

Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies

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In a recent issue of *Scope*, Eleftheria Thanouli observes that, thirty years on, the two most influential articles on art cinema remain David Bordwell's "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" (1979) and Steve Neale's "Art Cinema as Institution" (1981). Thanouli then critiques Bordwell's "canonical" account of art cinema—which, she notes, he later expanded in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985)—to underline "weaknesses that undermine the applicability of art cinema as a cohesive paradigm of narration" (Thanouli, 2009: 1). She argues that Bordwell's account is incompatible with recent trends in the genre, including the appearance of American "smart films," Danish Dogme films, and second-wave Iranian art films—and she wonders why we would want to retain a category that has been "so diluted over the years that it can contain practically everything" (Ibid: 9). Nevertheless, Thanouli reaffirms the necessity of fine-tuning our formal terminology, even if this task persuades us in the end "to abandon the idea of 'art cinema' as a grand narrative paradigm once and for all" (Ibid: 11; see also 10).

This is an effective essay, but we should reinforce its premises so as to embrace its conclusions in a more culturalist way. First, it is imperative to discern that Thanouli is questioning "art cinema" as a *narrative* category and not as a generic or institutional one. This might be hard for us to discern if we are primarily familiar with Neale, for he and Bordwell treat art cinema very differently. Neale looks at the genre as a diffuse industrial institution, while Bordwell treats it as a historically specific set of narrative forms arising from a circumscribed set of European attitudes, movies, and directors. [\[1\]](#) So when Thanouli dismantles Bordwell's account by showing how varied the genre has been as a narrative form, she does not confirm that we should renounce this term as a generic concept. What she confirms is that we should stop thinking that it still makes sense in the narrative terms put forth by Bordwell. On this, I fully agree with her. "Art cinema" makes little sense as a term that implies static or even *coherent* narrative forms.

Indeed, Thanouli comes close to saying that Bordwell's analysis—which places certain works by Robert Bresson and Jean-Luc Godard outside his art-cinema category while placing those of Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni inside it—was never sensible (Ibid: 6). I wish she had said it. To me, it makes no sense to define art cinema, whose cultural and institutional status has been so universally sought, as a subset of an already restricted set of narrative

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distinctions. This point is only magnified, I think, when we consider how Bordwell has reduced the scope of the genre from the outset of his account. Not only does he distinguish what he considers an authentic art cinema from the many art cinemas referred to as such before the Second World War, but he also distinguishes it from all the post-classical art cinemas that do not match the new-wave phenomena he prefers. [2] By contrast, in "Art Cinema as Institution," Neale refuses to make exclusionary distinctions of this sort. He accepts all historical art cinemas as "art cinema," for he hopes to grasp the logic of art cinema's institutional eclecticism, which Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover have referred to as the genre's "mongrel identity" (Galt and Schoonover, 2010: 3). So Neale quickly confronts the fact that art cinema has long entailed a diversity of forms that have run the gamut from Jean Cocteau and the French avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s to Francis Ford Coppola and the New Hollywood of the 1960s and 1970s. Recognizing all this heterogeneity, he does not pretend that the genre could be equated with one narrative concept. Could we expect one idea of narrative form to cover the movies of Marcel Duchamp, Werner Herzog, Shirley Clarke, Robert Altman, Dario Argento, Radley Metzger, Chantal Akerman, and Nagisa Oshima?

This suggests that Thanouli's concluding point—that the "crisis of 'art cinema' as a coherent mode of narration in contemporary cinema is at least partly due to the inherent deficiencies of this paradigm and partly to the transformations of the entire cinematic terrain over the past two decades"—is imprecise (Thanouli, 2009: 10). Although neither she nor any scholar has really focused on the main source of the genre's diversification over recent decades (i.e., the emergence of the cult-art cinemas), she is still mistaken to suggest that the problem is even *partly* the fault of contemporary cinema. Given that the potential for formal diversity was always present in the film-art concept, the blame for this "crisis" rests with theorists intent on squeezing diverse forms into extremely narrow paradigms. But abandoning this mistake would not mean that poetics would have to abandon their analyses of art cinema, for Thanouli has herself advocated a method that maps narrative properties in a "bottom-up manner" (Ibid: 7). Nor would they have to dispense with art cinema as a generic institution. Indeed, doing so would be almost futile, for art cinema is an active cinematic category that is not going to go away just because academics have a hard time figuring out what each new manifestation of "art cinema" means in the precise terms of poetics. As Thanouli recognizes, art cinema is a dynamic, global category that theorists must come to grips with in some fashion. They can't do so, however, through a unified theory of art-cinema narrative.

This critique of Bordwell's method should instead prompt scholars to embrace Neale's more supple institutional approach, which Thanouli introduces but then looks at only in passing. Indeed, her essay leaves us with a question mark: why did she focus on Bordwell while all but neglecting Neale? Her choice might have made sense had she used her article in the manner that Morris Weitz once used

"The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956): as a way of showing that the diversity of forms referred to as "art" make a hash out of the evaluative, formalist logics that try to explain *all* art in terms of *some* art. Such an approach would have been an elegant way to lead back to Neale, since it was Weitz's innovations that led George Dickie to construct the institutional theory that he finished in *The Art Circle* (1984). But Thanouli hasn't done this. She seems fully invested in solving Bordwell's problems within the terms of his formalist project.

