



Film Scenes: Paris, New York, Toronto

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It has been argued that the greatest invention of the Industrial Revolution was not the steam engine but the clock. Its abstract spatialization of duration functioned to keep track of hours and to synchronize human actions in a way that inadvertently served capitalist ends. This choreography gives the industrial city the semblance of a theatre stage, fostering a unity of experience and an internalization of abstract time that runs backwards and forwards “like the hands of a clock or the images of a moving picture” (Mumford 1956, 7). This is what gives the diversity and heterogeneity of city life its structure.

When the Lumière brothers began to use moving pictures to document everyday life in Paris, they focused on scheduled moments: the lunch hour, the arrival/departure of a train, the end of the work day, a child’s meal. What fascinated audiences the most, as Siegfried Kracauer has remarked, is what could not be controlled or scheduled in the scene: the frenetic movements of crowds, “the ripple of leaves stirred by the wind,” the child’s behaviour—that is, life (1970, 31). For Kracauer, film and photography offset the temporal and material abstraction imposed by the city. To Simmel’s famous formulation of the city as lonely place, Kracauer proposes that the cinema functions to reestablish a “sensuous” and “immediate” contact between citizens and the external world of surfaces. Like Benjamin, Kracauer sees the consumption of films and earlier forms of mechanical reproduction as a response to modernization rather than an effect or expression of it. The cinema is the art of the city, it reproduces the *flâneur*’s “susceptibility to the transient real-life phenomena,” it provides spectators with “the stuff of dreaming”—with a reality that “eludes measurement,” that is open, full of possibility (170). It is the “flux” of the setting rather than the story that is most important for the dreamer, “taxi cabs, buildings, passers-by, inanimate objects, faces... bar interiors; improvised gatherings” all hold “the opportunity of drama.” Kracauer believes this may “promote the redemption of physical reality”(300). We find this utopian quality of the film scene in earlier scenic forms as well.

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i. Flaubert’s scenes

Un livre sur rien was Flaubert’s project for a book about a bourgeois housewife’s romantic fantasies, the figuration of her everyday life by com-modified temporalities. Emma Bovary wanted to “die and live in Paris” (“*Elle souhaitait à la fois mourir et habiter Paris*”{90}) as if Paris was the very limit of corporeal experience:



Paris, more vague than the ocean, glimmered before Emma's eyes in an atmosphere of vermilion. The many lives that stirred amid this tumult were, however, divided into parts, classed as distinct pictures. Emma perceived only two or three that hid from her all the rest, and in themselves represented all humanity. The world of ambassadors moved over polished floors in drawing-rooms lined with mirrors, round oval tables covered with velvet and gold-fringed cloths. There were dresses with trains, deep mysteries, anguish hidden beneath smiles. Then came the society of the duchesses; all were pale; all got up at four o'clock; the women, poor angels, wore English point on their petticoats; and the men, unappreciated geniuses under a frivolous outward seeming, rode horses to death at pleasure parties, spent the summer season at Baden, and toward the forties married heiresses. In the private rooms of restaurants, where one sups after midnight by the light of wax candles, laughed the motley crowd of men of letters and actresses. They were prodigal as kings, full of ideal, ambitious, fantastic frenzy. This was an existence outside that of all others, between heaven and earth, in the midst of storms, having something of the sublime. For the rest of the world it was lost, with no particular place and as if non-existent. The nearer things were, moreover, the more her thoughts turned away from them. All her immediate surroundings, the wearisome country, the middle-class imbeciles, the mediocrity of existence, seemed to her exceptional, a peculiar chance that had caught hold of her, while beyond stretched as far as eye could see an immense land of joys and passions (43).

Emma sees Paris in terms of three distinct tableaux that represent in themselves "all humanity." These correspond to a hierarchy of social structures that are couched in scenes of secret lives and romantic love which Emma can only imagine. Emma's 'space-time' pictures mirror Flaubert's own style, giving us no one character, but social roles in successive instants of "an existence in the making," heavy with atmosphere, inaccessible in their totality (Masson 1982, 14).

