

## Part 4

# Cinema, Modernity and the Local

# The Social Biograph

## *Newspapers as Archives of the Regional Mass Market for Movies*

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*The home paper is the mirror in which those at a distance see us.*

Local News column, *Paris (ON) Star-Transcript*, 1 May 1907

In 1904 the *Fort William Times-Journal* introduced a new column called the ‘Social Biograph’, compiling local curiosities and gossip from all over northern Ontario.<sup>1</sup> The feature had begun with the title ‘Social Chat’, but its new name seemed to elevate its purpose beyond gossip into a more significant record and review of the intricate details of ordinary life. The ‘Social Biograph’ lasted into 1909, in its later years often sitting next to advertising for the town’s new nickel shows. This edited collection of curiosities provided a biography of the social, graphing the lifeworld for its public of readers. Like the aphorism printed in the *Paris Star-Transcript* in 1907, the small town newspaper’s social biograph was a mirror that allowed those at a distance to see its community. The visual dynamic of this metaphor inverts the mass media roles of cinema, since moving pictures conversely allow us here to see them at a distance.

Early twentieth-century newspapers are an archive of cinema’s reorganisation of social life. Every small town and village newspaper had a local gossip column, under a heading such as ‘Town Topics’, offering a nonchalant compilation of the indiscriminate social and commercial happenings of the past week. These columns often recorded the first appearances of five-cent picture shows in not-quite-rural places across North America. More than advertising, more than news stories, these passing comments amidst the village gossip fascinate me most in studying early cinema. Altogether they paint a surprisingly detailed picture of the regional diffusion and institutionalisation of the novelty in the years before it was a mass practice. My book-length study of early moviegoing in Toronto emphasised urban routines and municipal governance as the foundation for making a mass culture out of big-city moviegoing (Moore, 2008). In keeping with some recent

*Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, First Edition.

Edited by Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers.

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film exhibition histories, my own archival research has shifted its attention from downtown to acknowledge the point succinctly made by Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, that ‘motion pictures seem to have been well tolerated wherever they were shown in villages and towns across the [U.S.] nation. Many itinerant showmen were successful, and nickelodeons cropped up as quickly in smaller towns and cities as they did in Manhattan’ (Fuller-Seeley and Potamianos, 2008, p. 7). Even more vociferously, Robert C. Allen has continued to fight against the ‘Manhattan myopia’ of ‘*New Yorker* map’ film history, most recently arguing that ‘our [US] national map of the history of the social experience of moviegoing is schematic, conceptually primitive, geographically distorted, not drawn to historical scale, and hence, of limited epistemological utility’ (Allen, 2007; see also Allen, 2006). While agreeing with the general emphasis of these arguments, my prior urban research, in combination with my recent research into early exhibition in Ontario’s small towns and villages, leads me to retain the significance of the metropolis, but now as a focal point of a region.

The emergence of mainstream cinema was metropolitan – not simply urban – insofar as it almost simultaneously included the hinterland in creating first a mass market for cinema, and subsequently a mass practice of cinemagoing. The modernity of cinema was not simply the electric apparatus, nor just the commercial form of its pastime, nor the edited sensations of its depictions. It was also, and perhaps primarily, a mass practice that connected all places in a region, not to each other so much as to the mass market. Whatever was on screen, cinema provided a way to practise modernity as it constructed a modern mass public. Of course, newspapers did this first.

About half of Canada’s population lived in Southern Ontario, spanning the northern shores of the Great Lakes.<sup>2</sup> This was the most densely populated part of Canada, and the only part of the country with an industrial economy rooted in transportation and metropolitan networks comparable with, and indeed integrated with, those in the bordering United States.<sup>3</sup> After government regulation became standardised and theatre inspection centralised, the bureaucracies of these processes created a rich archive of architectural and administrative records. These archives, however, do not cover the beginnings of everyday moviegoing from 1906, before regular advertising and government inspection became the norm, and the history of the emergence of cinema must be constructed from other sources, particularly from the trade press and local newspapers. As I pursued the emergence of nickelodeons (a strictly American term, it turns out, as these places were known in Ontario as ‘theatoriums’ or simply ‘picture shows’), it seemed at first as if every city, town and village was entirely unique and required an entirely distinct way of searching through its newspapers. The following analysis, however, formulates a more systematic methodology, gradually developed in the process of researching dozens of towns across all of Ontario. It provides not only a typology of cinemas and relations to their localities, but also a typology of newspapers’ relations to their localities, in which the local appearance of cinema is embedded and archived.