But if we are not restricted by this sort of disciplinary investment, we may take Thanouli's advice and subject Neale's essay to scrutiny. This effort reveals that the assumptions of "Art Cinema as Institution" remain relevant to contemporary art cinema, despite the "enormous changes" that have reshaped the genre since the 1980s (Ibid: 11n.1). After we have done this, we will be in position to update Neale by joining his early institutional account to later ones. The later accounts, some of which are still just emerging, cover art-cinema institutions that Neale surveys only in brief, such as the art-house circuit, the festival circuit, and the academic discipline of film studies. These art-cinema institutions have, it seems, anchored our ideas of the genre in flexible but stable evaluative paradigms like "the festival film" and auteurism.

Thinking Institutionally

Before turning to Neale, we should consider the term "institution." When theorists like Neale, Dickie, or Andrew Tudor refer to an "institution," what they mean is a social construct collectively created and maintained over time. Such a construct can be broad and diffuse, like film studies, or it can be compact and concrete, like *Cahiers du cinéma*, but it is in any case mediated by our group nature, not our individual nature or biological nature. Thus "institution" is often contrasted with "form" such that fields that promote the idea of intrinsic properties and the study of single texts seem to oppose institutionally minded fields like film history, cultural studies, and sociology.

Both Neale and Bordwell begin their respective pieces with an assumption that qualifies as "institutional": that art cinema gained traction as a genre through Europe's opposition to Hollywood's domination of its film markets. [3] But whereas Bordwell uses this idea as a reason to return to a conventional idea of form—and to the belief that art-cinema narrative *must* oppose that of Hollywood—Neale remains focused on institutional specifics, such as the efforts of the "European countries both to counter American domination of their indigenous markets in film and also to foster a film industry and a film culture of their own" (Neale, 1981: 11). As a result, he looks at postwar European art cinema as an important instance of art cinema but *not* as the only one. And this makes it plausible for Neale to present the post-Code, New Hollywood tradition as embracing *some* European attitudes and forms without having to present it as embracing every practice associated with European art cinema simply to justify

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it as an art cinema. In this way, Neale remains open to the genre's historical diversity. [4]

Although Neale often refers to the distribution and exhibition of postwar European art cinema, he is strongest in reference to its production. According to Neale, this strain of art cinema came to seem "European" through the contributions of major European powers to its production in the postwar era. Specifically, he looks at the genre's postwar development in France, Germany, and Italy. In each case, his "point of historical and theoretical departure [is] the fact of Hollywood's increasing domination of the mass market in these countries after the First World War" (Ibid: 15-16). Neale predicates each case on the idea that sound technology contributed to Hollywood's industrial hegemony. Subsequently, producers in these nations, aided by government subsidies, in effect ceded their mainstream "mass" markets to Hollywood, opting to compete through a niche "art" strategy that supplied cultural prestige, national identity, and global distribution but never the most profits. This class-based strategy became more unified in the decades following the Second World War, when foreign producers were handed distribution advantages in the U.S. market, beginning with the Paramount decrees.

To make my next section more concrete, it helps to summarize what Neale says about the government policies that helped art cinema grow in these European nations. As András Bálint Kovács has noted, "it was already apparent—in the early 1930s—that the semicommercial narrative art-film institution could not survive without state support" (Kovács, 2007: 24). The postwar art cinemas of France, Germany, and Italy got their start through national strategies designed to protect domestic industries and to reinforce a sense of native cultural identity, which seemed threatened by imports from Hollywood and elsewhere. In France, a centralized system of quotas, tax incentives, and prizes for artistic and cultural merit was established through the formation of the Centre National du Cinéma Française in 1946, the passage of the Loi de Développement de l'Industrie Cinématographique in 1953, and the interventions of the Assemblée Nationale and Minister of Cultural Affairs in 1958 and 1959, respectively (Neale, 1981: 16-20). Having subsidized its own silent-era cinema, Germany returned to these policies fairly late, establishing production incentives in the 1950s, with a full system emerging after the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto through "the setting up of the Kuratorium junger deutsche film in 1965, the Film Subsidy Bill of 1967, and the various interlocking systems of grants, subsidies, and prizes since then, each feeding into the establishment of the 'New German Cinema'" (Ibid: 24; see also 21-25). Other systems were established in Italy through the Andreotti Law of 1949 and the Aid Law of 1965, which taxed imports and gave awards for merit (Ibid: 27-28). These systems also offered incentives to distributors and exhibitors. In France, a policy of "tax concessions" encouraged what Neale refers to as the "development of a numerically powerful Art house circuit" that grew out of the *ciné-clubs* and *cinemas d'art et d'essai* (Ibid: 20).

Still, according to Neale, it was only through art cinema's international dimension that it became truly influential. This dimension, which clashed with the nationalism that had underwritten postwar art cinema, reconciled the genre's contradictions through the universals of art, status, and culture (Ibid: 35-37). This new internationalism relied on the equally global dimensions of the art concept, which had traditionally submerged a tremendous amount of heterogeneity, both political and artistic, under the universals of "authorship" and "aesthetic value." The first signs of this internationalism were visible in the co-production agreements that emerged in this period, like the one signed between France and Italy in 1949, and in the "international film festivals, where international distribution [was] sought for these films, and where their status as 'Art' [was] confirmed and re-stated through the existence of prizes and awards, themselves neatly balancing the criteria of artistic merit and commercial potential" (Ibid: 35). Indeed, by having their credentials certified nationally and internationally, highly sexed European art films could be viable in the crucial American market. It is no accident that *Roma, città aperta* (1945), a film that encouraged the growth of the American art-house circuit by causing a stir there on its U.S. release, won a Grand Prix at Cannes in 1946.

