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philia has proven to be so enduring precisely because it forms a bridge between the biographical and the theoretical, the singular and the general, the fragment and the whole, the incomplete and the complete, and the individual and the collective.¹⁸ This essay confirms and reiterates such an approach to cinephilia as double-movement. It shows how film critics and film archivists engage in the debates with both intellectual interests and professional concerns in mind, moving back and forth between personal preferences and rational considerations. The editors of *Movie Mutations* and *Film Curatorship* have both chosen a strikingly similar format that dovetails neatly with a characterization of cinephilia as a quintessential middle ground: the *bricolage* of transcribed discussions, letters, e-mail exchanges, written essays, and interviews mirrors the double-movement between the anecdotal and the serious, between the spontaneous and the contemplated, and between the familial and intellectual. It is precisely its ability to move between positions that privileges cinephilia as a preferred conceptual starting point for so many constituencies in their discussions of contemporary transformations.

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- 18 Malte Hagener and Marijke de Valck, "Cinephilia in Transition," in *Mind the Screen: Media Concepts According to Thomas Elsaesser*, ed. Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters, and Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals

by LIZ CZACH

Since the publication of Susan Sontag's 1996 essay "The Decay of Cinema," cinephilia has reemerged as a subject of some debate and consideration in film studies.¹ Woven through these investigations has been the vexing question of whether cinephilia is dead, and if not, what new manifestations of cinephilia are evident. There is little doubt that cinephilia has undergone numerous transformations since its golden age, epitomized by the moviegoing habits of the devotees of the ciné-clubs and cinémathèques in 1950s and 1960s Paris. With more than a tinge of nostalgia, most commentators are willing to acknowledge that that era has passed. What, however, has taken its place? Have new kinds of "cine-love," as Sontag called it, emerged? If so, where do they transpire? And what forms do they take?

- 1 Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, 60–61.

Perhaps there is no better place to undertake an examination of what is emerging than to begin with a consideration of what has been lost. Sontag's lament for cinephilia's death specifically mourns the passing of the conditions necessary for the cinephiliac experience, particularly the demise of the movie theater. Sontag passionately articulates how a movie image can seduce an audience through the sheer magnitude of screen size: "You wanted to be kidnapped by the movie," she writes, "and to be kidnapped was to be overwhelmed by the physical presence of the image. The experience of 'going to the movies' was part of it. . . . To be kidnapped, you have to be in a movie theater, seated in the dark among anonymous strangers."² It is the darkened theater that is the privileged site of the cinephiliac encounter between screen and spectator. As Adrian Martin has similarly pointed out, "immersion in the film itself" is a precondition for the cinephiliac experience.³

Sontag's "The Decay of Cinema" might aptly be refigured as "The Death of the Big Screen." In the era of declining single-screen movie theaters and the concomitant "multiplexing" and "megaplexing" of theaters with smaller screen sizes, as well as the decline of art house cinemas and repertory circuits, the potential for the cinephile to watch a film from the preferred vantage point of third row center has severely diminished outside of large metropolises with thriving film cultures. In this context, it is no surprise that film festivals emerge as one of the last refuges for the cinephile. Film festivals occupy a liminal space between the older forms of first-generation, pretelevision cinephilia, where the only access to films was in movie theaters, and contemporary forms of cinephilia, in which DVD collecting and digital downloads bypass the moviegoing experience altogether.⁴ As Malte Hagener and Marijke de Valck point out, "[a]rguably one of the most 'classical' of contemporary cinephile practices is the festival visit."⁵ The explosion of the international film festival network suggests that cinephilia is far from dead. Catherine Russell optimistically notes that "[c]inephilia is in many ways alive and well, continuing to flourish in the hundreds of film festivals that take place every year around the world."⁶ Thomas Elsaesser echoes the sentiment by suggesting that cinephilia's natural home is the "film festival and the film museum, whose increasingly international circuits the cinephile critic, programmer, or distributor frequents as flâneur, prospector, and

2 Ibid.

3 Adrian Martin, "No Flowers for the Cinéphile: The Fates of Cultural Populism 1960–1988," in *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Cinema*, ed. Paul Foss (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998), 117.

4 Thomas Elsaesser has distinguished different generations of cinephilia in his "Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 27–43. The editors of this collection have elsewhere followed up on his distinctions. They write, "Whereas the first generation of cinephilia was marked by local trajectories and one's favorite seat in a specific cinema, the second wave was marked by international trajectories toward specific festivals (Deauville, Rotterdam, Pesaro) and retrospectives, while contemporary cinephilia relies on the dispersed and virtual geography of the link and the directory"; see Hagener and de Valck, "Cinephilia in Transition," in *Mind the Screen: Media Concepts According to Thomas Elsaesser*, ed. Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters, and Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 23.