Flaubert creates scenes that cannot be ingested as easily as Emma's reading materials. Emma experiences Paris as a multitude of discourses: her fingers move along streets on a map she has memorized; she reads about soirées and horse racing in *La Corbeille* and *Sylphe des Salons*; she takes an interest in the career of a young singer, and in the opening of a new shop; she studies descriptions of furniture, has the addresses of good tailors, and reads Balzac and George Sand. This is how Emma imagines Paris which is the setting for her fantasies. In its movement, erotic encounters and lifestyle, Paris stands in direct opposition to the reality of Emma's life which takes on the qualities of a photograph. As she stares out the window day after day, longing for a change in scenery, the daily rituals of her provincial bourgeois life coalesce into a predictability and

spaciality that effaces time: “the future was a dark corridor with its door at the end shut fast” (46) (*L’avenir étaient un corridor tout noir, et qui avait au fond sa porte bien fermée* {95}). Flaubert makes of Paris a series of scenes from which Emma is excluded. Her fantasy life is fuelled by her spectatorship and her exclusion, by her desire to be part of a scene, a city, to partake of its daily life—she imagines running errands in Paris. Flaubert captures the economy of the scene, as it emerges reified through the new spectacles, exhibitions, forms of writing and shopping in the capital of the nineteenth century as Benjamin referred to it.

It is Paris as “dream world” that inspired Benjamin (1999) to embark on his unending study of the arcades, tracing out patterns of consumption and visibility through the fragments and ruins of the past. Paris is the city of light with its carefully arranged views, dark passageways, and spectacular juxtapositions inviting *flânerie*, and a panorama of coincidences. (It is precisely those coincidences that will mark the sensual encounters in *Madame Bovary*.) It is the Paris that will exist between 1848 and the Haussman period, a time when “la vie Parisienne,” is distinguished by “meetings, the confrontation of differences, reciprocal knowledge and acknowledgement... ways of living, ‘patterns,’ which co-exist.” In other words, it is the golden age of the industrial city (Lefebvre 1997, 75). Paris is always the emblem of this age; even today it is “a spectre haunting social theory” because it is a city that has been imagined and lived across centuries of intellectual and creative activity (Crang and Thrift 2000, 13). Paris in *Madame Bovary* is already mythologized, an imagined city mediated through journalistic accounts, specialized commodities and the fashionable literature of the day. This is the Paris that exists simultaneously through the mediated fragments Flaubert collects, and inside Emma’s mind. Thus Flaubert can call himself a realist and a romantic, an ethnographer of the sentimental (Sartre 1971, 1285; Culler 1974, 68–74).

It is not surprising that there have been a multitude of *romans-photos* and at least ten cinematic adaptations of the novel very much against the author’s general disdain for illustrations and pictures (Geneviève Idt 1982, 159). Flaubert’s descriptions of capitalist commodities are ‘cinematographic.’ Emma enters the city through scenic descriptions, and it is the scenes which make Paris something more than a ‘vague’ ocean, more than merely a spectacle. She is an invisible spectator, a witness to its goings on, both distant and yet completely immersed in them. The scene, as a unit of construction has a central function in Flaubert’s fiction, and it makes an appearance most forcefully in *Madame Bovary*.

Cairo

Flaubert had begun work on *Madame Bovary* after his return from Egypt where he had travelled extensively with his friend Maxime DuCamp,



