

7. Against enclosure: DIY exhibition as prefigurative action

Abstract

This chapter considers the presence of utopian imaginations and forms of action in the practice of organizing film screenings. It argues that there are aspects of non-theatrical cinema as a collaborative practice that build towards a broader transformation of social relations. Through the temporary reconfiguration of private spaces as public, or their reclamation for play and pleasure rather than commerce, a screening can create a brief prefigurative interlude, where it is possible to glimpse the possibility of a different world. While being critical of the exaggerated promises of DIY and 'pop-up' projects, this chapter centres the action of organizing screenings as such, as a direct engagement with publicness and sometimes a subtle way of reclaiming or imagining the commons.

Key words: DIY, pop-up cinema, meanwhile use, direct action, prefiguration, commoning

'[T]rue luxury could only be communal luxury'

– Ross 2015, 140

What is the point of cinemagoing at a time of climate crisis, rising fascism, and peak inequality? In these desperate times, this use of resources, of time, space and labour, may seem extravagant. In the UK, only about 15% of cinema seats are occupied, and that only during opening hours.¹ While more and more films are released every year, audiences and profits are

1 Independent Cinema Office. 'How to start a cinema: The economics of the operation'. <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/how-to-start-a-cinema/the-economics-of-the-operation/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

increasingly concentrated in a handful of big-budget blockbusters (Follows 2017). VIP lounges with hyperreal screens compete for a handful of viewers, meticulously selected as a target market. Cinemagoing is a wasteful, unsustainable, and unnecessary practice. Its demise cannot come too soon.

Outside these institutional trappings, however, the practice of gathering around the moving image finds other purposes. Cinema as a constellation of small gestures can join the effort to let 'beauty flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves', by becoming 'fully integrated into everyday life and not just the endpoint of special excursions'? (Ross 2015, 61) Transforming a space into a temporary cinema, even fleetingly, requires both a physical change and a social convention. Since these have to be created anew, cinema in an unexpected site offers an opportunity to disrupt entrenched patterns of social use. In pop-up cinema, the cinema space is not pre-existent; it must be produced, and it can thus be re-imagined and re-configured. For many exhibitors, consciously or not, this presents an opportunity to try out more just and equal ways of being together. It can be as simple as arranging the seats differently to encourage discussion, providing subtitles and audio descriptions, or removing barriers to access; it can also be realized in the form that labour takes, as freely given rather than alienated. These decisions express in microcosm a desire for a more just world, and are the first step towards creating it.

In the previous chapters, I have described examples of exhibition situations where the screening creates a framework for people to get together as a community, share some cake and get acquainted with each other's laughter. Screenings can make room for subcultures to bond and splinter, to cross genre boundaries and take risks alongside willing audiences. They can be a site of informal learning and inclusive discussion, where participation is catered for and nurtured. They can be sites of artistic experimentation, rife with multi-sensory, multimedial innovation and sensory joy. In all these variants, however prosaic or otherworldly they may appear, there is a utopian kernel. These spaces may be just a temporary reprieve from alienated existence, but they enact the yearning for a different social relation. This does not need to be articulated explicitly, or even consciously realized, to constitute a prefigurative moment.

This final chapter identifies some interesting and promising elements of pop-up exhibition practice as observed in my fieldwork, looking for their potential to challenge the reactionary aspects of cinema as an institution. Focusing on the work of independent exhibitors organizing around Scalarama and Radical Film Festivals, I discuss the emergence and ongoing negotiation of decentralized collaboration in exhibition and distribution practice. I also

return to examples from previous chapters to consider potential directions of travel and identify emergent organizational strategies that may resist both depletion and assimilation.

7.1. Tactical urbanism

Pop-up cinema in its contemporary usage is often associated with a broader trend for temporary uses of space, described by some of its practitioners as ‘Tactical Urbanism’. Oli Mould points out that the use of ‘tactical’ here has drifted away from de Certeau’s idea of an intervention from below, an action intended to disrupt hegemonic strategies or at least to enable other ways of living amongst them. Instead, governmental institutions and private investors now deploy pop-up spaces in a way consistent with neoliberal urban policies, such as the ‘creative city’ and its attendant processes of culture-led gentrification. As Mould argues,

The packaging of a variety of activities (from guerrilla gardening to pop-up retail outlets to yarn-bombing) into a narrative that is pushed forward into urban policy is, in effect, creating a logic that politically neutralises the interventionist and subversive characteristics of said activities (Mould 2014, 532–533)

One of the forms of this institutionalization of tactical urbanism is that of ‘stalled spaces’ initiatives. Temporary transformations of private or reclaimed space are realized with the permission of landowners and local councils, which see ‘meanwhile use’ as a value-enhancing strategy. In the introduction to their ‘stalled spaces’ programme, Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Housing Association frame it as a response to ‘poor environmental conditions that have become more prevalent due to the economic downturn’ (Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Housing Association 2012). By funding ‘value-added’ projects in unused but privately owned sites, the initiative aimed to foster community involvement in activities such as urban farming and beekeeping as well as recreation or public art. In brokering relationships between landowners and potential users of the space, the Council thus helped mobilize public, participatory art projects in the interests of the private sector. As artist Annie Crabtree points out, power remains with the landowner (Crabtree 2016).

This conciliatory stance is typical of tactical urbanism in its liberal form. By and large, pop-up cinema in this context exists as a clearly bounded

event, with a beginning and an end. Any oppositional menace is foreclosed by this promise of return to the status quo. Precariousness does not bring liberation. However, temporal boundaries do encourage some forms of experiment, of playfulness, and an intensity of experience that may exceed the neoliberal frame. A pop-up space can be a test case, a proof of concept, and a confidence-building exercise. It can be a termite practice, in Manny Farber's formulation: one that by its very existence challenges '[t]he idea of art as an expensive hulk of well-regulated area' (Farber 1962).

The Pollokshields Playhouse, mentioned in the previous chapter, is a successful example of Glasgow's Stalled Spaces programme. The takeover of a brownfield plot across from Tramway, one of Glasgow's foremost contemporary art venues, allowed the neighbourhood community council to avoid embarrassment while hosting the Turner Prize exhibitions in 2015. The Council leased the ground, owned by private housing developers, for one year, and helped fund a small group of artists and community organizers, led by architect Lee Ivett and artist Rachel O'Neill, both of whom had previous experience of pop-up architecture (Taylor 2015). Ivett works under the name Baxendale Studio Ltd. Baxendale's projects often involve using volunteer labour to build structures out of reclaimed materials, such as wooden pallets and shipping containers.² Their interventions in relatively deprived parts of Glasgow have been accused of being at best patronizing, and at worse complicit in the displacement of lower-income residents through gentrification (Findlay 2018). This is a common thread in criticism of participatory arts, amply rehearsed when the multi-disciplinary collective, Assemble, won the Turner Prize in 2015 with Granby Four Streets, a housing regeneration project in Liverpool.