Neale does not, then, neglect form. He focuses on just a few narrative and stylistic features that run across art cinema, such as sexualization, psychological realism, and the difference that art cinema maintains between itself and the dominant forms of Hollywood narrative, but he does address quite directly the profound degree of heterogeneity that has traditionally been submerged under the term "art cinema." In so doing, he shows how this classifier has managed to contain art cinema's expanding formal heterogeneity over its history. These explanations clarify why such heterogeneity persists today. And they are even more helpful if we update Neale's account, so it touches directly on the past thirty years. In this way, we may see how institutions in the areas of distribution, exhibition, and evaluation have encouraged the production of diverse art-cinema forms while also encouraging the use of a single concept to cover all of them.

As noted, one necessary limitation of this account is that its main focus is the production end of European art cinema. Thus, Neale leaves out major developments in European art-cinema exhibition and reception, including those in the festival network; he also leaves out most developments in North America and Asia. However, he does cite the impact of Hollywood, which helps explain how the Production Code came to influence Hollywood's postwar competitors: through the Production Code, European producers and distributors learned all the things that Hollywood could *not* do, meaning they learned all the *same* things that they *should* do. This counter-Code approach helped art-cinema producers and distributors bind their films into what seemed to American eyes a genre despite its diversity: "the foreign film." This result was the byproduct of a

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process designed to enhance the appeal of these films in the U.S., which was the crucial world market due to its huge collective audience and its outsize impact on the films Hollywood exported to the world. From 1948 to 1968, this crucial market opened up to foreign films, giving power to this lucrative art-house circuit—and playing a major role in Hollywood's flirtations with art cinema and its eventual scuttling of the Code.

Here a few words about American art houses are in order. Until the middle of the twentieth century, viewing art films in the U.S. meant attending one of the little cinemas, repertory theaters, museum theaters, university theaters, or film societies available to cinephiles mainly in college towns and urban areas. But after the Supreme Court's 1948 Paramount decision and its 1952 Miracle decision, these outlets became more prolific, profitable, and organized (Wasson, 2005: 1-31). Indeed, after those signal events, the art-house circuit rapidly developed into a more regular network with complex relations to other "alternative" sites of exhibition, like the grindhouses and drive-ins of the exploitation circuit (Wilinsky, 2001: 41-79). This circuit tolerated much formal diversity, exhibiting a range of foreign art films as well as exploitation movies by foreign and domestic producers. As in Great Britain, the U.S. art-house circuit entered a period of decline in the late 1960s that lasted into the 1970s (Tudor, 2005: 136). It was adversely affected by competition with the New Hollywood art movies and high-concept blockbusters that played in Hollywood's standard outlets. This circuit was also affected by suburbanization and the proliferation of multiplexes; later, it even suffered the coming of home video. Despite these setbacks, the American art house survived the 1980s to thrive in the 1990s after the resurgence of American independent film, which encouraged the establishment of new art houses, multi-screen art-plexes, and even a range of microcinemas. Indeed, if American critics still use terms like "art-house style" and "art-house film" in their reviews today, it is because this circuit has been a flexible and resilient host, not because it has actually made movies.

But there is one component of art cinema's global exhibition apparatus that *has* had a generative role in art cinema over the past decades: the global festival network that began at Venice and Cannes and that is still anchored by those institutions as well as by relative newcomers like Sundance. Of course, the art-house circuit and the festival circuit have shared many roles. As Neale notes, both were devoted to the reverential exhibition of art films, so both reinforced the cinephile's neo-Kantian sense that such films *deserved* or *mandated* their accolades. Through their evaluative functions, these two networks have helped bind art cinema into a genre that has been more unified by its institutional claims to high-art status than by its formal attributes, which are as diverse as those of any form of high art. What gives the festival network an edge over the art-house circuit in cultural significance is that it has been able to dictate which art movies have been distributed to art houses across the globe—and scholars like Thomas Elsaesser, Azadeh Farahmand, and Mark Betz have argued that the

festival system has also had a direct creative role by way of the constraints and incentives through which it enmeshes art-film directors, whom it has traditionally, albeit ironically, referred to as "autonomous" auteurs. Because the institutional significance of this system within art cinema cannot be overstated, we should look at it as a primary mechanism through which art cinema has sustained through time the ideas of high-art value that have bound it together. These ideas include the mythology of the auteur and the flexible notion of "the festival film."

But we must also look at one other segment of postwar reception and evaluation, the academic discipline of film studies. Film studies is noteworthy here because, "as with film festivals, academic study bestows artistic worth on its object," as Shyon Baumann puts it (Baumann, 2007: 67). Academic film studies has for the most part been a postwar phenomenon (albeit one that has undergone dramatic changes since Neale wrote "Art Cinema as Institution"). Indeed, its institutionalization within the Anglo-American academy loosely correlates with the mid-century consecration of the cinema as high art, which justified its place in academia. This is notable because, if my analysis is right, film studies has played a significant, albeit underreported, role in sustaining art cinema as a genre. Although film scholars have at times been hostile to auteurism and art cinema itself (Galt and Schoonover, 2010: 3-8), their participation in the quasi-academic "crossover" forums, which reinforce art cinema's most conservative assumptions, has been important in the long-term maintenance of the genre's institutional values.