## **Newspapers and Modernity**

Despite our collective scholarship on the nickelodeon years in North America, it remains surprisingly difficult to recover histories of specific early picture shows. Especially in the biggest cities, nickel shows opened almost anonymously, without advertising, reporting or building permits: the entertainment equivalent of corner stores. The mass market for movies in North America was successfully entrenched through the independent planning of thousands of entrepreneurial showmen, largely because film exhibition began with precisely the radical decentralisation that mass production of celluloid entertainment allowed. Recovering the history of this process consequently needs to be equally decentralised, and locally attuned.<sup>4</sup> There is no single archive of the spread of the nickel shows. Instead, there are thousands, resting in almost every local newspaper and municipal record of the period. Tracking how these variously local appearances of cinema existed in a concerted network requires as many methods as there were routes into showmanship. Exhibition was the avenue through which cinema became culturally meaningful to the population of North America, who gained access to cinema practically simultaneously but initially as somewhat isolated regional publics. A composite local history of nickel shows describes the origins of cinema as a transition from metropolitan curiosity to mass culture during the 'transitional' period from 1907 to 1913 (Keil, 2001; Keil and Stamp, 2004). The regional mass market was an important transitional scale, mediating the initial perception of picture shows as local enterprises, which were then transformed into an institution providing entry into a continental popular culture.<sup>5</sup> Along with the other contributors to the project of *New Cinema History*, I would argue that the research effort required to verify this process through grounded social history is as valuable to film history as time spent investigating the more centralised processes of production and distribution.<sup>6</sup>

Mapping the nickel show's appearance on a regional scale collects local cases into a mass market without abstracting the process to global or national generalisations. Such a project requires grounded research to bring into view the networks of localities sharing a common subcultural experience of mass culture.<sup>7</sup> To define cinema as mass culture implies the existence of showmen and audiences themselves oriented to moviegoing as a modest way of participating in the mass market of modern metropolitanism. Little remains of their perceptions, of course, but promotional journalism and advertising can stand in as an archive of showmanship and of the ways that it enticed audiences into going to the movies. Newspapers are an important empirical record of transitional cinemagoing because they provided a route for the normalisation of cinema, and were themselves a similarly modernising means of connecting readers in one location to the modern mass market everywhere.<sup>8</sup> This nexus of communication, consumption and public participation (whether through newspapers, cinema, railroads, the telegraph or postcards) defines the very foundation of modernity, but for this assumption to be securely grounded historically, it needs to be supported by contemporary observations of

cinema that provide evidence of its arrival being discussed as a sign that localities were becoming modern through their connection to the mass market.<sup>9</sup>

Given my advocacy of empirical grounding, a few examples are in order. Most overtly, showmen often showcased metropolitan business connections, such as the boast of one making 'arrangements to secure, with the leading moving picture theatre of Toronto, the latest films', or another's claim that 'these films are brand new and have never been shown outside the larger cities'.<sup>10</sup> Moving pictures were evidence of communities becoming modern and more like larger cities. Consider the rhetoric of an advertisement for a tent show set up on a town square for the summer, defending the townsfolk against the dismissive attitude of a nearby city: 'Berlin says Galt never wakes up till it's too late. Hundreds have wakened to the good things at the Tentorium'.<sup>11</sup> In the town topics of Newmarket, well north of Toronto but connected by electric railway, the opening of the Scenic put the town 'in the swim' with other places, a cogent, if colloquial, way of denoting modernisation as a network, as connection and circulation rather than hierarchy and progress.<sup>12</sup> Metropolitan downtowns might have taken the plunge earlier, but once 'in the swim' anywhere could be part of modernity. Interpreting newspaper discourse as linking peripheral sites to the metropolitan market even revives the clichés of showmen's advertising copy: new and up-to-date, first-class and refined, the latest and the best. These became vital signs of cultural currency, and could even be transferred from the films to the town or audience itself: 'Scott's Colloseum Coming to the City – Peterborough Up-to-Date', and simply the command, 'Be Up-to-Date. Visit Wonderland'.<sup>13</sup>

From 1995 to 1997, *Cinema Journal* staged a debate over methodologies for studying early cinema, centred around Ben Singer's attempt to defend the working-class and immigrant associations of early cinema against Robert Allen's foundational tracing of 'Manhattan Nickelodeons' corresponding with areas of middle-class consumption much earlier than the mythology of working-class cinema implies (Allen, 1979).<sup>14</sup> Part of the discussion was the need for a more contextualised methodology for studying immigrant moviegoing, marginal theatres and research outside of Manhattan. Subsequent research on Jewish and Italian picture shows in Manhattan has indeed demonstrated an affinity between these marginal audiences and early cinema, regardless of the coexistence of mainstream moviegoing elsewhere. The evidential basis for this casework of the margins has largely been provided by the subcultural newspapers of their communities.<sup>15</sup>

For example, Jacqueline Stewart's history of migrant black moviegoing in Chicago successfully describes cinema as a key route for becoming modern in this viciously marginalised population (Stewart, 2005). One of Stewart's primary sources is the *Chicago Defender*, which contains a surprising wealth of early information on south State Street picture shows (far more than we know of Loop nickelodeons), and richly detailed information on black entrepreneurial film-makers (much more than the *Chicago Tribune* ever published about Essanay or Selig).<sup>16</sup> Early cinema and the community newspaper are perfectly aligned to promote their common audience's integration into the modern public sphere, not just politically

but also through consumption and leisure. The appearance of cinema in the *Defender*, however, is less the result of its racialised or class-based marginality than the consequence of the newspaper's role in forming an identifiable community as a public of readers within the larger metropolis. Cinema's place in the *Defender* was, therefore, similar to its early and detailed appearance in the *Englewood Economist*, serving the affluent, white suburb nearby the University of Chicago. The role of the newspaper in promoting readerships to become modern publics was similar in both subcultural communities, and cinema was a valuable tool for integrating each community into a mass-marketed modernity while nevertheless remaining distanced from the Loop. In both cases, the community paper and local cinema became ways to cope with the problems of the wider public sphere, whether those problems were racism or regressive corruption.

