

CinemaCon: Identifying the Voice of the Film Exhibition Industry
Through the National Association of Theatre Owners'
Field-Configuring Event, 2011-2018

By
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the film exhibition industry's main field-configuring event, CinemaCon (2011-2018), deemed the largest convention and trade show in the world with over 4,000 participating delegates each year. Though CinemaCon is the newest industry event operated by the exhibitor trade organization, the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), it has quickly become the prominent annual ritual activity for film exhibitors and production and distribution industry delegates to attend. This study draws upon extensive primary and secondary source materials from archival research; immersive field attendance as a participant-observer at the multiple events; and industry artifacts. It combines these analyzed resources with multi-disciplinary approaches from media industry studies, political economy, organizational, management and event studies in order to present a detailed case study of the CinemaCon event as well as a critical examination of the 'semi-embedded deep texts' of its activities, presentations, and messages. Overall, I argue that CinemaCon is a powerfully constructed film exhibitor field-configuring event where its dominant organization is the represented 'voice' of the film exhibition industry that reinforces technological standards and intra-industry practices.

The study begins with an overview of film exhibition's history of formulating a unified convention event as it attempted to organize its body during the beginnings of the film industry. I draw upon substantial archival research in articulating the experimentation and evolutionary aspects of national convention events as they formed ritualistic practices and promoted a sense of exclusivity among film exhibitors. This analysis includes the formation of the principle trade organization, NATO, in 1966 and its first convention, as well as the shift toward outsourcing conventions, like ShoWest, as the event industry evolved. Chapter Three begins the case study of

CinemaCon, when NATO took back its convention from a for-profit organization and launched its own in 2011. I draw heavily upon three years of convention attendance (2014-2016) in addressing *what* CinemaCon is and *how* its programming, badging, trade show, panels and sessions reinforce the ritual of convention attendance in promoting an exclusive experience for exhibitors through the marketing of “hype” and “buzz.” These activities create opportunities for dialogue among exhibitors that highlight areas where the homogenization of exhibition is not definitive. Furthermore, Chapter Four continues building on this case study in addressing the activities—studio presentations, advanced screenings, NATO’s president John Fithian’s “CinemaCon State of the Industry” addresses, and the final awards ceremony—that occur in The Colosseum space. This exclusive space is viewed as a place where the three areas of the film industry unite, yet these industry stakeholders sometimes contradict one another as small fissures reveal discontent and points of conflict. This chapter reinforces my argument that field-configuring events, such as CinemaCon, are valuable research fields that provide inter- and intra-organizational insights from film exhibitors about film exhibition. CinemaCon is an event where industry knowledge is shared, unification is attempted, and the principle ‘voice’ of the film exhibition industry represented by NATO is made known.

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I would like to begin by thanking my chair, Tamara Falicov, for her incredible support, direction, feedback and mentorship that kept me moving “onward” throughout this project. I am grateful for her guidance and collegiality throughout my tenure in the program as we worked together early on in identifying opportunities and possibilities for graduate students after the department was launched in 2009. Her responsiveness to students, her open door, and mentorship offered (especially to female students) will forever be cherished.

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My love of film exhibition started as a small child at a single-screen cinema called the Park Theatre in northwestern Wisconsin. I sat the fifth row back, fifth seat in every movie. The excitement and experience kept me coming back each week. As I continued in avid moviegoing, experiencing Drive-Ins, budget cinemas, historic Movie Palaces, etc., my interest in studying this side of the film industry continued as an undergraduate student in history at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire researching picture palaces and conducting interviews with local movie theatre owners and followed me to graduate school. In Kansas, I pursued research on the history

of a movie palace in Topeka, Kansas called the Jayhawk Theatre and even received a grant through the Kansas Humanities Council to turn this research into a documentary film, another passion of mine. My interests in all of exhibition—technologies, aesthetics, concessions, architecture, business operations, worker experiences, ticketing, loyalty programs, etc.—led me to thinking and questioning the business of exhibitors in pursuing this research of CinemaCon.

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During my second semester a professor made a comment that “anything could happen in life while you are working toward your dissertation goal.” Little did I know how true “life events” would be for me. This dissertation is dedicated in part to those loved ones that left us too soon. First, my dad, Orville F. Stone Jr., was one of my biggest champions and supporters. It was hard to have him go as he was a great father and friend. I know he would have loved to see this to the end, and would be so incredibly proud. Similarly, my partner's father, Lester ‘Les’ Pitzer, is not able to share in this excitement, but would be happy for my achievement.

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Dedication

*for Haakon and Henrietta
my sun and my star
who stole my heart*

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Dedication	ix
List of Figures.....	xiii
List of Tables.....	xvi
Chapter 1: The Study of Film Exhibition Field-Configuring Events	1
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	3
Understanding and Applying Event Studies Scholarship.....	3
Conventions, Trade shows, Festivals and Media Industry Studies.....	8
Methodology and Methods.....	17
Chapter Breakdown.....	22
Chapter 2: Film Exhibition Conventions as Field Configuring Events	26
Introduction	26
Film Exhibition Conventions as Field Configuring Events	26
Internal Organization and the Birth of Film Exhibitor Conventions (1906-1911).....	29
Establishing the Trade Show and Exhibits (1912).....	43
Developing the Exhibitor-Driven International Motion Picture Industry Expo (1913).....	45
A Focus on Convention Partnerships	48
Increasing Exhibitor Participation.....	48
The Transitioning Convention From ‘Business Meeting’ to Collaborative Event.....	52
NATO Assumes the ‘Voice’ of the Industry.....	55

ShoWest Steals the Film Exhibitor Convention Spotlight	58
Summary	60
Chapter 3: CinemaCon Case Study	62
Introduction	62
NATO Takes Back Its Convention.....	63
Applied Case Study Analysis of the CinemaCon FCE.....	70
Temporally Bounded By Networked Calendars.....	71
Spatially Bound through Accommodation	74
Social Unbounded and Bounded by Differentiation	78
Functionally Unbounded Hybrid Event.....	84
Summary	95
Chapter 4: The Colosseum: An Industry Exclusive Cultural Arena.....	96
Introduction	96
The Colosseum As an Exclusive Industry Space	98
Exclusive Access to The Colosseum.....	100
Technology and Stakeholders.....	102
Studio-Hired Security Presence Promoting Exclusivity and Product Elevation	106
Studio Presentations as Ritual & Spectacle.....	108
The Colosseum: Unity, Conflict, and Agency.....	114
The ‘Global’ Message of Unity	115
Awards Ceremonies as a Cultural Economy of Prestige.....	123
Dissemination of CinemaCon Industry Knowledge	127
Summary	128

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Future of CinemaCon and Film Exhibition FCEs.....	130
Bibliography	135
Figures.....	151
Appendix A	179
Appendix B.....	180
Appendix C.....	181
Appendix D	183
Appendix E.....	184
Appendix F	185

List of Figures

Figure 1: Movie Attendance in the United States and Canada.....	66
Figure 2: Movie Theatre Sites in the United States and Canada.....	67
Figure 3: Annual Domestic Box Office Grosses.....	117
Figure 4: Global Box Office Gross.....	117
Figure 5: Ethnicity Share of Total Population, Moviegoers, and Tickets Sold Domestically in 2017.....	118
Figure 6: Advertisement for 1934 MPTOA Convention, <i>Film Daily</i>	151
Figure 7: Advertisement for the 1919 National Convention, <i>Motion Picture News</i>	152
Figure 8: Decorated Entrance to the Caesars Palace Conference Center, CinemaCon 2016.....	153
Figure 9: LED Advertising by Coca-Cola and NATO, CinemaCon 2016.....	153
Figure 10: LED Advertising, CinemaCon 2016.....	154
Figure 11: CinemaCon Gateway, CinemaCon 2016.....	154
Figure 12: Inside Out (Disney, 2015) Movie Poster, CinemaCon 2015.....	155
Figure 13: Star Trek Beyond (Paramount Pictures, 2016) Movie Poster, CinemaCon 2016.....	155
Figure 14: Movie-Themed Elevators, CinemaCon 2016.....	156
Figure 15: Signage for CinemaCon App, CinemaCon 2016.....	156
Figure 16: Pixels Car, <i>Pixels</i> (Columbia Pictures, 2015), CinemaCon 2015.....	157
Figure 17: Raphael Statue, <i>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows</i> (Paramount Pictures, 2016), CinemaCon 2016.....	157
Figure 18: CinemaCon Registration Area, CinemaCon 2016.....	158
Figure 19: CinemaCon Badge with International Day and Domestic Passports, CinemaCon 2014	158

Figure 20: CinemaCon Booklet and Badge, CinemaCon 2016.....	159
Figure 21: Map of Caesars Palace Convention Center found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014	160
Figure 22: Trade Show Booth List found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014.....	161
Figure 23: Trade Show Map found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014.....	162
Figure 24: Map of Breakout & Private Meeting Rooms found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014..	163
Figure 25: CinemaCon Goody Bag, CinemaCon 2016.....	163
Figure 26: Dolby Trade Show Space, CinemaCon 2015	164
Figure 27: Dolby Accessibility Technologies, CinemaCon 2016	164
Figure 28: RealD Breakout Room, CinemaCon 2016	165
Figure 29: Look 3D Glass Booth, CinemaCon 2016.....	165
Figure 30: MX4D Interactive Booth, CinemaCon 2016.....	166
Figure 31: CGV Sales Booth, CinemaCon 2016.....	166
Figure 32: Trade Show Booth, Movie Buff Game, CinemaCon 2016	167
Figure 33: Easy to Clean Luxury Seats, CinemaCon 2016.....	167
Figure 34: Multi-Grain Bob Pop Product, CinemaCon 2016.....	168
Figure 35: Panel Session, CinemaCon 2016	168
Figure 36: The Colosseum Stage, CinemaCon 2016.....	169
Figure 37: The Colosseum Seating Area, CinemaCon 2015.....	169
Figure 38: Twentieth Century Fox Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016.....	170
Figure 39: Walt Disney Studios Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016.....	170
Figure 40: Now You See Me 2 (Summit Entertainment, 2016) The Colosseum Evacuation, CinemaCon 2016	171
Figure 41: Dolby Vision at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2015.....	171

Figure 42: RealD 3D Sponsor, CinemaCon 2016	172
Figure 43: James Cameron Returns to CinemaCon, CinemaCon 2016.....	172
Figure 44: Paramount Pictures Studio Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2015.....	173
Figure 45: Tyler Perry at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016	173
Figure 46: Advanced Screening of <i>Spy</i> (20 th Century Fox, 2015), CinemaCon 2015	174
Figure 47: Studio "Gifts" of Ugly Doll Toys, CinemaCon 2016	174
Figure 48: Amazon Studios Presentation Sign, CinemaCon 2016	175
Figure 49: Amazon Studios Presentation Luncheon, CinemaCon 2016.....	175
Figure 50: CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards at The Colosseum with Program, CinemaCon 2016	176
Figure 51: Gina Rodriguez Accepts CinemaCon Award, CinemaCon 2016.....	176
Figure 52: CinemaCon and Coca-Cola Final After Party, CinemaCon 2015	177
Figure 53: Publication Stand for Industry-Related News, CinemaCon 2016	177
Figure 54: CinemaCon-themed <i>Boxoffice</i> Magazines, 2015, 2016, 2018	178
Figure 55: Screenshot of CinemaCon App Interface, CinemaCon 2018.....	178

List of Tables

Table 1: National American Theatre Organizations 1911-2018	50
Table 2: Primary International Film Exhibitor Convention Events.....	73
Table 3: NATO Regional Film Exhibitor Convention Events	73
Table 4: Nonprofit and Alternative Domestic Film Exhibitor Conventions.....	73
Table 5: CinemaCon Registration Packages	79
Table 6: CinemaCon 2019 Registration Fees by Affiliation.....	81
Table 7: NATO Membership Fees for 2018	82
Table 8: Studio Presence at CinemaCon, 2011-2018	110

Chapter 1: The Study of Film Exhibition Field-Configuring Events

Introduction

“In exhibition, the best dialog appears to have been achieved through the years by somewhat prosaic ‘exhibitor convention.’ True, we often go around in circles, we beg the question, we make promises and we endorse pledges which oftentimes seem futile in retrospect. But little by little, we grow in awareness, we learn, we absorb and we transmit. There is, therefore, no substitute for the convention concept, especially the convention-trade show concept, on state, regional and national levels. Endeavors to broaden individual participation at these get-togethers through programing that encourages eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation and discussion are, of course, to be applauded. Therein lie approaches to the answers to the problems of theatre operation, merchandising, legislation, taxation, trade practices, public relations, censorship, regulation and restriction that take on, from time to time, new and different forms.”¹ Ben Shlyen, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher, *Boxoffice* 1976

Published as an editorial promotion of the second convening of ShoWesT² on the second page of *Boxoffice*, an industry trade magazine, Ben Shlyen’s elaboration on the role and purpose of film exhibitor conventions and trade shows illustrate valuable modes to which these events are organized and programmed to promote social, cultural, political, and economic practices within film exhibition and the film industry at large. As industry-centered events, film exhibitors via local, regional, and national exhibitor-run organizations have been operating and promoting exhibitor-oriented conventions and trade shows in the domestic and international marketplace since the early 1900s. These conventions have since brought together exhibitors, distributors, above-the-line and below-the-line film personnel and stars, technology companies, alternative content providers, and merchants tailoring to everyday movie theatre business operations in the same space, during a short period of time, under a common goal of promoting and selling the moviegoing experience and consumption of Hollywood, dominant, motion pictures by domestic

¹ “Go WEST—TO ShoWesT ’77,” *Boxoffice* 110, no. 10 (Dec 13, 1976): 2.

² From its run in 1976-1980, ShoWest utilized the spelling ‘ShoWesT.’ It later dropped the capitalized ‘T’ and remained ShoWest until 2010. This dissertation will refer to the event as ShoWest unless utilizing a direct quote.

and international audiences. Domestically, large-scale exhibitor conventions such as Show-A-Rama (1961-1985), the National Association of Theatre Owners' (NATO) National Convention (1966-1988), ShoWest (1975-2010), and CinemaCon (2011+) entailed long-running, successful annual conventions.

In film and media studies it is acknowledged that scholarly work in film exhibition falls behind that of its producer and distributor counterparts. Scholars such as Robert Allen, Douglas Gomery, and Gregory Waller (Allen and Gomery, 1985; and Waller, 2002) have rallied for more work to be done in areas of film exhibition histories—social, economic, political, and cultural—and this area of study has produced more research in recent years. Scholarly analysis in film exhibition has promoted case studies analysis of individual cinemas and exhibition practices (Gomery, 1992; Waller, 2002; Maltby, Biltereyst, and Meers, 2011); movie audiences and reception studies (Austin, 2002; Jancovich, 2003; Staiger, 2005); research on exhibitor organizations and policy (dissertation and numerous articles by Deron Overpeck, 2007, 2010, and 2014; and dissertation by Edgerton, 1981); globalization of exhibition (Acland, 2003); and other studies of theatre development, design and technological change (Belton, 1992; Friedman, 1982; Valentine, 1996; and Hall, 1961).

While much work has increased in film exhibition in the last 40 years and these approaches and studies remain valuable to the field, at the present time one cannot locate an academic study on film exhibitor conventions and trade shows that further promotes exhibition scholarship under the auspice of defining the “voice of the film exhibition industry.” *Who* is the voice of the industry and *how* is that voice communicated? It is under this indication that this dissertation argues a need to produce an in-depth examination of film exhibitor conventions and trade shows as organization-led events where the programming, practices, rituals, and messages

provide a pathway toward understanding organization operations in analyzing event issues such as “theatre operation, merchandising, legislation, taxation, trade practices, public relations, censorship, [and] regulation and restriction” articulated by Shlyen in his editorial.³ *Who* organizes and programs film exhibitor industry conventions and *who* participates and attends? *What* happens at these events? *How* does the study of film exhibitor convention events contribute to research and promote understanding of the exhibition industry and its exhibitor organizations and stakeholders operating and evolving over time?

In order to address these questions, this dissertation calls upon an interdisciplinary approach in joining media industry studies in film and media studies with organizational, management, and event studies and practices that have been similarly applied to recent research of film festivals. As an event-based study, this research addresses operation, activities, influences, and agency dominant conventions, through a case study analysis of CinemaCon, the recently launched professional film exhibitor convention and trade show by the largest and primary domestic exhibitor organization, NATO.

Review of Literature

Understanding and Applying Event Studies Scholarship

To understand the framework from which CinemaCon and the wider arena of film exhibitor trade shows, also called sales markets or trade fairs, and conventions begins, this literature review recognizes research in the interdisciplinary field of event studies. Event studies research has traditionally been found within business schools, management, economics,

³ “Go WEST—TO ShoWesT ’77,” 2.

anthropology, and sociology.⁴ Scholarly journals including *Organization Science*, *Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Management Studies*, *European Planning Studies*, *Anthropos*, *Economic Geography*, and the *Creative Encounters Working Papers* from the Copenhagen Business School include essays covering a variety of topics and applied theories on trade shows, events, and organizations that this study on film exhibitor conventions can employ. Event studies, on its own, aims to look “at the bigger picture, all issues surrounding planned events, in addition to their management, design and production.”⁵ When combined with economic, sociological, political, organizational and media studies, etc. the significance, impact, and importance of an event on its stakeholders, participants, and industry is further enhanced. Events, by common dictionary definition are an “occurrence at a given place and time; [under] a special set of circumstances; [and of] noteworthy occurrence.”⁶

The study of events began with 1960s and 70s research of tourism and leisure (see Gunn’s *Tourism Planning*, 1979) and expanded in the 1990s to include event management (see Goldblatt’s *Special Events: The Art and Science of Celebration*, 1990) and tourism (see Getz’s *Festivals, Special Events and Tourism*, 1991) which by then had broadened its scope to include festivals and large-scale events such as the Olympics and World’s Fairs.⁷ In his text *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (2012), Donald Getz defines this field as encompassing: 1) the study of all planned events; 2) experience of events by stakeholders and/or participants; and 3) the meanings attached to events and event experiences.⁸ CinemaCon exhibitor convention and trade show is a hybrid event that is positioned as both an ‘exhibition,’ a

⁴ In non-academic literature can also be found with many “how to” books written by industry and business managers and workers dedicated to numerous topics including trade show design, event planning, creating social media and even better utilizing balloons in attention-capturing décor.

⁵ Donald Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (London: Routledge, 2012), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

company or organization producing and designing exhibitions such as trade and consumer shows, and ‘meetings and conventions’ which consist of organizational orchestration of meetings, seminars, and business activities.⁹ The same hybrid classification could be applied to many other operating media-based conventions and trade shows such as Comic-Con, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) convention, and the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), who all include seminars and events within the ‘exhibition’ (trade show) phenomenon.

Trade shows have drawn significant research in sociology, anthropology, and business and economics areas. Gopalakrishna and Lilien write “Trade shows are a bit like industrial versions of shopping malls: they are industrial examples of potential buyers visiting prospective sellers. And, like at the shopping mall, most attendees either have specific plans to buy a product in the category exhibited or at least exert some degree of influence on purchase decisions in the category (*Trade Show Bureau* 1986).”¹⁰ They point out that prior to the 1990s, there was not a lot of research conducted on trade shows, which was partly due to firms attending these events were not collecting and documenting their own data or having clear objectives for their attendance.¹¹ This early marketing research utilized a three-stage model of trade show performance in demonstrating applied activities of booth attraction, contact and conversion efficiency altered the buyer and seller’s experience. Their study looked at impersonal promotional variables such as attention-getting techniques (giveaways, demos, and the value of décor), preshow promotions (advertising, direct mail, etc.); booth space (size of their paid area); points (the firm’s longevity of association with the convention); competition (sizing up similar products at the show); and personal promotional variables of their personnel of how well

⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁰ Srinath Gopalakrishna and Gary L. Lilien, “A Three-Stage Model of Industrial Trade Show Performance,” *Marketing Science* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 22.