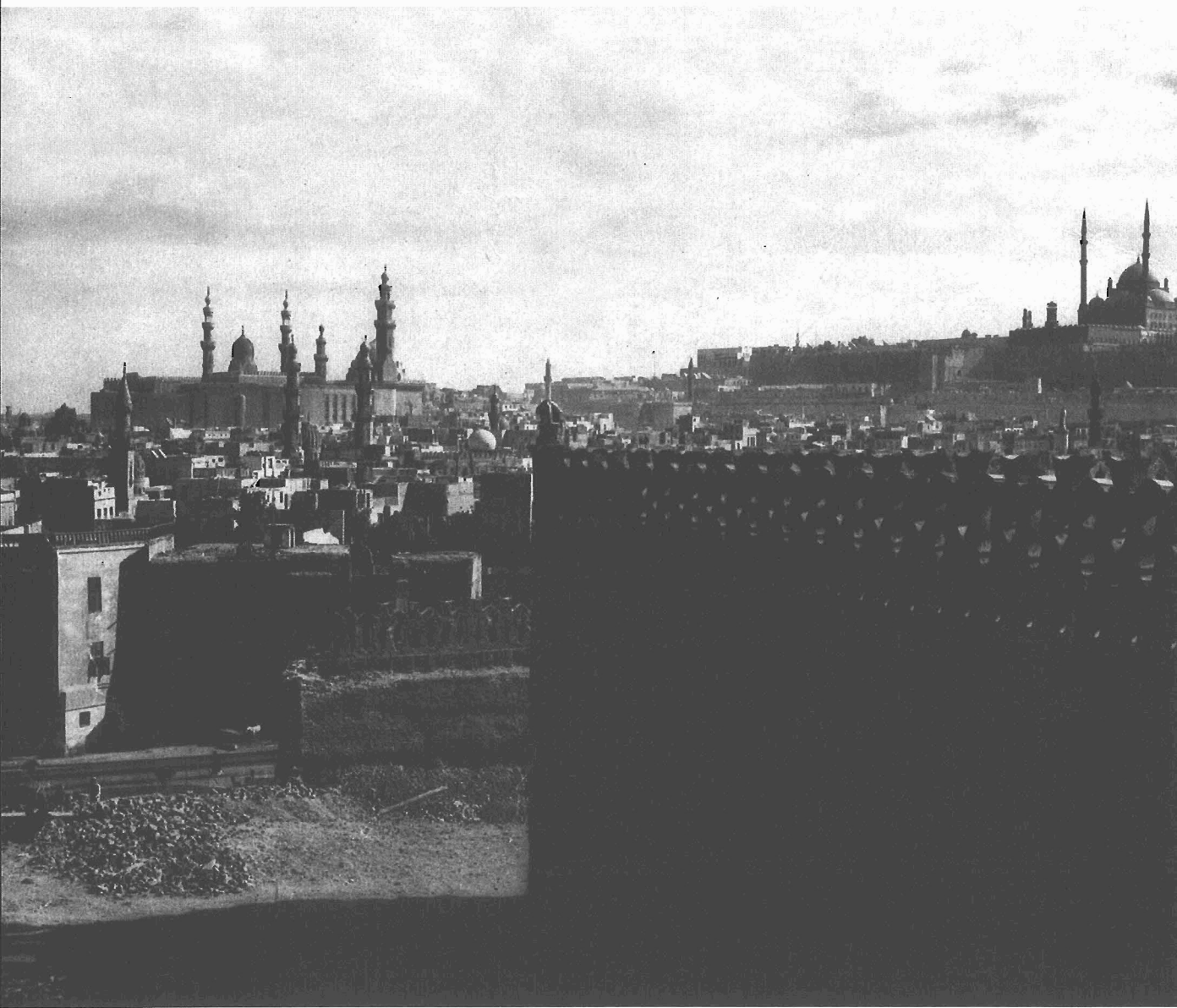
charged with taking photographs of monuments for the French Government. Flaubert, writing in 1850, is completely disoriented by the reality of Cairo which until then had been experienced through ancient texts, panoramas, and ethnographic descriptions:

What can I say about it all? What can I write you? As yet I am scarcely over the initial bedazzlement... each detail reaches out to grip you; it pinches you; and the more you concentrate on it the less you grasp the whole. Then gradually all this becomes harmonious and the pieces fall into place of themselves, in accordance with the laws of perspective. But the first days, by God, it is such a bewildering chaos of colours... (qtd. in Mitchell 1991, 21)

Flaubert makes sense of the city by locating it within known pictorial conventions “in accordance with the laws of perspective.” The formal qualities of the exhibition which lie at the origin of the tourist industry, guided the European traveller of the nineteenth century in a practice of Orientalism. Flaubert’s encounter with a culture that reduces his “eyes to organs of touch” (22) refocuses an epistemological difficulty in the mediated quality of place. Inherited from the Romantics, this problematic is one that will be of concern to Flaubert from his earliest writings onward (Culler 1974, 26–74). But it is in Cairo that Flaubert’s imagined geographies and topographic inventories will begin to take on the shape of the city:

I am sure that as an intelligent man you don’t expect me to send you an account of my trip... In a word, this is how I sum up my feelings so far: very little impressed by nature here—i.e., landscape, sky, desert (except the mirages); enormously excited by the cities and the people. Hugo would say: “I was closer to God than to mankind.” It probably comes of my having given more imagination and thought, before coming here, to things like horizon, greenery, sand, trees, sun, etc., than to houses, streets, costumes, and faces. The result is that nature has been a rediscovery and the rest a discovery (1980, 106).