Methodologically, such community studies require the researcher to understand the ways in which a history of early cinema is embedded in the promotional discourses of newspapers that envisioned their own roles as serving their readerships as a public. The difference between mainstream and ethnic moviegoing was not simply a matter of who the empirical audience was, but of how those publics were differently included in documents recording the public life of a locality. Most strikingly, major metropolitan dailies, which constituted their readership as a public encompassing the entire city, did not treat cinema with the same promotional zeal shown by the weekly papers of ethnic ghettos, affluent suburbs or small communities, until years later when the movies had unquestionably become a mass culture.

Consider the methodological implications of the following four 'first appearances' of moving picture shows in distinct types of towns.

In the metropolis of Toronto, the earliest trace of five-cent shows occurred at the end of April 1906, when one burnt down. Small news articles about the fire reported the destruction of showman John Griffin's Trocadero near City Hall, explaining why Griffin filed a building permit to rebuild the theatre the next day. The next report of the nickel shows also recorded a fire in November 1906 in Griffin's Lyceum a few blocks away.<sup>17</sup>

The earliest advertising for a moving picture show was not in Toronto, but in the much smaller city of Brantford, about halfway between Toronto and Niagara Falls. The Allen Brothers opened their Theatorium, perhaps the first nickel show opened in Canada outside of Montreal and Toronto, with modest fanfare in November 1906 by purchasing a two-column advertisement in both of the small city's daily newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

In 1907, picture shows began to open throughout Ontario. In small towns, neither news nor advertising was the norm, but a careful search through the 'town topics' column reveals such needles-in-haystacks as 'The Theatorium is again running', in May 1907 in Paris; 'The Majestic Theatre, giving moving pictures and illustrated songs, opened up in the Samson Block last week – Performances every night', in September 1907 in Petrolia; or again 'Dreamland will be open each day 4 p.m.' in October 1907 in St Mary's.<sup>19</sup>

In the Great Lakes port city of Owen Sound in March 1907, there was the smallest of notices for the opening of its first picture show, worded exactly the same in the town gossip column of all three weekly papers: 'Watch for the Opening of the Theatorium, corner Poulett and Union', although one paper repeated this sentence three times and added the smallest further detail that the showman was Mr T. Joy of Brantford. When more shows opened two months later, the *Wonderland* secured a full article about its owners' plans, while the showman of the *Star* instead purchased a single advertisement to announce his opening, in just one of the three papers.<sup>20</sup>

These various 'first notices' of cinemas in newspapers constitute a set of distinct relationships between a theatre and its locality, all of which need to be included simultaneously in a methodology accounting for a regional review of early cinema. In metropolitan centres, nickel shows tended to be first noticed only when something 'newsworthy' happened: something out of the ordinary routines of operation, usually negative in effect. In smaller cities, however, the local daily newspaper apparently allowed a very different relation between the theatre and the public, and picture shows were 'adworthy' from the start. In villages, where newspapers had only weekly editions, the first remarks about moving picture shows were more variable, but were dominated by merely 'noteworthy' passing comments about the appearance of cinema in town life. With these three prototypical examples as a starting point, some towns with several weekly newspapers such as Owen Sound presented a combination of these forms. Nonetheless, the typology of the newsworthy, the adworthy and the noteworthy by and large corresponds with the relatively distinct methods that I now use, with a considerable degree of reliability, to find cinema in metropolitan daily papers, small city dailies, and small town weekly newspapers respectively. I have also found that the typology holds for the earlier decade of the cinema of attractions: although booked and promoted by the same advance agent, the 1896–97 travels of the *Cinématographe* and other cinema shows around Ontario receive news stories but minimal advertising in metropolitan cities, relatively large display advertisements in smaller cities, and often only after-the-fact notes in the 'town topics' in small towns.<sup>21</sup> In later decades, I have noticed that small town papers do indeed profile such phenomena as industrial and educational films much more prominently than big city papers, while the relative standardisation of mainstream advertising and promotion after 1913 confirms the cultural homogenisation of classical cinema.