¹¹ Ibid.

employees were trained and how many were at the booth to assist customers.¹² Building on this research, publications and dissertations in business and marketing, sociology and anthropology began to explore domestic trade shows and the positioning of global expansion (Leinenbach, 1992); trade show marketing and sales techniques of vertical and horizontal trade show classification techniques (Hanchett, 2007); spatial, temporal, social and functional boundaries of trade fairs and festivals and the values of these relationships in cultural industries (Moeran and Pedersen, 2009); trade fairs as imagined communities and market fields (Moeran, 2011); trade shows as ‘temporary clusters’ or what Maskell, Bahelt and Malmberg (2004) define as “hotspots of intensive and dedicated exchange of knowledge” (Nanton, 2015: iii); and the roles exhibitors play in displaying and drawing in a captive trade show audience (Garaycochea, 2017).

It would be inaccurate to position the trade show at CinemaCon as being operationally different to those identified in the studies above. The event’s trade show sponsored by the long-standing concessionary organization, the National Association of Concessionaries (NAC), and the International Cinema Technology Association (ICTA) is similar to book, technology, medical, etc. trade shows in their booking, staging, and buyer/seller contact. However, much can be learned about CinemaCon’s organizational and stakeholder goals, interests, and agendas by identifying and analyzing the market fields and values illustrated by Moeran and Pedersen (2009; 2011).

CinemaCon is a ‘planned event,’ a temporal phenomenon with a planned schedule and advanced publicity of which festivals, conferences, fairs, sports, etc. occupy.¹³ Planned events are further characterized as “live, social events created to achieve specific outcomes, including

¹² Ibid., 29-31.

¹³ Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*, 37, 40.

those related to business, the economy, culture, society and environment.”¹⁴ The planning of the event includes the orchestration of “themes, settings, consumables, services and programmes that suggest, facilitate or constrain experiences for participants, guests, spectators and other stakeholders.”¹⁵

In event studies, stakeholders play a significant role in understanding functions of power (who has it and how do they wield it, as well as who does not), legitimacy (socially constructed and accepted system of values, beliefs and definitions), and urgency (how and what stakeholders call for attention).¹⁶ Applying ‘stakeholder theory’ (see Freeman, 1984; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997; Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001) is useful for understanding the experiences, needs and motivations of the various players at CinemaCon.¹⁷ For example, the planning and management of CinemaCon falls under the film exhibitor trade organization stakeholder, NATO, and its in-house management team guided by managing director Mitch Neuhauser, the previous director of ShoWest.¹⁸ The organization has a history of catering to large cinema chains, which could be considered NATO’s principle exhibitor stakeholder versus smaller independent operations. NATO is also not the only domestic film exhibitor organization with a national convention. The League of Historic Theatres (LHAT), founded in 1976 and serving historic theatre operations, Art House Convergence (AHC), founded in 2008 and serving art house and other alternative independent cinema businesses, have been operating independently and hosting their own annual national conventions for their constituents. There also exists crossover in organizational affiliation with companies such as the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema’s

¹⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶ Ibid., 116.

¹⁷ Ibid., 115-6, 208-14, 278-86.

¹⁸ NATO Staff, *NATO Online*, accessed June 15, 2018. <http://www.natoonline.org/contact-nato/>.

Tim League and key players, as attending both CinemaCon and Art House Convergence conventions.¹⁹ Thus, identifying all of the potential stakeholders of CinemaCon is a voluminous task. This dissertation undertakes the task of identifying key stakeholders, where applicable, in Chapters 3 and 4, when discussing organizational structure, management, participants, and presentations. Identifying stakeholders allows me to evaluate structures of power, agency and resistance because the desired presentation at CinemaCon is toward the creation of an annual, unified, ritual event of common goals and exhibitor interests. However, as we will see, not every exhibitor buys into the messaging, technologies, etc. that are being ‘pushed’ upon them by studios, distributors, industry agents, and NATO. Applying a “bottom-up” approach to understanding organizational functions and operations (Hirsch, 1972; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) enables a more in-depth evaluation of behind-the-scenes research of media industries such as those applied to case studies of production cultures (Caldwell, 2008) found in the creative industries as well as recent applications to film and television conventions, trade shows and festivals in the distribution and exhibition arenas. This method is utilized to distinguish between the dominant voice of the film exhibition industry and those ‘voices’ acting in the periphery.

Conventions, Trade shows, Festivals and Media Industry Studies

In the film and media studies discipline, the study of events—conventions and trade shows—would be considered in its infancy. Media industry studies itself is new and has only gained scholarly traction since the 2000s by creating a more integrated approach to understanding the complex and increasingly changing and growing media industries (Havens and

¹⁹ Tim League (CEO Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas) in discussion with the author, April 24, 2014. ‘Key players’ is term formerly used by the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema company in referencing its corporate leadership in Austin, Texas. Key players were identified as the CEO, general managers, head chef, and principle programming staff. However, post-2015, the webpage that identified the company’s ‘Key Players’ was removed. Where applicable, I may still refer to Alamo’s leadership as ‘key players.’

Lotz, 2012; Holt and Perren, 2009; and Arsenault and Perren, 2016). Research across media industries has included the recent work and aforementioned studies of distribution and acquisition of global television programming trade fairs (Havens, 2006) as well as recent research on Comic-Con (Hanna, 2014; Gilbert, 2014; Jenkins, 2018), a media industry fan convention.²⁰ This section examines how the emerging field of media industry studies provides an avenue and need for rich exploration and inclusion of film conventions and festivals and the organizations that facilitate them.

In their 2009 article “Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach,” Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz and Serra Tinic termed the emerging area of film and media studies scholarship ‘critical media industry studies’, which is now media industry studies. Media industry studies would create an area for a more holistic approach to understanding the ever-expanding media industries, challenging the individualization of political economy approaches (led by political economist research of Herbert Schiller, Robert McChesney, and Edward Herman), which they argue was too narrow in focus, and cultural studies (following traditions of Adorno, Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School), which had become too expansive in both complexities and inclusiveness. Research in media studies has included areas of globalization and studies of Hollywood’s domination in film (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, and Wang, 2004; McDonald and Wasko, 2008) and television (Hoskins, McFadyen, and Finn, 1997). As Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren suggest, scholarly work across these texts have made efforts to combine both political economy with cultural studies in investigating “interests in ownership, regulation, and production with cultural studies’ interests in texts, discourse, audiences, and

²⁰ While this is not a reception or audience-based research project, this dissertation highlights fan-oriented conventions, such as Comic-Con, as fan studies scholarship continues to grow and explore conventions and events.

consumption.”²¹ Through a top-down approach, many of these studies employed powerful examinations of the studios and their distributor arms, with minimal attention to the exhibition arm, but gave little attention to human agency employed by those working in industries.

According to Havens et al., critical political economy approaches to media industries, “results from their consistent focus on the larger level operations of media institutions, general inattention to entertainment programming, and incomplete explanation of the role of human agents (other than those at the pinnacle of conglomerate hierarchies) in interpreting, focusing, and redirecting economic forces that provide for complexity and contradiction within media industries.”²² By comparison, media industry studies is interested in those areas of the roles of media institutions, but also about the production and work happening within and the agency expressed by human agents and the cultural factors at work.²³ This approach includes “midlevel fieldwork in industry analyses, which accounts for the complex interactions among cultural and economic forces.”²⁴ One of the most powerful methods for eliciting that data has come from media industry studies’ valuation and incorporation of ethnographic research borrowed from anthropology and sociology.

Ethnographic research by way of participant-observer analysis and interview gathering has become an invaluable research tool for exploring the “human agent” element in trade shows, conventions, and festival research.²⁵ As mentioned, there is minimal work on convention events in film and media studies. Yet, event studies and media industries provides an environment to

²¹ Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren, *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8.

²² Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz, and Serra Tinic, “Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (2009): 236.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁵ In the following section on methods, I will elaborate in more detail my use of ethnographic research as a participant-observer at CinemaCon.

analyze the business transactions and human elements of exchange (power and agency) through political economy, cultural studies, and ethnographic models. On-the-ground research has enabled researchers bottom-up and middle-level access to event participants, activities, and managers and organizations. It is through this “lived experience” that researchers are able to draw and connect with participants and stakeholders.

John Thornton Caldwell’s research of the “cultural studies of film/television production” is one example of how ethnographic, social, critical, and industrial methodologies can be applied to the critical industry studies of film and television industry participants.²⁶ In his fieldwork that included interviews with primarily below-the-line workers in Los Angeles, Caldwell addressed those professional communities and subcultures that “forge and remake their identities;” find ways to legitimize their “significance and value to neighboring industrial communities;” and the rituals that members operate under that further promote a sense of survival and connectivity.²⁷ Caldwell defines these rituals and activities of industry workers and members as being “full embedded, semi-embedded, and publicly disclosed ‘deep texts’” that provide academics with a richer framework for assessing the agency of members operating within, in this case, the film exhibition industry.²⁸ Caldwell writes that

“Trade shows and markets are charged sites in which these [consensus and relationship-building] tasks are broached and bartered. Such events are also ‘liminal’ rituals and spaces within which practitioner groups suspend the day-to-day grind of work in order to collectively re-imagine a common future or contested present.”

²⁶ John Thornton Caldwell, “Cultures of Production: Studying Industry’s Deep Texts, Reflexive Rituals, and Managed Self-Disclosures,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 199-200.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

This categorization of ritualistic participation and intra- and inter-group activities is useful in application to this participant-observation case study of CinemaCon and film exhibitor conventions and events, which will be discussed further in the section on methodology.

In the field of fan studies, research by Erin Melissa Hanna and Anne Gilbert utilized participant-observer methods in attending Comic-Con International: San Diego events over the course of several years. Hanna's study incorporated the use of time and space in identifying relationships of power between fans (consumers) and producers, distributors, creators, and stars (producers). She looks at both the culture of waiting in lines as an enforcement of rules, as well as an analysis of the largest convention room, Exhibit Hall, and how the retail space (similar to trade shows) is used as a common area by small companies and large corporate entities in selling and communicating with participants/attendees.²⁹ My work on CinemaCon is similar in its ability to identify spatial and temporal issues that promote power dynamics among stakeholders operating within Caesar's Palace Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, the site of the CinemaCon event. However, CinemaCon is not a fan-event nor is any of its target audiences meant to be industry outsiders. The organizational structure of NATO, being for exhibitors with membership and membership access, and the trade show and convention's panels and sessions program aimed at its film exhibitor audience creates a seemingly exclusive environment for film exhibition. Yet several audiences are still in attendance. Utilizing this combination of media industry, event, and organizational studies allows for the discussion of power relationships among distribution companies, celebrities, NATO, theatre owners, the press, and other media industry entities and supporters. This event focus then, falls more in line with that of Timothy Havens.

²⁹ Erin Melissa Hanna, "Making Fandom Work: Industry Space and Structures of Power at the San Diego Comic-Con" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014).

In addition to interviews, Havens participated in several television programming trade fairs in his longitudinal research of the business practices of both distributors and buyers who attended the largest global sales events: MIP-TV (Marché International des Programmes de Télévision, or International Television Program Market), NATPE (National Association of Television Programming Executives), and MIPCOM (Marché International des Films et des Programmes pour la Télévision, le Câble et le Satellite, or International Film and Programme Market for Television, Video, Cable and Satellite).³⁰ In his text, *Global Television Programming*, the chapter “Global Television Trade Shows” is similar to Hanna’s spatial work in that Havens identifies the various exhibit halls where trade takes place, as well as the set-up and displays by individual businesses. However, his approach addresses that business and economics of event interactions that are expressed through rituals of business practices of cultural trade such as creating a cultural economy of ‘buzz’ and creating a sense of corporate identity through the design and implementation of sales stalls building on organizational and trade show research (Hirsch, 1972; Gopalakrishna, Lilien, Williams and Sequeira, 1995; Du Gay and Pryke, 2002)³¹ Both Hanna and Havens have further validated the need to include conventions and trade shows as part of media industry studies.

Recent film festival scholarship has also legitimized the role of festival studies in media industries, through interdisciplinary research methods borrowed from event studies organizational management. In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, Marijke de Valck’s introductory chapter identifies multiple facets of film festival research exploration.

³⁰ See Timothy J. Havens, “Exhibiting Global Television: On the Business and Cultural Functions of Global Television Fairs.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 47, no. 1 (2003): 18-35. See also Timothy Havens, *Global Television Marketplace* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2006).

³¹ Timothy Havens, *Global Television Marketplace* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2006), 66-94.

Festivals implore concepts of prestige, power, and leisure.³² They are events that have constructed market fields, as suggested by Moeran and Pedersen (2009; 2011). The festival size, outreach (local, national, international), target audiences (stakeholders as well as demographics), programming, and projection technologies helps identify and characterize festivals as functioning media industry events in the global market.³³ Additionally, case studies applying concepts of stakeholder theory (Rhyne, 2009); global cultural industries (Stringer, 2001; Elsaesser, 2005; Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009); and organizational management theories (Rüling, 2009; Rüling and Pedersen, 2010) have provided a survey of social, political, economic and cultural structures at work in festival industries that can be applied to this study of CinemaCon and film exhibitor conventions.³⁴

Conventions, trade shows and film festivals operate under similar management pretenses and standards as organizations. In 2005, Lampel and Meyer introduced the term ‘field-configuring events’ (FCEs) as “temporary social organizations such as trade shows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets and industries (Meyer et al., 2005). They are settings in which people from diverse organizations and with diverse purposes assemble periodically, or on a one-time basis, to announce new products, develop industry standards, construct social networks, recognize accomplishments, share and interpret information, and

³² Marijke de Valck, “Introduction: What is a Film Festival? How to Study Festivals and Why You Should,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, ed. by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1-7.

³⁴ Additional film festival case studies can be found in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit* (2009) edited by Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne; *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities* (2010) edited by Dina Iordanova with Ruby Cheung; *The Film Festival Reader* (2013) edited by Dina Iordanova; and *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016) edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist.

transact business.”³⁵ In the same way that Ruling and Pedersen (2009; 2010) applied organizational studies perspectives and the FCE classification on film festivals, I intend to use FCEs to create a theoretical framework from which the study of film exhibition conventions and trade shows is constructed. CinemaCon brings together “multiple constituents and reflect divergent set of values” (Ruling and Pedersen, 2010: 4); they are “rooted in specific cultural [the dominant film industry] and institutional contexts, and act as places of global ‘travel and exchange’ (Mazdon, 2006: 23) (Ruling and Pedersen, 2010: 4-5); and they are “temporary organizations” in which both economic and aesthetic values are constructed and attached to films, technologies, moviegoing experiences, and industry operations (Ruling and Pedersen, 2010: 5).

CinemaCon is a domestically-run, globally attended convention event with distinct and hidden agendas and values held by its varying stakeholders. Ragan Rhyne’s examination of film festival circuits addresses why festivals have gravitated toward nonprofit identities in managing stakeholders within the global cultural industry (Rhyne, 2009). Rhyne traces a pattern of film festival classification as nonprofits, known as the third sector of business in the United States, to being the mainstay of festival organization and management practice.³⁶ She found that for the Sundance Film Festival the “festival-as-non-profit” [sic] concept challenged perceptions of international festivals as being congruent circuits. Instead, we are to rethink film festivals as new cultural industries with new structures of cultural management. As nonprofits festivals find more amicable financial positioning between public and private subsidy, they may find conciliation of

³⁵ Joseph Lampel and Alan D. Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms: How Conferences, Ceremonies, and Trade Shows Constitute New Technologies, Industries, and Markets,” *Journal of Management Studies* 45, no. 6 (September 2008): 1026.

³⁶ Ragan Rhyne, “Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: Film Festival Circuits*, eds. Dina Jordanova with Ragan Rhyne (Great Britain: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 10-11.

their varied and often conflicting motivations of their many stakeholders more manageable.³⁷ Likewise, part of the divorcement of NATO from its long-standing relationship (and ownership) with ShoWest in 2010 was due to the exhibitor convention becoming ‘for-profit’ after it sold the event to the Sunshine group in 2000. NATO, a nonprofit lobbying organization cited the rising costs of the event as a burden on its members as a significant reason for parting ways. Forming its own exhibitor-run convention event would also give NATO, as an organization under the leadership of president, John Fithian, more control over the management of domestic and international stakeholders, messaging, and event themes and topics. These messages in turn represent the shared voice of domestic exhibitors, whether real or imagined. Similar to film festivals, the nonprofit status would also allow NATO to find greater fiscal freedom in managing its registration and overhead costs.

While the interdisciplinary disciplines and studies above add to our understanding of trade shows, film festivals, and conventions in media industries areas of exhibition, they do not address the phenomenon, the programming experience, the messages, and the power relationships among stakeholders at exhibitor-run convention events of the film exhibition industry. For this reason, this dissertation identifies CinemaCon, film exhibitor conventions, and film industry conventions and trade shows as ‘arenas of emergence’ (Rüling and Pedersen, 2010). Though these industries and organizations have been operating conventions since the dawn of the 20th century, the research and study of these events in film and media studies is only beginning.

³⁷ Ibid., 19-20.

Methodology and Methods

This dissertation investigates CinemaCon, the largest international film exhibitor convention and trade show, from a film and media studies-grounded interdisciplinary approach favoring media industry studies, event studies, and organizational and management practices. I answer the call of the varying disciplines seeking scholarship on conferences, trade shows, and festivals through case studies (Allen and Gomery, 1985; Lampe and Meyer, 2008; Havens and Lotz, 2009; Holt and Perren, 2009; Aresnault and Perren, 2016; Valck et al., 2016) to better understand film exhibition as a powerful political, economic, social and cultural industry in its own right and to identify the voice(s) of the film exhibition industry. My approach examines data from four areas of analysis: 1) ethnographic field observation as a participant-observer at the primary film exhibitor convention event, its space and activities; 2) informal conversations with event attendees and delegates; 3) an assessment of film exhibitor and film industry-produced event artifacts and materials; and 4) an historical and textual analysis of film exhibition convention events found in trade magazines, journals, and organization-oriented publications.

Similar to Caldwell, Hanna and Havens, I approach this case study as a participant-observer seeking to uncover CinemaCon's "thick description," its "web of significance," as identified by Clifford Geertz (1973).³⁸ At the same time, I implore Caldwell's immersive strategy to go behind-the-scenes in observing those 'semi-embedded deep texts' that can only be accessed by attending an industry-operated trade show and convention event. Caldwell defines 'semi-embedded deep texts and rituals' as the "professional exchanges with ancillary public viewing and inter-group relations" such as trade shows and trade publications.³⁹ This

³⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Works by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9-10.

³⁹ John Thornton Caldwell, "Cultures of Production," 202.

categorization of ritualistic participation of film exhibitors and film industry helps this study situate and contextualize *how* these industry agents or ‘stakeholders’ assimilate and interact to discuss, define, and identify the ‘voice’ or ‘voices’ of the film exhibition industry, in echoing Caldwell’s sentiment that “‘the’ industry is comprised of numerous, sometimes conflicted and competing socio-professional communities, held together in a loose and mutating alliance by ‘willed affinity.’”⁴⁰

In attending CinemaCon over a period of three years (2014, 2015, and 2016), I immersed myself into the convention and trade show event badged as an affiliated industry ‘delegate.’ I participated in event activities and rituals, collecting data via photography, audio recordings of permissible panels and sessions, and pamphlets and brochures. While formal interview situations were not permissible, I was able to interact with exhibitors, trade show affiliates, and partner attendees in asking questions through informal interview conversations at various social events. I also attended every exclusive Studio Presentation of up and coming film product and distributor-sponsored advanced screenings, as there was little overlap in the scheduling and programming of CinemaCon. My experiences attending CinemaCon are also informed from having attended other major media industry conventions like the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in 2018 and participation in a variety of themed academic conferences and trade shows.