The Film Festival as Contemporary Institution

Before we examine the film-festival system as a contemporary institution of some significance, we should contemplate its history. This system, which began in Venice in 1932, is rooted in Europe. As Elsaesser has noted, the film festival is:

a very European institution. It was invented in Europe just before the Second World War, but it came to cultural fruition, economic stature, and political maturity in the 1940s and 1950s. Since then, the names of Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Oberhausen and San Sebastian have spelled the roll call of regular watering holes for the world's film lovers, critics and journalists, as well as being the marketplaces for producers, directors, distributors, television acquisition heads, and studio bosses. (Elsaesser, 2005: 84)

Still, as both Neale and Elsaesser have noted, this institution was not confined to Europe for long. As a distribution network, it has performed its commercial role by reproducing itself through export. Gaining glamour through its capitals, Venice and Cannes, the circuit spread to North and South America, Asia,

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Australia, and Africa. Today, there are over 700 festivals globally (James, 2009: 5; Roddick, 2009: 13). It is now a truly global phenomenon, meaning that its cinephilic values are, too.

Consider the U.S.: although the festival system is European in origins and bearings, the first U.S. festival was held in 1953. The circuit spread to major American cities in 1957, when the San Francisco Film Festival was held. After that, the American festival system grew explosively, with seventy-three festivals already active in 1985, many of which were juried, and most of which judged their entries using auteur assumptions (Baumann, 2001: 408-409; Baumann, 2007: 56-57). The juried festivals included the U.S. Film Festival, which was renamed the Sundance Film Festival in 1985. The expansion of the American film-festival circuit has been steady since then, with festivals taking root in major cities as well as smaller ones like Austin. Today, some cities have multiple festivals or multiple *major* festivals; New York, for example, features the New York Film Festival and Tribeca. Many festivals have a sprawling, catholic sensibility while others, like Ann Arbor, which focuses on experimental cinema, have specialized tastes. Specialized festivals may be devoted to a genre, theme or style, or to an identity or subculture that cuts across the lines of gender, class, race and sexual orientation; thus, festivals for gay and lesbian cinema form a dynamic segment of today's American scene. Another notable segment is the cult festival, which often focuses on the "paracinema" aesthetic, that is, on an alternative taste regime that quite often presents itself as a cult variation on the art-house sensibility.

Like the art-house circuit, the festival circuit is a loose system with a variety of extensions. But it grows tighter, more institutionalized, as cinephiles move from its outer reaches to the inner reaches of the international "A" festivals at Venice and Cannes as well as Berlin, Toronto, Tokyo, and Pusan. These festivals form a compact "network with nodes and nerve endings" through imitation and rivalry (Elsaesser, 2005: 87). Elsaesser observes that elite "host cities compete with each other regarding attractiveness of the location, convenience for international access and exclusivity of the films they are able to present. The festivals also compete over desirable dates on the annual calendar" (Ibid: 86). This competition has raised standards across the network,

add[ing] value to the films presented. Competition invites comparison, with the result that festivals resemble each other more and more in their internal organization, while seeking to differentiate themselves in their external self-presentation and the premium they place on their (themed) programming. (Ibid)

A festival offers a stamp of prestige and raises tourist revenues. But what intrigues me most is how festivals' cultural capital flows among producers, distributors, critics, films, and genres through a self-sustaining, circular logic of association. Everything is so colored by the festival hothouse that the sources of

value and the objects of reverence merge. Yet this cultural capital has practical uses. As Baumann notes, postwar critics referred to "the awards that a film had won as testimony to its artistic worth" (Baumann, 2001: 409), and sales agents and distributors could follow suit. To justify this atmosphere, festivals have had to speak the language of the absolute, the unquestionable. Thus, they have increasingly adopted an air of bogus religiosity that makes their film judgments seem "impervious to rational criteria or secondary elaborations" (Elsaesser, 2005: 99). The practical nature of this religiosity is plain. As Farahmand notes, "festival awards would not be useful for distributors if the public were aware of the capital-dependent and politics-driven dynamics of film festivals that [...] influence the selection of films and allocation of awards" (Farahmand, 2010: 266). This protective religiosity is not new, for André Bazin noticed it as early as 1955, when he made it the premise of his essay, "The Festival Viewed as a Religious Order" (Bazin, 1955: 15-18).

If a festival has a high profile, it may even provide its prestige to entries that win nothing, for just getting into such festivals can be competitive and costly—and useful to distributors. Thus, as Marijke de Valck argues in *Film Festivals* (2008), the value "added by festival selection and programming reaches beyond the level of personal preference and becomes more or less—according to the festival's prestige on the international film circuit—globally acknowledged as evidence of quality" (De Valck, 2008: 186-187). Much like a festival award, this participation-based prestige may be invoked by sales agents during or after a festival to market a film to exhibitors and audiences, including viewers who watch on televisions or computers. In this way, festivals function as "the turnstiles taking directors into the industry" and as sites for deal-making between sales agents and distributors (Elsaesser, 2005: 107n28). [5] They have been used by exhibitors of all nationalities as guides for programming art houses, art-plexes, microcinemas, and even museums. In the U.S., they have been used this way by executives at Blockbuster Video or Hollywood Video. The festival is, then, art cinema's central institution, the one that best captures the naked contradictions of a commercial genre whose marketability is structured by rituals that testify to its anti-commercial purity.

