sharp rise, amounting to a 95.1% increase over the previous year, was partly attributable to the consolidation of Cineplex Starburst during 2016.[310] Though these alternative revenue streams have not yet overtaken box

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306 Cineplex Entertainment, *Cineplex Inc. Management's Discussion and Analysis*, 3, 19.

307 Ibid., 3.

308 Ibid., 20.

309 Ibid., 16, 23.

310 Ibid., 16, 23-24.

office and concessions as Cineplex's core business, the trends indicate the growing importance of new exhibition commodities and diversified holdings to Cineplex's profits. Moreover, these economic trends suggest incentives for Cineplex's branding practices beyond increasing theatre admissions. As the chain seeks to increase the amount customers pay for tickets, through branded premium experiences, and extend its brand to other areas of business, positive associations with the brand, particularly among those customers with significant disposable income, likely hold greater value for the exhibitor than increased theatre attendance.

As these movements continue into the future, several questions linger for further work on contemporary cinemagoing in Canada and the United States. Though I have noted alternative content, like opera, theatre, ballet, sports, concerts, and video game tournaments, as part of the current of change at Cineplex theatres, I have not had space to address it comprehensively. These offerings operate in a different register than the appeals of emerging exhibition commodities, with areas of overlap and divergence with the currents I have identified here, and would benefit from further study. And, while my focus has been on Cineplex and its activities in the 2000s and 2010s, the contemporary history of Canadian exhibition also includes other exhibitors, and a sense of AMC, Empire Theatres, Landmark Theatres and Guzzo Cinemas' contributions to the industry's current state would offer other pertinent perspectives on this moment of historical change. Finally, I have situated the activities of Cineplex within the North American exhibition industry where possible, but a more wide-ranging appraisal of the current movements across the industry is still missing from scholarly literature on cinemagoing. Though a complete assessment of the American industry and the influence of global actors would be impossible in a work of this length, investigation of these forces could form the basis for future research in this area that would further illuminate the subject matter of my thesis.

By understanding the film exhibition industry as the product of industrial discourses directed at audiences addressed according to their class position, this thesis has sought to trouble perspectives that see contemporary movie theatres as universally available cultural spaces and inevitable products of fixed industrial conditions. Exhibitors have long celebrated myths of the cinema as a democratic meeting place for public cultural consumption. In their branding practices, these exhibitors champion movie theatres' social function as a place of communion with both the virtual others onscreen and those who share the public cinema space. Simultaneously, the industry promotes technological advancement, upscaled cinema spaces and expanded services as part of a linear trajectory towards improvement, by which exhibitors have inevitably come to better serve the cinemagoer and fulfill this social function. This thesis has shown that emerging cinema commodities have been designed to align with the desires of bourgeois cinemagoers and marketed according to these customers' imagined needs. The resulting reorganization of cinema spaces exposes contradictions at the heart of exhibitors' self-promotion as neutral purveyors of venues for public gathering and demonstrates how their practices constrain the terms of this shared cultural engagement. By studying the moment of pronounced historical change in film exhibition during the 2000s and 2010s, I have not only sought to map the activities presently reshaping the industry, but to grasp film exhibition as a contingent and negotiated industrial practice, *always* in the process of constructing and reconstructing itself. It is in this inherent instability that I see space for interruption of hegemonic movements and hope for more inclusive formations of public cultural practice.

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