In addition to this on-site research, my work is supplemented with primary source materials found in industry trade journals and news articles, NATO-publications such as *Boxoffice* magazine and website, NATO’s website content and social media accounts, other industry materials from the MPAA and other exhibition organizations, and archival research. Many of these primary and secondary source materials were sourced from online archives and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 200.

databases including: the Film & Television Literature Index from EbscoHost and the International Index to Performing Arts and the Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive of ProQuest both of which were retrieved from The University of Kansas Libraries system. Other *Boxoffice* magazine resources were identified from The Vault of *Boxoffice Pro* magazine's online archive.⁴¹

As indicated, this study applies the organizational and management theory of Lapel and Meyer (Meyer et al, 2005) to classify and explain CinemaCon as a 'field-configuring event' (FCE) functioning as a temporal, spatial, social, political, economic and transnational organizational institution while representing the voice of film exhibitors via its largest and oldest trade organization, NATO. I am interested in the history and evolution of film exhibitor organizations and conventions; the organizational operations of CinemaCon and how it navigates its stakeholders; the programming formats and trade show functions; and CinemaCon's participants in both national and global markets in answering questions about this emerging arena of film exhibitor conventions and trade show events.

I acknowledge that media industry studies and applications are further complicated in historical-based research. As Michele Hilmes notes, it is difficult to find authors as sources and approach "texts" when programs (citing radio shows) cross over decades through many social, economic, technological, and political periods and changes.⁴² Following the origins, meanings, and context of the major film exhibition conventions is complex because organizations, affiliations, and purposes for these events have evolved and changed. The organization of film

⁴¹ *Boxoffice* magazine has two sites where it hosts its archival magazine issues. For current issues dating 2014-2018, *Boxoffice*'s main site <https://pro.boxoffice.com/the-vault/> was accessed. For back issues that were not available through The University of Libraries system, I utilized *Boxoffice*'s older, but still accessible site, http://www2.boxoffice.com/the_vault/.

⁴² Michele Hilmes, "Nailing Mercury: The Problem of Media Industry Historiography," in *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 22.

exhibitors, as demonstrated by several studies of NATO by Deron Overpeck, had a very vexatious beginning with exhibitor organizations forming and splitting up over differences only to be replaced with new ones. It would go beyond the scope of this study to identify every historical shift and map every film exhibitor organization that formed in local, regional, and state markets occurring over the 110+ years since the first exhibitor organization and convention convened. Instead, this study approaches the organizational aspect of film exhibitor organizations and events as examples of consolidation and conglomeration through a critique of power: large chains with connections to studios and/or wielding more power through screen numbers and finances versus smaller independent exhibitors with differing needs and interests (Kuntz, 2006). Through this approach, I am able to identify the overall narrative of nationally-founded domestic exhibitor organizations and the nationally attended conventions that provided the widest appearance of industry unification and the promotion of values.

My longstanding history of scholarship, production, and organizational affiliation with film exhibition ranging in topics of social, architectural, political, economic, technological, experiential, cultural, and historic preservation issues is factored into my contextualization and exploration of CinemaCon and its stakeholders. I began studying film exhibition as a history undergraduate student writing my senior capstone case study on the movie palaces in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Through archival research of newspapers, Sanborn Insurance Maps, and trade magazines, I was able to map the 100-year history of film exhibition businesses in Eau Claire and turned this discovery into my first short documentary film. As part of this project, interviewed local theatre owner Gene Grengs (of Grengs Family Cinemas), whose family had been part of the Paramount case fighting to get first-run films in their downtown theatre in the

1930s and 40s. The film also addressed a variety of exhibition topics including architectural design, aesthetics, and technological advances.

Throughout graduate school, I continued pursuing the future of moviegoing and theatrical exhibition exploring the digital transition, digital projection technologies and their companies (XpanD and Real-D), as well as topics of showmanship, ownership and business practices. In a forthcoming essay, I explore and define the shift from the megaplex (Acland, 2003) to the ‘cultureplex’ through a case study of theatre operations (chains, small franchises, and independent operations). The idea of the ‘cultureplex,’ whose term was first mentioned in loose discussion at a CinemaCon 2015 panel, is indicative to this cultural and community-minded shift of contemporary movie theatre business operations. Through a School of the Arts research grant opportunity at The University of Kansas in 2014, I was able to travel to Austin, Texas to speak with Tim League, owner and CEO of the Alamo Drafthouse enterprise (cinemas, magazines, distribution house, etc.) and several key players about the business and aspects of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas’ cinema-eatery concept, something that has been copied and repeated by larger chains across the country and globally and warrants further pursuit.

While at the University of Kansas, I also partnered with a local nonprofit organization striving to restore a 1926 movie palace in Topeka, Kansas and produced a short documentary with a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council called *Preserving the Past: Topeka’s Jayhawk Theatre* (2010). For a short time, I was a member of its board of directors, an experience that opened my eyes to the world of nonprofit historic and art theatre organizations and the network of organizations and theatres in the State of Kansas in various stages of historic preservation and/or restoration. These theatres strived toward affiliation with LHAT and members looked at attending its national convention. Being a part of this theatre organization from 2008-2011 as a

volunteer researcher turned documentarian turned board member gave me a good background in understanding the interworking management of a nonprofit organization and the often-varied goals and motivations of its many stakeholders.⁴³

My continual draw toward movie theatre business operations, management, and organizations led to the desire to attend ShoWest, and I followed this convention for several years through trade magazines. Reports from this convention sparked an interest in researching the ‘future of moviegoing’ through technologies, innovations, experiences, and operations. Though I did not get the chance to attend ShoWest before it was retired, the launching of CinemaCon and its affiliation with NATO harkened new questions about the exhibition industry and the role of industry-run conventions in communicating uniform messages. Through this lengthy (and quite anecdotal) narrative, I hope to demonstrate my comprehensive background as a scholar, documentarian, and organizational affiliation with film exhibition industries. My background provides a unique positioning in the analysis of business operations and organizational management structures in contextualizing and analyzing CinemaCon as the principle film exhibitor field-configuring event driving the evolution of the field.

Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter Two, I explore film exhibitor conventions and trade shows as an emerging arena in organizational studies by arguing a case for their identification as ‘field-configuring events’ that contribute to the evolution of the field. The chapter produces an evolutionary

⁴³ At one point in my prospectus journey, I considered writing my film exhibition-focused dissertation on historic preservation and organizations working toward creating cultural value with the revival of older movie theatres. However, my proximity to the subject was too close at that time. The complexities of organizational management and affiliation showed me the difficulties that locations faced in designing and implementing brand campaigns, defining location barriers, targeting (the right) audiences in efforts to secure fiscal donations, and (re)locating moviegoing habits among changing cultural values.

narrative of the formation of film exhibitor trade organizations and their creation of unifying conventions and trade shows. It identifies three distinct programming types that laid the foundation for the modern convention and trade show format. The chapter concludes its discussion with the organization of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) in 1966, its annual convention, and its complicated relationship with ShoWest, the once esteemed premiere film exhibitor convention.

Chapter Three introduces the case study of CinemaCon, the NATO-operated convention since 2011. It relies on three years of participant-observation (2014-2016) and field immersion as a delegate at the event, in addition to drawing upon industry trade magazines and event materials and artifacts. The chapter identifies the period of industry change that led to NATO reclaiming its national convention to create and implement CinemaCon in 2011. Then it offers an analysis of the convention and trade show event's purpose, programming, and practice through an application of four of the six FCE characteristics outlined by Lampel and Meyer (2008): 1) a limited duration; 2) the assembly of actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds in one location; 3) providing unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interactions; and 4) the exchange of information and occasions for collective sense-making.⁴⁴ Through the applied case study, the temporal, spatial, social, and functional operations highlight the event's 'culture of exclusivity' and the 'semi-embedded deep texts and rituals' that reinforce the position of film exhibitors operating as part of the larger film industry. CinemaCon is viewed as an industry 'gate-keeper' through its programming and generation of knowledge and 'buzz' that privilege technologies and industry-related issues defined by stakeholders and NATO participants. CinemaCon is an FCE where the 'voice' of film exhibition is represented

⁴⁴ Lampel and Meyer, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms," 1026-27.

and promoted through its organizing stakeholder, NATO. However, the event also allows for other ‘voices’ to be heard through programming discussions, sessions, and at social functions where operating members agree and disagree with internal and external industry business mandates and operational practices.

Chapter Four continues to build on the case study analysis of CinemaCon by addressing the final two FCE characteristics: 5) the inclusion of “ceremonial and dramaturgical events;” and 6) that the event “generates social and reputational resources that can be deployed elsewhere and for other purposes” in its evaluation of CinemaCon’s multi-stakeholder presentation of ‘semi-embedded deep texts and rituals.’⁴⁵ It identifies the site of The Colosseum, the exclusive event space at Caesars Palace, as a ‘cultural arena’ where the most important ceremonial and dramaturgical events of the convention take place. In this space the ‘voice’ of the film exhibition industry is personified through the mouthpiece of NATO’s president John Fithian, who identifies the threats facing its industry members; endorses a homogeneous exhibitor operation by privileging of certain technological standards and upgrades; and promotes the idealization and globalization of the Hollywood film product and expansion of global film exhibition. His sentiments are sometimes echoed and/or negated by film producer and distributor counterparts on stage, or by film exhibitor members operating outside of the arena. With NATO acting as the premiere voice of the exhibition industry, this chapter is also interested in those domestic theatrical sites that are not included as primary stakeholders. The presented agendas and technological mandates often come at the expense of smaller cinema operators and not-for-profit or nonprofit theatres who operate under substantially different fiscal means than their large chain and global cinema conglomerate counterparts. These elements are explored through the analysis

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1027.

of CinemaCon's three main events that occur at The Colosseum: the exclusive studio presentations; the "CinemaCon State of the Industry" address given annually by John Fithian, the president of NATO; and the "CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards" ceremony. These activities identify the roles stakeholders play in generating prestige, building industry knowledge, bringing issues among stakeholders to the forefront, and ultimately contributing to the evolution of the field by way of mandate or the dissemination of shared knowledge. These ideas, beliefs, values, and directives are further endorsed through NATO's production and disbursement of CinemaCon publications and content that summarizes and supports the film exhibition industry's standardization.

Chapter Five provides a summary of this study on film exhibitors and their field-configuring events. As the primary domestic film exhibitor event and largest industry event in the world, CinemaCon, NATO's convention and trade show is an important FCE that has affected field evolution of film exhibition practices. The event provides an exclusive time and space, where the domestic 'voice' of the exhibition industry is represented. It also provides suggestions for further research of film exhibition's field-configuring events would offer significant contributions toward enriching academic research, knowledge and understanding of the interworking activities of film exhibitors, their organizations and their industry events.

Chapter 2: Film Exhibition Conventions as Field Configuring Events

Introduction

This chapter argues a case for film exhibitor conventions and trade shows as an emerging arena and important ‘field-configuring events’ (FCEs) in media industries and organizational studies. Since the early 1900s, American film exhibitors have been organizing and attending exhibitor-oriented conventions and trade shows in the domestic and international markets. These convention events created designated and temporal spaces for organization members and industry agents to organize and plan, congregate and socialize, constitute and contest new technologies and regulate their implementation, and articulate problems and solutions within exhibition and the film industry at large. Through a historical analysis of American exhibitor association and development of early conventions, trade shows, and international expos, this chapter identifies programmatic standards and practices of national exhibitor convention event evolution leading to the contemporary, nationally-driven and internationally-minded FCE, CinemaCon.

Film Exhibition Conventions as Field Configuring Events

Joseph Lampel and Alan D. Meyer write, “that fields begin as agglomerations of individuals, groups, and organizations that meet sporadically at first, and then come into contact with increasing frequency. These contacts foster competitive and collaborative interactions, depending on the specific local circumstances and individual strategies trigger field evolution (Powell et al., 2005).”⁴⁶ Organizational fields, such as the formation of film exhibitor

⁴⁶ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1027.

organizations, co-evolve around “sweeping historical changes, including ‘social, technological, [political,] or economic changes that exert pressure on existing relations and reconfigure models of action and social structures’ (Powell et al., 2005, p. 1134).”⁴⁷ In the field of film exhibition’s exhibitor conventions—confabs, convos, convocations, parlays—and trade shows—trade fairs, expositions, expos, exhibitions—have been utilized by large and small exhibitor operations as quintessential event platforms since the emergence of film exhibition association affiliation in the early 1900s.

The creation and formation of exhibitor-centric organizations and their convention events enabled exhibitors to “partake in a common meaning system” (Scott, 1995: 56) that fostered “common channels of dialogue and discussion” of issues (Hoffman, 1999: 352) and created “arenas of power relations” (Brint & Karabel, 1991: 355).⁴⁸ The subsequent convention and trade show events that simultaneously mirrored the institutional changes and developments of both the field film exhibition organizations and shifts in film industry practices and trends highlight the alignment of film exhibitor events as ‘arenas of emergence.’⁴⁹ Conventions and trade shows are thus spaces in which film exhibitors meet once a year (in national settings and more frequently in local and regional practice) to “announce new products, develop industry standards, construct social networks, recognize accomplishments, share and interpret information [and experiences], and transact business.”⁵⁰ As previously identified, Lampel and Meyer have termed these as ‘field configuring events’ (FCEs).

⁴⁷ Amalya L. Oliver and Kathleen Montgomery, “Using Field-Configuring Events for Sense-Making: A Cognitive Network Approach,” *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, September 2008, 1148.

⁴⁸ Andrew J. Hoffman, “Institutional Evolution and Change: Environmentalism and the U.S. Chemical Industry.” *The Academy of Management Journal* 42, no. 4 (August 1999): 351-371.

⁴⁹ Røling and Strandgaard identify the term ‘arena of emergence’ as originating at the September 2009 Creative Encounters Workshop on trade fairs and festivals by Joseph Lampel. Charles-Clemens Røling and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, “Film Festival Research from an organizational Studies Perspective,” *Creative Encounters Working Papers*, Copenhagen Business School 49 (August 2010): 4.

⁵⁰ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1026.

By definition, FCEs are “temporary social organizations such as tradeshow, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets and industries (Meyer et al, 2005).⁵¹ Film exhibitor conventions can be framed as FCEs as modeling the following characteristics:

- 1) FCEs assemble in one location actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds.
- 2) FCEs’ duration is limited, normally running from a few hours to a few days.
- 3) FCEs provide unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction.
- 4) FCEs include ceremonial and dramaturgical activities.
- 5) FCEs are occasions for information exchange and collective sense-making.
- 6) FCEs generate social and reputational resources that can be deployed elsewhere and for other purposes.⁵²

As purposeful and transient events, this chapter demonstrates that the early period of film exhibitor unification and convention development directly influenced field evolution over three distinct implementation types (Lampel and Meyer, 2008: 1026) resulting in the contemporary promotion of the primary film exhibitor trade organization the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) and its contemporary not-for-profit convention event, CinemaCon. These early exhibitor convention field event types are identified as: 1) internal organization development, the exhibitor ‘convention’ (1911); 2) supply partnership affiliation and networking, the ‘trade show’ (1912); and 3) all-industry international inclusion, the ‘expo’ (1913). These three event types contributed to established patterns of temporal, spatial, structural, marketing, and programmatic development as well as paved the way for the globalization of film exhibition’s convention field-configuring events.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 1026-7.

⁵³ Rogers (2008) points out that terms used to identify industry events have used works like ‘conference’, ‘convention’, and ‘meeting’ synonymously, but that the Convention Industry Council (CIC) has adopted an updated glossary in 2011 to identify the specific traits of each event (Rogers, 2008: 22). While these terms are also used interchangeably here, this dissertation adopts the meaning of ‘convention’ as a “gathering of delegates, representatives, and members of a membership or industry organization convened for a common purpose. Common features include educational sessions, committee meetings, social functions, and meetings to conduct the governance

Internal Organization and the Birth of Film Exhibitor Conventions (1906-1911)

According to Julie Spiller in her study of the history of convention tourism, “The desire to found and join associations is deeply embedded in American culture; it is part of a long and distinguished democratic tradition going back to the Pilgrims and their organized religious meetings (Voso, 1990).”⁵⁴ The early development of film exhibitor conventions was sought through the creation and affiliation of separate local then regional protective exhibitor organizations. Affiliated conventions and meetings grew in tandem with the development of these organizations, which were first designed to protect self-interests economically and politically.⁵⁵

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrialization was spreading across the United States creating the need for more contact among businessmen and tradesmen working in a variety of industries, including the emerging entertainments of vaudeville and moving pictures.⁵⁶ Organizational affiliation hit vaudeville first, which was receiving lessons from theatre and opera industries through its own development of mutually beneficial associations. Though this study is not focused on vaudeville (refer to numerous studies on the subject including Robert C. Allen’s dissertation “Vaudeville and Film 1895-1915: A Study in Media Interaction” (1977); Timothy D. Connor’s dissertation “American Vaudeville Managers: Their Organization and Influence” (1981); and Danielle Herget’s dissertation “The Vaudeville Wars: William Morris, E. F. Albee, the White Rats and the Business of Entertainment, 1898-1932 (2004)), the history of the formation of its internal organizations are included here to

business of the organization” (Rogers, 2008: 22) and will make clear if there is a given distinction between events when necessary.

⁵⁴ Julie Spiller, “History of Convention Tourism,” in *Convention Tourism: International Research and Industry Perspectives*, eds. Karin Weber and Kaye Chon (Bringhampton, New York: Haworth, 2002), 3.

⁵⁵ Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*, 60.

⁵⁶ Spiller, “History of Convention Tourism,” 4.

demonstrate the movement across entertainment industries to protect vested economic and political interests per common business and social trends of the time. It should also be noted that the organization of both vaudeville (actors, musicians, and managers) and the motion picture industry (renters, manufacturers, actors, exhibitors, etc.) groups were of great editorial interest and investment by early trade magazines, like *Variety*, *Billboard*, and *Moving Picture World* (*MPI*), who both promoted and condemned these parties in a continually tipping scale towards operational ‘fairness’.

Variety’s investment into the formation of entertainment industry organizations was established in its inaugural December 15, 1906 issue through its overall tone of disdain for the vaudeville circuit and show managers and identified issues with actors working without contracts. Continually referencing the previous work of the White Rats vaudeville actors boycott,⁵⁷ the magazine focused heavily on formation of managerial organizations and the consolidating circuit management. By its third issue in January 1906, the magazine published a large boxed-in advertisement titled “To the Vaudeville Artists of America” claiming that, “*Variety* has received numberless complaints in reference to the pernicious evils now existing in vaudeville detrimental to the interests of the artists. We suggest the advisability of all artists whenever assembled discussing the formation of an organization embracing the artists of America for mutual self-protection and co-operation.”⁵⁸ Between January and November of

⁵⁷ The White Rats were an organized union of male vaudeville actors that operated in the late 19th century through the 1910s. The organization was known for its actor strike in 1901 and several boycotts along the way. While the organization did not prevail from a perceived lack of directional leadership, the work of organized individuals fighting for rights against large and small management copies and operations left lasting impact. See “Ex-Headliner,” *Variety* 1, no. 2 (December 23, 1905): 2; “Variety Managers and Variety Artists in Big Fight,” *Variety* 5, no. 2 (December 22, 1906): 4-5; and “Why Vaudeville Artists of America Should Organize,” *Variety* 5, no. 12 (March 2, 1907): 6.

⁵⁸ “To the Vaudeville Artists of America,” *Variety* 1, no. 14 (January 27, 1906): 3.

1906, the emerging field of vaudeville entertainment saw agents, talent, musicians and managers forming their own protective associations and unions.⁵⁹

In similar fashion, the business of moving pictures was quickly growing in popularity and demand in its first decade and many parties operating in the industry wanted to protect their investments and interests. During the early 1900s, renters, film manufacturers, booking agents, exhibitors, machine operators, producers, and distributor parties sought local and regional meetings that resulted in the adoption of several independently-operated industry organizations.⁶⁰ This initial period of internal organization development saw the utilization of conventions as meeting places that birthed primarily local charters and associations.