This sort of contradiction is also important to Elsaesser's comments about how, in its effects on production and distribution, the festival has come to resemble Hollywood (Ibid: 92-93). Elsaesser's argument is based on what he considers a crucial shift that took place in 1972 when the festival at Cannes supported the move away from national selection committees. Because any shift at Cannes has tended to reverberate across the entire system, this change helped give festival directors across the globe the final say over the entry process. Thus it marked a fairly significant moment in the development of what Elsaesser calls an increasingly "postnational" festival system. As Elsaesser notes, "the gold standard of the European festivals under the rule of Cannes [after 1972] became

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the auteur director," not the nation or the national cinema (Ibid: 91; see Kovács, 2007: 25). By stressing "the auteur" and other signs of universalism, film festivals could better facilitate the international flow of cultural and economic capital on which they depended. But as Elsaesser has also pointed out, the increasing auteurism of this postnational system has also been in fairly open conflict with industrial realities.

For example, although festivals promote the autonomous auteur, film directors face a variety of constraints when taking films to festivals. These constraints tend to reinforce formulae approved by festival directors. "[F]ilms are now to some extent 'commissioned' for festivals," Elsaesser notes, meaning that the "power/control has shifted from the film director to the festival director," who is put in the position of a "star curator" or a studio executive (Elsaesser, 2005: 93). For example, many of the Iranian films that Thanouli mentions are festival films (Thanouli, 2010: 9), for directors like Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami have tailored their films to festival criteria so as to win reliable acclaim. [6] However, the fact that these auteurs have faced specific subcultural constraints does not mean "the festival film" is a very restrictive category. Indeed, it implies just as much leeway for individual innovation—at the level of the auteur or the festival itself—as the term "art cinema." Festivals do not have to adhere to centralized criteria, so their dispersal through time and space, in tandem with the incentives that festival directors have to offer choice and to discover new auteurs, new new waves, and new national cinemas, has traditionally encouraged heterogeneity. (Here it is to the point that the other hard cases that Thanouli mentions, including smart films and Dogme films, have also been identified with film festivals [Thanouli, 2009: 7-8]). As Farahmand has made refreshingly clear, the fact that art cinema's "generic boundaries remain loosely defined [...] ensures that festivals can continue to offer fresh products, or at least a new take on the products they showcase" (Farahmand, 2010: 265).

One last point might be made about the festival system. Although this system is for the most part an agent of conservatism, it may also be an agent of change that is political and aesthetic. For Elsaesser, the existence of gay-and-lesbian film festivals, which are as value-oriented as any other kind of festival, has said many positive things about same-sex identities; similarly, the fact that an apolitical site like Cannes awarded *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) the Palme d'Or said negative things about American foreign policy in the Bush years (Elsaesser, 2005: 100). Another way that festivals have provoked change is by acting as a register for the changing tastes of juries, audiences, and auteurs. I have noted the existence of cult-movie festivals, which have appeared in Europe (cf., the Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival), North America (with significant events in San Francisco, Austin, and Montreal, among other cities), and other continents. These festivals may seem to form a separate system with their own rituals and audiences. But this "separateness" is hardly unique to cult festivals, given that festivals devoted to experimental cinema and gay-and-lesbian cinema

also display this separate-yet-connected nature. There are, then, ways for movies to flow across these systems into the most culturally prestigious circuit anchored by Venice, Cannes, Toronto, Berlin, and Rotterdam, among others. What is more, festivals such as Tribeca have often included particular screenings dedicated to films classified as having a cult flavor (see, e.g., Hale, 2010: 1-2). Although often ghettoized, these cult film areas are an important part of the festival culture's overall diversity and flexibility.

Thus in an age in which a fanboy like Quentin Tarantino has become a fixture at Cannes, it may be a harbinger of things to come that the last few years have witnessed a great deal of cult-art crossover. For example, art-horror movies like Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003) and Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (2008) have won prizes at both traditional festivals and "fantastic" festivals, with *Oldboy* winning a Grand Prix Second Prize at Cannes. But this is not surprising. If art cinema and its auteurism have proved useful to Hollywood directors and studios in more traditional areas, there is no reason to think they couldn't prove useful to directors with cult sensibilities specializing in cult forms and themes. Cannes has been in the vanguard here, as shown in the July 2009 issue of *Sight & Sound*, a fairly staid journal that has greeted Cannes' investment in cult provocation with a good deal of reserve. Regardless, the points of crossover between cult forms and traditional forms have clearly demonstrated that cultural tastes evolve over time. Of course, as Joan Hawkins reported in *Jump Cut*, it is traditional for mainstream critics and traditional cinephiles to see in this process the "erosion of a certain *idea* about art cinema," for they often believe that art cinema is "superior to and clearly distinct from exploitation" (Hawkins, 2009: 2). Thus, these people follow the pattern set by Bazin in habitually lamenting the "sorry" state of the festival, whose spiritual corruption is in their eyes a fall from the grace of cinephilia. [7] What such people fail to understand is that art cinema is perpetuated by the rituals of the circuit and not by its tastes. That *many* status-laden festivals like Cannes and Venice still award prizes through these rituals is sufficient to confirm that the art-cinema institution is very much alive—and the fact that people still lament the state of art cinema is sufficient to confirm that a "certain *idea* of art cinema" has been successfully handed down through that institution.