5 Ibid., 25.

6 Catherine Russell, "Cinephilia," in *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film*, Vol. 1, ed. Barry Keith Grant (New York: Schirmer Reference, 2007), 302.

explorer.”⁷ With the decline of other screening opportunities and venues, the film festival has emerged as a privileged site for big-screen, art cinema cinephilia.

Film festivals present a seductive return to classical cinephilia with their promise of a unique, unrepeatable experience frequently offering a rare opportunity to view films on the big screen before they disappear into the ether or only reappear on DVD. Festivals screen films as they were “meant to be seen,” in the immersive space of the darkened movie theater. Yet, while many argue that cinephilia is alive and well at film festivals, there is a creeping anxiety that it is still endangered. Increasingly, festivals are perceived as not facilitating cinephiliac connoisseurship, but rather the consumption of stars and celebrity culture. The anxiety has been fueled by the increased column inches devoted to “red-carpet reporting” at the expense of serious film criticism. For example, a few days before the launch of the 2005 edition of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), the cover of the entertainment section of the local newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, was inscribed with the headline “Hollywood Is Coming.” This caption was superimposed over dozens of tiny photos of the celebrities who were due to make their way north for the festival. Hollywood, it seemed, was literally invading the city. The perceived takeover of film festivals by stars, particularly from Hollywood, threatens the cinephiliac public sphere that many festivals have traditionally fostered. The threat of Hollywood and its stars is a radical departure from the first generation of French cinephiles, who adored and venerated American cinema as one of genres, directors, and actors (as opposed to stars). Contemporary cinephilia is seemingly threatened by Hollywood and its star power.⁸ The assumption is that where stardom is celebrated, the importance of film wanes. Thus emerges a central dilemma for film festivals—stargazing seemingly can only be embraced at the expense of cinephilia.

The threat to film festival cinephilia and the cinephile is most evident in the anxiety over particular festival participants who embrace a noncinephiliac disposition. A playful, but no less insightful, characterization of various festival “types” was published in a pull-out section entitled “The Insider’s Guide to the Film Festival” included with the monthly magazine *Toronto Life* that coincided with the 2006 TIFF. The special publication included an introduction to the five TIFF types—the diehard, the festival staffer, the cineaste, the stargazer, and the scenester—as well as a guide to “their haunts and the movies they’ll be watching this year.”⁹ Of the five types, the cineaste is the stereotyped beret-wearing cinephile and the only one with a clearly demarcated cinephiliac disposition. By contrast, the diehard enjoys watching movies but does not love them, and the festival staffer is simply too overworked to watch films. It is, however, the last two figures, the stargazer and the scenester, who provoke the most anxiety in their clear allegiance to celebrity culture over film culture. The stargazer, for example, can “typically be found riding the elevators at the Four Seasons or loitering poolside at the Intercontinental. . . . Owns three camera phones and has subscriptions to *Us*, *Hello!*,

7 Elsaesser, “Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment,” 36.

8 The “threat” may be felt more profoundly by North American festivals such as TIFF and Sundance, which are located in closer proximity to Hollywood than European festivals.

9 See <http://www.torontolife.com/insiders-guide-film-festival/tiff-types> (accessed June 22, 2009). Marijke de Valck has outlined a somewhat similar taxonomy of festival participants in her “Drowning in Popcorn at the International Film Festival Rotterdam? The Festival as a Multiplex of Cinephilia,” in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, 97–109.

Figures 1–2. The scenester and the cineaste (“Insider’s Guide to the Film Festival,” *Toronto Life*, August 2006; reproduction by permission of Edwin Fotheringham).

People and *Entertainment Weekly*.”

While still credited with attending movies, the stargazer’s principal pursuit is to spot celebrities (and apparently to photograph them). Equally enamored with the stars, the scenester is credited with fixing “Nick Nolte up with his ‘Toronto girlfriend’” and showing “Vince Vaughn what a *real* lap dance is like.” And when it comes to the category of Must-See Movies, the scenester’s noncinephilia really comes to the fore, for he will never “sacrifice beauty sleep

or party time to see movies.”¹⁰ The centers of attraction for both the scenester and the stargazer are celebrities, not films. In a film festival environment in which parties, scenes, and events overpower the status of film as an art form, the cineaste, as exemplary of the cinephiliac disposition, appears as an endangered species (Figures 1–2).