On October 13, 1906, which may be the first mention for a call for moving picture organizations in trade magazines, *Billboard* reported growing issues within the emerging entertainments of moving pictures.

“Film manufacturers, dealers and renting firms are suffering considerable loss as the result of dishonesty among a small percentage of the operators and some untrustworthy exhibitors. . . . It has been suggested in some quarters that the formation of a protective association would be advisable, with a view to ‘keeping tab’ on unreliable exhibitors who carelessly handle or steal outright the property of others; and at the same time organize some system of identification, whereby dishonest machine operators may be driven out of the business.”⁶¹

This publication may have helped launch the organizational strategies of several independent and operating parties that would come to make up the motion picture industry in the years that

⁵⁹ Refer to the following articles in *Variety*: “Agents to Organize,” *Variety* 1, no. 7 (January 27, 1906): 11; “Colored Artists to Organize,” *Variety* 1, no. 8 (February 3, 1906): 2; “Why the Vaudeville Artists of America Should Organize,” *Variety* 1, no. 11 (February 24, 1906): 4; “Actors Organize,” *Variety* 1, no. 12 (March 3, 1906): 2; “Musical Leaders Organize,” *Variety* 3, no. 1 (June 16, 1906): 6; “Managers and Agents Organize,” *Variety* 3, no. 2 (June 23, 1906): 7; “Artists Organize in Philadelphia,” *Variety* 4, no. 8 (November 3, 1906): 6; and “Small Managers Organize,” *Variety* 6, no. 7 (April 27, 1907): 2.

⁶⁰ Refer to the following articles in *Variety*: “Machine Operators Organize,” *Variety* 5, no. 8 (Feb 2, 1907): 11; “Small Managers Organize,” 2; “Exhibitors Organizing,” *Variety* 9, no. 10 (February 15, 1908): 10; “Organization Expected in Philadelphia,” *Variety* 9, no. 11 (February 22, 1908): 10; and “Exhibitors’ Organization Plans Still in the Air,” *Variety* 9, no. 12 (December 14, 1907): 11.

⁶¹ “Moving Pictures,” *Billboard* 18, no. 41 (October 13, 1906): 21.

followed beginning with the Moving Picture Machine Operators' Union, who met to formalize their union in February 1907.⁶²

Reported in both *Moving Picture World* and *Billboard*, the first documented exhibitor organization was filed in New York on June 3, 1907, called the Moving Picture Exhibitors' Association (MPEA).⁶³ The organization aimed to “promote the interests of the members, to prevent the use of improper pictures, to devise and adopt methods for the more effective observance of the laws and ordinances, and to prevent the cancellation of licenses without the holder having an opportunity to be heard.”⁶⁴ As discussed by Deren Overpeck in his study of legislative practices of NATO, NITE, and early film exhibitor organizations (Overpeck, 2007; 2009; 2014), the MPEA focused immediately on fighting for exhibitor through legal channels in New York City and other cities, such as Chicago.⁶⁵ Exhibitors joining forces through association to fight legislation became an established practice of protectionism that would continue through the organization of NATO, who functions primarily as an exhibitor lobbying organization today. The MPEA moved quickly in its first few months until it went quiet in the latter part of 1907. As argued, the organization of exhibitors was a slow process because unlike film renters or manufacturing counterparts, exhibitors varied significantly in terms of location (rural, urban, and geographic location), type of operation (peep shows, storefront, and later nickelodeons), and ownership (independent and licensed). Identifying common business interests and practices, and a leader to take charge proved untimely.

⁶² “Machine Operators Organize,” 11. This is the first report of the Moving Picture Machine Operators' Union that I could find in any trade publication, though this article actually refers to its second charter organization created in Philadelphia.

⁶³ See “Moving Picture Combine,” *Moving Picture World* 1, no. 14 (June 8, 1907): 223 and “M. P. Men Organize,” *Billboard* 99, no. 24 (June 15, 1907): 47.

⁶⁴ “Moving Picture Combine,” 223.

⁶⁵ “Trade Notes,” *Moving Picture World* 1, no. 17 (June 29, 1907): 263.

The greatest impetus to the organization of film exhibitors into collective associations was brought forth by the convention of film renters in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania on November 16-17 of 1907 and their subsequent convention on February 8-9 of 1908 in Buffalo, New York.⁶⁶ The unification of film renters under the organization United Film Service Protective Association, later coined the Film Service Association (FSA), aimed to create a “cohesive system of manufacture and distribution” through fixed pricing, elimination of sub-renter practices, and the elimination of unfair competition among them.⁶⁷ The FSA also collectively agreed to separate the ownership of renter and exhibitor effective March 1, 1908, when all renters were to suspend their involvement as exhibitors and ownership of theatres.⁶⁸ This resolution became problematic as large rental companies and theatrical circuit (soon to be large chain or franchise) holders such as Herbert Miles and William Fox continued in their dual endeavors. Both Miles and Fox held out, attempting to maintain leadership positions in film exhibitor organizations and keep membership in the FSA. They eventually tendered their resignations in order for film exhibitor organizations to move forward, further separating the interests of each forming industry sector.⁶⁹

The period between these important convention meetings of the FSA in Pittsburg and Buffalo were met with grave uncertainty among exhibitors. *Variety* quickly responded that, “Then [sic] an organization of exhibitors having a national scope may be expected, for there will be another side of the subject developed unquestionably.” Exhibitors began to mobilize more rapidly, holding their own small conference gatherings, or meeting conventions, in New

⁶⁶ See “The New Film Association,” *Variety* 4, no. 1 (December 14, 1907): 44; “Film Makers’ Convention,” *Variety* 9, no. 2 (December 21, 1907): 8; and “Film Renters Meet in Convention,” *Variety* 9, no. 10 (February 15, 1908): 10.

⁶⁷ “Film Renters Meet in Convention,” 10.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Greater New York Ass’n Again Becoming Active,” *Variety* 11, no. 1 (June 13, 1908): 11.

England, Boston, Chicago, and other cities across the country, including a resurrection of New York theatre owners into the Greater New York Exhibitors' Association, which included those previously in the defunct Motion Picture Exhibitors Association (MPEA).⁷⁰ These meetings once again helped establish their local, city-minded organizations and members paid dues and attended weekly, bi-weekly and/or monthly meetings to discuss business.

While the Film Service Association diligently went after renters and exhibitors not following protocols punishing them with hefty fines and threatening the removal from the organization and business entirely, exhibitors continued to meet and mobilize in local affiliations to legislatively fight state and municipal laws threatening their livelihood.⁷¹ In these first establishing convention meetings, exhibitors created their goals, elected officials, and planned their strategies to combat unfair FSA and other municipal practices. Yet, as *Variety* reported, there was still “no one individual [exhibitor] who [was] willing to step forward with a [national] plan”⁷² and felt that “local organizations of exhibitors over the country could quickly be welded into [one] unit”⁷³ should they attempt to coordinate together across America.

The second wave of early exhibitor organization mobilization came in 1909 with the creation of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC)⁷⁴ and the subsequent dissolution of the FSA.⁷⁵ After the MPPC was chartered, film exhibition organizations sought consolidation

⁷⁰ “Organized Exhibitors Want to Eliminate Film Renters,” *Variety* 9, no. 13 (March 7, 1908): 13.

⁷¹ “Snapping the Whip Over Film Rental Exchanges,” *Variety* 11, no. 3 (June 27, 1908): 10. However, the FSA did not wield much agency in terms of price fixing and technological decision-making power.

⁷² “Convention Aftermath,” *Variety* 9, no. 11 (February 22, 1908): 10.

⁷³ “Exhibitors’ Organization Plans Still in the Air,” 11.

⁷⁴ The formation of the Motion Picture Patents Company created a monopolistic and protectionist organization for manufacturers and renters. Those businesses with legal MPPC patents came to be known as “licensed” entities, separating those who were not associated with the MPPC as ‘unlicensed’ or ‘independent.’ Theatres essentially identified as licensed, MPPC sanctioned or connected, entities or independent.

⁷⁵ The FSA fizzled out because it did not have any direct power over manufacturers, who could dictate pricing, fines, etc. The MPPC, of which the large manufacturers and renters were aligned with, such as The Edison Manufacturing Company and Vitagraph. The following articles provide more context to this fading away of the FSA: “Moving Picture War Over,” *Variety* 13, no. 3 (December 26, 1908): 8; “Convention May Mark Dissolution of

merging multiple local exhibitor groups into larger state and regional units, and hosting conference meetings across the country. In January 1909, for example, the independent exhibitor organization Toledo Film Exchange was formed in Ohio through a meeting of over 300 exhibitors. Their convention meeting event consisted of approving its inauguration by all attendees, voting on officers, and concluded with a “sumptuous banquet” and “theatre party” at the Wayne Hotel.⁷⁶ In February, exhibitors in the state of Ohio came together to create the Film Exhibitors’ Protective Association of Ohio to protect their 1,500 picture houses. Over that same month in the south, exhibitors of Oklahoma, Kansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas came together at Little Rock for a convention where they dissolved their individual organizations to form the Southwestern Motion Picture Exhibitors’ Association with intentions to “benefit and protect every moving picture exhibitors [sic] in the Southwest.”⁷⁷ In the United States, the creation of new organizations and the merging of exhibitor organizations into state and regional units continued through 1910, with reports of the first Canadian exhibitor organizations also forming to protect their own interests in film exchange and trade.⁷⁸

The adoption and stability of local, state, and regional organizations was accompanied by the establishment of annual conventions, which by 1911, *Motography* reported “conventions [were] getting to be the rage.”⁷⁹ The history of conventions as a business endeavor in the United States dates back to the creation of the first convention bureau in Detroit, Michigan in 1895.⁸⁰

Association,” *Variety* 13, no. 5 (January 9, 1909): 12; and “The Film Service Association,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 2 (February 1909): 35-8.

⁷⁶ “Ohio Association of Film Exhibitors,” *Billboard* 21, no. 6 (February 6, 1909): 13.

⁷⁷ “Southwestern Exhibitors Organize,” *Billboard* 21, no. 8 (February 20, 1909): 13.

⁷⁸ “Montreal Exhibitors Organize,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 2 (February 1909): 39. Canadians would later combine their efforts into a unified national organization in 1914 called the Canadian Exhibitors’ Protective Association of Ottawa. See “Sore From Getting Short End Canadian Exhibitors Organize,” *Variety* 55, no. 3 (June 13, 1919): 53.

⁷⁹ “Of Interest to the Trade,” *Motography* 6, no. 2 (August 1911): 92.

⁸⁰ Rob Davidson and Tony Rogers, *Marketing Destinations and Venues for Conferences, Conventions and Business Events* (Routledge: London, 2006), 2.

According to Gartrell (1994) the growing establishment of associations and organizations bolstered the development of committees sent to *lure the growing convention business from these expanding and thriving associations*.⁸¹ Convention bureaus continued to emerge in Cleveland (1904), Atlantic City (1908), Denver and St. Louis (1909), Los Angeles (1910), and other major cities.⁸²

In September of that year, the writers of *Moving Picture World* made their first plea to the American motion picture businessmen concerning the need for all industry partners to put together a single national convention event. They highlighted the recently held convention in Brussels, called the Brussels International Exposition, which was the first convention of its kind to call upon and bring together international industry representatives toward the progression of the moving picture industry.⁸³ Despite the existence of the FSA, the National Independent Moving Picture Alliance (NIMPA), an independent consortium of manufacturers, numerous exhibitor associations, and the MPPC, America still lagged behind in the creation and unification of a national organization.

“Here in America there does not exist, as we pointed out a few weeks ago, a representative body empowered to pose before the world as having authority to take charge of and conserve the interests of all department of the business. There is not, in fact, either a typical or representative moving picture society, or institution, or organization in existence in this country.”⁸⁴

The trade journal asked that parties move quickly to host a convention for the entire moving picture industry in 1911.

“We want the moving picture industry to rest upon a broad basis; we do not want anyone [sic] section or faction to be preponderant in it. . . . We want our convention to work for the good of the entire industry.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Tony Rogers, *Conferences and Conventions: A Global Industry* (London: Routledge, 2008), 4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁸³ “A Moving Picture Convention,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 13 (September 23, 1910): 677.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ “A Moving Picture Convention: Third Article,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 15 (October 8, 1910): 799.

However, by March of 1911, the focus of the convention was put on exhibitors due to patent litigations and issues among manufacturers, renters and exhibitors that had caused some tension among the players. Trade magazines instead turned their attention toward exhibitors, who were the only industry branch that had not by that time formed a single national association.⁸⁶

1911 thus became a pivotal year in the drive to create a national exhibitor convention that would facilitate the solidification of a unified exhibition organization. This foundational field-configuring event would set a precedent for subsequent annual events through its consideration of temporal, location, spatial, and programming decisions, creating a working model not just for film exhibition, but for the other motion picture industry areas. Throughout the year trade magazines—*Motoplay* and *Moving Picture World*—continued following the event planning progress.

The location of the event was under careful consideration. While New York remained the primary site of industry business operation, exhibition continued spreading to cities in the West. Chicago was first called upon to host the convention, as Chicago's convention draw was a growing market. The *Moving Picture World* recorded that "If Chicago cannot offer the ocean waves and the boardwalk of Atlantic City, it is the most convenient city, being a great center easily reached from the East, West, North and South, and Chicago has a reputation for big things."⁸⁷ However, *MPW* also commented that film exhibitors in Chicago needed to quickly make improvements to their theatres to be considered worthy of spotlight or showcase.⁸⁸ Despite the journal continuing to pressure the industry toward a July convention, by May, no local, state or regional organization had stepped forward to take ownership.

⁸⁶ "The Moving Picture Convention," *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 12 (March 25, 1911): 638.

⁸⁷ "Chicago for the Convention," *The Moving Picture World* 8, no. 10 (March 11, 1911): 534.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The Exhibitors League in Ohio, who had a longer-running and reputedly established exhibitor organization, finally accepted to host the first national exhibitor convention in Cleveland as a centralized location with venues in line for both hosting the event and modeling the latest film products. Committees were chosen to plan the event, which would include meetings and social activities. Individual delegates were selected from respective exhibitor organizations across the country in addition to Canadian exhibitor representatives. In a rousing call to exhibitors, Exhibitors League president M. A. Neff penned a plea for exhibitors to attend the convention and what aspects of discussion were to be expected.

“Now, Brother Exhibitors, it is up to you to make this convention a grand success. There are many matters pertaining to our business which need to be adjusted. You cannot alone do anything, but through organization you can get results. Come to the convention. Get acquainted with the exhibitors from all over the United States and Canada. Give the men in our line of business the benefit of your knowledge of what you know about the business. If you have any grievances, Cleveland is the place to state them and it is a duty you owe the moving picture exhibitors. If you know of anything beneficial to the business, be at Cleveland and enlighten the exhibitors. If you stay at home, quit your kicking. Remember, the Lord helps those that help themselves. Don’t expect to stay at home in order to save a dollar and depend on other exhibitors to work early and late that you may receive the benefits. It is time that every exhibitor become aroused to the fact that the meeting at Cleveland is the greatest event in the history of the moving picture world and that our destiny depends upon the meeting at Cleveland being a great success. Stop and think of all the injustice imposed upon you and then remember that it is only by and through organization that you can get a fair and square deal from everybody. Wake up! Get the right focus and when the light is turned on, you will see a new picture by a National Exhibitor’s League, [sic] and the motto will be “A Square Deal for All; Live and Let Live.”⁸⁹

Furthermore, the Cleveland convention committee commented that “The time has come when the *voice of the exhibitor* must be heard and needed in the councils of the industry.”⁹⁰ The convention event would also provide an ongoing platform for demonstrating an outward

⁸⁹ M. A. Neff, “M. A. Neff, ‘To the Moving Picture Exhibitors of the United States and Canada,’” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 3 (July 29, 1911): 196.

⁹⁰ “The Exhibitor’s Opportunity,” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 4 (August 5, 1911): 269.

appearance as a nationally unified organization, turning the industry's attention every year toward the exhibitors' proclamations, needs, and concerns.

At this time, there was no cost to attend the national convention as it was not yet a common practice or expectation. The Convention Visitor's Bureau (CVB), made up of the collection of CVB associations around the country, would not publish this type of recommendation until 1919.⁹¹ Citing the rising expenses of large-scale conventions, the notion of registration fees was thought to help defray costs, which until then had been placed upon organizers, associations, partners, convention bureaus, and municipalities. For exhibitor organizations, the 1920 regional meeting of the Exhibitors League of Eastern Pennsylvania appeared to be the first exhibitor convention to charge a \$5.00 fee for attending their confab in Atlantic City.⁹² ⁹³ For the 1911 convention in Ohio, the Ohio exhibitors' association took up its own collection of \$500 to cover the costs of the convention and its closing banquet event, which also became a common practice of the annual host organization.

The first national exhibitor convention was held from August 1st to the 4th with roughly 300 attendees from eleven states and Canada that represented over 2,200 exhibitors operating in the industry.⁹⁴ At 10:30 a.m. on the event's initial day, and behind closed doors, the theatre men voted for the adoption of a national exhibitor organization called the Moving Picture League of America, later identified as the Motion Picture Exhibitors League of America (MPELA),

⁹¹ Robert C. Ford and William C. Peeper, "The Past as Prologue: Predicting the Future of the Convention and Visitor Bureau Industry on the Basis of its History," *Tourism Management* 28 (2007): 1108.

⁹² "Elaborate Program Arranged," *Wid's Daily of Film Daily* 13, no. 43 (August 13, 1920): 6.

⁹³ After 1920 collecting a registration fee at state, regional, and national exhibitor conventions became a more common practice and was standardized in the 1930s. Despite this, there were exhibitor members who still challenged the idea of a registration fee arguing that they already paid chapter dues to be part of the organization, as was the case in 1934 by ten members of the Independent Exhibitors of Philadelphia branch of the Allied States organization. See "Balk at Convention Fee," *Film Daily* 66, no. 47 (August 24, 1934): 12.

⁹⁴ See "First National Convention," *Motography* 6, no. 2 (August 1911): 55 and "Exhibitors Form National League: Report of Organizational Meeting," *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 6 (August 19, 1911): 440.

chartered under the laws of Ohio.⁹⁵ M. A. Neff, the president of the Exhibitors' League of Ohio, was also voted as president of the new association. A secretary, treasurer and a board of directors comprising of vice presidents chosen from seven different states became its official governing body. Membership requirements were also put into place that supported the unification of all exhibitors by state affiliation.

“The initial membership fee of a state organization to the Moving Picture League of America is ten dollars, therefore a per capita tax of twenty-five cents per year. Let it be understood that the Moving Picture League of America recognizes only one association in each state. If there are two or more so-called state organizations, they must become one before they can be affiliated with the National Association.”^{96 97}

Membership for the organization was open to both exhibitors in the United States and Canada, and only to those with no connections to manufacturing of films or rentals.⁹⁸

“The purpose of this organization are self-protection, to raise the standard of motion picture films, to secure recognition of the National Censor Board, the regulation of prices for film service, to prevent breaches of contract on the part of film exchanges, to regulate insurance rates, to secure protection against adverse legislation, to regulate the rental of films to large playhouses during their idle seasons, to adjust difficulties with labor, and the adjustment of many other minor matters of importance to the exhibitor, individually and collectively.”⁹⁹

As a host location, Cleveland had the venues and hotels to support member turnout and visiting industry partners in manufacturing and sales. Weber's Hall, a voluminous three-story structure, was the site of the event and all of its meetings and was in close proximation to major hotels. The hotels were used for accommodations, as well as by sales manufacturers to host

95 See “First National Convention,” 55 and “First National Convention of Exhibitors,” *Motography* 6, no. 2 (August 1911): 58-63.

96 “First National Convention,” 55.