My typology is, importantly, less a representation of variation in the relation of a theatorium to its local audience than a codification of newspapers' relations to their local readerships. What I am really outlining here is not simply an empirical map of the emergence of regional cinemagoing, but an analysis of how the rapid spread of the movies was embedded within the various relations a community could have with its newspaper. Cinema did not immediately change how local publics congregated, how local businesses promoted themselves, or how local news was communicated; instead, it fitted into the existing norms and routines of

what was expected to be mentioned, advertised, noted as merely curious, or reported about in detail. Before cinema was institutionalised – before it was bureaucratically regulated, before film distribution was consolidated, before film showmanship became a big business – hundreds of independent showmen may have worked independently of each other, but they did not, taken altogether, work independently of local norms. They left regular traces that can be used to recover and scrape together a grounded history of movie exhibition.

### Verifying the Typology's Reliability

With just a few exceptions, my typology of the ways cinema appears in newspapers can be classified in terms of town populations at the time:

- metropolitan centres of more than 50 000 people with several hefty daily papers;
- small cities of 8000 to 20 000 people with one or two brief daily papers;
- towns of 4000 to 7500 people with multiple weekly papers; and
- villages of fewer than 4000 people with a weekly paper.

There was a fifth type of place, which had a population of less than 2000, but these are marginal to my typology because while they sometimes had a weekly paper, only very rarely did these places have a picture show.<sup>22</sup>

In 1907 in Ontario, there were four cities with a population exceeding 50 000, all with multiple daily newspapers, cosmopolitan in content with distinctly more elaborate illustrations, lengthier editions and significant amounts of international news on the front page.<sup>23</sup> What appeared in a metropolitan daily paper needed to appeal to a mass readership that was by definition polyglot, heterogeneous and fractious. Metropolitan advertising implied that the entire city was welcome and that a wide swathe of the public was likely to attend, something that was only rarely true of the early nickel shows, even those located downtown. Metropolitan daily news needed to appeal to readers' common concerns in politics, their common human interest, or their common ground of consumption downtown. Only extraordinary news and extra-special events tended to be reported, not routine business. Neighbourhood, ethnic or class-based subcultures were by definition marginalised except when they were turned into curiosities or framed as affecting the common good of a democratic society. What made cinema newsworthy was remarkably invariant from one big city to another: fire safety cut to the core of real estate value as the very basis of urban form; children's moral education, immigrants' integration and women's leisure consumption were each crucial concerns affecting the viability of democratic ideals in an increasingly secular, commercial society.<sup>24</sup>

All but two of the remaining daily papers in Ontario were published in small cities of between 8000 and 20 000 population, and all but two such small cities had a daily paper.<sup>25</sup> Downtown was usually the only shopping area, rather than the



primary one among peripheral neighbourhoods. Ethnic and class diversities rarely amassed themselves into identifiable subcultures, and were usually connected to specific industries or services, such as Jewish merchants, Italian manual labourers, Greek restaurateurs and Chinese laundrymen. Rather than pare and edit out the routine chaos of everyday life, the daily newspaper in a small city more typically filled its columns with the trivia of routine business notes. Every business was geographically within easy reach of every citizen; and the daily frequency of the paper encouraged a planned, public relation between reading and consumption. Advertising predominated, costing less than in big city daily papers and being more effective than handbills or word of mouth in a smaller village. Picture shows were relatively prominent among amusements; the filigree and cost of a storefront nickel show was more like a small town opera house than a big city vaudeville palace or syndicate playhouse. The daily deadline for advertising easily allowed small city showmen to promote film and song titles for every night right from their grand opening, and these small city papers have provided the most comprehensive archive of film programmes for the transitional period.

The towns of between 4000 and 7500 population are most difficult to codify. These towns tended to have several competing weekly instead of daily papers. The format and content of a town weekly paper was, however, more variable: some emphasised town news, sometimes using headlines, while others printed dense notes from surrounding villages, and yet others featured boilerplate national or international news. There might be many or very few advertisements, much or very little local gossip. In turn, the appearance of picture shows varied without pattern between adworthy and noteworthy from one show to another, even within a single newspaper. Just as a town could seem neither entirely urban nor strictly provincial, these papers needed to be regionally sensitive, covering commercial news in town but also attending to the happenings of the many small villages just outside town. Both advertisements and articles had to be useful to a public not necessarily sharing a daily site of consumption in town. The specific problem for picture showmen in such towns was that the weekly dateline of the newspaper required planning several days ahead for advertising. Advance promotion of film titles was, as a result, extremely rare in weekly newspapers until much later in the 1920s.

Village weekly newspapers typically included political news and opinion, syndicated columns of curiosities from afar, and fiction for leisurely reading. Their original, local content could be characterised simply as local gossip, most often headed with the phrase 'Town Topics'. Summarising the past week's events with scattered previews of the coming week, the village weekly provided a baseline of common knowledge about the commercial doings of local businesses, the travels and transitions of local people, even the weather. Was this really needed in such a small place? The irony is that a village picture show opening would truly have been an event compared to one in a town or city, but the newspaper was not necessary to spread the word in advance. Its opening was instead noted as a matter of fact the following week. Village weekly newspapers, even in places with a population below 4000, still served a catchment of nearby, even smaller places. There seems to be a

cut-off point of about 2000 people: in villages with smaller populations than this there might be a weekly paper, but it was unlikely to serve smaller communities nearby. Not coincidentally, there was also only rarely a picture show in the village.