At the Pollokshields Playhouse, the lofty discussions of participatory arts and agile design took a back seat to the practical challenges of building an outdoor cinema out of pallets. The physical viability of the idea had to be tested: How to build a stage and screen, where to set up the projector and mixer, how to deal with potentially inclement weather. The cinema was only one of the many activities that took place in the space. The little cluster of pallet constructions surrounded by mounds of rubble was a playground for children, a place to hold small fairs and craft markets, for local organizations to set up stalls, and a meeting place for various groups. The coordinators arranged events that involved the local schools, dance clubs, cycling clubs, temples and shops. The whole project was an experiment in collaborative methods, even though there was a hierarchy reflected in the

2 Baxendale. 'About'. <http://baxendale-dco.com/about/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

allocation of (small) salaries from institutional support. Throughout the year, the Playhouse provided a focal point for local community activity, in contradistinction to the prestigious arts venue next to it, which tends to attract more visitors from outwith the neighbourhood. Community use of the Playhouse space was linked to specific functions and connections. There is, arguably, still a problematic binary between organizers and 'communities', but direct engagement in the co-production of events based on existing groups and resources is more inclusive than a bland 'everyone welcome'.

As an example of tactical urbanism, the Playhouse required a programme of events. Architectural and curatorial practices had to work in tandem: the screen was only built once the screenings were proposed, and the stage in front of it was a decision connected to the desire to involve live performances alongside the films. The cinema events felt like celebrations of this new-found space, snapshots of collective activity and pleasure that could hold meaning as community memories. By linking the screenings with eye-catching live performances, the Playhouse enhanced the eventfulness of the occasions, without restricting it to the film event itself. As discussed before in relation to the Kelvingrove Bandstand, outdoor exhibition tends towards more relaxed behaviour norms, and this is a key attraction for audiences that include people with a range of needs and preferences. At the Playhouse screenings, children alternated between being captivated by the film and trying to climb the screen frame; people ate hot, spicy food (which would not be polite in an enclosed space), moved between the seating bleachers and the bonfire, admired the sunset over their tenements, and offered each other hot drinks or a corner of a blanket against the falling night. The film set-up created an opportunity for those acts of sharing space, but it did not fully determine them. Because the film was subsumed into a more multi-layered event with local live performers, the publicness produced can be more inclusive. This suggests that not all public screenings are public in the same way. Their publicness reflects its own production, as a top-down concession or a bottom-up intervention.

7.2. Publicness and commoning

Publicness as a protocol associated to film exhibition cannot be taken for granted, or at least cannot be assumed to always take the same form. The modern experience granted to early and classical cinema audiences existed as much through the production of spaces, buildings, and situations, as with the aesthetic or narrative thrills of the medium. Therefore, the displacement

of cinemagoing in favour of private viewing is, according to Miriam Hansen, 'not merely a matter of technological and institutional adjustment but a palpable, seismic shift in the cinema's relation to publicness or *Offenlichkeit*, as the unstable matrix through which individual and social experience is articulated and organized' (Hansen 1991, 22). By drawing on recognizable configurations, a screen can evoke and modulate publicness. A space of transit or a shop window can be transformed into a 'space of vision', because 'a screen functions as a spatial enunciator, in the sense that it appropriates the space in which it finds itself' (Casetti 2015, 133). As Maeve Connolly argues in relation to artists' moving image exhibition, the ghostly evocation of the public in contemporary works is not singular; publicness is *staged* in the relationship between the work and its exhibition site (2009, 50–51). Screening is thus a deliberate and transformative intervention that can have different valences.

By pushing at the boundaries of private and public space in a way that makes an intimate experience possible in a shared space, ephemeral cinema configurations can be implicated in forms of *commoning*. This is a movement to reject the enclosure of resources, the artificial scarcity produced by economic imperatives. The resources needed to get together and watch a film are not scarce, but they are often locked away, like the empty auditoria at the multiplex. In *Cinema Makers* (2019), Mikael Arnal and Agnès Salson gather many examples across Europe of buildings that have been taken over by collectives and cooperatives, and reopened as multi-use venues with a DIY ethos. The Piccolo America, in Rome, started as an (illegal) occupation of a derelict cinema; the Novi Bioskop Zvezda in Belgrade has a similar origin, and aims to become a cultural centre run and programmed in a non-hierarchical manner. A squatted hotel in Athens operated as a self-managed housing cooperative for refugees, with cinema screenings on the rooftop (Gutiérrez Sánchez 2017). Cinema Usera in Madrid is a DIY outdoor screen built by activists and residents, and run collaboratively as a neighbourhood cultural centre (Volont 2019). Alongside these radical examples, there are numerous cases of industrial buildings and warehouses purchased through crowdfunding campaigns and transformed by volunteer builders into community venues. The Star and Shadow Cinema, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, is one such venue, built and run by volunteers, 'an urban commons covered in solar panels, vibrating with grassroots energy', and standing its ground in 'a neoliberal, Brexit-worn, austerity riddled, Northern city centre' (Waller 2019). The creation of these spaces under the sign of cinema can then be a form of direct action, bringing into being new social relations that do not need to replicate those of capital.

Reclaiming spaces for common use is what allows the emergence of new public spheres. The projection of moving images can thus become part of the toolkit of squatting and occupation as a tactic for social movements. Whether used for entertainment, information, fundraising, and propaganda, temporary screens often appear within larger interventions in urban space. A historically significant example is Tahrir Cinema, in Egypt's Tahrir Square during the 2011 protests, where activists screened crowd-sourced videos showing the images of popular revolt that were not being broadcast by the official channels. Here, according to Mollerup and Gaber, 'revolutionary street screenings enable particular paths to knowledge because they make media engage with and take place within quotidian spaces that the revolution aims to liberate and transform' (2015, 1906). This politicization of outdoor exhibition makes clear that the publicness of the city square and the street cannot be taken for granted. This publicness needs to be actualized, produced and reproduced – or it risks being lost to revanchist urbanism and land-grabbing.

Pop-up cinema is an opportunity to see publicness as a process rather than a static condition of space. This processual view is present in Negt and Kluge's notion of the 'proletarian public sphere', so effectively deployed by Miriam Hansen to understand early cinema and its parallels with post-classical exhibition practices. The proletarian public sphere is imbricated in the universe of labour under capitalism: it is produced through labour and, in that sense, stands among the experience of alienation. For that very reason, it has a radical potential. As Hansen explains,

Negt and Kluge locate that utopian possibility in the very process of (alienated) production, in the 'historical organization of labor power'. For, while constituted in the process of separation (e.g., primitive accumulation and division of labor), labor power contains and reproduces capacities and energies that exceed its realization in/as a commodity: resistance to separation, *Eigensinn* (stubbornness, self-will), self-regniation, fantasy, memory, curiosity, cooperation, feelings, and skills in excess of capitalist valorization. Whether and how those energies can become effective depends on the organization of the public sphere (Hansen 1993, 204).

By bringing it into the realm of production, the concept of the proletarian public sphere is useful to see the utopian possibilities of the mass-produced, ersatz outputs of the consciousness industries. If this utopian notion of publicness is fundamental, and if its effectiveness is in part predicated on the work it takes to produce it, then it is important to understand how that labour is organized.