Upon returning to France after his eighteen-month voyage through the Middle East, Flaubert will develop a style that describes his own culture through the textual legacies of the military occupation of Egypt (Said 1995, 215; Mitchell 1991). In *Madame Bovary*, Paris becomes exhibition, organized into iconographies, displays and scenes distinguished by a stress on details which are excessive, without meaning or function in the narrative. Rendered through a mobile gaze, such a spatial aesthetic came to define the modern novel as intricately bound to the capitalist moder-



nity of the city (Jameson 1972). It is the impersonality of the stranger (city dweller or tourist), a quality of spectatorship and distance intrinsic to an experience of modernity and imperialism (Crary 1990; Said 1994; 1993) that we encounter in *Madame Bovary's* particular form of narration. We could read Flaubert's novel as a response to the expressions of modernity he came to recognize in Cairo, his mirroring of the ethnographic discourses of description and modern enframing deeply ironic (which does not make his own voracious consumption of Cairo any less colonial). Yet there is also a utopian dimension in this ironic rendering of Emma's fantasies of city life.

Scenic Pictures

Flaubert was undoubtedly exposed to the new discourses and debates around mechanical reproduction through his travelling companion Maxine DuCamp. From the very beginnings of photography, 'atmosphere' is recorded in a most impersonal way. In Daguerre's dioramas, background scenery replaces the theatre drama (previously Daguerre was a set designer) and comes to stand on its own as entertainment (Gernsheim 1968). Stereoscopic scenes of street life in London, New York and Paris, which appeared near the time of *Madame Bovary's* publication, discovered a beauty and theatricality in everyday life (Gernsheim 1969; Jeffrey 1999).

The Anthony Brothers in the United States were among the first to market stereocards of famous street scenes and distribute them internationally. Shot at ground level or from first floor balconies, such scenes express "the metropolis as an aggregate of fragments" (Jeffrey 1999, 43). There is no romantic totality to most of these scenes, these were truly unspectacular moments of everyday life. Indeed, early images of street crowds featuring heterogenous groups of people going about their business challenge the conventions of another dominant stereoscope genre of the period, the military scene. The street scene comes to signify everything that military service is not, movement is tied to individual agency, purpose and freedom. The street image encapsulates the urbanity and cosmopolitanism of the everyday in the city, the visual textures of the street as both container and funnel for heterogenous actions.

The city has been compared to a stage upon which the drama of social life is enacted with actors and spectators continuously shifting positions (Mumford 1938; Jacobs 1992; Lefebvre 1991; 1997; Berger 1985). The built environment and the performances of citizens can be seen as "*oeuvre*" to use Lefebvre's expression—an *oeuvre* that is the product of collective activity, that exists for use rather than exchange value, that concerns appropriation rather domination, that makes possible chance encounters, exchanges (1996, 66). These are the utopian energies that define street festivals.

Madame Bovary has been criticized for the kind of spectator it makes of Emma relying for its critique of commodity culture upon “the spectre of a feminized aesthetic of consumption” (Felski 1995, 86) or for the equation of a debased mass culture with the figure of woman (Huysen 1986). One could, however, make a case for a dialectical reading of this novel as a series of modern scenes from which Emma as woman, as housewife, enframed by the window of modernity is excluded. She is not a passive reader but one whose imaginative activity fuels a furious desire to approximate the commodified scenes of the magazines and novels that paper her existence. There is a utopian quality in this desire for the “opportunity of drama,” a desire quite literally to put herself in the scene and be recognized (cf. LaCapra 1982; Lloyd 1990).

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ii. *Warhol's Stars*

The history of cinema is tied to the experience of the modern city. As a popular culture that crossed language, gender and class barriers, the cinema offers that which is most common and therefore vulgar in mass culture. Some fifteen years into its history, after “the ripple of leaves” had ceased to have effect, film stars were invented. Stars would help to offset this vulgarity and to sell it at the same time (Morin 1972; Dyer 1998). The star’s dialectical existence takes its shape between the film character and actor’s role, and “points beyond the film” to a place that spectators believe to be reality or wish it to be, to *places of experience* (Kracauer 1970, 99). This is the space of Emma’s fantasy, “between heaven and earth, in the midst of storms, having something of the sublime.”

There was no artist more adept at creating that space than Warhol. Warhol entertains the commodity status of everyday life, appropriates images from commercial culture, inhabits spaces and makes scenes. The end of the New York underground has been attributed to Warhol, to his ambition to be out in public. Warhol refused to be underground, he screened his films at a mainstream cinema, most famously *The Chelsea Girls* at the Regency in 1966, and in so doing attracted a great deal of attention. He broke the rules, he crossed scenes: high art museum patrons with the transvestites and sex workers of 42nd Street, art and consumer culture, sexualities and genders (Acker 1989). This is why his fame was so immediate.