⁹⁷ Both *Motography* and *Moving Picture World* reported a variety of adopted names for the first exhibitor organization: Moving Picture League of America, National League of Exhibitors, the National League of Exhibitors of America, the National League of Moving Picture Exhibitors of America, and the Moving Picture Alliance of America. The final adopted name appears to be the Motion Picture Exhibitors' League of America (MPELA) with each affiliated chapter substituting their state or region in for the word “America.”

⁹⁸ “First National Convention,” 55.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

possibly the first makeshift “trade show-like” events. This was partly due to the fact that despite an advertisement by convention organizers stating “all manufacturers of moving picture machines and supplies are invited to make an exhibit. . . [with] ample committee rooms and space for exhibits. . . ”¹⁰⁰, upon their arrival, manufacturers found that nothing had been reserved or planned for.¹⁰¹ Instead, these salesmen made their own opportunities, competing with one another for local space and exhibitor attention. The Moving Picture Distributing & Sales Company (noted as the Sales Company), an independent ‘unlicensed’ manufacturer, invited the exhibitors for a luncheon at the neighboring Hotel Hollenden to create a networking and sales event. There they highlighted their latest products such as cameras and film as well as expressed their loyalty in supporting exhibitors should any patent suits be brought against them by the MPPC over choosing to use their equipment.¹⁰²

Manufacturers also labored to secure their own film exhibition sites to promote future film screening events. An attempt was made by a group of ‘licensed’ or MPPC endorsed manufacturers at the Hippodrome, the largest theatre in Cleveland, but independent manufacturers demanded that their films be shown as well. Since the theatre was considered a licensed theatre, a representative from Vitagraph involved the MPPC, who promised harsh revocations if they proceeded. The entire event was cancelled. On the next day, an independent theatre owner, Mr. L. H. Becht, opened his Mall Theatre to allow independents to prescreen their new releases to exhibitor attendees.¹⁰³ These impromptu events by manufacturers and renters demonstrated areas of program development consideration for future national exhibitor conventions in both trade fairs and exclusive screenings, as well as identified some of the

¹⁰⁰ “The Coming National Convention of Exhibitors,” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 2 (July 22, 1911): 111.

¹⁰¹ “Film Manufacturers,” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 6 (August 19, 1911): 440, 443.

¹⁰² “Exhibitors Form National League: Report of Organizational Meeting,” 440-41.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

obstacles and issues facing exhibitors trying to operate businesses during period ruled by the Trust and MPPC.

The actual event schedule organized by the convention planning and entertainment committees consisted of the exhibitor-only, closed door meetings, luncheons, guided city tours, and a celebratory closing banquet. The two city tours consisted of a 40-mile decorated automobile entourage led by city exhibitors in visiting parks and highlights of Cleveland, and a boat ride event. Through savvy marketing ploys, the Sales Company secured permission to install a projector on deck offering a second opportunity to network and sell equipment, as well as allow the independent renters to show more films. This connected opportunity between all parties in the industry was also the second time that licensed film representatives were left behind due to the rules and regulations of the MPPC.¹⁰⁴ They would instead find their opportunity to address the exhibitors at the final banquet, where several business professionals were provided the floor to welcome in the newly formed national exhibitor organization and petition for partnerships.

The first national exhibitor convention was hailed as a success in both establishing a unified association and in setting expectations and potential for future national exhibitor-only annual convention events.¹⁰⁵ Before ending the event, the exhibitors awarded the next national convention to the Chicago exhibitors. The aftermath of the convention also saw the growth rate for MPELA exhibitor affiliations increase significantly. Between the 1911 convention and through the end of 1912, M. A. Neff traveled state-to-state helping establish upwards of 30 MPELA organizations in the United States and Canada.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 441.

¹⁰⁵ On the last day of the convention, exhibitors voted to award the 1912 convention location to Chicago.

Establishing the Trade Show and Exhibits (1912)

Building off of the accomplishments at the first convention, the second national MPELA convention would further enhance its scheduling, activities, and partnership possibilities through the implementation of a formalized trade show space and exclusive exhibitor-only experiences. With the growing number of MPELA affiliations, the second national convention held between August 13th to 15th in Chicago saw the attendance increase to over 2,200 participants. Of these participants about 1,000 were exhibitors, 250 were industry-related delegates, and the remaining were non-member parties.¹⁰⁶ In order to identify each group, the event planners adopted a badging process.

First introduced at the state-level MPELA of Ohio convention in March of that year, badge-wearing was introduced as a way to identify and separate participants from one another.¹⁰⁷ Wearing your badge meant special convention perks, such as the advertisement claiming, “Everyone wearing an exhibitors’ badge will be the recipient of the best that Chicago can offer in the amusement line, without cost. White City, Riverview, and Forest Park, the city’s most prominent amusement parks, have all offered free admission to exhibitors.”¹⁰⁸ Manufacturers also gave special screenings and incentives to those wearing the MPELA exhibitor’s badge to their exhibits and display booths. The concept of badging continues as a traditional identification practice at conferences today.

The second evolving convention practice was the official designation of a “trade show” space. Though it was not termed as such, the 18th floor of the hotel became the designated area for all manufacturers, renters and representatives to showcase their products through mini

¹⁰⁶ “The Second National Convention,” Vol. 8, no. 5 (August 31, 1912): 155.

¹⁰⁷ “Ohio Convention at Dayton, March 25,” *Motography* 7, no. 3 (March 1912): 103.

¹⁰⁸ “Chicago Convention Program,” *Motography* 8, no. 4 (August 17, 1912): 122.

exhibits. Companies including Gaumont, Nicholas Power Company, Film Supply Company, and Universal Film Manufacturing Company, brought equipment and displays for the designated space.¹⁰⁹ Having learned a lesson from the first exhibitors' convention in not being able to display wares and properly meet with exhibitors, licensed manufacturers also booked rooms for exhibits at the hotel and some stepped in to be the official sponsors of leisure and entertainment event activities. With a seemingly strong theme of American Indians patterned throughout the participating manufacturers that year, Universal lavished guests on a sponsored boat ride featuring talent dancing in Native American dress and screenings on board. The Essanay Company, a licensed manufacturer in Chicago, outfitted a room at the hotel to model a Native American set from one of their films and hosted a lavish party. They served refreshments, gave out Native American-themed souvenirs, and had their actors and actresses on site to meet their guests. A tour of the nearby Selig studio facility was also part of the event's programming with staged sets in an American Indian theme with photo opportunities with actors, refreshments and more souvenirs.¹¹⁰

In other convention developments, during the business portions of the convention's meetings exhibitors voted to start a charity fund, designated a League-identified insurance plan for movie houses, and approved salaries for elected officials of the national MPELA. Insurance representatives would continue to work alongside of exhibitors and their organizations and maintained some representation and sponsorship at their convention events, similarly the notion of a charitable fund would continue to be a valuable resource for assisting exhibitors in need over time. However, the area of paying officials would prove to be a point of contention through

¹⁰⁹ See "Chicago Convention Program," 122; and "Manufacturers Convention Exhibits," *Motography* 8, no. 5 (August 31, 1912): 183.

¹¹⁰ "Essanay's Convention Activities," *Motography* 8, no. 5 (August 31, 1912): 165.

various exhibitor groups over time and continued well into formation of the National Association of Theatre Owners in 1966, who would not vote to pay their presidential representative until 1988.¹¹¹

Developing the Exhibitor-Driven International Motion Picture Industry Expo (1913)

‘International trade fairs’ are a special class. . . [as they target] global or multi-country audience[s], and therefore are usually held in cities with major airports and exhibition halls.”¹¹²

In 1913, the MPELA national convention was scheduled to be held in New York. Though airports were not yet an operable form of travel, New York City was a gateway port city for international travel and accommodation. The New York affiliation of the MPELA decided to both host the third convention as well as hold an International Exposition of the Motion Picture Art at the same time. This ambitious dual event brought with it much dissent in the industry with some arguing that the exhibitors should focus on their own convention and affairs and leave the trade show to the manufacturers. Even show promoters offered to buy the event franchise from them, but the exhibitors refused to sell.¹¹³ The exposition event was expected to give over 20,000 exhibitors the opportunity to showcase their wares, and invitations were sent to industry partners in Europe, Africa, Australia, and throughout the United States and Canada.¹¹⁴

“The idea is to have the latest ventilating systems installed, the best lighting effects, the most comfortable chairs, the best projecting machines, the recognized leading screens, and everything that will make the motion-picture theater pleasing to the public.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Tom Matthews, “Profile: The New NATO,” *Boxoffice* 124, no. 9 (September 1, 1988): 10.

¹¹² Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*, 61.

¹¹³ “The First International Exposition,” *Motography* 9, no. 1 (January 4, 1913): 15.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The expo event was held at the Grand Central Palace of New York City with a planned show floor space of over 40,000 square feet that could house the latest technologies and innovations. This trade show floor would be categorized into seven classifications identified as: “1—Development of the cinematograph industry from its commencement to the present day; 2—Exhibition of American and foreign camera and projecting machines; 3—Representations of cinematograph subjects, etc.; 4—Theatre equipment and electric lighting novelties; 5—Mechanical orchestral organ, piano and other musical attractions in the picture theatre; 6—Miscellaneous allied industries and 7—An international cinematograph congress.”¹¹⁶ Seating, lobby fixtures, ticket machines, projection equipment, musical instruments, screens, film, lighting, and even asbestos tiling companies came to display their products.¹¹⁷ Major manufacturing companies had exhibition sites as well as hosted scheduled events and demonstrations. Heralded as one of the “most elaborate exhibits” was the installation by the General Film Company. General Film constructed a 30-foot long and 15-foot deep contained exhibit with a reception space, poster and banner displays, and a miniature theatre screening area to host exhibitors and the general public.¹¹⁸ Many industry names, like Thomas Edison, were also in attendance and giving presentations. The Famous Players studio hosted over 1,500 at a reception and dance party, bringing with Daniel Frohman, James K. Hackett, Mary Pickford, and other on-camera personalities and favorites.¹¹⁹

The International Exposition of the Motion Picture Art event in New York City, which brought in thousands of exhibitors, dealers, and the public, was considered an overwhelming success in light of the early development stages of large-scale sales expos. The MPELA

¹¹⁶ “Exposition to Be Vast in Scope,” *Motography* 19, no. 6 (March 15, 1913): 192.

¹¹⁷ “The Exposition of the Motion Picture Art: A Mammoth Display,” *Motography* 10, no. 2 (July 26, 1913): 50-2.

¹¹⁸ “General Film Notes,” *Motography* 10, no. 1 (July 12, 1913): 31.

¹¹⁹ “Entertaining the Convention Visitors, Fun for Everyone,” *Motography* 10, no. 2 (July 26, 1913): 53-4.

continued organizing a coordinating convention with a national expo from 1913-1917. In 1917, *Motion Picture News* wrote a series of articles addressing the fate of motion picture industry expositions and the exhibitor. Who should manage and run a film exposition? Should it be the exhibitors or other industry organizations, such as the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI), the organization that had come to represent the manufacturers? Who should cover the bills and expenses, especially when there were no entry fees or registrations being collected at this time? Why weren't exhibitors turning out in numbers to attend these events? By this time, the growing industry of exposition events had become a quarter of a million-dollar operation with that number growing into the millions by the 1920s, charging upwards of \$25,000¹²⁰ per exhibit space.¹²¹

While the MPELA remained in the exposition business through these years, it inevitably faced competition from other industry organizations entering into exposition events. One such draw was in 1916, when the Motion Picture Board of Trade (MPBT) sponsored a competing event, the First National Exhibition at the same time. The MPELA and the MPBT eventually settled in promoting one another's consecutive shows in New York, while adding to the surmounting dialogue surrounding what to do about film industry expositions.¹²² The 1918 standoff between the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI) and the MPELA once again challenged the management of large-scale industry events. After having to cancel the exposition that the MPELA had planned to hold in tandem with their national convention, the two teamed up later that year to hold an exposition that featured a "war time"

¹²⁰ "First National Exposition," *Motography* 15, no. 16 (April 15, 1916): 956.

¹²¹ "What Might Be Done," *Motion Picture News* 16, no. 9 (September 1, 1917): 1423-4.

¹²² During the event's third year, the MPELA and the Motion Picture Board of Trade of America held competing events causing tension in the industry. They finally agreed to host them at different times and support one another. See "Board of Trade Makes Peace With the League," *Motion Picture News* 13, no. 18 (May 6, 1916): 2719.

theme to support government agencies showing camaraderie with the entertainment industry. The event also went under the management of Motion Picture Exposition Company, who oversaw the event and contracts.¹²³

A Focus on Convention Partnerships

As convention trade show and expos evolved, industry associations and partners developed better utility in showcasing business and technological innovations. In the 1940s, two of these organizations, the Theatre Equipment and Supply Manufacturers Association (TESMA) and the Theatre Equipment Dealers Association (TEDA) began partnerships alternating between the Theatre Owners of America (TOA) and Allied States (Allied) film exhibitor organizations at the time in operating the adapted trade show event of the national convention. The networking of these organizations brought in theatre equipment and business suppliers. In the 1950s, the National Association of Concessionaires (NAC)¹²⁴ formed a second partnership with national exhibitor organizations sponsoring trade shows in conjunction with TESMA in balancing the food and beverage side of theatre ownership needs, including the introduction of the soon-to-be-staple, popcorn.¹²⁵

Increasing Exhibitor Participation

Another issue concerning the separation of national expositions and trade fairs from exhibitor confabs was the lack of exhibitor participation at the events. What value did

¹²³ Advertisement, *Motion Picture News* 18, no. 11 (September 14, 1918): 1666.

¹²⁴ The National Association of Concessionaires has its own history of organizational name changes and restructuring efforts among concessionaries and popcorn affiliations. In 1953 it became the International Popcorn Association, a merger of two popcorn-oriented organizations. In 1955 it changed its name to the Popcorn and Concessions Association to further express the variety of theatre concessionaries. The PCA name barely lasted a year when it was renamed the National Association of Concessionaires in 1956 and continues under this organizational banner today. See "Associations Merge In Popcorn Industry," *Motion Picture Daily* 73, no. 123 (June 25, 1953): 6; "New Name for Popcorn Group," *Motion Picture Herald* 201, no. 9 (November 26, 1955): 43; and "Name Koken President of Concessionaires," *Motion Picture Daily* 80, no. 60 (September 25, 1956): 2.

¹²⁵ See "4,500 Theatres Boosting Popcorn in First Industrywide Campaign," *Boxoffice* 63, no. 11 (July 11, 1953): 22.

expositions have for exhibitors, who already attended their national convention and local, state, or regional business meetings? Were expositions worth having? *Motion Picture News* set forth a challenge,

“If a trade exposition is to be held it will not pay the manufacturer to take space unless exhibitors attend in sufficient numbers to make it worth his while. And exhibitors will not attend in sufficient numbers unless it is worth *their* while; unless, for instance, the exposition exposes something—of such business value—that as up-to-the-minute theatre men they cannot afford to miss it. This situation demands a real *trade* exposition, one that will show the exhibitor how to make more money and save more money, one that will exhibit every new and valuable adjunct to showmanship which the industry has developed.”¹²⁶

Trade shows between 1916 and 1918 saw a decline in exhibitor participation. Part of this could have been due to the rise in state and regional conventions that were growing in numbers with the exponential increase in local exhibitor associations. Another reason could be that as *Motion Picture News* suggests, exhibitors needed a reason and a draw to get them to attend national conventions and large-scale exposition events in addition to being active in their local groups, which attended to exhibitor needs in a more personalized way. A third factor affecting exhibitors in the late 1910s was that the national MPELA was becoming unstable and splintering into different associations, ceasing its eight-year run by 1919. The inability for exhibitors to maintain a national unit would plague the exhibition industry for decades to follow, as demonstrated by the comings and goings of national exhibitor organizations in Table 1.

126 “Expositions and Good Publicity,” *Motion Picture News* 16, no. 12 (September 22, 1917): 1973-4.

Table 1: National American Theatre Organizations 1911-2018¹²⁷

Dates of Operation	Organizations and Mergers
1911-1919	Motion Picture Exhibitors League of America (MPELA)
1913-1914	International Motion Picture Exhibitors Association (IMPEA) – Merged with MPELA
1917-1928	American Exhibitors Association (AEA) – Merged with Allied States
1919-1920	Motion Picture Exhibitors of America (MPEA)
1919-1947	Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America (MPTOA)
?-1928	Theatre Owners Chamber of Commerce (TOCC) – Merged with IMPEA
1920-1930	Independent Exhibitors of America (IEA) – Affiliated with Allied States
1922-1928	Independent Motion Picture Exhibitors of America (IMPEA) – Merged with Allied States
1923-1965	Allied States Association of Motion Picture Theatres (Allied)
1946-1947	American Theatres Association (ATA) – Represented theatres during litigation
1947-1965	Theatre Owners of America (TOA) – Merger of ATA and MPTOA
1949	National Association of Drive-in Theatres
1966+	National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO)
1975-1981	National Independent Theatre Exhibitors Association (NITE)
1976+	League of Historic American theatres (LHAT)
2008+	Art House Convergence

At the same time, conventions and expositions tested different marketing tactics and “experiences” to increase attendance through the 1920s and 30s to draw in more participation to national events. For one, more attention was given to media and trade advertising to draw in both fans and industry businessmen through national advertising campaigns in expanding the reach of potential attendees by focusing on interest areas and growing national trends.¹²⁸ A second major and lasting example, was the leisure sport of golf, which by the 1920s was growing in popularity

¹²⁷ Table data culled from trade magazines (*Boxoffice*, *Movie Picture World*, and *Exhibitors Herald*); organization websites (*NATOonline.org*, *LHAT.org*, and *ArthouseConvergence.org*); and from the Media History Digital Library database. Numerous other local and regional exhibitor organizations also formed and dissolved throughout this period, but are not considered national affiliations or national groups for the purpose of this study. Often these smaller organizations were part of a larger affiliate and were active in pursuing state and federal action in some way.

¹²⁸ “Expositions and Good Publicity,” 1973-4.

among the public in the United States.¹²⁹ By 1922, the Motion Picture Golf Association was created, introducing the concept of golf tournaments to industry men.¹³⁰ Even trade magazines were hosting and sponsoring their own golf events.¹³¹ The inclusion of golf tournaments as part of convention events started appearing in 1927 with the 8th annual convention of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America (MPTOA)¹³² and have remained to this day an annual tradition of pre-convention events, often supporting charitable causes, at CinemaCon.¹³³

A third adoption to draw in exhibitors was changing the programming of the event. Meeting agendas up to the 1930s focused on internal business dealings and decisions expected to be made by the national body. In 1934, MPTOA published a full program in the *Film Daily* that included the first topical training sessions in addition to promotional advertising for the event (Figure 6¹³⁴).¹³⁵ In addition to their regularly anticipated business meetings, exhibitors could hear special program topics on “The Theater’s Liability to Its Patrons,” “Why Motion Pictures Are Improving,” and “How Pictures Are Put Together,” given by industry leaders, producers, theatre owners, and special interest groups.¹³⁶ Expanding the event to include trainings and topical seminars became common practice by the 1940s.

¹²⁹ “Historical Highlights: Celebrating 120 Years of USGA (Part 1): 1894-1924,” United States Golf Association, Accessed August 10, 2018, <http://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/articles/2014/12/celebrating-120-years-of-the-usga-part-1-a-nation-is-introduced-to-golf-21474873960.html>.

¹³⁰ “The Golf Tournament,” *The Film Yearbook* (1922-23): 377. See also “Tom Moore, Exhibitor, Leads at Film Golf Tournament,” *Exhibitors Herald* 26, no. 1 (July 19, 1926): 3 and “Golf Tourney Opens in Philadelphia Sept. 22,” *Exhibitors Herald* 26, no. 12 (September 4, 1926): 27.

¹³¹ Advertisement, *Exhibitors Herald* 29, no. 4 (April 9, 1927): 16.