For Hansen, the ‘incompleteness’ of early film as commodity left a margin for proletarian re-appropriation. The liveness of exhibition could, in the right conditions, make cinema a site for the emergence of a social horizon of experience that negates the fragmentation of experience, that is, a resistance to alienation and ‘a catalyst for new forms of community and solidarity’ (Hansen 1993, 208). In contexts like Tahrir Square, alternative or oppositional publics may prefigure this proletarian public sphere. Breaking down the division of labour enshrined in bourgeois exhibition is a first step: As the Egyptian activists remembered, ‘electricity from a nearby lamppost, deftly rewired by an electrician in the crowd, made the screenings possible’, and the videos screened were mostly made by the people in the crowd (Mollerup and Gaber 2015). This co-production – in solidarity, in mutual aid – holds a radical potential: that of cinema as a site of disalienated work.

7.3. DIY and disalienated work

The commoditized publicness of commercial cinema spaces is produced and maintained through labour. By definition, the waged work of those who build, furnish, clean, and staff the multiplex is alienated labour: they do not own the building nor distribute the profits. The customers, meanwhile, purchase their ration of publicness in which to spend surplus time and money, but are not invested in its maintenance. In contrast, the publicness co-produced in an open space like the Playhouse can be disalienated. There is no monetary relation: no tickets, no wages and no profits. It does not mean that it is always easy or pleasurable work, or that it is emancipatory in and of itself. In his article about the construction of the Star and Shadow Cinema, Christo Wallers recognizes that, despite best intentions, the labour was unevenly distributed and caused intense stress for those who took up responsibility. The pressure was ‘internalized by too few individuals [...] resulting in a dangerous form of hidden self-exploitation and burn out that rarely gets discussed in DIY projects’ (Waller 2019). The contradictions of prefigurative non-hierarchical organizing within a hierarchical social system cannot be overlooked; money still needs to be raised, authorities placated, and livelihoods sustained. A lot of relational labour needs to be invested alongside hard physical work. But whatever its very real limitations, collectivizing the work around the film screening does offer a different kind of investment in its publicness. This is already present in village halls, where the work of stacking chairs and washing dishes after the show is part and parcel of the event’s sociability, and in the good will of every audience that waited for a cable to be replaced or a file to be downloaded.

Few places offer such a direct example of a disalienated cinema space as the Cinemor77 yurt. This is a pop-up cinema in a literal sense: thick canvas wrapped around a wooden frame in the traditional Mongolian shape, and then furnished with projection equipment and cushions. The idea was conceived in 2016 by community worker Neill Patton, who was already organizing pop-up screenings, including those at the Playhouse, and his friend Gary Thomson, who had moved back to Scotland after many years working in oil fields and was living in an intentional community where he had learned to build yurts. They shared a love of music festivals, 'that thing of being somewhere totally, totally different from the rest of the world', and came up with the idea of the yurt cinema as something they could take to festivals.³ Around that idea, a shifting cast of characters has converged. Apart from Neill and Gary, there is Kim who teaches forest school, Gee who is a teacher, Jen who works with community projects, Debbie who runs workshops with children, Georgia who improvises to a 1950s film, and various friends, volunteers and artists. A call for submissions of shorts allows the programmers to gather new work, mainly by local filmmakers who are then invited to attend their screenings. Participatory screening events for children have become a feature, and live music to silent films has also been performed. This is thus an expertly-curated programme build through friendship and professional networks.⁴

Cinemor's first outing was at Doune the Rabbit Hole, a medium-sized, family-friendly festival in Stirlingshire, in 2016. Work was intense: when not operating the projector, Gary and Jen were calling people in for the next screening, or making sure the rain did not get into the audience's footwear laid out by the entrance. In between films, the yurt was still busy: it was a dry, cosy space, a much-appreciated refuge from the rain which was almost constant throughout the weekend. The yurt is a cinema, but it is first of all a yurt: a shelter, where toddlers can nap and festivalgoers can catch their breath or feed some visual input into their psychedelic experience. An elsewhere within the experiential bubble of the music festival, the yurt creates its own heterotopia. Furthermore, for the organizers, travelling with the yurt becomes a temporary lifestyle, a situation in which, as De Ville explains in relation to domestic microcinemas, 'the organizers' public and private lives, work and leisure time, were inextricably fused' (2015, 249). This wholeness is the seed of resistance to alienated labour.

In June 2017, I was invited to help build the yurt in the Victoria Allotments, a block of green space tucked behind rows of tenements in a multicultural

3 Neill Patton, interview with the author, January 2018

4 Disclosure: I have been part of Cinemor77's volunteer board of directors since 2018.

residential area of Glasgow. The yurt was a venue for the Southside Film Festival, an independent event organized by producer Karen O'Hare and a team of local collaborators and volunteers, some of whom were there to help with the build. The allotments were all in bloom, the sky a rare blue above the Victorian tenements that encircle the green space. Half a dozen friends and volunteers were there to help, while a few of their children ran around. I noticed how the work of assembling the yurt became an opportunity for conversation and bonding, the transmission of knowledge and the appreciation of the sensory context.

The trellis that makes the sides of the yurt is the first part to go up, followed by the top of the roof, a ring to which the poles will be connected. Gary stood in the middle and explained how to affix the poles to it with silky white ropes. As we do this, pole by pole, I chatted to Chris, a very experienced filmmaker and festival programmer who was there simply as a local resident and friend. He mentioned a Mongolian song that he once taped off the radio, where a woman sings about all the different parts of a yurt and the order in which they are put up. Gary and Neill joked that they have their own yurt songs, with punning titles like 'Everybody Yurts'. Once the structure is completed, the heavy cover needs to be pulled over the top and carefully unfurled. As we tied the canvas sides to the frame, we talked about the wonder that it is to watch a circus big top go up: the moment in which all the circus performers – all perfectly eccentric – pull the ropes all at once reminded Chris of the surreal circus scenes in a Jodorowski film.

As Gary and Neill added thicker pieces of fabric between the rafters and the top to serve as a blackout, children kept coming in and out, speaking different languages and eating ice lollies. Chris went to get a handsaw from his allotment shed to make new pegs for the front awning, talking about the pleasures of tending to his vegetables, about the blackbird that sings every night, about the sunflowers he was yet to plant. After laying down the carpet, Gary and Neill brought in the screen and projector, placing them with consideration to the position of the door and the arc of the sun. Once the generator was started, the yurt was ready for a birthday party that evening, and a series of festival screenings over the weekend. The audience was a mix of local kids and parents, and young hipsters drawn in by the twee potential of watching *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) in an unusual site.