Influenced by the music and dance scenes in New York, especially John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer as well as the Fluxus group, he is struck by the idea that art might be open to life, by ‘art as action.’ In Lefebvre’s vocabulary, action art prioritizes time over space so that time comes to inscribe itself in space, thus replacing domination by appropriation. The *fête* is a central emblem for Lefebvre of a space of use rather than exchange value, transforming the urban centre through cre-



ative corporeality, opening space up to the eros and poetics of unpredictability—to the utopia of the city street as spontaneous theatre. What better way to describe the happenings of the Judson Church in New York where artists ‘occupied’ the city (Suknick 1988). But this doesn’t describe Warhol’s shiny surfaces: “I never wanted to be a painter, I wanted to be a tap dancer.” (1989, 56).

Factory Scenes

For Lefebvre (1991) the spectacle colonizes everyday life, circumscribes its temporality to the abstraction of the clock. In Warhol’s world, clocks are dissolved into silk screens of serial photographs of stars and disasters not as the critique of abstract time but as its performance. In fact, the colonizing alienating effects of the spectacle are reanimated by the scenes that Warhol creates. Like Kracauer, Warhol’s interest in Hollywood films is in the ornamental quality of their surfaces. For Warhol, the privileged site of this quality is the Star. Trained by the advertising industry, he understands that their economy is about one thing and one thing only, that thing Flaubert’s Emma failed to find, *l’amour*. And we know with love comes danger.

Warhol brings the spectacular aspects of transgressive sexualities into the banality of the domestic realm in an unlikely combination of camp and minimalism (Wollen 1989). He lives in a factory and invites others to make his art (not their own) out of everyday incidents and out of themselves. His early ‘eventless’ films reflect this impetus, *Sleep, Eat, Haircut, Blowjob* (1963). These can be read as documentaries; long takes with a stationary and distant camera, documenting not the experience but the staged experience, the experience staged for the camera and its passive director/voyeur Warhol—a kind of “ocular vampirism” (24). The films themselves are environmental and often last the duration of the event being filmed, they can be seen as both belonging to an earlier experience and lending a distinctive shape (‘moving wall paper’) to the scene of the screening. Warhol experiments with expanded cinema and different projection techniques: single, double, superimpositions, different speeds mixed in with live music. Interestingly, unlike his serial paintings, his films were not repetitive because no one ever saw the same movie twice. Arguably Warhol’s art has no object, it is the art of the scene as a space of experience from which most are excluded.

Art for Flaubert was everything. This was his mythology: he sacrificed his life and his love (Louise Colet) for his writing. He spent years secluded from the world, locked away in libraries or in his study writing. Perhaps this is why there is in fact no life in Flaubert’s novels but work itself, the labour of writing—his own painful compositions and those appropriated discourses (scenes) in the construction of fictional worlds. Similarly, there



is no life in Warhol, everything is work without the suffering or seriousness. His style is famously dissociative: “I think we’re in a vacuum here at the Factory: it’s great... it leaves me alone to do my work” (1989, 57). His life is a film, he lives in a scene that he endlessly documents: tape recording all phone conversations, photographing all parties, subjecting everyone in the scene to a screen-test. This is the life of *la star* as Edgar Morin has described it: “Their private life is public, their public life is publicity, their screen life is surreal, and their real life is mythic” (1972, 13). Warhol’s work is directed toward the production of mythology. He is more than just an art star though, he is a superstar because his stardom is built upon making stars: “He will shine. He will be remote, majestic, untouchable, simultaneously adored and self-contained... he is one who is seen because he sees, one present because absent, a star who is in fact a stargazer” (Koch 1985, 17). Famously, Warhol like a Hollywood mogul would select from among a crowd of people camped outside the Factory, those who gained entrance, who were ‘taken up’ to the parties and those left standing below the elevator. Those left standing outside could only imagine what they were missing, hear the music, read about the event.

In his production of stars and in his own status as a star, Warhol performs the contradictions of commodity culture—this is why there are so many contradictory interpretations of his art (Whiting 1997). Even as his filmmaking moved closer to the grammar of Hollywood production and commercial screenings, Warhol’s project never changed because his innovation was “displaying the display” (Wollen 1989, 25) and his art was the scene. Warhol’s work can be placed alongside French writers like Flaubert and Baudelaire, not as a comment on the impersonality of the commodified personality, on the impossibility of imagining something new. But rather, as Adorno has written of Flaubert and Baudelaire, because he makes “art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated” (1997, 21, 2, 85). The spectacle of commodities is not resisted nor simply endorsed; it is multiplied, serialized and even exhausted and outdone. This may explain the continued interest in, and force of Warhol’s theatricalization of distraction.