Auteurism and the Institutional Function of "Crossover" Forums

Another institution that plays an important role in art cinema is film studies. This is a tricky case to make, since film studies is usually considered an academic institution, not a cinematic one. However, once we see that the mainstream world of movie reviews, trade presses, and Internet blogs cannot be cleanly separated from the academic world of peer-reviewed journals, university presses, and professional conferences, we will be more open to the idea that film studies promotes art cinema in a variety of fashions. Still, if all these forums

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may claim to be "doing" film studies in some sense, they clearly do it in different ways, bringing varying kinds of expertise and legitimacy to the conversation. The most expert forums are peer-reviewed academic publications, where film scholars have critiqued the ideological bases of art cinema, its stress on auteurism in particular. These expert forums have the most subcultural legitimacy. However, film scholars have also been free to participate in crossover publications where they may appear alongside more mainstream critics. The quasi-academic, crossover forums have big circulations and may constitute the most academic publications on cinema that many non-academics ever encounter—and for that reason, they have greater cultural legitimacy than the peer-reviewed forums. Crossover forums are significant here in that they channel their academic credibility to promote the discourse of cinephilia that is mandated by their particular market constraints. Consequently, mainstream readers who do not recognize the difference between a fully academic, peer-reviewed text and a more popular, quasi-academic, crossover text may presume that all academics are in full agreement with art-cinema assumptions—and with auteurism in particular. To understand what this means *vis-à-vis* the genre itself, it helps to review two interrelated histories: the development of auteurism and the emergence of academic film studies.

Because I focus on auteurism elsewhere (Andrews, forthcoming), below I will only outline my conclusions as they relate to film studies. We must first recognize that the idea of film authorship is as old as film itself and that the belief in the director as the most logical creative "center" of a movie goes back to the silent era. Ergo, we should look at the success of *Cahiers du cinéma* and the French New Wave at promoting *la politique des auteurs*—which later became known as "the auteur theory" by way of the American critic Andrew Sarris and journals like *Movie*—as a development in the history of auteurism but not as the start of that history. However, auteurism did contribute to the emergence of the Anglo-American discipline of film studies. Partly under the aegis of the auteur theory, academic film studies grew quickly in the U.S. and elsewhere from the late 1950s through the 1970s. The Society of Cinematologists (later renamed the Society for Cinema and Media Studies) was started in 1959, as followed by film-studies departments across the United States and Great Britain (Baumann, 2001: 409-410). These departments blended the professionalism of the older film-production schools with the critical slant of the highbrow journalism that appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Movie*, *Film Quarterly*, and other crossover journals. The auteur theory was crucial in that it provided this emergent discipline with an accessible and respectable sense of rigor that scholars could invoke to justify their field to outside administrators. Moreover, an auteurist brand of art cinema provided film studies with a popular subject that many students were very interested in studying, thus adding momentum to this disciplinary shift.

Once the new field was established, however, it came to operate according to the mechanics that ruled elsewhere in the humanities: to get ahead in the field, its participants had to publish innovative research in peer-reviewed publications. What this meant was that the academic segment of film studies could *not* stop with the auteur theory, as its more mainstream segments *had to*. The incentive behind the academic market is the pursuit of academic capital, which is mainly useful in that subculture. Its institutionally subsidized presses and journals are designed to experiment with inaccessible ideas, meaning that film scholars have been encouraged to critique more popular approaches like the auteur theory when necessary. And such critiques often seemed necessary after 1968, when a combination of academic and political pressures led scholars to demolish the auteur theory in the publications of cutting-edge university presses and theoretically radical journals such as *Screen*, *Jump Cut*, and others.

In "Art Cinema as Institution," Neale asserted what came to be seen as the basic knock on the theory: that it was "a means by which [film scholars] avoid coming to terms with the concept of film as social practice" (Neale, 1981: 37). Film scholars pursued this idea in a variety of ways. They argued that auteurism was untrue to the communal nature of film production and the industrial necessities of film promotion. They also argued that it was untrue to the realities of language, discourse, and consciousness; that it was untrue to the racist and patriarchal "apparatus" of cinema; and that it was untrue to the nature of auteur status, which derived not from intrinsic talent or from intrinsic value but from the sociological processes of art, society, and the film industry.

Some of these arguments were very convincing. But a funny thing happened: the auteur theory didn't go away, not even in the academy. Auteurism turned out to be a fully human attitude that only grew more stable despite the criticism. Indeed, this stability has often seemed beyond scholarly argument, probably because auteurism has enabled so much activity, helping us to talk about film, to think about it—and because auteurism has grown so institutionally entrenched, providing its users with collective and individual benefits. Among its collective users is film studies itself, whose auteurist lineage has proved adaptable, open to diverse agendas, including some that are notably progressive. As a result, even in the most academic sectors of film studies, we may still find auteurist thinking, from the standard conference paper on a feminist or queer auteur to the psychoanalytic treatise that is actually a loosely veiled form of auteur study. Moreover, university presses regularly publish openly cinephilic (hence academically retrograde) explorations of a single auteur *oeuvre* or a single "masterwork."