¹³² “Stage Set for Convention; Golfers Prepare to Tee Off,” *Exhibitors Herald* 29, no. 12 (June 4, 1927): 21.

¹³³ It should be noted that women were also taking up the sport of golf and sometimes participating in early film industry golf tournaments. See “Secretaries of Film Boards Close Successful Convention,” *Exhibitors Herald* 29, no. 13 (June 11, 1927): 19.

¹³⁴ “Looking On At The Hollywood MPTOA Convention,” *The Film Daily* 65, no. 84 (April 11, 1934): 5.

¹³⁵ This was the first found trade magazine publication for film exhibitors that included topical seminars geared toward exhibitors. It is not to say that earlier types of sessions were not part of annual meetings, but the practice of publishing the full program of an event prior to it, and not just a trade editor’s recap, began appearing in magazines in the late 1920s and 30s. Leading film exhibitor organizations were the publication of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (SMPE) convention event schedules. See “S.M.P.E. Convention Program,” *Film Daily* 59, no. 28 (May 2, 1932): 8 and earlier publications.

¹³⁶ “Program of the M.P.T.O.A. Convention,” *Film Daily* 65, no. 82 (April 9, 1934): 4.

The Transitioning Convention From 'Business Meeting' to Collaborative Event

In the arena of national exhibitor conferences, each organization continued to value the importance of a yearly convention meeting. From the 1910s through the early 1930s, national exhibitor conventions were viewed as the location and event for major organizational and exhibitor-industry decisions, concerning legal stances and policy positions to take place. From the 1910s to the 1930s, conventions continued to advertise and function like business meetings (Figure 7)¹³⁷. As a result, national conventions were often the site for vocalizing internal issues and discontent by conflicted members.

Some of the first issues among the MPELA's members arose through heated discussions at their 1913 joint national convention and exposition event over organizational operations. One of the areas of major contention was fairness in representation among each state affiliation. The second was concern over how the president, M. A. Neff, was running the organization and taking liberties in making decisions without taking them to vote. Heated arguments entailed and resolutions were made after a brief recess.¹³⁸ The results of these convention disagreements did not satisfy all members causing six state affiliations to cleave and form the International Motion Picture Exhibitors Association (IMPEA) that operated on its own until both the IMPEA and MPELA could come to terms a year later.¹³⁹ Issues of leadership, especially in the personalities, convictions and agendas held by presidents of national and regional exhibitor organizations, would become the continual dividing force fractioning exhibitors to a large extent between the 1910s and the 1960s. After the 1960s, much of the breakdown among exhibitors was focused on

¹³⁷ "Advertisement for the 1919 National Convention," *Motion Picture News* 19, no. 23 (June 7, 1919): 3764.

¹³⁸ "League's Big Five Day Convention: Third Annual Meeting," *Motography* 10, no. 2 (July 26, 1913): 41-6.

¹³⁹ "The Exhibitor's Progress," *Exhibitors Herald* 11, no. 26 (December 25, 1920): 101.

the differences between large and small theatre operations, including the arthouse and independent cinemas.

Discussing organizational issues at conventions, while counterproductive, became commonplace. In its 1911 issue, *Motography* editors had warned against this in advising the newly organized exhibitors to adopt a convention code of conduct. They wrote,

“And now just a friendly word from men who have attended conventions and watched association work in other fields for many years. The association must consider individual grievances; but not in convention. If every exhibitor who had a grievance were given the privilege of telling the meeting all about it, all the time would be taken up with tales of woe and no business would be done at all. The association has all year to receive complaints from members; it has only a few days in convention. Encourage the member to write his troubles. He may be a poor correspondent; but he will have to learn. Then his case may be taken up in due form and given proper consideration.

Another thing: Conventions, after a few years, often degenerate into mere pleasure junkets, and no real work is accomplished. The exhibitors have shown that they can get plenty of pleasure out of their meetings and get a lot of work done, too. Maintain that spirit, and the Moving Picture Alliance of America [sic] will grow increasingly powerful with every meeting.”¹⁴⁰

The sanctity and purpose of the national convention would be challenged time and again, as disgruntled exhibitors used the event as a platform to continually air grievances and voice their discontent. More often than not, as seen at the 1913 convention, major confrontations of burgeoning leaders led to dissolution and the formation of new exhibitor organizations and the whole industry was aware of the issues within the film exhibition side.

“Let’s have a regular convention in St. Louis this summer. Not simply a squabbling match where one person gets mad because he’s not the ‘whole cheese’ and proceeds to filibuster; or another simply wants to get in because of the standing it will give him with the various producing companies, but a convention made up of honest-to-goodness, regular exhibitors of the caliber of Mr. Schaefer, for instance, who are interested solely in the organization FOR THE GOOD IT WILL BRING TO THE EXHIBITORS IN THE EXHIBITING END OF THE BUSINESS [sic].”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ “First National Convention,” 55-6.

¹⁴¹ “Thomas Calls for Real Exhibitor Organization,” *Motion Picture News* 19, no. 18 (May 3, 1919): 2811.

Notwithstanding, the period of early convention development continued to evolve into an established field of annual exhibitor-oriented events with licensed and independent manufacturers and renters paralleling these activities with their own associations and event invitations aimed at exhibitors.

Maintaining unification among exhibitors as a national body would prove to be most difficult given the complexities of ownership needs among independent exhibitors and those still intertwined with manufacturing (what would become the studios) and renters (distribution channels) and the growing tensions through the 1920s and 1930s leading to the vertical separation of studio-owned theatres with the Paramount decision of 1949.¹⁴² The period between 1932, when the Department of Justice brought forth the case against the studios, the 1938 DOJ called for divorce against the Big Eight, and its conferment in 1949; the unstable relationship between exhibitors and producers and distributors was evident in inclusion or disinclination of event participants.¹⁴³ During this contentious period, exhibitors were both fighting their industry counterparts through legislative action and ongoing litigation and fighting internally as further divisions between independents and studio-owned, franchises, and/or large chains were escalating. Despite these repeated separations and reformations of exhibitor associations, whether in agreement or working separately, exhibitors remained diligent in effectively and efficiently utilizing conventions as their primary platforms to voice their stance on issues and work in units to maintain protections for their businesses.

¹⁴² Deron Overpeck, “Chapter Two: ‘Depressed, Divisive, Undirected’—A History of Exhibitor Trade Organizations” in “Out of the Dark: American Film Exhibition, Political Action and Industrial Change, 1966-1986” (PhD, diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007), 57-145.

¹⁴³ “Neely Divorcement Bill to Senate,” *Boxoffice* 36, no. 21 (April 13, 1940): 8, 14. The Big Eight were actually made up of five large studios—Warner Bros. Pictures, Loew’s Incorporated, Paramount Pictures, Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation (RKO), and Fox Film Corporation—and three smaller units—Universal Pictures, Columbia Pictures, and United Artists.

Between the 1920s and 1960s, conventions were often used to unite exhibitor organizations in attempt to reconcile a national body. The Allied States and MPTOA sought to find common ground when Allied invited leadership and members of MPTOA to participate in its 1939 national convention with little to no incident.¹⁴⁴ However, the shake-up of organizations in 1947 with the merger of MPTOA and the American Theatre Association (ATA) to form the Theatre Owners of America (TOA) as well as the uncertainty of how the Supreme Court would decide their case led to a series of rival competitions as ten territories around the country held conventions in 1948 to drive membership between the TOA and Allied States.¹⁴⁵ The results of the Paramount decree took several years to come into actualization, as agreements stretched divestment and sales of theatres into the 1950s.¹⁴⁶ This period kept theatre organizations active in protecting their members and businesses and looking for ways to reconcile differences. In 1951 Allied and TOA would hold their first joint regional convention in Memphis, maintaining cordial dialogue and practice into the early 1960s. This openness allowed for the revalidation of merger talks that would eventually lead to the development of a single exhibitor organization in 1966, the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO).¹⁴⁷

NATO Assumes the ‘Voice’ of the Industry

The strategic launch and inauguration of the NATO organization as the official unified ‘voice’ of the exhibition industry included the immediate planning of a first-annual national convention, not only for its newly joined exhibitor affiliates, but also served to rebuild industry

¹⁴⁴ Kanu, “It Must Be Spring,” *Boxoffice* 34, no. 25 (May 13, 1939): 3.

¹⁴⁵ “Rivalry of TOA and Allied Spurs Regional Conventions,” *Boxoffice* 52, no. 22 (April 3, 1948): 15.

¹⁴⁶ See “Majors Offer to the Court: Drop 796, Keep 2,140 Theatres,” *Boxoffice* 54, no. 8 (December 25, 1948): 8 and “Paramount Busy Negotiating to Meet Provisions of Decree,” *Boxoffice* 55, no. 1 (May 7, 1949): 10.

¹⁴⁷ “Allied, TOA Topers to Midsouth Parley,” *Boxoffice* 59, no. 22 (September 29, 1951): 20.

relationships. Facilitated by NATO, the convention created exhibitor-controlled dialogue and exhibitor-directed relationships within the industry solidifying NATO as the official national organization of exhibitors and lobbying group.

The entire industry rallied around the exhibitor and its newly formed national organization with over 2,000 leading theatremen [sic] and their wives representing all regions of the United States and some of Canada attending NATO's first national convention.¹⁴⁸ The October 3, 1966 publication of *Boxoffice* dedicated several pages of its edition in recapping each session, event, and speaker addresses to NATO's premiere convention, and featured a photo of the incoming officers as its cover. The programming of the first NATO convention defined the voice of the exhibition industry—its values, needs, and position—in relationship to the industry at large laying a foundation for all forthcoming national conventions.

The four-day event schedule included business meetings; industry sessions; trainings and workshops; presentations from NATO as well as leaders in other film industry fields; black-tie events, luncheons, dinners and dances sponsored by corporate entities; and a trade show. The all-industry event incorporated American exhibitors, distributors, studios, the MPAA as well as community and international participation. The event opened internal exhibitor dialogue and training, provided a platform for community engagement, and established a “woo” factor between exhibitor-distributor and exhibitor-producer that would continue in practice.

For NATO, the convention offered a platform of which to indicate its own state of the industry, an official address that would be adopted by later NATO presidents. This 1966 statement by outgoing president Sherrill C. Corwin provided the opportunity to recap the

¹⁴⁸ “NATO to Honor Disney As ‘Showman of World,’” *Boxoffice* 89, no. 21 (September 12, 1966): 7. This number was later confirmed in the October 3rd recap edition of *Boxoffice* in that the 2,000 mark had been passed by Wednesday's activities. See “All-Industry Unity Stressed As Goal in NATO Sessions,” *Boxoffice* 89, no. 24 (October 3, 1966): 4.

successes of its inaugural year as well as discuss its political stance on issues plaguing the industry including pay television, blind bidding, unfair trade practices, the minimum wage bill, and its approval of the revised Motion Picture Production Code.¹⁴⁹ Corwin made it clear to distribution that it was going to work together, but also push against unfair trade practices and policies through legal action. In his address to distributors, Corwin proclaimed,

“We are your biggest and best customer and there are certain basic rights and protections which justly must be accorded that position. NATO will vigorously challenge all practices which breach those rights and protections. We will be equally vigorous in joining with distribution to seek progressive and equitable solutions to all differences.”¹⁵⁰

Utilizing the convention as an outreach site and premiere convention platform was further expressed in the form of accolades and honors bestowed on these internal and external partners as a recognition and “thank you” nod to distribution, production, and its stars. NATO created the first “Showman of the World” award in reverence of Walt Disney.¹⁵¹ It also honored Hollywood male and female stars giving the first “Star of the Year” to Sophia Loren and “Star of the Future” to Michael Caine following the tradition of Allied and TOA conventions attracting stars to exhibitor conventions.¹⁵² Star-studded participation at conclaves proved to be successful drawing points to lure exhibitors to conventions and were in return used by studios and distributors to “woo” audiences and promote their film products.¹⁵³ Distributor-sponsored after parties and preview screenings of the upcoming slate of films also allowed the distributor to dote on its exhibitor counterparts, enticing them to subscribe to their film products.

¹⁴⁹ “All-Industry Unity Stressed As Goal in NATO Sessions,” 4.

¹⁵⁰ “Corwin Lauds Industry Teamwork in Past Year,” *Boxoffice* 89, no. 24 (October 3, 1966): 4-5.

¹⁵¹ “NATO to Honor Disney As ‘Showman of World,’” 7.

¹⁵² *Boxoffice* magazine post-convention reports of TOA and Allied national conferences includes pictorial highlights of stars and awardees who came to events as early as 1960. See “Scenes at the TOA Convention,” *Boxoffice* 77, no. 23 (September 26, 1960): 8. This record is not exhaustive and most likely had earlier star-studded adoptions.

¹⁵³ Prior to their invitation to exhibitor conventions, which started in 1949 with the formation of TOA and its desire to work across the divorcement, distributors had set up their own parleys at the studios and traveling cities across the country to invite exhibitors to preview the slate of films.

The NATO-organized event would continue each year, rotating locations, and building industry relationships. At the same time, its regional affiliates continued organizing their own conferences to conduct business on a smaller scale, and continued to host conventions designated to drive-ins and showmanship that had already been in operation for several years.¹⁵⁴

ShoWest Steals the Film Exhibitor Convention Spotlight

Where NATO's first convention set to establish the single voice of the exhibition industry and establish a programming pattern, it was the instant success of ShoWesT¹⁵⁵ in 1975, organized by affiliates of NATO's western region, that truly transformed the entire industry's convention practices in becoming the main film exhibitor confab event within a decade.¹⁵⁶

ShoWesT was a joint convention sponsored by NATO's Western States Association, representing 13 state and local film exhibitor affiliates, and the NAC, which operated its trade

¹⁵⁴ After the formation of NATO, only a few conventions that had been in operation continued. Show-A-Rama is one that started in 1957 by the United Theatre Owners of the Heart of America in Kansas City. The event had its final run in 1985. In 2013, there was an attempt to revive it the convention in Kansas City, but it ended up being a one-time operation. For more on Show-A-Rama see Ben Shlyen, "The Pulse of the Motion Picture Industry: Alive Showmanship!" *Boxoffice* 76, no. 22 (March 21, 1960): 5.

Smaller niche organizations also formed to service the needs of drive-ins and historic theatres. For example, the League of Historic American Theatre Owners (LHAT), is a not-for-profit organization that formed in 1976 and started its own annual national conventions to serve its population of small, independent theatre owners that operated in historic buildings. There are many laws and requirements for theatres of this type to access restoration grants and be accepted on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), a United States federal government program. Visit the League of Historic American Theatres <http://www.lhat.org/about/lhat-history> for more details.

¹⁵⁵ ShoWesT was spelled with a capital "T" from 1975 through its 1980 convention. The spelling changed to ShoWest in 1981. The author will utilize the spelling ShoWesT to identify this original convention of 1975, but for consistency will adopt ShoWest for the remainder of its writing.

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note that the 1970s was a period of convention growth and interest in many different film and media industries. For one, Comic-Con held its first convention in 1970 to a gathering of around 100 individuals. Today it has over 130,000 people from all over the world coming to its event. "About," *Comic-Con*, Accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.comic-con.org/about>.

show event.¹⁵⁷ The first confab was heralded as a success with over 500 in attendance. By its third year, it had outgrown its California site and the event was moved to Las Vegas.

Operating in the spring to avoid the conflicting schedule of NATO's national convention in the fall, ShoWest continued to grow in popularity becoming known for its trade show and studio presence. The consolidation of ShoWest and NATO's national convention event was announced in April of 1988 after operating two separate annual national film exhibition conventions from 1975 to 1988.¹⁵⁸ The major factor in uniting the convention events were brought forth by the reconciliation of NATO with the Theatre Owners of California, who had left the national organization in 1979 and held ownership of ShoWest. Other reasons for the consolidation of both events into one—NATO/ShoWest—were due to opportunity cost and fiscal management. Studios had begun selecting only one event to attend each year causing significant decline in Hollywood participation at the NATO national convention in particular.¹⁵⁹

1988 was also a year of change for the national organization with its first paid president, William Kartozián, taking helm.¹⁶⁰ Prior to that, the organization had operated with a volunteer presidential leader and leadership team. This change would allow the national exhibitor organization to focus more persistently on legislative and lobbying efforts. The consolidation of two events into one, under the direction of ShoWest California/Nevada regional affiliation would redirect NATO's attention toward film exhibition needs in other areas. The two organizations held one joint event for the next 26 years together under NATO ownership, and additional ten

¹⁵⁷ Ben Shlyen, "The Pulse of the Motion Picture Industry: Go West – to ShoWest '75." *Boxoffice* 106, no. 13 (January 6, 1975): 24.

¹⁵⁸ "National News: NATO And [sic] ShoWest Together Again," *Boxoffice* 124, no. 4 (April 1, 1988): 13.

¹⁵⁹ "ShoWest '84 Focuses on Bright Side," by Alexander Auerbach, *Boxoffice* 120, no. 5 (May 1, 1984): 9.

¹⁶⁰ Tom Matthews, "Profile: The New NATO," 10.

years through its industry partnership with the Bob Sunshine Group before NATO would split for good to take back its convention and create CinemaCon in 2011.

Summary

Lampel and Meyer argue that field-configuring events operate as first emerging fields, which involves “setting standards, defining practices, and codifying key vocabularies, as well as positioning the field relative to other fields and institutions” and then move into maturation, whose field replication is situated.¹⁶¹ From the early formation of exhibition convention FCEs to instituted organizational gatherings to hybrid and niche events, this chapter argued that film exhibition conventions and trade shows have operated in cyclical patterns of emergence and maturation that have followed industry, cultural, social, and economic changes and influences.

After 1911, conventions really did become “all the rage” as did large industry expositions for businesses, organizations, and associations both nationally and internationally. In the film industry, studios and distribution channels produced their own sales shows and marketing parlays and operators, engineers, and manufacturers associations held annual events as well.¹⁶² The 1910s were a growing period in the infancy of the film industry and saw the organization of a national film exhibitor association, the launching of an annual national convention, and the garnered value of the trade show and exposition experience. National exhibitor conventions coincided with the internal development of emerging exhibitor organizations. Early conventions

¹⁶¹ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1029.

¹⁶² Operators, engineers, and manufacturers were already forming and strengthening their own unions and associations holding annual events such as the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Machine Operators of the United States and Canada annual convention and the Society of Motion Picture Engineers annual spring confab event. See Advertisement, *Boxoffice* 37, no. 1 (May 25, 1940): 73 and “150 Expected at Spring Convention of SMPE,” *Boxoffice* 34, no. 21 (April 15, 1939): 58.

operated as local, regional, or national business meetings for a primarily male constituency.¹⁶³

The purpose for these first conventions was to conduct intra-organizational business as well as address issues affecting theatres by the MPPC (until its dissolution in 1915) and later the studios and distribution channels, and local, state, and federal regulations. Results of meetings whether political, economic, or social, in the form of gossip, continued to be published in trade magazines (*Moving Picture World*, *Exhibitors Herald*, *The Moving Picture Weekly*, *Motion Picture News*, *The Film Daily*, *Exhibitors Trade Review*, *The Film Mercury*, *Variety*, and *Boxoffice*.)

As field-configuring events, conventions and trade shows continued to operate annually on the national scale and evolved in both programming and scheduling practices that were influenced by popular culture, industry events, and shifting practices in large-scale conventions nationwide. While staples such as meetings, luncheons, banquets, and entertainment activities would continue, the next phase of film exhibition's convention evolution was brought through industry consolidation, more advantageous and experienced partnerships, to the formation of ShoWest and ultimately CinemaCon.