But would we remember Warhol if he had not lived in New York? His art is so intricately tied to the counter-culture scene of New York in the sixties, it is difficult to imagine him anywhere else (although L.A. was the city of surfaces he truly loved). His mythology, the story of a young gay artist who fled his provincial background to reinvent himself in New York is connected to a narrative of that larger scene, built up through the years in reviews, reports, interviews, photographs, publicity, films and art. Could he, for example, have lived in Toronto?



iii. Ideal Scenes

When I imagine the Toronto film scene, one picture rises up above all the possible others. It is one with which most Canadians, and all Torontonians are familiar: a 1998 photograph of film director Atom Egoyan and his wife/lead actress Arsinée Khanjian at the Academy Awards dressed in evening attire and sunglasses basking “in the cinema’s biggest spotlight.” We’ve seen this cliché one thousand times before. It is the image of success, of making it in the big city, big time, “the parties were exactly what you’d dreamed of” (Egoyan 1998). I don’t want to simply reduce this photograph to a cliché, to exchange value or to spectacle. It is all of those things. But it is also a photograph that has a use value beyond simply promoting a film or a star director. It is tied to an economic and cultural context in Canada, and to a local scene in Toronto.

Fredric Jameson has argued that a national film culture needs its stars in order to take root in a culture, to become part of a common imaginary.¹ If this is so, then I would add that it also needs its scenes and its cities, the settings where stars come into being. Culture scenes form structures of sociality that can encourage a productive and diversified cultural economy in the context of globalizing homogenizing forces. Scenes give citizens a sense of agency both as spectators and as ‘players.’ As an analytical concept, the scene is more fluid, more exclusive and far less purposeful than the notion of community (Mouffe 1992). Yet it is more materially grounded and less abstract than the concept of “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser 1990) and more public and stylized than the individualized aspects of vernacular space (Zukin 1992). Scenes which have always been part of everyday life and the “stage of history” (Lefebvre 1991, 135) take on particular characteristics in the society of the spectacle. By virtue of their structures of publicity, scenes might be read as cultural responses (not necessarily forms of resistance) to globalization because scenes, which are at once social gatherings and the on-going accumulation of impressions, are relational. Scenes make the city visible in particular kinds of ways often linked to tourism and leisure. In this respect scenes make the city a place, they are both universal to the discourse on cities and differentiated experiences in them (Blum, this issue). It is the unique local character of a scene in a city that is its appeal, yet it is a uniqueness defined in relation to scenes present or not in other cities. The uniqueness of a scene, also depends on its being totally current which is its affinity to fashion and music. This infuses scenes with an ephemerality that makes them difficult to track and analyze. This is not to say that scenes are without history. One could in fact study the way in which some scenes, the performance scene in New York or Berlin for example, are built upon and appropriate an infamous art history or city’s mythology to fashion new

forms of transgression. Their importance in the history of cities, and certainly in the history of art movements is without question. But what of younger and smaller cities that do not have that art history or mythology? Do the scenes in these cities simply emerge out of nowhere?

Making Scenes

There is a story that Canadian artist Joyce Wieland recounts to Toronto filmmaker and archivist John Porter about walking through Toronto in 1950:

I could walk with my girlfriend Mary from Broadview and Danforth to Keele St. and we wouldn't see anything. We made suicide pacts. We would say 'This is life and this is what happens to you so you might as well jump off the bridge' (Bloor Viaduct), and we were considering it because there was fuck-all! There was an art gallery and a few people but no feeling (qtd. in Porter 1984, 26).

Wieland's sense that she couldn't "see anything" in Toronto is not entirely without foundation. Throughout the fifties and well into the sixties, the inner municipality of the city was reconfigured to accommodate an explosive metropolitan growth in which the urban region's population more than doubled. The demolition of historic buildings in the city's old business district, the destruction of older residential pockets within the urban core (amounting to the displacement of some thirteen thousand people) were a reflection of Toronto's municipal planning policies which favoured development and saw history "as an impediment to 'progress'" (Caulfield 1994, 18). This kind of urban renewal was transpiring on a larger scale in Robert Moses' New York but neighbourhood communities led by Jane Jacobs would challenge this lack of history. Famously, Wieland along with Michael Snow and countless others after them fled to New York to join the culture scenes there. (Toronto got them back along with Jane Jacobs in the seventies.)