While it can function as a festival venue with a predetermined programme, the reality of operating the yurt is also an experiment in live, flexible programming, open to chance encounters and opportunities. Neill recalled how a pair of Scottish animators who were attending Electric

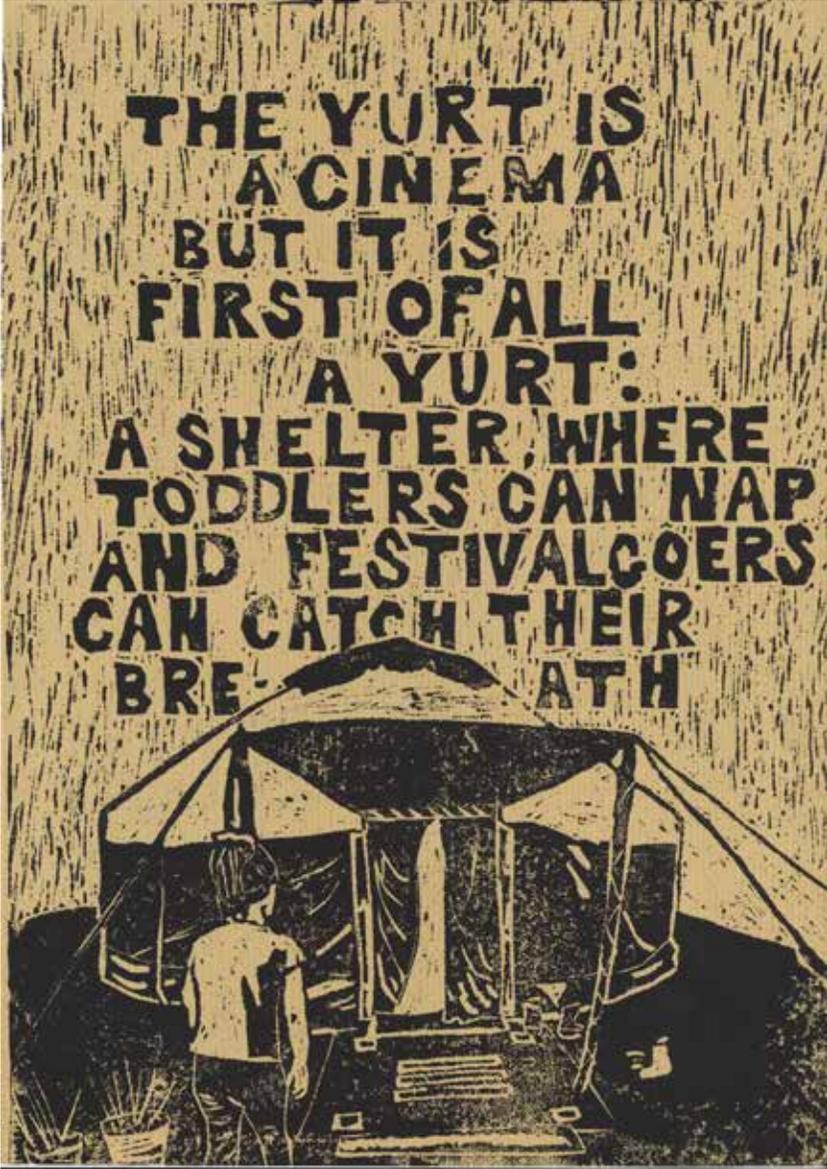


Figure 7: Cinemor77 yurt cinema. Linocut print by Marta Adamowicz, 2019

Fields music festival approached them with all their short films on a USB drive, so they ran an impromptu screening after midnight to a packed-out audience. Local filmmakers turned up with their own films in the islands of Tiree and Bute, and ‘at Belladrum one of the lighting guys came with a film he’d made in the 80s for this German psychedelic band’. According

to Patton, these spontaneous contributions were possible because of the visibly non-hierarchical organization of the space:

It's interesting, programming, because you just make connections, people give you stuff you would never have. And it's another side of film, because film is so top-down [...] Everybody is on the floor with their shoes off, you take away a lot of the barriers that would normally be there, that formality of, is my stuff really good enough to be shown here? And you're also sat right next to the projectionist, he's fumbling around the wires trying to make things work. The workings are there, people can see what you're doing...⁵

An exhibition space where the projectionist is also the programmer and promoter is a space where showtimes can be flexible and audience requests accommodated. Have all the kids gone to the swimming pool at the time scheduled for a children's film? No matter: it can be shown later. If the fancy dress parade clashes with the shorts programme, the screening can be moved. The volume can be adjusted as the noise levels outside rise and fall. This was crucial at music festivals, where film soundtracks can sometimes mingle with the bands playing outside, creating interesting sensory moments, but can also be swamped into incomprehension. In such cases, recognizing that the film screening may not be the highest priority takes both humility and flexibility.

These qualities are often lacking in the institutional frameworks of exhibition licensing and permissions. Cinemor's flexibility is limited by the more rigid framework of film trade reporting, particularly when they choose to programme films in mainstream distribution. For the commercial feature films, Cinemor has to report precise audience numbers to Filmbank, and they do not have the freedom to repeat a screening or change the date. Dealing directly with the filmmakers is a way to overcome such restrictions, and also asserts the legitimacy of the space and of the programmers as cultural intermediaries (de Ville 2015: 248). This in turn increases the likelihood of obtaining external funding for the project, such as the Creative Scotland support that enabled Cinemor to subsidize the costs of their festival tour, and increases the social capital of the project, motivating collaborations such as those established with Pollokshields Playhouse, the Southside Film Festival, and the Festival of Lights, all local initiatives driven by personal networks.

5 Neill Patton, interview with the author, January 2018

7.4. Home cinema

The defining private site in the bourgeois imaginary is the home, and therefore turning a home into a temporary cinema is a way to push against the hegemonic separation of public and private. Because the publicness of cinema relocated to domestic spaces is not assumed, but produced, it can take different forms. It can be more or less permanent and extensive; more or less controlled or spontaneous. During the period of my fieldwork, two Glasgow-based cinema activists started a series of domestic screenings under the name Radical Home Cinema (hereafter RHC). RHC uses some of the recognizable configurations and protocols of cinema to produce, by association, an experience of publicness in a domestic space. The hosts are also curators, as they choose the films and sometimes theme the screenings accordingly. People sign up to attend each screening, and are then given the precise address. Publicness is thus tightly bounded, not open to passers-by but requiring some previous engagement and allowing hosts to potentially veto attendees, though at the point of writing this option had not been used. Even within these margins, the proposal is still a challenge to the taken-for-granted privacy of people's homes.

The first instalment of Radical Home Cinema took place in the context of the Radical Film Network film festival, in May 2016. Amparo Fortuny and María Suárez, who had recently moved to Glasgow, had the simple idea of finding people who would host a screening in their own homes, of a film of their own choosing. The screenings would be run under the umbrella name of Cinema Up Collective, an organization that was born with this project. Cinema Up takes charge of coordinating various guests, helping them secure permission to screen the films, setting up social media event pages and coordinating with the broader festivals to include the RHC screenings in festival brochures. After their first successful run, RHC featured again as part of Scalarama in September 2016 and 2017, and in the Open House Festival in 2017.

Amparo and María, who met in Glasgow when friends insisted on introducing each of them to 'the other Spanish activist', are clear about the intent of their project in relation to their political activity:

María: Rather than saying that we do cine-activism, we say we are creating cinematic experiences that use cinema as a transformative weapon, sometimes simply by showing stories that hadn't been heard before.⁶

6 'Más que decir que estamos haciendo cine-activismo, es que estamos creando experiencias cinemáticas usando el cine como un arma de transformación. A veces simplemente mostrando historias que simplemente no están ahí.' Interview with the author, May 2017 [author's translation]

Amparo was fresh from an experience of distributing her own documentary about the fight for reproductive rights in Spain, which was shown as a simultaneous online screening in over 200 non-theatrical locations. Her interest in alternative distribution, and on the special relationship to the audience that it enables, was one of the inspirations for Radical Home Cinema. But even before that, there is a radicalism in the way that each screening is organized, since it requires a voluntary and individual production of publicness by the host and the Cinema Up volunteers.