Festivals, both North American (Sundance, TIFF) and European (Cannes, Berlin, and Rotterdam), have always stressed their cinephiliac image, highlighting the serious nature of the films screened. Yet, over the past several years, an increase in both the participation of stars at film festivals and the ensuing media coverage devoted to same has provoked criticism that film festivals are becoming too star-driven.¹¹ The perceived threat of stars to festival cinephilia and the status of film within these festivals was clearly the target of an awareness campaign launched during the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Responding to growing concern that the screenings and director Q&As were losing ground to celebrity sightings and parties, the festival furnished attendees with buttons emblazoned with the slogan “Focus on Film.” An accompanying postcard coached festivalgoers to keep film as a primary concern. The campaign tacitly acknowledges the “threat” that a burgeoning, and perhaps uncontrollable, celebrity focus poses: it draws attention away from films and filmmakers. As the accompanying material pointed out, displaying the button spoke the following of its wearer: “I want to see films that I know I’ll never get to see anywhere else; My idea of ‘celebrity’ is the filmmaker who directed my favorite film at the Festival; I’m willing to wait in the cold for two hours to see a hot documentary; I love that for 10 days I have something in common with over 50,000 people in a small ski town. . . .”¹² Sundance’s campaign

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ There is growing criticism within both TIFF and Sundance that Hollywood is having too much influence over the selection process. Both film festivals have “become too big, some say; too slick, too commercial, and even too mainstream.” Mary Dickson, “Sundance: 20 Years,” *Weekly Wire*, January 20, 1988, http://weeklywire.com/www/01-20-98/slc_story.html (accessed June 22, 2009).

¹² As quoted by Eugene Hernandez and Brian Brooks in “Park City ’07 Daily Dispatch,” January 18, 2007, http://www.indiewire.com/ots/2007/01/park_city_07_da.html (accessed June 22, 2009).

posits an increased focus on celebrities at the festival, which it attempts to combat by recasting celebrity in terms of films and filmmakers and by restoring film's status as the principal object of desire through a renewed emphasis on the cinephiliac disposition.

This plea to "focus on film" thus asks participants to experience the festival as a cinephile. Problematically, the cinephiliac disposition is proposed as a means by which community is created among festival participants, so that 50,000 people can have "something in common." Yet this commonality of the filmic experience runs counter to the deeply personal, often idiosyncratic, response to a film that characterizes cinephilia. While viewing a film at a festival may be a collective event, the cinephiliac moment is not necessarily communal. Christian Keathley explains that even when cinephiliac details or moments are shared, they still "remain one's own, no doubt in large part because the initial encounter was a private one, even though it occurred in the public space of a darkened theater."¹³ Sundance's campaign to recuperate and reconfigure cinephilia fails to take into account essential features of the phenomenon.

Can film festivals emerge from under the media attention directed at celebrities and reinvigorate their reputations as film-centered experiences? Similar responses to the perceived threat can be seen at the Toronto International Film Festival. In his 2006 *Time Canada* article "How Toronto Attracts the Stars," film critic Richard Corliss enumerates some of the expected attendees and playfully suggests that TIFF adopt MGM's motto: "More Stars Than There Are in Heaven."¹⁴ However, Corliss mitigates the considerable star power that will be in evidence by suggesting that these "movers and shakers . . . might outnumber the spectators—if Toronto didn't attract 300,000 of the film faithful to see, discuss and gawk." After breezing through a list of celebrities forecast to attend the event, Corliss notes, "However much glamour the star vehicles bring to Toronto, the real value of the festival lies in the foreign art films and the knowledgeable audiences who seek them out." Shifting the focus from the stars to the audience, whose gawking refers to watching films and not spotting celebrities, Corliss suggests that the secret of Toronto's success is that here "the audience is the star." Again, we witness a compulsion to recast the audience broadly and the cinephile more specifically as the festival's film-friendly core to counteract the blinding luminosity of so many stars.

That film festivals and their critics are compelled to re-emphasize film as a *raison d'être* is highly indicative of the precarious position that filmgoing occupies in the public's perception of what transpires at film festivals. In TIFF's case, the threat to cinephilia strikes at the heart of the festival's identity, given its carefully cultivated image of a special viewing public. TIFF's success as one of the world's leading international film festivals has been heavily weighted toward two intertwined phenomena: the claim to being the world's biggest publicly attended festival and the audience's film savviness.¹⁵ Similarly, Brian D. Johnson's anecdotal history of TIFF, *Brave Films Wild*

13 Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or the Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 31.

14 Richard Corliss, "How Toronto Attracts the Stars," *Time Canada*, November 9, 2006.

15 See "About the Festival," <http://tiff.net/aboutthefestival> (accessed June 22, 2009).

Nights, written to coincide with the festival's twenty-fifth anniversary, favors a narrative in which the audience figures as a major contributor to the festival's achievements. Johnson peppers his text with endorsements by enthusiastic festival attendees gushing about their Toronto screenings, such as David Putman, producer of *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), who, after a particularly successful festival experience, stated, "Toronto had one of the best cinema-going audiences in the world."¹⁶