Those who stayed in Toronto, those who like Emma Bovary could only read about what was going on elsewhere, created their own scenes. As if the perceived absence of an art scene in Toronto came to define the very core of the scene, performance was its central aesthetic preoccupation. Most of the Toronto art scenes in the sixties and seventies were formed around the night-time economies of exhibition spaces and bars designed for performance and socializing; the Bohemian Embassy, Isaacs Gallery, Cinecity, Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC), the punk bar Crash'N Burn, the Rivoli, A-Space, Trinity Square Video, The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre to name but a few. While the arts councils (federal and provincial) were helping to fund some of these



spaces and consolidate a community infrastructure that would become visible for almost two decades around Queen Street West, the scenes were created by individuals or small informal groups. The early art scenes took shape around often sexually explicit, often homoerotic gestures and images that sought to challenge the “let’s not cause a scene land of the beavers” (C.E.A.C. 1977; qtd. in Tuer 1986, 21) along with the city’s highly conservative views of art and rigid provincial censorship/fire regulations. One thing is certain, New York’s cosmopolitan performance scenes (perhaps Warhol combined with Joseph Beuys in particular) served as model in the imaginary registers of Toronto’s avant-garde culture. This mirroring was not simply derivative but largely self-conscious. Not only was New York the port to an international art scene (France, Germany and Italy mostly), it had two interrelated characteristics that Toronto did not have: a market for art and a history of artistic contestation. That is, an art scene. The Toronto artist group General Idea would mockingly refer to this in their now infamous Warholian account of an ‘idea’:

We wanted to be famous, glamorous and rich. That is to say we wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be. We never felt we had to produce great art to be great artists. We knew great art did not bring glamour and fame. We knew we had to keep a foot in the door of art and we were conscious of the importance of berets and paint brushes (1975, 21).

General Idea became famous for its imitations of successful artwork, setting up Art Metropole as a bookstore and artist distribution centre in a defunct art gallery from the twenties in 1974. Here, a scene (for a while a café) and importantly an archive of scenes would grow. Other groups were far less overtly self-serving but equally concerned about being part of a history that was seen to be lacking in Toronto (Monk 1984, 14; Tuer 1986, 24). A magazine culture grew up around these scenes, with newsletters, catalogues and small independent presses helping to create a critical interdisciplinary discourse around art and culture. *Now Magazine* was modeled on the *Village Voice* and was meant to serve a similar function featuring portraits of local ‘stars’ on its cover each week. All these publications and networks of interconnected scenes in art, music, theatre and literature created a common narrative and with that narrative came vitriolic debates and political clashes, that in turn gave rise to new alternative cultures in the city. A process of shifting boundaries and meanings that Alan Blum’s delineation of the scene as “fundamental ambiguity” provocatively evokes:

The scene is the fundamental ambiguity which its name and connotations arouse in collective life. This is the symbolic order of the scene. And the scene is the myriad courses of action directed to solve the problems released by such ambiguity, including the ethical collisions and forms of collectivization which it inspires. This is the imaginative structure of the scene. The scene is both symbolic order and imaginative structure, a locus of collectivization and a catalyst of problem solving... (this issue, 33).

Central to the imaginative structure of the scene is the discovery/creation of mythologies which supersede the production of art works. Indeed the question of whether a good scene produces good art is particularly appropriate here. Arguably, some scenes do not produce art of lasting significance but engender founding myths that may generate a sense of possibility, the “opportunity of drama.” We find that same “opportunity” and creativity in the scenes, in all their variety, that people make out of the city. Thus Ross McLaren, a co-founder of The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre (1977–1988), can state in retrospect that “the films were not important. The Funnel was about social interaction” (interviewed in Lypchuk 1991, 46). The Funnel like other scenes of the time was very connected to New York, to performance, to Warhol and his mentor Jack Smith (who performed there). It is an interesting example of how a scene survives in popular memory as a point of reference from which new actions are built (Liaison of Independent filmmakers and Pleasure Dome Screening Group for example grew out of The Funnel), even though there is not a large body of work that stands as its legacy.