An important aspect of this typology of newspapers is a hierarchy of attentiveness: each attends to events in the municipal level just below, so that metropolitan newspapers included news from nearby cities, city newspapers included events from nearby towns, towns from neighbouring villages, and villages from surrounding farming areas. The inverse was much rarer, because publishing deadlines usually prevented weekly village papers from being the first to report newsworthy events, even those that occurred locally. Thus, the network of newspaper attentiveness marked out mutually exclusive markets of social life. While the metropolitan city-dweller might read competing morning and evening editions and be inundated with choice, the farm dweller might conceivably subscribe to a village weekly, a city daily and a condensed, weekly mail-order edition of a metropolitan paper in order to have all levels of events covered. This sometimes explicitly extended to picture show promotions, especially in weekly papers serving farming areas: 'When in Goderich, Don't Miss Seeing the Moving Pictures at Wonderland'.<sup>26</sup>

The picture show spread throughout Ontario as a region just as it did in the markets of the Midwest and Northeast United States. Through advertisements, articles or notes, I have identified 251 'first appearances' of picture shows in 88 different towns in Ontario from the first in Toronto in April 1906 to the end of 1909. These include 220 different theatres and 31 seasonal shows in pre-existing theatres (but not travelling one-nighters) or changes in theatres' names. Almost two-thirds of the notices recorded the exact opening date of the theatre (something either an advertisement or an article might do). Twenty-eight theatres were identified from municipal documents or directories such as *Billboard*, although they were not noted in newspapers before 1910. Thirteen theatres were open in Ontario in 1906, 85 new shows opened in the boom year of 1907, 78 in 1908 and 75 in 1909. Although Toronto was the largest single location, with 28 different shows, it did not predominate. It was quite distinct from American cities of the same size, with relatively few theatres before a spree in 1909 and 1910. In February 1908, there were still only eight shows in Toronto, a shockingly small number for a city of 350 000. By comparison, Cleveland had over 50 shows, Pittsburgh about 40, Montreal 26, and Buffalo, Detroit, Cincinnati and Milwaukee about 20 each.<sup>27</sup> The full domestication of the Canadian film market into the American was less a result of how cinema worked in Toronto downtown than of how the whole region worked as a mass market bordering the United States.

The most common form of 'first notice' was an advertisement: a boxed display laid out in the newspaper to attract attention. Sixty percent of the theatres were first announced with a newspaper advertisement, more than twice as many as were first announced with an article (with a headline) and more again than with a note (within a list of other nondescript town topics). Advertisements were, however, often combined with articles or notes that had been paid for, and it is impossible to distinguish which articles were bought as a form of advertising, and which

**Table 15.1** Methods of searching newspapers by population of place (columns are independent of each other, compare proportions in each column against total sample).

	<i>Adworthy – promotional advertising</i>	<i>Noteworthy – nondescript notice</i>	<i>Newsworthy – promotional or news article</i>	<i>Total sample</i>
Metropolis (50 000 or more) Multiple daily papers	23%	0 (far lower than expected)	21%	24%
City (8000 to 20 000) Daily paper	49% (higher than expected)	37%	36%	36%
Town (4000 to 7500) Multiple weekly papers	16%	18%	21%	17%
Village (less than 4000) Weekly paper	13% (lower than expected)	46% (far higher than expected)	22%	23%
Total (sub)sample sizes	100% <i>n</i> = 146	100% <i>n</i> = 68	100% <i>n</i> = 76	100% <i>n</i> = 251
Significance ( $\chi^2$ test)	<i>p</i> = 0.00 Significantly different from total sample	<i>p</i> = 0.00 Significantly different from total sample	<i>p</i> = 0.71 As expected, similar to total sample	

were simply a matter of editors looking for any local events to fill up their newspaper’s space. Most promotional articles accompanied advertisements, although the more anonymous notes only rarely appeared when advertising was placed elsewhere in the paper. Only 1 in every 20 theatre openings was first noted in news items, and these were predominantly in metropolitan cities. For the purposes of the statistical summary in Table 15.1, I have grouped both promotional articles and news event articles together. Although qualitatively distinct, they are methodologically equivalent, relying on the researcher reading headlines to filter out the mass of inapplicable material on any page. Notes without headlines, on the other hand, require a distinct method of scanning newspaper content by reading the content of every item in the ‘town topics’ column, rather than attending carefully to every page in the paper.

As outlined above, I distinguished between four sizes of towns: the four metropolitan centres, 24 cities, 22 towns and 38 villages. The town–city distinction provided an almost perfect correlation with the break between daily and weekly papers. Almost everywhere with a population of more than 2000 had a picture show open by 1910; nowhere with a population of 3000 failed to have one. By far the most common name for early picture shows was ‘Wonderland’, especially if it was the first show in town. Over one-third of all localities had a theatre with this name, with ‘Theatorium’ and ‘Lyric’ distant runners-up. Although ‘nickelodeon’ is now the generic term for these places, only four Ontario theatres used any variant of the word ‘nickel’ in their name.