163 As mentioned earlier in the chapter, there are records of women attending film exhibitor conventions, and other motion picture industry events, including the first confab in 1911. Wives often accompanied their husbands to national conventions, and soon ladies' committees became essential parts of convention management in the allocation of special ladies-only tours and events until the early 1980s. Early advertisements also suggested that women owned or were part of the co-ownership with their spouses in the 1930s, and started managing theatres in the 1960s. See the following articles: "Exhibitors Form National League," 441; Advertisement, *Motion Picture Daily* 43, no. 107 (May 9, 1938): 10; "Ladies' Entertainment Program Completed," *Boxoffice* 52, no. 25 (April 24, 1948): A-41; "Ladies Program," *Boxoffice* 94, no. 4 (November 11, 1968): A-6; and "Women Are Good Theatre Managers: Harold Janecky," *Boxoffice* 94, no. 8 (December 9, 1968): NC-3.

Chapter 3: CinemaCon Case Study

Introduction

This chapter applies a case study analysis of CinemaCon that relies on three years of participant-observation and immersive field attendance (2014-2016) as well as trade magazines such as *Variety* and *Boxoffice* and exhibitor-oriented industry materials and artifacts received during my event participation. The first section provides an overview of CinemaCon's implementation as the primary industry field configuring event (FCE) in the twenty-first century under the ownership and stewardship of the American-operated film exhibitor trade organization, the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO). It defines *how* this event came to be and *why*. The second section details the case study approach applying four of the six defining characteristics of an FCE set forth by Lampel and Meyer (2008) to CinemaCon. These FCE areas are identified as: 1) a limited duration; 2) the assembly of actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds in one location; 3) providing unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interactions; 4) the exchange of information and occasions for collective sense-making.¹⁶⁴ In this section the FCE characteristics are explored through concepts of temporal, spatial, social, and functional operations of the convention and trade show that reinforce its field-specific and organizationally-specific culture of exclusivity in demonstrating *what* occurs at CinemaCon and *how* this has impacted the evolution of the field. These activities and rituals, envisaged as Caldwell's 'semi-embedded deep texts,' become useful points of analyses in identifying, understanding, defining, and explaining the inter- and intra-group relations and activities at the event that expose the active and engaged 'voice' of film

¹⁶⁴ Lampel and Meyer, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms," 1026-27.

exhibition via NATO and those ‘voices’ of its exhibitor participants. Through this principal analysis, the chapter further exposes the marketing practices and rituals of event through discussions of its badged differentiation, programming, the generation of knowledge and ‘buzz,’ and the privileging of formats that further promote a presented unified film exhibition industry.

NATO Takes Back Its Convention

“CinemaCon has evolved and grown to be the largest and most important gathering for the worldwide motion picture theatre industry.”¹⁶⁵ – NATO’s CinemaCon website

Charles-Clemens Ruling writes, “Field-configuration assumes a mutual influence between fields and events. Events depend on fields, and the development of a given field will be influenced by events that are related to it. A key argument underlying the idea of co-evolution is that the persistence of an event is related to its adaptability in a situation of environmental change. A field-configuring event’s contributions must be in line with the demands of its environment.”¹⁶⁶ The field of film exhibition and their associated events have emerged, developed, and matured for over 100 years. It has been met with growing changes in social, cultural, political, technological, and economic forces that have impacted and shaped exhibitor organizations and their conventions over time. This section identifies major points of impact in both the film industry and the field of convention events that led to NATO and domestic film exhibitors taking back their convention event from corporate ownership in order to reinforce NATO as the primary ‘voice’ of the exhibition industry (2011+).

¹⁶⁵ “About CinemaCon,” *CinemaCon*, Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://cinemacon.com/about-cinemacon/>.

¹⁶⁶ Charles-Clemens Ruling, “Festivals as Field-configuring Events: The Annecy International Animated Film Festival and Market” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: Film Festival Circuits*, eds. Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhynes (Great Britain: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 60.

In the events arena, the global convention industry saw national and international consolidation of ownership and implementation through a variety of event fields.¹⁶⁷ Professional marketing and event companies purchased and acquired event operations and brands from organizations and industry affiliations in efforts to maximize skills in promotions and productions of large and small-scale conventions domestically and internationally through globalization, affecting film industry areas such as film festivals and circuits and industry conventions.¹⁶⁸ NATO's signature convention, ShoWest became one of these traded event brands in 2000.¹⁶⁹

After 26-years of ShoWest, an event coproduction of the regional NATO of California/Nevada and the NATO national organization, the event was sold off to the Bob Sunshine Group in 2000.¹⁷⁰ The final year of NATO-led facilitation also marked a record-breaking attendance with over 11,000 attendees, a number that has not been achieved by any exhibition event prior or since. In setting aside annual convention planning, the sale of ShoWest allowed NATO to focus its efforts on legislative goals, organizational needs, and changes in the industry.¹⁷¹ For Bob Sunshine and his company, ShoWest was added to its repertoire of

¹⁶⁷ For more on industry-wide consolidation efforts during the 1990s and 2000s, visit William M. Kunz's *Cultural Conglomerates: Consolidation in the Motion Picture and Television Industries*. Kunz's work provides an analysis of consolidation and conglomeration practices of businesses and corporations in the broader media industries.

¹⁶⁸ Rogers, *Conferences and Conventions: A Global Industry*, 2-19.

¹⁶⁹ Bob Sunshine's collaboration with NATO-related events was first sought out in 1984 with NATO of New Jersey's creation of ShowEast. This event remained a co-production with his company and NATO of New Jersey, NATO of New York, NATO of Pennsylvania, Connecticut Association of Theatre Owners, Theatre Owners of New England and Mid-Atlantic NATO until it was moved to Florida in 2000. See K.D. Shirvani, "ShowEast by SouthEast: Exhib Confab Flies South for Florida Base," *Variety*, July 16, 1999, <https://variety.com/1999/biz/news/showeast-by-southeast-1117743054/>; and Patrick von Sychowski, "CineEurope Celebrates Bob Sunshine's Legacy," *Celluloid Junkie*, June 23, 2017, <https://celluloidjunkie.com/2017/06/23/cineurope-celebrates-robert-sunshines-legacy/>.

¹⁷⁰ Bob Sunshine Group was a natural pairing since the organization had already been contracted in years prior to help facilitate and plan ShoWest.

¹⁷¹ "Exhibition Briefings: Lead Story: ShoWest's Change of Ownership," *Boxoffice* 136, no. 9 (September 1, 2000): 144.

nationally and internationally acquired film industry conventions: ShoEast;¹⁷² CineAsia, Hong Kong; and CineEurope. No longer under the operation of the NATO organization, ShoWest was run as a for-profit convention business. NATO national and the Bob Sunshine Group formed a contractual agreement where NATO would remain a principal sponsor and supporter of the event in promoting ShoWest to its members. The Bob Sunshine Group would in turn go through a period of corporate buyout and consolidation first as Nielsen Media Research property under the Dutch company VNU NV, which was purchased by Valcon Acquisitions in 2006, who was bought by e5 in 2009.¹⁷³

At the same time, the first decade of the new millennium brought forth many social and economic uncertainties for film exhibitors in terms of the box office attendance, digital cinema (d-cinema) conversions, and the instability of the economy after the Great Recession of 2008. The domestic industry (United States and Canada) saw a record attendance in 2002 that has trended in decline (Figure 1). Similarly, the number of movie theatres closing their doors also began to rise dramatically after 2000 (Figure 2, Appendices A and B) with another round of closings that were affected by d-cinema. The advancements in digital technologies and the impending d-cinema projection and screen conversion upgrades were being forced upon them by producers and distributors and many could not afford the costly investment from film to

¹⁷² ShoEast originated in Atlantic City and held its convention there until 1999, when it relocated to Miami, Florida. See K. D. Shirkani's article "ShowEast by SouthEast."

¹⁷³ The Bob Sunshine Group would also find its organization shifting ownership through corporate consolidation and buyouts in the 2000s. It first came under ownership as a Nielsen Media Research property, which was purchased by the Dutch company VNU NV. In 2006 VNU NV was bought out by Valcon Acquisitions BV. The film exhibition conventions that were housed under this entity went under its Film Expo business umbrella. Again, corporate ownership changed hands in 2009 with an acquisition by e5, a joint company operated by Pluribus Capital Management and Guggenheim Partners. As of 2011, the Film Expo Group operates ShoEast, CineAsia, and CineEurope, formerly Cinema Expo International. See sources: Lucia Moses, "e5 Global Buys 8 Nielsen Brands, Including Adweek," *Adweek*, December 10, 2009, <http://www.adweek.com/tv-video/e5-global-buys-8-nielsen-brands-including-adweek-101097/>; Carl DiOrio, "Zalokar to Head ShoWest," *Variety*, November 27, 2000, <http://variety.com/20000/biz/news/zalokar-to-head-showest-1117789657/>; and Renee Dilulio, "Sold! Valcon Successfully Acquires VNU," *Tradeshow Executive*, May 28, 2006, <http://tradeshowexecutive.com/archive/industry-news/sold-valcon-successfully-acquires-vnu/>.

digital.¹⁷⁴ Larger chain operations and many smaller ones fared the conversion, while others closed their doors or were purchased by chains through industry consolidation.

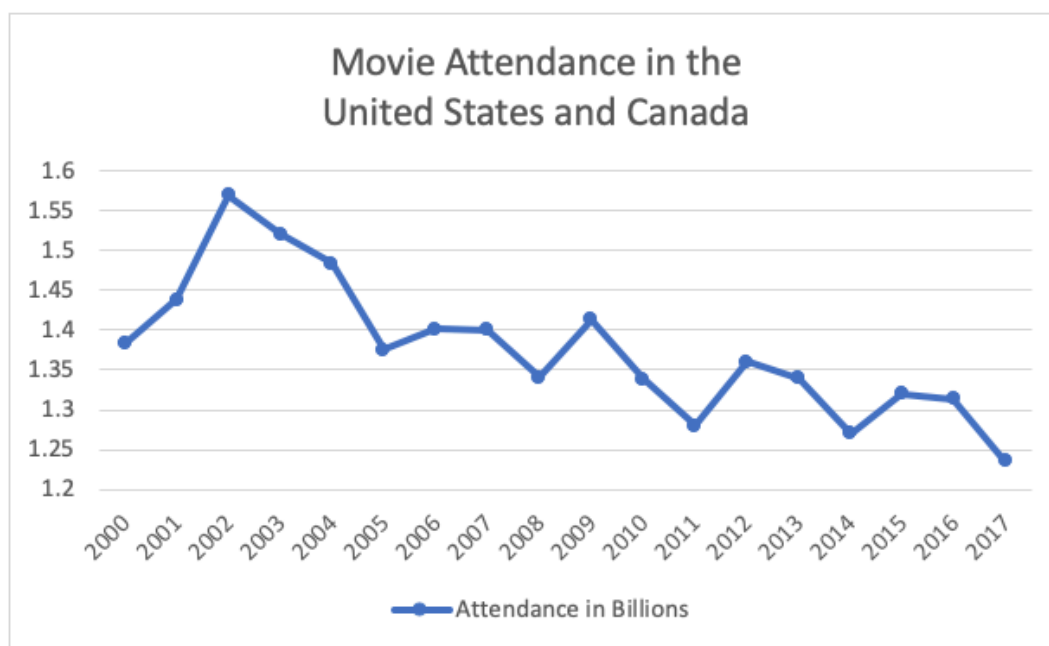


Figure 1: Movie Attendance in the United States and Canada

Source: NATO Online¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ The period of d-cinema conversion affected all movie theatres: chains, independents, drive-ins, art house, etc. D-cinema and the digital conversion for exhibitors was a costly and highly debated undertaking. Conversion costs per screen were \$75,000 with digital 3D additions adding \$20-30K to each upgrade. Theatres across the country fought to keep their cinemas in operation with some, such as the Tivoli in Kansas City, Missouri, turning to Kickstarter and other crowd-sourced fundraising efforts to convert within their own means instead of signing into the costly finance plans put forth by manufacturers, financiers, and Digital Cinema Initiatives, LLC. (DCI), the d-cinema organization created in 2002 in association with six major motion picture studios. Visit the DCI webpage for more information <http://www.dcimovies.com>.

¹⁷⁵ “Annual U.S./Canada Admissions,” *NATO Online*, accessed August 20, 2018, <http://www.natoonline.org/data/admissions/>.

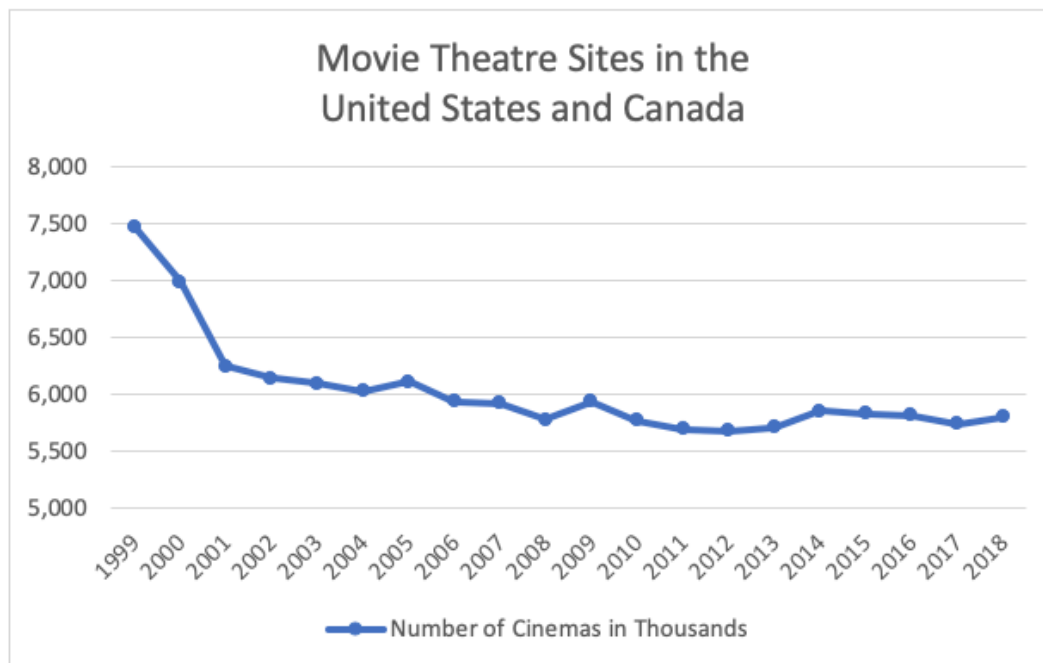


Figure 2: Movie Theatre Sites in the United States and Canada

Source: NATO Online¹⁷⁶

In 2008, NATO announced that it would be ending its partnership with ShoWest and the Bob Sunshine Group at the expiration of its ten-year contract (2000-2010). One of the driving factors for this termination cited the rising costs of the event on trade show participants and distributors, as well as and most importantly on registration fees for its participating exhibitors. The Nielsen Company, the Sunshine Group's parent company, had been operating ShoWest as a for-profit convention and business, which had become a standard mode of operation within the privatized event industry in the 1990s and early 2000s.¹⁷⁷ In a press conference prior to his State of the Industry address at the final ShoWest 2010, John Fithian, president of NATO stated:

“By taking it back to a non-profit [sic] status we can pump more resources into improving the value of the show. Everything from what chicken we order to other food

¹⁷⁶ Data culled from “Number of U.S. Cinema Sites,” *NATO Online*, accessed August 23, 2018, <http://www.natoonline.org/data/us-cinema-sites/>.

¹⁷⁷ Rogers, *Conferences and Conventions: A Global Industry*, 2-19.

offerings to what kind of rooms we can use and driving down a little bit the registration costs to get more of our smaller members in to get some of our smaller members and cinema players that don't typically come and really make it a show about the entire industry [sic]."¹⁷⁸

With all of the theatre consolidation practices, *Variety* had reported that the event had become more of a place for exhibitors and distributors to meet instead of having a focus on programming, which had been one of the principal functions of the event. "Increased consolidation of movie theater chains has also taken the pressure off studios as they maintain key relationships with fewer players."¹⁷⁹ Since NATO would not explicitly profit from the event, the focus shifted to creating a quality and more affordable exhibitor-driven experience that would benefit all of its members: domestic, international, larger chains and smaller independents. However, as we will see below, registration costs for CinemaCon have evolved in favor of NATO and NATO-affiliated organizations over other stakeholders—distributors and non-member exhibitors—in promoting national membership.

Another reason that was not presented through NATO's press releases or in coverage or quotes from NATO representatives but ascertained based on media coverage and supported by the evidence of movie theatre closings, were the effects of the aforementioned digital transition. Throughout the early to mid-2000s, pressure was being placed upon exhibitors by the film industry's producing and distributing arms. It was further reinforced by producers, directors, and studio representatives, such as George Lucas, James Cameron, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, who began touring ShoWest conveying messages of the impending digital conversion and placing pressure on exhibitors who they felt were holding up the process. Both Fithian and Katzenberg,

¹⁷⁸ J. Sperling Reich, "NATO to Transform ShoWest Into CinemaCon," *Celluloid Junkie*, March 16, 2010, <https://celluloidjunkie.com/2010/03/16/nato-to-transform-showwest-into-cinemacon>.

¹⁷⁹ Ian Mohr, "Big Films Absent from ShoWest," *Variety*, March 12, 2007, <https://variety.com/2007/film/markets-festivals/big-films-absent-from-showwest-1117961043/>.

for example, engaged in finger-pointing messages in arguments over digital projection across the industries.¹⁸⁰ As a result, the timing of Fithian's announcement coming in the midst of this change makes it apparent that the exhibition industry needed clear representation and unification in order to manage the conversion practice as a whole. A NATO-owned event would be able to steer that message.

NATO desired to dictate the narrative and assert itself as the 'voice' of the entire domestic exhibition industry through 'message control' is a third aspect of which this dissertation is most concerned. CinemaCon would thus become an event and mouthpiece for the organization. Patrick Cocoran, Vice President and Chief Communications Officer of NATO reinforced this in his claim that, "Taking the show under NATO's control allows us to rethink everything about what works and what doesn't. . . . It allows the theatre industry to take control of the messaging, marketing and perceptions of its industry's premier event. All decisions on programming will be aimed at serving the industry's interests rather than generating profit for an outside company."¹⁸¹ NATO's control of the event was immediately impacted by the immediate hiring of an internal event management team.

NATO national had outsourced convention management and planning since 1989 while the trade show and convention industry had modernized and developed.¹⁸² In 2007, before announcing its takeover, NATO organized a task force made up of Phil Harris of Signature Theaters and Bill Stembler of Georgia Theatre Co. serving as co-chair along with Leroy Mitchell of Cinemark, AMC's Peter Brown, and Rob Del Moro of Regal Entertainment.¹⁸³ This group

¹⁸⁰ Pamela McClintock, "John Fithian Enters Digital Fray: Jeffrey Katzenberg, Exhibitors Trade Barbs," *Variety*, April 30, 2008, <https://variety.com/2008/digital/markets-festivals/john-fithian-enters-digital-fray-1117984905/>.

¹⁸¹ Verrier, Richard, "Goodbye ShoWest, hello CinemaCon," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2010, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/entertainmentnewsbuzz/2010/03/goodbye-showest-hello-cinemacon.html>.

¹⁸² "National News: NATO And [sic] ShoWest Together Again," 13.

¹⁸³ Pamela McClintock, "Theatre Owners leaving ShoWest," *Variety*, October 13, 2008, <http://variety.com/2008/film/markets-festivals/theatre-owners-leaving-showest-1117993915/>.

worked on a feasibility plan for a NATO-owned and exhibitor-driven national convention, negotiating new location deals and hiring an in-house NATO management team to operate the event.¹⁸⁴ On September 14, 2009, Mitch Neuhauser, the former VP of Nielsen Film Group who had also been working for the Sunshine Group since 1981, was hired as the Managing Director of CinemaCon.¹⁸⁵ He was joined by Matt Pollock in 2011, who had worked with the Film Expo Group as the Director of Operations for ShoWest, ShowEast, CineEurope, and CineAsia for three years, the same company that had bought out the Nielsen Media holdings in 2008.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, NATO hired Matt Shapiro, Director of Operations, and Cynthia Schuler as Finance Manager to complete its four-person CinemaCon event team. To assist with the coordination of the trade show, NATO initially brought in Andrew Sunshine, the brother and long-time partner of the Bob Sunshine Group, as the Director of Sponsorship and Trade Show.¹⁸⁷ While some of these representatives were previous managing stakeholders of ShoWest or umbrella company, the expectation for CinemaCon would be an event overhaul with NATO driving its exhibitor-oriented messaging.