At a time when social perceptions of privacy are being reshaped by techno-culture expectations of total visibility and measurability, the agency implied in the act of sharing one's private space can be a way to reaffirm the importance of consent. This happened in one case, where the host had recently been involved in a controversy over a Lottery-funded arts project deemed indulgent or insensitive to the social history of the city. Online critics had exposed the artist's address and posted pictures of their flat, which made them reluctant to go through with a previous agreement to host a screening. Amparo and María arranged the screening so that the attendees did not know the host's identity, and the meeting place was outside. The initial apprehension on the part of the host gradually turned to a perplexed acceptance of a house full of strangers, and then to farce as the whole audience helped search for the remote control. After such a prelude, camaraderie was tangible, and a sense of trust seemed to be reaffirmed. The parameters of hosting a screening provided a relatively safe way to reconnect with a community that could have been hostile.

Most of the people who have hosted screenings for Radical Home Cinema are part of the artistic and cultural milieu of the city. Given that there is no funding to pay for a screening fee, hosts are encouraged instead to seek permission directly from filmmakers, who may be captivated by the premise and happy to connect with a small group of enthusiastic viewers even if no money changes hands. This practical strategy of contacting directors has the further advantage of making them so intrigued by the proposal that many have decided to accompany their films, stay with the hosts, and meet their audiences in the intimacy of a living room. For filmmakers the visit can prove productive and inspiring. The material constraints and the approaches adopted to organizing, that is, the way these screenings are produced, can thus have a positive impact on the type of publicness that is created. It is one of mutuality, horizontal power relations, trust and adaptability. Publicness here is an emergent property rather than a design, and so many viewers and hosts do not know what to expect.

Amparo: I would classify the kind of viewers we have in two types: the viewer who comes for the film, who would go to the ends of the Earth to watch it, and the viewer who comes because they're into this odd idea, something they have never done before, going to someone's home and be invited in. They want to see it because they think it's something alternative, and it is a different way to experience cinema.⁷

This account of curiosity and, to an extent, novelty-seeking as a motivation for attendance emphasizes the fact that the context of Radical Home Cinema is abundance, not scarcity. The choice of venues is not due to the lack of alternatives; people's homes are not offered as a temporary replacement in lieu of a proper cinema. Instead, the rediscovery of living rooms around the city is a recognition of resources that already exist in a community, and which can be activated collectively. These resources include not only the domestic space itself, but also equipment, knowledge, skills, and social connections, which can all be mobilized outside a cash economy. In a parallel development, these sorts of assets – living space, tools, skills – have come to be the focus of the so-called 'sharing economy', which can be more properly described as an intensification of rentier capitalism. In this other timeline, it would be possible to imagine an AirBnB for home cinema, where punters could buy tickets to other people's living rooms. By framing itself as 'radical' from the outset, RHC rejected this transactional proposition. What remains is the radical act of inviting a stranger into the home: a nexus of trust and hospitality, mediated through the recognizable codes of cinemagoing.

Hospitality is a special form of generosity. In Chapter 4 I discussed the impulse to share a film you love with others, an expansive cinephilia that undermines the accumulation of cultural capital as a mark of distinction. The generosity of RHC hosts goes beyond this symbolic sharing, and it is very concrete. At every home screening I attended, hosts laid out a buffet for attendees, treating us to everything from herbal tea to vegan burritos, popcorn to pintxos, beer and baklava. Food and film prove once again to be ideal companions in the production of convivial spaces, but the profound resonances of shared sustenance run deeper than that. The cinema space as a lived experiment in hospitality is empowering for hosts and guests. It

7 'Yo clasificaría el tipo de espectador que tenemos como en dos: el espectador que va por la película, que iría al fin del mundo a verla, y el espectador que va porque le gusta mucho esta idea tan rara, que nunca he hecho en mi vida, de ir a casa de alguien y que me abran la casa de alguien y yo quiero verlo, porque me parece algo alternativo, y es una manera diferente de experimentar, que es un poco lo que tratamos, que la gente experimente de manera diferente el cine.' Interview with the author, May 2017 [author's translation]

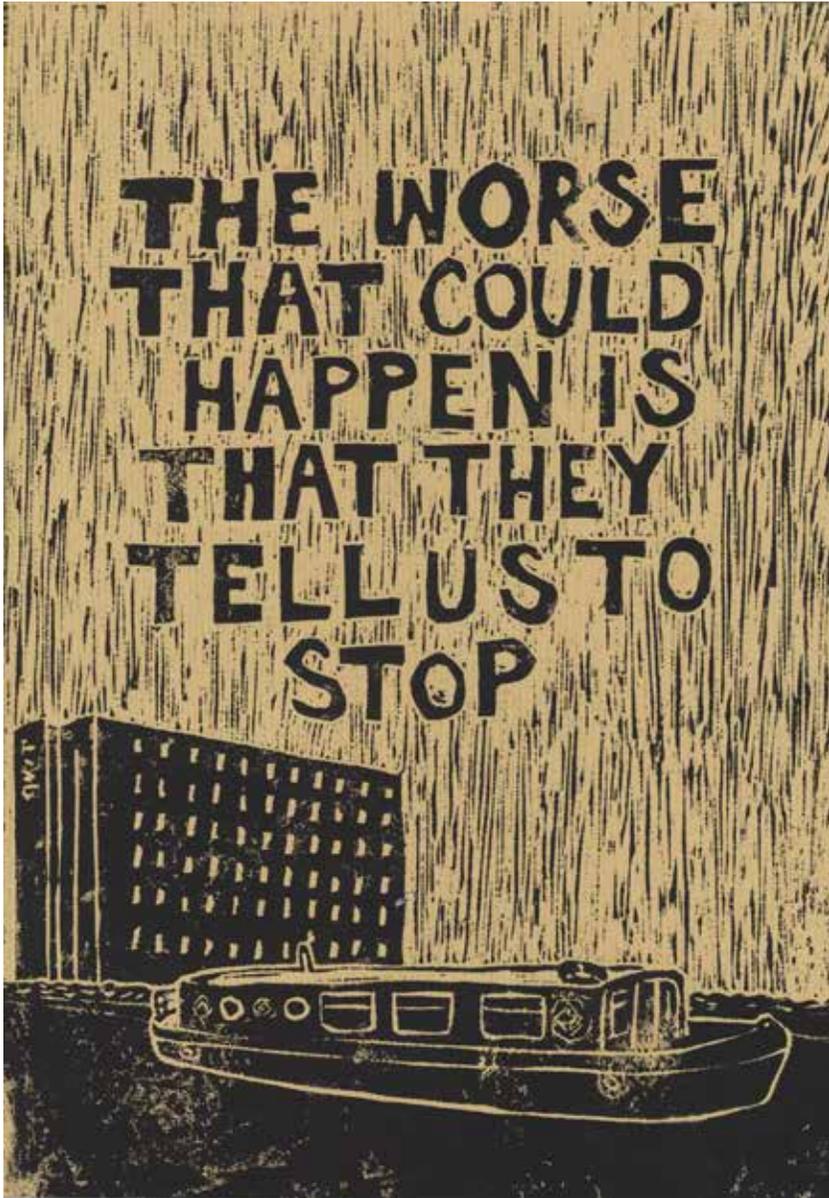


Figure 8: The Peccadillo houseboat, a Radical Home Cinema venue. Linocut print by Marta Adamowicz, 2019

starts to chip away at the learned fear of the stranger by offering a relatively controlled framework for the invitation. The mediation of Cinema Up as official organizers, and the widely-understood parameters of the feature

film, help set a common expectation of how long the event will take and what it will involve, allowing for a more openly consensual, temporary social contract.