I make these observations to explain why so many scholars have taken part in crossover forums. It is not simply that they are pursuing a mainstream form of success. Scholars are humans, and auteurism appeals to them as such.

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Moreover, although it offers a simplistic account of genre, cinematic production, and value, auteurism has an ancestral legitimacy in academic film studies, where it is still accepted as a "normative" stance. Scholars who conform to the auteurism that dominates crossover publications are not, then, betraying their academic background. But what we must acknowledge is that their participation in the crossover forums is what gives those forums the quasi-academic bearing, reinforcing the legitimacy of their opinions in the mainstream. And that dynamic has in effect protected the traditional understanding of art cinema as a special genre, one that "deserves" its privileged place as a cinematic institution.

This shouldn't surprise us, given Baumann's belief that the cinema could not have been consecrated as legitimate without expert intellectual discourses working to justify it. These justifications emerged through the growing ties between the academy and the film industry and through the growing specialization of review-oriented publications, which evaluated movies in increasingly professional ways (Baumann, 2007: 66-69, 111-160). Haden Guest claims that by "the 1950s one can see productive debates [...] between popular film writing and the more rigorous academic writing beholden to standards of evidence and argumentation" (Grieverson and Wasson, 2008: xxiv). Indeed, the more rigorous journals, such as *Films in Review*, *Cinemages*, and *Film Culture*, may have been even more important outside film departments, where they "played a foundational role in establishing film studies as a major intellectual force across the humanities" (Ibid). In other words, they spoke to the educated general reader as well as to the budding scholar. Today, journals in this crossover category include the U.S.'s *Film Quarterly*, *Film Comment*, and *Cineaste*; France's *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*; the U.K.'s *Sight & Sound*; and Canada's *CineAction*, among many others. [8] These journals juxtapose mainstream critics with film scholars. Although they have regional tendencies, they are unified in their stress on auteurs and on art, with the corollary that the default subject of these magazines is the plastic notion of "the auteur work."

Much the same might be said of certain presses—including Wallflower, Berg, BFI, Continuum, Twayne, etc.—that support the foundations of art cinema by subsidizing accessible academic tomes on auteurs, masterpieces, new waves, national cinemas, and even cult-art cinemas. Recently, Betz published an article that focuses on the "little book" in film studies: the small, sophisticated book written by specialists for non-specialists. To reach the widest audiences, imprints like the *Sight & Sound*-affiliated series Cinema One, which was active between 1967 and 1976, stressed in Betz's view a "circumscribed set of subjects," including "directors" and "nations/movements or the 'new' cinema" (Betz, 2008: 323). This trend has persisted through to the present, Betz claims, noting the general prominence of British publications and the specific prominence of Wallflower:

The sizes and formats of [the Wallflower] series cut a swath between some of the much smaller little books in current publication and that of the standard university press monograph, denoting Wallflower's crossover address among those studying film within the educational sector and a new generation of the cineliterate fueling their passion from without. On the production end, there is room in its stable for both the academic scholar and the belletristic critic. (Ibid: 340)

Betz's insight is born out by *dekalog³: On Film Festivals* (2009), a Wallflower volume that I have cited in this essay. This physically small volume is quite useful in spite of the programmatic cinephilia that makes all its opinions suspect. But what this kind of book shows us is that auteurism, with its default cinephilia, still represents the one theoretical stance open to scholars who hope to apply their talents to trade publications. As Betz puts it neatly, "the predominance of the director as subject of study" has been a crucial force of "continuity" linking little books through to the present day (Ibid).

What does this all add up to? Crossover publications reinforce art cinema's most cinephilic values through their persistent stress on art, on form, on canon—and on the auteur in particular. In this way, they help to stabilize the genre in the eyes of the public, making its foundational concepts seem impervious to fashion, academic fashion included. That scholars take part in these publications is crucial to this effect in that it suggests, I think, that the more radical aspects of film studies are symptoms of an academic flakiness that scholars are unwilling to pursue in high-profile forums, where they instead reinforce the cultural distinction that mainstream critics accord the genre. [9] Consequently, despite film studies' many radical paradigms, its crossover sector has in my view lent a great deal of legitimacy to the conservative values that anchor art cinema.

Only by crafting institutional accounts like those above will we be in a position to deflect Thanouli's suggestion that "art cinema," a term that has facilitated the distribution of a diversity of themes and styles and institutions under a single heading, may in the end be too vacuous to be useful. I hope to have shown here that "art cinema" is *exceptionally* useful—and like "auteurism," it is not going to go away just because we have had enough of its dizzying forms and illogics. Instead, we should construct an institutional theory of art cinema that understands the formal heterogeneity implied by this useful heading not through a narrative lens or a formalist sensibility but through a supple cultural schema that relates the genre's diversity to its institutions, including the art house, the festival, and the discipline of film studies. These accredited sites of evaluation have in effect fixed the value of art movies on their first release and have regulated that value over the long term, often relying on the genre's flexible ideologies, such as auteurism, to complete the ritual. But to grasp all this, we need *the term*. For whether we are unreformed cinephiles writing reviews or

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myth-busting scholars in dark sunglasses taking in the festival scene, the term "art cinema" is indispensable to all our projects.