Table 15.1 indicates that scanning metropolitan daily newspapers for topical notes about early cinema is unrewarding, while simply looking for advertising in village newspapers might mislead you into thinking that cinema was almost absent from these locations. Although newsworthy events are important for all places and all types of newspapers, checking for newsworthiness is generally unproductive unless the event and time are already known. Keeping a systematic eye out for advertising is easier because it is visually distinct. Advertising is especially useful in cities, but much less so in the biggest metropolitan centres. Picture show advertisements were the most common way for cinema to appear everywhere except in the smallest villages, where noteworthy curiosities predominated. These nondescript notes also appeared in cities and towns, but never in the biggest metropolitan centres. They were sometimes richly detailed with names, costs, programmes, business connections and locations, providing vital information for the earliest shows, which often had only brief lifespans.

The methods of reading newspapers that I first developed for Toronto and the largest cities turned out to be inapplicable elsewhere, and I had to return to smaller city and small town newspapers many times, always discovering something new, expanding my method to incorporate different ways of searching. For the biggest cities, newspapers are in fact an altogether unreliable source for studying early cinema, and instead I turned to the trade press (*Moving Picture World*, *Billboard* and *Variety*) and especially to bureaucratic archives like police records, tax assessments and building permits. Municipal records were, on the other hand, not at all useful in smaller places, where they were less likely to be archived or even recorded in the first place. In smaller cities and especially in the smallest villages, newspapers proved a much more important archive of local cinema, both more exact and more thorough in capturing the appearance of early cinema. Advertisements alone are a relatively reliable method for documenting cinema history in small cities, while the village gossip columns are as reliable for documenting the appearance of picture shows in the smallest villages. Towns show the least consistent patterns and include all types of announcements, but in every type of smaller municipality advertisements, news and notes all need to be kept in mind.

Another statistical test can address the accuracy of newspapers as archives of early cinema, at least in the minimal sense of whether the exact opening date is mentioned in the 'first notice'.

Table 15.2 clearly illustrates that using newspapers to trace the history of early cinema is far more accurate than relying on the trade press or more general histories, and up to 87 times more accurate if a theatre first appears with both an advertisement and an article or note. The table also demonstrates that the least useful way of reading the newspaper for cinema's appearance is for news: town gossip and advertising are much more likely to offer detailed information, especially when any two sources are combined. News, even including promotional articles, does not catch cinema in its routines but in exceptional, anecdotal, random events when it breaks its everyday character. Such news might be illuminating, but it cannot be gathered methodically, and it will not represent the important aspect of cinema's being, essentially an everyday habit. These results are not greatly affected by the

**Table 15.2** Logistic regression on whether the first announcement indicates the exact opening of the picture show (interpret results as the odds, or likelihood, of recovering exact opening date).

	<i>E(b)</i> 'odds'	Sig.	Interpretation
Type of first announcement (compared to none in newspaper but something elsewhere, e.g. Billboard, MPW, city directory)			
News article only	12.9	**	13 times more likely, significant result
Advertising only	18.3	***	18 times more likely, highly significant result
Note only	21.8	***	22 times more likely, highly significant result
Advertisement and article both	68.3	***	68 times as likely, highly significant result
Advertisement and note both	86.9	***	87 times as likely, highly significant result
Type of locality (compared to metropolis)			
City	3.32	**	Three times more likely, significant result
Town	0.96		No significant difference
Village	2.00		Twice as likely, but not significant
Year opened (compared to 1906)			
1907	3.26	*	Three times as likely, some chance not significant
1908	1.40		More likely, but no significant difference with 1906
1909	0.71		Less likely, but no significant difference with 1906
If first show in town	0.67		Less likely, but not significant
Cox & Snell $R^2$ (test of predictive power)	0.29		29% of the sample's variation is explained

\*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

type of locality, and are consistent from year to year. The suggestion that local newspapers are more accurate and detailed than continental sources such as *Moving Picture World* is hardly original, nor is it surprising that more information will also be more accurate, but the results provide a way to verify the intuitive assumptions behind our methods. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the observation that the accuracy of our research depends almost entirely upon the character of the archive, rather than the locality or year or whether the show was first in town. This means that the detail and richness of our moviegoing history depends more heavily on local journalism than it does on film trade journalism or processes internal to the development of the film industry.

Newspapers are especially useful and accurate for smaller cities compared with either metropolitan centres or small towns and villages. The main instrument for subsequently promoting and announcing Hollywood or institutional cinema – routinised advertising for the coming days' shows and show times – appeared in prototypical form in smaller cities right from the opening of their first picture

shows in 1907, before it was applied in a centralised and standardised way in the metropolitan centres and throughout the continent from 1913. The institutionalised promotion of cinema *originated* outside the metropolis, and it is especially important to note how production centres in New York and Chicago were among the last places to use newspaper advertising as a way of announcing cinema. This point is vital: promotion made cinema a mass practice, because it explained and made meaningful the idea that there was a common audience dispersed across the continent. Newspaper announcements of cinema collected and collectivised the mass audience, connecting these people here to everyone, everywhere. This happened first at the regional scale, from the periphery inwards, as each town saw cinema as a small way to make a modern connection to the metropolis.