This playful establishment of short-lived utopias is a trope of the celebratory discourse of pop-up urbanism. But even when the longed-for effect does not materialize fully, the praxis of the attempt holds its own prefigurative interest. In other words, even if cinema fails to change the world, working together to show films to one another can be a means for people to experience collaboration and solidarity in small but concrete ways. DIY exhibition of the kind proposed by RHC, without official interference or distributor contracts but plenty of hospitality, warmth, conversation, and last-minute panics, can reclaim the act of showing films to one another, and watching together, away from the cash nexus. Reflecting on the audience's involvement in home cinema events, María ventured that 'it takes away a lot of the glamour, which has worn out over the years anyway, or it's a different glamour [...] It is an odd experience'.⁸ This demystification is connected to the breakdown of the division of labour implicit in hegemonic exhibition practice, where some people are working and some people are 'at leisure'. This blurring of boundaries is characteristic of DIY spheres, and important in a production-based definition of publicness.

7.5. Networks

The interconnectedness that sustains non-profit cinema initiatives is woven in concentric layers. There are the intimate networks of home, family and friends who come together to organize a screening, and the local networks of makers and organizers that converge around specific projects. While these are crucial in the production of each event, involvement in non-theatrical exhibition also connects people to broader formal and informal networks, through the circulation of films, sector organizations, festivals, and one-off partnerships. In her work on the US and Canada, Donna De Ville uses Angela McRobbie's description of 'network sociality' to characterize microcinema scenes in North America. This describes the contemporary shape of independent entrepreneurialism, dependent as it is on social capital and fluid bonds. What is striking about the dynamics I observed amongst

8 'Yo creo que le quita mucho glamour, que ya se ha quitado mucho con los años, pero es un glamour diferente, [...] es una experiencia muy rara.' Interview with the author, May 2017 [author's translation]

Scottish independent exhibitors was the prevalence of collaboration rather than competition or monopoly as a horizon, even when this was more complicated in practice.

A key site where this commitment to collaboration was foregrounded was Scalarama, an annual DIY programming season which has taken place every September since 2012. Scalarama is hard to define, but as of 2018 it was part film festival, part loose crowd of people who are interested in showing films. During the month of September, these independent exhibitors (some of whom work in permanent venues, some of whom are long-term cine-club programmers, and some of whom are new to this) coordinate a calendar of screenings in different cities, supporting and promoting each other. There is a website with all the listings, and special deals with distributors are available. It is a simple idea, but it is infused with a utopian tone, made visible through manifestos and critical writing, as well as the selection of films. The 2013 promise was to be 'the UK's widest and most inclusive film event... ever!⁹, and the commitment to more diverse programming includes, for instance, the '58% pledge' to programme films made by women.

Scalarama's utopian streak, although made possible by the Internet and affordable digital projection, is nevertheless rooted in cinema history. The project started as an initiative of two London-based event promoters, Phil Foxwood and Michael Pierce, who programmed the Ritzy theatre and later operated under the name Cinema Nation. In 2012, they organized the first season, 'Scala Beyond', in homage to the eclectic slate of London's Scala cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Over the years, the initiative has expanded in a federated way, and transformed into a banner to bring together people who were putting on film screenings across the UK, with some international participants.

The diversity of exhibition sites is a feature of Scalarama. In 2012, the Scala Beyond manifesto urged people to 'fill the land with cinemas'.¹⁰ In the same year, Foxwood and Pierce ran a workshop in partnership with the Independent Cinema Office, called 'I want to start a pop-up cinema'. Promotional material foreground the most photogenic of these novel cinema spaces. Of more than six hundred exhibition sites used over the first five years of Scalarama, the most memorable tend to be those that were used only once. These include a variety of bars and cafes, some parks, libraries,

9 *Scalarama* Kickstarter video, 2013. <https://youtu.be/XLao4gTEuTU>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

10 Scala Beyond manifesto, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c-pVTgTAN4>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

comic shops, record shops, video game arcades, canal boats, and several community centres and village halls.

However, it would be misleading to describe Scalarama as a festival of pop-ups. All of the top 10 venues by number of Scalarama screenings are either independent cinemas, arts centres, or 'small cinemas'. One of the aspects that make Scalarama interesting and productive for participants is that it brings together the institutional and DIY exhibition spheres, creating access routes into the industry for those operating at the margins. It allows those putting on their first ever screening in a local pub to chat on the same level to programmers at established cultural venues. The participation of different types of exhibitors has material benefits, such as options for venue sharing that may reduce costs, access to borrowed equipment, and mutual promotion, as well as programming ideas. Scalarama's championing of collaborative entrepreneurialism is not oppositional, but it shows an alternative to a cinema sector that has been notoriously competitive and monopolistic. However, a more critical examination of the relationships between DIY practices and cultural institutions shows the limits of a liberal approach to cultural democracy.

Scalarama's claim for inclusivity is premised on the adoption of a 'fringe' model, like that of the Edinburgh festival in the sense of having no curation and consisting of a collection of self-reliant, self-funded events.¹¹ The claim for inclusivity has remained a key element, and this ambition is premised on a DIY ethos (the 2016 programme proclaimed: 'Scalarama is by everyone, for everyone, everywhere, with DIY in its veins!'). However, the notion that DIY equals inclusivity has been challenged extensively from within DIY scenes, because access to opportunity is not the same as fair participation, if it does not challenge the structural barriers. The collective authors of Glasgow zine *Communal Leisure* pointed out in their first issue that 'DIY' has often reproduced various forms of oppression and exclusion, and needs to be reassessed through 'critiques of the structures that deny people access to artistic production and enjoyment' (2016). Theatre collective GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN similarly contested the escapist or ameliorationist politics of DIY, calling it 'a temporary fix for a deep structural problem' (Daniels 2013, 60–61). Like the Edinburgh Fringe, the decentralized model of Scalarama has a double edge.

11 Critiques of this model, which forces artists to take on substantial risks, and can enable various forms of exploitation, from extortionate rents to underpaid and overworked labour, have emerged from the performing arts. See for instance the *Fringe Whistleblower* blog: <http://fringewhistleblower.tumblr.com/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

On the one hand, it rewards entrepreneurialism as an accommodation to the precarious conditions of cultural work; it offers low-cost solutions to market failures, and opportunities for mobility into the industry. DIY can allow capital to exploit deep-seated subcultural valorizations of authenticity and the pervading myth of arts work as a labour of love. In this version, pop-up cinemas can be one of the 'artwashing' strategies deployed as part of developer-led gentrification, and they can enable local councils to claim a cultural impact with minimal investment, while permanent facilities such as libraries and community centres have their funding slashed, and decently-paid culture sector jobs disappear in favour of precarious or unpaid labour. In this scenario, DIY cinema cannot contribute to more inclusive access in the long run.