A key element in the success of TIFF, and a significant selling point, then, is that it delivers film-literate spectators to filmmakers, producers, distributors, and sponsors.¹⁷ As the festival's own Web site suggests, its success since its launch in 1976 can be largely attributed to Torontonians' cinemagoing habits: "Toronto was becoming a key screening location for both Hollywood and international cinema in large part because of its audience, which was cinematically literate, diverse in its tastes, and curious. If other festivals were relatively exclusive, Toronto provided a true, and accurate, public testing ground."¹⁸ In their comparison of TIFF and Montreal's Festival des Films du Monde (FFM), Dipti Gupta and Janine Marchessault argue a key point of differentiation between the two festivals is how they promote themselves. FFM focused on selling the festival's home city as a beautiful location combining old-world charm with the allure of cosmopolitan foreignness, while Toronto, they contend, did not have an interesting city image to sell, so "it turned toward its local audiences, which have been sold *ad nauseam* as the biggest commodity of all."¹⁹ Yet, festivals like Toronto and Sundance increasingly appear concerned with losing the power to shape their image as an event populated by cinephiles.

Can festivals re-create a prelapsarian experience harkening back to an idyllic time when film festivals were untainted by stargazers and scenesters? Such a fabled period, of course, never existed. Festivals have always courted, and struggled with, stars. As early as 1957, in his book *Les Stars*, Edgar Morin was already noting how the "star system has devoured the international film contests and turned them into international star contests. At Cannes, it is no longer the films but the stars that are exhibited as the chief attraction."²⁰ Cannes, a key destination for cinephiles as well as one of the most glamorous festivals in the world, illustrates the inevitable coexistence of stargazers with cinephiles. What Cannes, and other film festivals, makes abundantly clear is that creating the conditions for a cinephiliac experience is not a film festival's only consideration. These are, after all, film *festivals*. The extra-cinematic or para-cinematic events at film

16 Cited in Brian D. Johnson, *Brave Films Wild Nights: 25 Years of Festival Fever* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2000), 90.

17 Also in Johnson's book, David Kehr of *Chicago Magazine* says that "there is an atmosphere of shared interest, shared enthusiasm, and (when the occasion demands) shared disgust unlike any other festival I've ever attended" (95).

18 This "festival history" section of the site has recently been removed, but can still be viewed via the Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine." See <http://web.archive.org/web/20080120122603/http://tiff07.ca/festivalinfo/festivalflashback/history70s> (accessed June 22, 2009).

19 Dipti Gupta and Janine Marchessault, "Film Festivals as Urban Encounter and Cultural Traffic," in *Urban Enigmas: Montreal, Toronto, and the Problem of Comparing Cities*, ed. Johanne Sloan (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 251.

20 Edgar Morin, *The Stars* (Les Stars, 1957), trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 47.

festivals are key to their success: they rely on events such as parties, press conferences, and red-carpet entries as much as they do on the films themselves.²¹

What is at issue here, then, is cinephilia's *visibility*. While the scenester sniffs out the ultimate para-cinematic event, the not-to-be-missed party destined to become part of festival lore, the cinephile seeks by contrast the "classic" encounter with film that is, though shared with a community of fellow cinephiles, a largely individual and personal experience. Unlike the adoring crowds of fans or autograph-hunting throngs, there is little to witness when a cinephiliac event has transpired—it goes largely unperceived. As Paul Willemen points out, your experience can be "different from [that of] the person sitting next to you, in which case you have to dig him or her in the ribs with your elbow to alert them to the fact that you've just had your cinephiliac moment."²² The evidence of the encounter is often only tangible, long after the immediacy of the screening, in the festival reviews found in specialty magazines such as *Cinemascope*, *Sight & Sound*, *Film Comment*, *Cineaste*, and so forth.²³ The cinephiliac moment cannot, and never could, as Edgar Morin noted over half a century ago, compete with a star event. It is thus little wonder that the largely invisible cinephiliac experience appears to be under threat from the largely visible star culture, an atmosphere wherein the stargazer's "Who did you see?" replaces the cinephile's "What did you see?" And yet, the apparent incommensurability of the cinephile with the stargazer and scenester is little more than a red herring, since cinephiles who attend film festivals "are attracted by the films, but are also lured by the whole festival atmosphere."²⁴ A film festival without stars and parties would be as impoverished as one without cinephiles. Cinephilia is not in decline at film festivals. Rather, star culture has profoundly permeated some film festivals to an unprecedented degree, and this shift has diminished the status and visibility of the cinephiliac moment—making its very existence appear imperiled. *

21 In her discussion of the role of para-cinematic events at Cannes, Vanessa R. Schwartz points out, "Movies alone could not establish the festival as worldwide stage for international film culture but press coverage of 'events' could"; see *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan French Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 72.

22 Paul Willemen, "Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London and Bloomington: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1994), 237.

23 These magazines, like the film festival cinephile, are themselves vestiges of the "classical" cinephiliac disposition: a new generation of cinephiles is turning to the immediacy of the Internet and blogging to post reviews and reactions.

24 Hagener and de Valck, "Cinephilia in Transition," 25.