Distribution companies' branch film exchanges eventually took responsibility for newspaper advertising and promotion. As part of the codification of the run-zone system, newspaper advertising became the primary mode of promoting 'Hollywood' cinema, irrespective of locality, theatre, date, ticket price or audience. But advertising has its own transitional history, shifting as it did from smaller cities to metropolitan centres between 1907 and 1913, as important a part of 'transitional cinema' as the development of classical production techniques or institutional vertical integration. As a neglected part of the cinema of transition, newspaper promotion can also be seen as a neglected component of debates over the 'modernity thesis'. The nickelodeon period began with the promotion of cinema locally controlled by showmen and attuned to regional audiences, and ended with standardised advertising provided by production-distribution companies and focused on movie stars and film titles. Key moments in this transition were the *What Happened to Mary?* fiction supplements in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1912, the Mutual Movies campaign late in 1913, and especially newspaper fictionalisations of serial films, beginning with *The Adventures of Kathlyn* in January 1914.<sup>28</sup> The idea that distributors needed to promote and advertise only first-run, downtown feature films at movie palaces followed a logic initially articulated in serial-film promotions in metropolitan newspapers.

Identifying this shift through newspaper advertising makes vivid how the transition from the cinema of attractions to classical cinema was precisely laid upon the foundational emergence of a mass market in cinema, in which a regional run-zone-clearance system of distribution gradually rationalised the distinct character of disparate movie theatres, and stripped away their cultural specificity in a pattern that is characteristic of the production of space in modernity more generally (Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991). This system took about a decade to develop, and first required each theatre showman and audience member in the mass public – as local newspaper readers – to understand cinema as a mass culture. The 'modernity' of filmgoing had less to do with the perception of urban modernism on the screen than it did with an awareness of filmgoing as a practice that embedded its viewers in metropolitan modernity, not least through its capitalist mass market. This was not restricted to perception-in-viewing, but started with an awareness of cinema as an option in daily life: a commercialised pastime and form of consumption that was somewhat similar everywhere, and that connected life in the town or

village to the metropolis, and indeed to the entire mass-marketed network of popular culture that animated modernity. The region in turn became an important mediating scale between the local and the global.

## Conclusion

The local case study is obviously important for grounding our understanding of cinema in experience, while theory or generalised history is important for understanding the complex industrial context. Mediating these two positions, the region provides a scale in which embodied experiences of cinema are made cultural. This culture became a mass culture precisely because the region had a metropolis. Regional practices are metropolitan, not cosmopolitan: experienced and interpreted by audiences and publics, but not considered in isolation or as a pointed, individuated case study. The cultural basis of the region admits a scale between the local and the global that is both grounded and yet strongly related to mass practices in the sense of activities open to everyone, and to all places. Thus, small towns treated the arrival of cinema as a sign of their modernisation and how they were part of the zeitgeist of common culture. Cinema gave local publics a strong relation to the metropolis and to modernity at large, and yet always grounded in a specific place, through a particular showman-entrepreneur, and focused on a precisely timed, promoted, and priced show.

## Acknowledgements

Hailey McCron assisted in coding the cache of research into a database. The presentation of the preliminary version in Ghent was supported with a travel grant from the Faculty of Arts at Ryerson University.

## Notes

- 1 'Social Biograph', *Fort William Times-Journal* from 6 August 1904.
- 2 My own concern is for the cultural and architectural history of cinemas and theatres throughout Canada, compiled into a nascent Canadian Theatre Historical Project ([www.mapleleafmarquee.ca](http://www.mapleleafmarquee.ca)). My research assistant, Nikesh N. Bhagat, single-handedly designed and created the database and its web-based interface.
- 3 For an excellent history of Toronto's urban geography in a North American context, see Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For more contemporary implications in the multiplex era, see Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 4 The model general history of the nickelodeon period remains Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Local case studies are numerous, including those compiled in Fuller-Seeley (2008). For exhibition on an overall industrial level, the key achievement of Richard Abel's last few books has been to bridge the national, indeed nationalist, with