Notes

[1] Several extended critiques of Bordwell's account of art cinema have appeared lately. Besides Thanouli, see András Bálint Kovács (2007) and Mark Betz (2010). While these critiques always show respect for Bordwell's work, they have increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with it as well. I share in both feelings. I regard Bordwell's work highly, but I think his achievements have restricted the development of alternative accounts. What I find most problematic is that he recognizes that what he calls "art-cinema narration" is one strand of a larger phenomenon that he calls the "international art cinema" (Bordwell, 1985: 205). Even a conservative view of this broader phenomenon would see it as potentially including everything from the pre-war *films d'arts*, to the interwar avant-gardes, to particular examples of classical Hollywood narration, to the art movies of the New Hollywood, and to the many art movies that *Narration in the Fiction Film* effect distinguishes from art cinema by categorizing them under alternate headings ("historical-materialist narration," "parametric narration," and Godardian narration). But Bordwell gives just one category of this broader phenomenon, art-cinema narration, preferential status as the "true" art cinema, not just through the label but also through the fact that he refers to its vehicle as "the art film." Even if his narrative categories held water, which there is growing reason to doubt, this taxonomy would be misleading and incomplete—for it would not explain how so many other types of art movie have managed to function as art cinema within the rubric of the "international art cinema" without actually being art cinema.

[2] See, e.g., Bordwell's article, where he refers to the New Hollywood as "an art cinema" but claims that American art films cannot be art films in the European sense, since they "warp art-cinema conventions in new directions (as the work of Altman and Coppola shows)" (Bordwell, 1979: 723). He makes a similar point in his book (Bordwell, 1985: 232). See also note 1 above.

[3] This has long been the accepted way of understanding the rise of the postwar European art cinemas, but innovative ideas are now emerging. For example, in his recent book *Beyond the Subtitle* (2009), Betz argues that the postwar European art cinemas were generated not through opposition to Hollywood but through "the nostalgia produced by the loss of imperial power and unified national identity that the nation states of France and Italy encountered in their similar yet distinct relations to decolonization and modernization" (Betz, 2009: 99). *Beyond the Subtitle* is also applicable to this article as it compares the Bordwell and Neale pieces discussed here (Betz, 2009: 10-14).

[4] The institutional approach profits Neale, then, by enabling him to see the obvious: that art cinema developed into a genre that did not "belong" to one

industry or region but was instead a niche in which different Hollywood art cinemas (including Euro-Hollywood co-productions, the New Hollywood, the indie-style labels, and so on) might compete. Indeed, Hollywood could dominate certain art-movie markets, as it did in America after Miramax merged with Disney. This isn't to claim that the opposition between Hollywood and European art cinema ever went away as a structuring myth. It is instead to show that Hollywood could collaborate in the maintenance of this myth.

[5] For business details, see Peter Biskind's book *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (2004), Steve Montal's article "Film Festivals and Markets" (2005), and Richard Porton's collection *dekalog³: On Film Festivals* (2009), which contains a number of useful essays like Mark Peranson's contribution, "First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals" (2009), an essay that describes in detail the centrality of the sales agent within the commercial hierarchy of the contemporary film festival (Peranson, 2009: 23-37).

[6] As Farahmand has put it, festivals "exert a direct or indirect influence on film production because of the role they play in helping a film transition from local economies to the global market" (Farahmand, 2010: 267). Later, she explains how this process has worked in the context of contemporary Iranian art films (Ibid: 272-276). Betz also touches on this process (See Betz, 2010: 31-32).

[7] This is the pattern of *dekalog³: On Film Festivals*, which not only reprints the Bazin essay but also follows it with essay after essay lamenting the corrupt state of the international festival circuit, whose overweening commercialism it depicts as an affront to cinephilia and the larger notion of the film as high art. As Robert Koehler puts it in this collection, the "central problem with film festivals [...] is not so much a willingness to show bad films [...] It is their general and unexamined aversion to cinephilia, and an unwillingness to place cinephilia at the centre of festivals' activities" (Koehler, 2009: 81). This attitude of continual lamentation over the commercialization of a festival circuit that was once pure has been ritually restated in crossover forums and in cinephile forums alike; for another recent example, see Nick Roddick, "Window Shopping," *Sight & Sound*, vol. 19, no. 12 (December 2009), p. 13.

[8] Near the start of his essay, Neale pithily indicates the importance that a crossover publication like *Sight & Sound* has played in maintaining the institutions of art cinema: "During the 1960s and early 1970s, at a time when the polemics surrounding 'popular culture' and Hollywood were at their height, Art Cinema was often defined as the 'enemy': as a bastion of 'high art' ideologies, as the kind of cinema supported by *Sight & Sound* and the critical establishment, therefore, as the kind of cinema to be fought" (Neale, 1981: 12).

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[9] See Jonathan Rosenbaum's relentlessly cinephilic book, *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons* (Rosenbaum, 2004: xii-xv). Rosenbaum's antipathy toward academic film studies is steeped in his rejection of what he sees as a flaky careerism that chases after new ideas rather than being satisfied by the old truisms upholding traditional canons and cinephilia. It is to the point that Rosenbaum's first descent into cinephilia resulted from reading an early 1960s issue of *Sight & Sound* (Ibid: xii).

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