On the other hand, the practice of organizing autonomously but in collaboration has a longer-term potential. It puts into practice, as an experiment, a different way of thinking about how cinema can function. In its programming policy, Scalarama demonstrates a model of federated decision-making that nurtures autonomy and cooperation. This is not an entirely flat structure, since there are named regional and national coordinators, who have sometimes received a small honorarium for their efforts, but these coordinators function as connecting nodes rather than hierarchically superior agents in the network. The Cinema Nation founders have acted as national coordinators of the season and in previous years have taken the initiative in negotiating with exhibitors and raising funds. However, local coordinators are expected to emerge autonomously and communicate with each other.¹² This happens online and through local and national meetings, in a flexible and informal way.

The problem that Scalarama shares with most other similar organizations is that institutions are notoriously bad at dealing with non-hierarchical structures; funding bodies want someone to 'be in charge' and take the blame if something goes wrong. Compromises need to be made all the time – especially as Scalarama (through Cinema Nation) received funding from the British Film Institute for two years, during which participation grew substantially. When this funding came to an end in 2016, an attempt to move towards more independent, less institutional forms of support through online crowdfunding was unsuccessful. This meant that the umbrella organization was limited in its ability to offer material support to people

12 When talking about his vision for Scalarama as an organization, incidentally, Pierce referred to Frederic Laloux's 2014 book *Reinventing Organizations*, which gives examples of structures that promote self-management through a sense of purpose.

trying to organize events, which in turn limited the participation of those less able to work for free or have access to equipment.

This ambivalence over institutional support and its bureaucratic demands touches a nerve for many exhibitors involved in Scalarama. As the manifesto-style promotion of the events often suggests, the desire to change cinema is for many an expression of a desire to change the world. Organizing in an autonomous way is therefore a strong part of their ethos. Being part of a network offers some practical advantages, described by Edinburgh Scalarama coordinator as 'knowledge sharing about licences, venues and equipment' (Dunn 2018). But there is also a vaguer, more utopian commitment to, and practice of, collaboration and openness rather than competition. This can be framed in such a way that it accommodates to current institutional discourse, but it can also be a way to exist beyond it. This utopian desire runs through the initiative.

In January 2017, Cinema Nation organized a gathering of exhibitors involved in Scalarama. Most of them were working in film exhibition on a freelance basis and seeking opportunities for paid employment in the sector, so Scalarama offered an opportunity to acquire direct curatorial experience. This could be understood in the context of a cultural sector in which discourses of 'passion' or 'love' serve to conceal (self-)exploitation, as they need to be demonstrated by working for free (Gill and Pratt 2008; Loist 2011; Weeks 2018). However, in Scalarama these potential rewards are secondary to a genuine desire to collaborate and to forgo the competitive pressures that define local scenes.

This event/network model has also been adopted by the Radical Film Network in its broader conception. Originally, this was a conventional research network supported through a grant from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The legacy of older activist and artist organizations, in particular the Independent Filmmakers' Association (IFA), was a strong influence within a group that wanted to challenge the exclusionary tendencies of academic networks (Presence 2019). At the time of writing, the RFN included 133 organizations – and many more individuals – across 23 countries.¹³ The concrete existence of the network is its directory and mailing list, plus an ad-calendar of events; there is no ongoing funding or physical base. In that mutable existence, the Network has materialized sometimes as a conference, sometimes as a film festival, or a mix of both, depending on the resources and backgrounds of local organizers. In 2016, a group of filmmakers, activists, and academics (of which I was part) organized

13 Radical Film Network. <https://radicalfilmnetwork.com/about/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

a meeting of the network at Glasgow. The collaboration was pitched as a 'single-purpose vehicle', a temporary alignment of diverse groups and individuals focused on a weekend. A total of thirty-five screenings, all free of charge, took place in various spaces around the city, including a ruined church, an art gallery, a trade union centre, a mental health support centre and a few private living rooms (Archibald 2017). Running in the mornings throughout the weekend, an 'unconference' provided a space for discussion and workshops on themes decided on the day.

One of the topics for discussion was the sustainability of the Network. Some participants proposed a more formal structure that would be able to attract funding, while others argued that this would detract from its independence. The relationship between the one-off event and the Radical Film Network as a wider organization remained unresolved.¹⁴ Like Scalarama, the tangible, ongoing existence of the RFN is mediated through online platforms as much as live events. The festivals themselves rely on online tools for organizing, promoting, and evaluating events, and in this technological adoption there are some tensions. A dependence on Google (for email, collecting and sharing information) and Facebook (for event promotion and communication with audiences) was felt as a necessary compromise, which would help reach more mainstream audiences and break down some access barriers. Meanwhile, the Unconference website was set up as a standalone site using a WordPress plug-in, linking to a pay-what-you-can registration page. The contradictions of 'radical' organizing thus had very concrete forms.

The resistance to establishing a normative definition of 'radical' complicated matters further. A 'non-hierarchical decision-making' workshop was held for all those involved in the organizing group, and specific strategies taken forward into the events. Behind this effort to take a conscious approach to decision-making was also a nervousness around control and accountability. Like in Scalarama, the non-curatorial principle for film screenings depended on their DIY nature: Whoever was prepared to put on a screening had the autonomy to decide what they wanted to screen, and the other network members were invited to collaborate. The main role of the organizing committee was to facilitate these contacts and to seek to expand the network, by reaching out to other organizations. Therefore, the organizing committee was not supposed to censor or define what was appropriate for inclusion. Pragmatic hierarchies still emerged or were agreed upon, such as a paid role for a coordinator, Fran Higson, who approached the

14 As it happened, several of the connections sparked then were reactivated for a month-long, Scalarama-style season in 2018 and a conference in 2019.

role with some apprehension and much care. In the final evaluation meeting, Higson spoke of the risk of 'letting the centre become the centre', while others pointed to the mirror risk of falling back on the claim of decentralization as a way to avoid conflict, which may leave issues unresolved or individuals unsupported. While this is a much broader conversation about the ethics of non-hierarchical organizing, it is interesting to note that the temporary nature of the project was seen to prevent the accumulation of power.

Scalarama and the Radical Film Network events are, therefore, examples of a shift towards devolution in the provision of film culture in Britain. While the relationship with funding bodies is not straightforward for a non-hierarchical network, the fact is that the national arts funding council, Creative Scotland, funded the Radical Film Network festival, and so did the British Film Institute. Since the establishment of the Film Audience Network, in 2012, the BFI has devolved the administration of exhibition funds to regional Film Hubs. This rhetoric of a less centralized film culture, where diversity in programming is enabled through autonomy rather than intervention, is thus not confined to the margins of the system. The notion of a 'creative ecology' and a 'modular' future for film exhibition was discussed by Creative Scotland's Screen Leadership Group in the run-up to the launch of their new screen strategy.