“Make love not films”²

Culture scenes survive to become history, as Warhol understood so well, only if they are publicized or documented in some way. John Porter was a long time member of The Funnel who made and championed super-8 films. He is one of the most prolific and active experimental film performers working in the city today. Not long before The Funnel opened its theatre, Porter began a project to excavate, document and produce a history of film in the city because he felt that the scenes and actions would simply disappear otherwise. He began to use his home movie camera to record the gestures and rituals of art openings, watching films and performances; he conducted interviews with filmmakers; collected program notes and catalogues. Porter also began a life long project to take photographs of people (artists, projectionists, writers, musicians, friends) involved in or simply attending alternative film events. He has written a history of how experimental film was experienced in Toronto in the fifties and sixties as well as most recently a history of CineCycle (Porter 2001, 24–26)—a bicycle repair shop by day, experimental film theatre and cappuccino bar



by night. Over a twenty-five year period he has amassed a fantastic archive which he maintains in his house. The photographs he has taken follow the formal arrangement of the family snapshot, they tell the story not just of cinematic occasions in Toronto but of a life lived through its scenes.

Porter's photos should stand in stark contrast to the publicity machine at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) whose twenty-five year anniversary in 2000 was marked by a myth-filled book, *Brave Films Wild Nights* (Johnson 2000) but they don't. They don't because Porter's personal snapshots and the festival's collection of 'photo ops' are performing the same work, writing a history, creating a mythology of scenes and personalities. Indeed, we can see TIFF's success as a festival in terms of its ability to carve a mythology out of and into Toronto.

Considered one of the most important and prestigious festivals in the world (second only to Cannes), TIFF was to be a conduit for bringing the best programs premiered at other international festivals to Toronto. Initially, this 'Festivals of Festivals' like General Idea's publicity campaign, had no investment in originality. It was conceived by a group of entrepreneurs, all sons of communists, all tied to show business, public relations and politics whose formula for success was publicity. The promise of bringing the "glitter and stars" to Toronto, set in motion through a link to Warren Beatty in Hollywood, enabled large corporate sponsorships and the city's support (17–25). TIFF's programming combined popular culture with art house features and hard-core experiments and politics in cinema. This combination of popular culture and counter culture functioned to create hierarchies within the festival—local stars, art house stars, movie stars—but also a dynamic and exclusive network of spectators, scenes, parties and cinematic constellations over a two week period every fall that has been called "festival fever." The Festival's success was also due to a multicultural polymorphous city that had the highest per capita film going audience on the continent, a city "that likes to watch" (12). I have no doubt that there is a relation between Toronto's diasporic population and the high level of film consumption in the city for precisely the reasons Kracauer theorized.

The challenge for TIFF was to outdo the New York Film Festival and to become an international festival in its own right, and it succeeded. TIFF had a significant impact on the international image of Toronto as a cosmopolitan city bringing in thousands of international guests and press each year, along with an equal number of films from around the world. Perhaps more significantly, TIFF created an image of a Toronto film scene, with young talent, creativity and its own stars. Very much like the Berlin Film Festival's promotion of New German Cinema in the seventies, TIFF has 'spotlighted' the work of young Toronto directors in its opening

Galas and major programmes creating an international presence for them. From the mid-eighties on, these young urban directors grew into something called the “Toronto New Wave.” The star director of this New Wave is Armenian-Canadian Atom Egoyan who, with his films, operas and art installations, has become a paragon for a whole new generation of film artists. His feature narratives have become the hallmark of a Toronto aesthetic—cool, heavily art directed, without affect and intelligent. While the festival was never connected to a local film scene like The Funnel (although it does dedicate a programme to local and Canadian films under the rubric of Perspective Canada), it created a mythology of struggling artists and deep friendship around which a group of film directors very much connected to their city (Egoyan’s highly publicized choice to stay in Toronto rather than to go to Hollywood being a case in point) became more familiar to the city than their films.

*

Cities, like people, have identities—shifting, relational and historical. We detect Cairo in Emma’s Paris; in Warhol’s factory we discover a provincial backdrop; and in Toronto’s art scenes we find New York. In the shadows of cities, alongside their most trivial and idealized occasions, we can locate narratives, habitual actors and settings envisioning a rhapsodic history of ‘the city.’ Paris, New York and Toronto are very different cities, yet a history of scenes allows us to better consider the imaginative and utopian constellations that connect them and make them particular.



Notes

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- 1 Frederic Jameson, Talk delivered at Innis College, University of Toronto, March 2001.
- 2 Funnel motto.

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