- local casework in *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Abel, too, has increasingly made newspapers themselves the subject of his research, not just his method. His forthcoming book is prospectively entitled *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Movies*.
- 5 Such an emphasis on the region has been cited as commercially important, especially because of railroad distribution networks. See Alfred D. Chandler Jr, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1977). On mass marketing, Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).
  - 6 Indeed, histories of production and distribution in the transitional or nickelodeon period 1907–1913 argue against the idea that these branches of the film industry were any more centralised or ‘vertically integrated’ than exhibition. Keil (2001); Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Scott Curtis, ‘A house divided: the MPPC in transition’, in Keil and Stamp (2004), pp. 239–284.
  - 7 The cultural particularity of regions has been noted vital to their independence-yet-integration into the continental mass market. See John C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
  - 8 The best discussion of newspapers as foundational to urban modernity is Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Emphasising an earlier connection to democratisation as well as the 1890s ‘yellow press’ period of modernisation is Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). A classic essay is Robert E. Park (1923) ‘Natural history of the newspaper’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 29, 273–289.
  - 9 The mass market is a key part of modernity for historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).
- Others define modernity in terms of concepts like interdependence, which connotes the mass market without focusing on it. See, for example, Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000 [1977]); David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2001); Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978), and of course Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society – Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1887]).
  - 10 Respectively, advertisement in *Seaforth Huron Expositor*, 19 March 1909; advertisement in *Fort William Times-Journal*, 22 September 1908.
  - 11 Advertisement in *Galt Reformer*, 29 July 1907. Note: Berlin is now named Kitchener; Galt is now named Cambridge.
  - 12 ‘Week’s Local News’, *Newmarket Era*, 1 November 1907.
  - 13 Respectively, advertisement in *Peterborough Examiner*, 23 January 1907; advertisement in *Collingwood Bulletin*, 31 August 1907.
  - 14 Allen’s essay was revisited by Ben Singer, prompting a sustained debate in *Cinema Journal* from 1995 to 1997, beginning with Ben Singer (1995) ‘Manhattan nickelodeons: new data on audiences and exhibitors’, *Cinema Journal*, 34 (3), 5–35.
  - 15 Giorgio Bertellini (1999) ‘Shipwrecked spectators: Italy’s immigrants at the movies in New York, 1906–1916’, *Velvet Light Trap*, 44, 39–53. Judith Thissen, ‘Charlie Steiner’s Houston Hippodrome: moviegoing on New York’s Lower East Side, 1909–1913’, in Bachman, G. and Slater, T.J. (2002) *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 27–47. See also Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds) *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: British Film Institute, 1999). On the immigrant press and its importance in America, see Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004).



- 16 On the *Chicago Defender*, see also Armistead Pride and Clint Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 17 'Theatre Burned Out', *Toronto Globe*, 30 April 1906; 'Two Firemen Injured', *Toronto Globe*, 15 November 1906.
- 18 Advertisement for Theatorium, *Brantford Courier*, 10 November 1906.
- 19 'Local News', *Paris Star-Transcript*, 1 May 1907; 'Local and General News', *Petrolia Advertiser*, 7 Sept. 1907; 'News About Town', *St. Mary's Journal*, 10 October 1907.
- 20 'Small Locals', *Owen Sound Advertiser*, 5 March 1907; 'New Wonderland', *Owen Sound Sun*, 11 June 1907; advertisement for Star Theatre, *Owen Sound Advertiser*, 25 June 1907.
- 21 On the dramatic dispersal all over the United States see Charles Musser, 'Introducing cinema to the American public: the Vitascope in the United States, 1896–97', in Gregory Waller (ed.) *Movieworld in America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 13–26. My research on the similar dispersal of cinema in Canada is summarised in 'Mapping early cinema's mass public: film debuts coast-to-coast in Canada in 1896 and 1897', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (forthcoming).
- 22 The terms metropolis, city, town, and village are my codes for the distinctions among types of community–newspaper–cinema relations, and are not legislated or official. Populations and newspaper circulations from McKim's *Canadian Newspapers Directory* for 1907. A relatively comprehensive list of Canadian (and American) picture shows is printed in *Billboard* between September 1910 and February 1911.
- 23 The four metropolitan cities and their 1907 populations are Toronto (340 000); national capital, Ottawa (80 000); steel-mill city, Hamilton (70 000); and farm country marketplace, London (50 000).
- 24 On fire safety, see my chapter 'Socially combustible' in Moore (2008). On the discourse over the juvenile, immigrant and gendered audience, see Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 25 The two places with daily papers but populations below 7000 were Lindsay and Port Hope, historically important towns whose regional position was slipping as other places industrialised more thoroughly. The two cities without daily papers were the suburb of West Toronto, and Owen Sound.
- 26 Advertisement for Wonderland, *Goderich Signal*, 12 September 1907.
- 27 'Everybody's Column', *Toronto Star*, 19 February 1908, p. 14. Estimates for American cities are from 1909 city directories for each. The count of 26 from Montreal is from *Montreal La Presse*, 12 October 1908, cited in Germaine Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: Le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montréal: Cinémathèque Québécoise, 1988).
- 28 This point draws primarily upon feminist research critical of how women were incorporated as foundational to the 'low culture' of mass-marketed entertainment: Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Moya Luckett (1999) 'Advertising and femininity: the case of Our Mutual Girl', *Screen*, 40 (4), 363–383; Barbara Wilinsky, 'Flirting with Kathlyn: creating the mass audience', in David Dresser and Garth Jowett (eds), *Hollywood Goes Shopping* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 34–56; Jennifer Bean (2001) 'Technologies of early stardom and the extraordinary body', *Camera Obscura*, 16 (3), 9–56.

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