The BFI's 2017-2022 strategy document highlights the role of partnership, and positions the funding for exhibition and distribution as 'accessible and responsive', while the Film Hubs are to become 'more strategic'.¹⁵ There is considerable variation between the way regional Hubs have pursued the allocation of funds, but it is worth saying that amounts tend to be very modest. The Film Audience Network Fund, which supports eight regional hubs, receives around £3m a year in Lottery funds, to be distributed amongst hundreds of projects and events throughout the UK. Within such constraints, visible concessions to cultural democracy need to be understood in the context of austerity. By funding projects which are mostly delivered through voluntary labour, funding bodies can lay claim to a vibrant, diverse film culture at minimal cost. For the people involved in the sector, the fluidity of temporary associations and project-based funding is mostly coherent with their broader experience of freelance working and precarity, which has become entrenched and normalized.

Festivals provide a privileged window to observe competing trends towards professionalization and instability, and they are also an arena where

15 British Film Institute. 2017. *BFI2022: Supporting UK Film*, p. 13. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/2022/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

resistance is gaining ground. During the 2018 RFN event in Glasgow, PhD student Alexandra Colta organized a session with festival organizers and programmers to discuss their labour conditions.¹⁶ This followed on from an initiative started at the Berlinale for a network of film festival workers. At the Glasgow meeting, one of the points raised was that the growth mentality embedded in many funding programmes was detrimental to working conditions and even to the mental health of festival workers. In order to obtain repeat funding from an arts council it is often a requirement to promise to do more. This compounds the chronic underfunding of festivals, particularly small ones, which rely on voluntary or underpaid work. While festival organizers are driven, passionate, and keen to take on challenges, there is also an emerging idea that it may be better to simply 'do less'. Precarity breeds isolation, but collaborative work offers other ways to manage expectations, avoid duplication and increase audiences per screening.

In the UK, there are strong incentives for independent exhibitors to formalize their activities. Funders and distributors reward formalization, and the organizations that support independent exhibitors often focus their efforts in enabling them to comply with legal requirements. The contradictions of sustaining a minor practice within majoritarian structures are again present in these incentives. For instance, Scalarama helps exhibitors get discounted screening fees for repertory titles, hence contributing to the assimilation of previously unauthorized and non-monetized screenings into institutional distribution markets. This compliance allows established venues to ensure that no illegal exhibition is taking place, so exhibitors may move their activities into these more convenient spaces. The venues and funders see this collaboration as a strategic response to gaps and inefficiencies in the market, such as under-used facilities and un-distributed films. Meanwhile, exhibitors may see their under-remunerated work as a gateway into an opaque sector.

At the same time, there is a risk that the habit of doing things through the regular routes might stifle the resourcefulness of DIY. Restricting analysis to those forms of cinema that are accounted for within state systems – taxed and regulated – is to overlook a vast universe of production and consumption practices (Lobato 2012, 42–44). This includes not only the many kinds of morally justifiable copyright infringement, but also the stimulus to show more local films or to establish relationships with filmmakers directly. This effort to legalize DIY activity has the parallel effect of holding up the legitimacy of the

16 Scottish Trade Unions Congress. 2018. 'Labour of Love – Film festivals speak out on working conditions'. <https://scottishtuc.blog/2018/05/04/labour-of-love-film-festivals-speak-out-on-working-conditions/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

distribution system itself, with its rent-seeking tendencies. The legitimization of DIY still leaves many other potential exhibitors outside it, and it may in fact marginalize them even further, because it relies on systems of credit (economic, but also in terms of cultural and social capital) that are not equally available. As one of the exhibitors explained about their free screenings,

Of course all of this is a-legal, because we'd be supposed to pay screening fees and a cinema license, which we don't do [...]. The worst that could happen is that they tell us to stop, but then again, if we ask for permission and they say no, we can't continue, so we'd rather give it a try. We don't think we're taking viewers away from any cinema.¹⁷

This ethos seems to be relatively rare in the UK, where there is a strong permissions-first attitude. But for many alternative or oppositional forms of exhibition, there is little precedent and therefore little comprehension from authorities and institutions. Often, the conditions that would need to be met for official authorization are unreachable and would prevent the screening from happening at all. Therefore, a measure of discretion, and sometimes rebellion, is necessary for some operations. In the summer of 2016, the Golden Trailer Collective travelled from Edinburgh to Belgrade with a welfare van to offer support to people trying to make their way north and living in refugee camps. In their mobile foot care clinic they tended to the injuries caused by long journeys and longer stints of rough sleeping; the van offered a place of respite where people could charge their phones and play music. This hospitality was a defiance to rabidly xenophobic and racist policies that crystallized around the so-called refugee crisis. From the Italian border town of Ventimiglia, the collective reported that the mayor had

re-implemented a staggeringly ludicrous ordinance forbidding the 'unauthorised' sharing of food and drink with migrants. This week two volunteers delivering food were arrested under this ordinance. In a minor act of civil disobedience we have even been serving tea and biscuits during the films, smuggling a tea urn past the police.¹⁸

17 'Por supuesto esto es bastante alegal, porque tendríamos que pagar cuotas por proyección, por el *cinema licence*, que no se hace [...] Si nos pillaran, lo peor que podría pasar es que nos pidan que paremos, y si preguntamos y nos dicen que no, igual no podemos seguir, así que preferimos intentar. Porque nosotros no creemos que le vayamos a quitar espectadores a un cine'. Interview with the author, May 2017 [author's translation]

18 Golden Foot Collective, Facebook post, 24 March 2017 <https://www.facebook.com/golden-footcollective/videos/343853096010968/>. Last accessed 17 February 2020.

In a world where serving tea and sharing a film can be criminalized, the radical kindness of this simple activity is profoundly counterhegemonic. The fleeting publicness created in a refugee camp is produced oppositionally, and not through the means of alienated labour and separation. It is different from one produced within commercial relations, and it is vital to the future relevance of cinema.

7.6. Conclusion

Scalarama and the Radical Film Network are examples of hybrid ways of organizing, pursuing utopian visions in the context of precarious entrepreneurialism as the dominant mode in the cultural sector. This negotiation is marked by contradictions, but in their fragmented, ephemeral exhibition practices, and in the revalorization of the viewing context, there is a space that opens for imagining something different. Their flexible approach offers a way to start ferreting away the good things about cinema, hollowing out its monopolistic, exclusionary edifice. Grassroots initiatives like Radical Home Cinema and the Radical Film Archive are riskier efforts to use protocols of film exhibition selectively to make new commons.

Many of those involved in independent and DIY film exhibition are critical of capitalism and of dominant politics. Their involvement is often framed in relation to their activism, as a counterhegemonic practice. Showing films with a political intent is part of it, as discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to 'useful cinema'. Using the practice of organizing screenings as direct action to reclaim a space is another type of intervention. Furthermore, as a social activity, organizing pop-up cinema screenings opens up a rehearsal space for non-hierarchical organizing, and for the development of prefigurative social relations at a small scale. This means that when people get together to put on a film screening or festival, their interactions can demonstrate how collective activity may exist outwith capitalism. By subtracting the constants of commercial cinema as a major form – its fixed venues, labour hierarchies, and profit motive – these minor forms can help people reclaim the commons for public life, and in these struggles over publicness 'what is at stake is the very possibility of making connections' (Hansen 1991, 36). As well as a site for aesthetic experience, for learning and pleasure, the shared spaces defined by the protocols of cinema can also be sites of solidarity and encounter.

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