Applied Case Study Analysis of the CinemaCon FCE

“We firmly believe that the time is right for NATO and its members to run this most important annual gathering for the industry. . . . In representing all of exhibition, we are committed to ensuring CinemaCon’s success.”¹⁸⁸ – CinemaCon Press Release June 3, 2010

¹⁸⁴ McClintock, “Theatre Owners leaving ShoWest.”

¹⁸⁵ “NATO Hires Mitch Neuhauser as Convention Show Manager,” *Film Journal*, August 25, 2009, <http://www.filmjournal.com/content/nato-hires-mitch-neuhauser-convention-show-manager>.

¹⁸⁶ Matt Pollock, *NATO Online*, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.natoonline.org/contact/matt-pollock/>.

¹⁸⁷ “CinemaCon, The Official Convention of NATO, Sets Dates for 2011 Confab,” *CinemaCon Press Release*, June 3, 2010, <http://www.natoonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/CinemaCon-Release-6.3.10.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

In 2011, NATO produced its first 4-day CinemaCon trade show and convention event for film exhibitors by film exhibitors from March 28th to 31st to over 3,000 registered attendees.¹⁸⁹ The NATO-owned, field-configuring event “encapsulate[s] and shape[s] the development of professions, technologies, markets and industries.”¹⁹⁰ As a hybrid event, with both an industry-specific convention and trade show, CinemaCon operates under temporal, spatial, social, and functional mechanics that support field evolution and promotes an exclusive and connected experience between exhibitors, distributors, sales, and celebrities. This field evolution, endorsed by NATO, drives institutional, technological, architectural, operational, and relational change within film exhibition to wield influence upon its distribution and production counterparts, as well as members and participants attending the event and working in the field at large. The following sections provide an overview of the event set-up, structure and activities in demonstrating the evolutionary significance of the CinemaCon field-configuring event as the principal mouthpiece of NATO and representative ‘voice’ of the domestic film exhibition industry.

Temporally Bounded By Networked Calendars

CinemaCon is an FCE where “people from diverse organizations with diverse purposes assemble periodically or on a one-time basis, to announce new products, develop industry standards, construct social networks, recognize accomplishments, share and interpret information, and transact business.”¹⁹¹ CinemaCon is temporally bounded as an annual, 4-day occurrence that replaced its predecessor ShoWest. The event runs from Monday to Thursday, which is the slower part of the week in moviegoing attendance allowing theatre owners from

189 John Fithian, “Congrats to CinemaCon,” *Boxoffice* 147, no. 5 (May 2011): 6-7.

¹⁹⁰ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1026.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

small and large operations to leave their businesses in order to participate. It has continued as a springtime event operating between mid-March and mid-April each year for three reasons: 1) its place in the convention event circuit, 2) the distribution schedule, and 3) to capitalize on the ‘buzz’ generated for new releases. Part of its calendar placement dates back to the 1960s and 70s with NATO’s original national convention being late fall and ShoWesT ’75 organizing a spring event to allow for attendees to participate in both. As more events filled the national and global calendar, fixed time-frames allowed both exhibitors and distributors to maximize attendance and reach.¹⁹² (Tables 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate the vast number of national and international film exhibition conventions in current operation with fixed calendar schedules and either fixed or rotating locations.) The springtime occurrence made it easier for theatre owners to attend because it was a traditionally slow release season by distributors who were preparing for major tentpoles and blockbusters for the summer. “With so many of the summer and fall films that are effects driven, it was decided to hold CinemaCon in the Spring so as to capitalize on the greater availability of footage. This decision was made in concert with the Hollywood Studios.”¹⁹³ Henceforth, summer and fall promotions benefited from the spring showing by generating and exploiting hype based on its exclusive presentations.

¹⁹² CinemaCon has taken premiere stage for being the most attended domestic film exhibitor event post-ShoWest. However, it must be acknowledged that there are other long-held temporal convention traditions within regional NATO affiliations, such as the annual Geneva Convention held in early fall by NATO of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan in Wisconsin since 1999. The Geneva Convention, for example, is also the third largest film exhibitor convention in operation today, next to CinemaCon and ShowEast. See Geneva Convention, Accessed July 10, 2018, <https://www.genevaconvention.com> and “Geneva Gatherings: Wisconsin NATO Convention Focuses on Digital Transition,” *Film Journal International*, September 15, 2011, <http://www.filmjournal.com/content/geneva-gathering-wisconsin-nato-convention-focuses-digital-transition>.

¹⁹³ “FAQ,” CinemaCon, Accessed September 15, 2018, <https://cinemacon.com/faq/>.

Table 2: Primary International Film Exhibitor Convention Events

Event Name	Location	Calendar	Organization
CinemaCon	Las Vegas, Nevada, USA	March/April	NATO
ShowCanada	Canada/USA (rotates)	May/June	Movie Theatre Association of Canada
CineEurope	Barcelona, Spain	June	FilmExpoGroup
ShowEast	Miami, Florida, USA	October	FilmExpoGroup
CineAsia	Hong Kong	December	FilmExpoGroup

Table 3: NATO Regional Film Exhibitor Convention Events

Event	Location	Calendar	Organization
Cinema Show and Tell	Hanover, Maryland (rotates)	May	Mid-Atlantic NATO
North Central NATO Convention	Minnesota (rotates)	May	North Central NATO
ShowSouth	Georgia (rotates)	August	NATO of Georgia
Geneva Convention	Lake Geneva, Wisconsin	September	Midwest NATO
Rocky Mountain Theatre Convention	Albuquerque, New Mexico (rotates)	October	Rocky Mountain NATO

Table 4: Nonprofit and Alternative Domestic Film Exhibitor Conventions

Event	Location	Calendar	Organization
UDITOA Convention	United Drive-In Theatre Owners of America	January	Kissimmee, Florida
Arthouse Convergence Annual Conference	Arthouse Convergence	January	Midway, Utah
LHAT National Conference	League of Historic American Theatres	July	Austin, Texas (rotates)
The Concession & Hospitality Expo	National Association of Concessionaires	July	Chicago, Illinois (rotates)
CinéShow	Theatre Owners of Mid-America (TOMA)	August	Dallas, Texas (rotates)

During that week, the hype produced at CinemaCon by those in attendance and all media and industry-related outlets create a cultural economy of ‘buzz’ in promoting the latest technologies, trends, activities, and upcoming Hollywood films. Timothy Havens research on the global television program sales events concludes that “buzz is a cultural phenomenon, in the sense of a symbolic activity engaged in by a specific society, which has unique business

consequences.”¹⁹⁴ This temporal experience promotes an exclusive opportunity for those engaged to become part of the generation of buzz and hype for the industry. “To be effective, buzz must circulate among those participants who are most likely to respond, and the creation of various networks of participants through the markets’ ritual processes facilitates this circulation.”¹⁹⁵ Those in attendance are exposed to never-before-seen product presentations by major and up-and-coming distributors—Sony, Paramount, Universal Studios, Walt Disney, Summit, and Amazon—and their A-list celebrities and stars that join to promote them. Points of impact are also administered through learning sessions, events, trade show and focal pushes toward the latest audio and projection technologies that are ever-developing and advancing through fast-paced digital platforms. In the media, online trades like *Variety* have used terms like ‘CinemaCon Buzzmeter’ for its recap story headlines of movie screenings and events. In 2018 it created a “hot and cold” color-coded chart (from shades of red transitioning to blue) to rate the up-and-coming films according to perceived preference.¹⁹⁶ Communications from news media and participants can affect both the domestic and global film industry’s perception of upcoming film products and other industry-related endeavors.

Spatially Bound through Accommodation

CinemaCon “assembles in one location actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds.”¹⁹⁷ The geographical location and spatial accommodation configuration of CinemaCon have significant historical, social and economic implications on the event’s activities. Geographically, the ties to Las Vegas, Nevada are rooted in tradition and

¹⁹⁴ Timothy Havens, *Global Television Market*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁹⁶ Brent Lang and Dave McNary, “CinemaCon Buzzmeter: What’s Hot and Cold in Las Vegas,” *Variety*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/15-things-we-learned-at-2016-cinemacon-001334935.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1027.

expanded offerings. Historically, NATO's original national convention (1966-1989), rotated cities and states representative of its national membership base. For ShoWest, a consistent location allowed for easier event duplication, accommodation, and travel. The decision to permanently move ShoWest '79 from California to Las Vegas were the results of the event's exponential growth in its initial four years of operation (1975-1978) from 500 to 1,500 attendees that required more hosting and convention space, that the Los Angeles area could not provide at the time. Las Vegas, however, was near the industry, had an international airport, and a convention bureau industry that was booming as hotels and casinos constructed large, multi-purpose facilities to host events congruent with the increased scale of convention and conference offerings.¹⁹⁸ The city was also an attractive site due to its numerous social activities outside of the event—gambling and entertainment—which had been a selling point for exhibitors that event organizers did not have to pre-arrange.

When NATO developed plans for CinemaCon, the geographic and site options were revisited. Las Vegas was ultimately chosen as the home for the event for similar reasons as ShoWest—tradition, proximity to industry, and social offerings—but the event would change venues. ShoWest had bounced around different hotels in its earlier years, finally settling on its long-term contracts with both Bally's Las Vegas Hotel and Paris Hotel and Casino. Holding a major event that split activities among two different hotels put significant logistical barriers on the scheduling, member choice, and navigation. Members had to learn the layouts of two hotel sites and make decisions on which overlapping presentations to skip. CinemaCon organizers desired to remedy conflicts of member options and distributor presentation arrangements, and the

¹⁹⁸ "Convention With A Difference," *Boxoffice* 114, no. 9 (December 4, 1978): 2.

separation of event sites.¹⁹⁹ In 2010, Fithian announced that NATO had secured a standing contract with Caesars Palace to run consecutive events at the hotel and casino. Caesars was sought out due to its recent upgrades in conference facilities and its state-of-the-art screen technologies in the Colosseum. Having the event at one location removed barriers and logistical concerns for members with no conflicts between presenters and distributors allowing for a more overall collective and unified event experience.

“Having discussed the city location of CinemaCon with its exhibitor and distributor partners, it was agreed that Las Vegas was best suited to host the new convention. Of the various properties considered, Caesars Palace stood out for several reasons: their convenient location on the “Four Corners” of Las Vegas; its beautiful and new Conference Center located away from the smoke and madding crowd of the casino; the availability of The Colosseum, one of the premiere, state-of-the-art performance venues in Las Vegas, complete with a seating capacity of 4,200 [sic] and which will be able to accommodate the entire CinemaCon delegation under one roof at the same time; the diversity and number of on-site property amenities and restaurants and the quality and reputation of the entire staff at Caesars Palace.”²⁰⁰

Caesars Palace covers 85 acres that includes its casino, hotel, resort, shops, stages, night clubs, and meeting space. The Caesars Palace Conference Center facilities alone comprise of 300,000 sq. feet of meeting and exhibit area within the complex, which is roughly the size of two Super Wal-Mart department stores in comparison.²⁰¹ CinemaCon has taken full advantage of the spacious accommodations spreading its panel sessions, luncheons and dinners, after parties, exclusive screenings, business sales meetings, and trade show across the vast pillarless Octavius, Forum, Augustus, Palace, Milano, Roman, and Florentine Ballrooms and their separate breakout spaces; several private meeting rooms for sales and distribution meetings as well as press junkets

¹⁹⁹ Las Vegas is a destination city for major national and international conventions with the Las Vegas Convention Center (3.2 million square feet) able to host thousands of vendors, exhibitions, meetings, and sessions at its vast site. Hotels, like Caesars Palace are also equipped to host conventions on their own.

²⁰⁰ “FAQ,” CinemaCon.

²⁰¹ “Caesars Palace Sales Kit – July 2017,” Caesars Palace, Accessed July 15, 2018, <https://www.caesars.com/meetings/locations>.

with visiting celebrities; a 4.5-acre Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis that holds up to 4,000 guests; the Omnia Nightclub; and the Colosseum, which seats up to 4,300 guests on a half-acre stage that is outfitted each year with the latest projection, audio and screen technologies.²⁰² While the event is housed at one site, the incredible size of Caesars with its multi-level floorplan takes significant planning to get around the conference and hotel areas in order to attend every event in its tightly woven 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. four-day event schedule.

On the Las Vegas Strip, it is apparent that CinemaCon is the premier activity of the week. LED marquees on the various Caesars Entertainment properties, including Bally's, Planet Hollywood, the Flamingo, and Harrah's, boast large "Welcome CinemaCon" messages. Inside Caesars Palace, areas of the hotel are decorated with marketing and promotional posters and insignia of both CinemaCon and upcoming new film releases. For example, the gateway escalators leading to the Conference Center, and those throughout its levels, are adorned with full-length, movie-themed signage (Figure 8). The Conference Center's main level is heavily decorated by distributors and movie theatre technology companies (Figures 9, 10). A main LED gateway paneling signals the CinemaCon event and schedule (Figure 11). Beyond the gateway and down every hallway are rows of cardboard, cutouts, LED, and banner movie posters for the upcoming summer and fall seasons (Figures 12, 13). Signage leads attendees toward registration areas and down the hall to the first floor of the trade show (Figure 14). Additional movie-themed escalators lead guests to the ballrooms for breakfasts, luncheons, panel sessions, and another level of the trade show (Figure 15). Interactive displays, movie-themed photo booths, and character statues and props are placed throughout the conference facility to entice and engage attendees in shared experiences through photographic social media-driven opportunities to

²⁰² Ibid.

participate in the generation of CinemaCon buzz and hype (Figures 16, 17). Despite its vast layout the CinemaCon event space provides a venue for unifying its many different participants.

Social Unbounded and Bounded by Differentiation

The CinemaCon convention and trade show offers both structured and “unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction” for its diverse delegates and stakeholders.²⁰³ Its attendees represent a variety of industry, organization and business operational areas with varied social opportunities categorized and defined through the registration process through the selection of the conference package and affiliation. Passports and badges thus identify, differentiate, and channel opportunities for bound, or limited and defined, and unbound social interaction. These ‘category distinctions,’ as referred to by Nick Couldry in his anthropological study of media rituals (2003), also replicate a certain hierarchy among participants.²⁰⁴

Registration for media industry events can be costly and are dependent on offerings and activities (trainings, sessions, social events, trade show, etc.). Since CinemaCon is a nonprofit, NATO is able to manage its registration fees for its attendees based on its fixed costs (Caesar Palace’s cost) and projected revenues (contracts, sponsorships, and paid participation of the trade show). Registration cost is prioritized by desired event activities: participation in International Day, domestic package only, trade show and seminars, or receiving a trade show pass only. Table 5 illustrates the CinemaCon main registration benefits at each package-level that have consistently been offered since the advent of the event.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1027.

²⁰⁴ Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (Routledge: Oxfordshire, England, 2003), 28.

²⁰⁵ One event category that is not advertised on its main CinemaCon website or schedule but is a valued film exhibitor stakeholder, is a special programming for independent theatre operators put on by NATO’s Independent Theater Owners Committee. The committee aligned its general meeting to CinemaCon in 2016 with its event titled “Independent Theater Owner Educational Session.” Independents and small operations that are part of NATO can attend this function, which overlaps Monday’s International Day scheduling. Information for the event is instead of disseminated on NATO’s main website, internal NATO newsletters, and press releases. For more on NATO’s

Table 5: CinemaCon Registration Packages

Package Inclusions	International Package	Domestic Package	Trade Show & Seminars	Trade Show Pass
Trade Show	X	X	X	X
Seminars	X	X	X	
Sponsored Food Functions	X	X		
Screenings/Studio Presentations	X	X		
International Day Programming	X			

Source: Data taken from CinemaCon's registration information.²⁰⁶

The activities represented by the “inclusions” column in Table 4 can be categorized further based on their socially bound and unbounded functions. Unbound activities might include the trade show and some of the sponsored food functions. At the trade show, vendors of equipment and technology and concessionaires interact with film exhibitors who are either in the market for a specific product or browsing the trade show floor as a ritualistic industry event activity. The food functions include program-indicated breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, after parties, and the final event celebration party. These are either informal gatherings where people can walk around, or formal seated situations where attendees can still intermingle in tabled conversations. Bound activities on the other hand would consist of closed events such as seminars, presentations, and the exclusive studio screenings, where little conversational time is permitted and information is instead disseminated to the audience by members of NATO, the MPAA, industry leaders, studio distributors, producers, directors, and/or celebrities.

tumultuous history in navigating the varied needs and interests of its large cinema chains and the smaller independent operations, I suggest the research of Deron Overpeck.

²⁰⁶ Registration Information, *CinemaCon*, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://cinemacon.com/registration-information/>.

Badging, a concept that was introduced to conventions and events in the early 1900s, is the added element of powered ‘category distinction’ that plays a role in negotiating degrees of social interaction. Table 6 identifies the types, benefits, cost, and color of the badge that separates each participant for the 2019 CinemaCon event (see Appendix C for a CinemaCon cost history). Similar to Timothy Haven’s (2006) badged experiences at television trade show market events, CinemaCon badging is the currency that prohibits and supports various levels of interaction among its attendees.²⁰⁷ The badge is your identifying passport providing access to various activities, as well as allowing for efficient ushering of participants into and out of authorized spaces (see Figure 18 of registration area). The front of the badge contains a printed card with the individual’s name and company affiliation and when flipped to the back, a passport notes which package one has paid for (Figures 19, 20). Color-coding further identifies each participants’ affiliation: 1) red is worn by NATO, ICTA, or NAC members; 2) black is worn by non-member affiliates; and 3) yellow is worn by those who are eligible for membership to film exhibition industry organizations, but have not yet paid appropriate dues. Color-coding effectively separates members by sight, thus creating social stratification across affiliations.

²⁰⁷ Haven’s research identifies a similar color-coded mechanism that separates and identifies stakeholders based on a hierarchal structure of access.

Table 6: CinemaCon 2019 Registration Fees by Affiliation

Package Type	Member (National NATO, ICTA or NAC)	Non-Member (Industry Affiliates, Association Ineligible)	Association Eligible Non-Member
International Package	\$1,185	\$1430	\$1570
Domestic Package	\$1045	\$1290	\$1385
Trade Show & Seminars	\$625	\$735	\$800
Trade Show Pass	\$525	\$620	\$675
Badge Color	Red	Black	Yellow

Source: Data is a representation of CinemaCon’s online registration with the added badge coloring based on observation.

One of the main differences between ShoWest and CinemaCon was that ShoWest had gained a reputation for letting any film enthusiast attend its conference.²⁰⁸ NATO’s production of CinemaCon on the other hand, from programming and messaging to its badging and identification levels, makes it clear that this is a film exhibition industry event catered to its membered participants. NATO segregated the new badging and price category in 2018 to separate out those eligible non-members. This privileging aspect reinforces the idea that all film exhibitors should join NATO in order to benefit from its value-generating activities including lobbying, scaling, knowledge-sharing, etc. These eligible non-members pay the highest registration fees and are instantly identifiable based on their yellow color. Table 7 illustrates the NATO membership fee-levels for those eligible film exhibitors to join its organization. Not all

²⁰⁸ ShoWest’s inflated attendance record, for example its 11,000-person turnout in 2000, may also account for its open-door policy of attendance. There was one short period in ShoWest’s history when Daniel Wheatcroft took the helm as the president of the event from 1997 to 1998. Wheatcroft’s envisioned bringing the event back to exhibitors and distributors only in aligning the event back to its original roots. He came under fire for this move, perhaps in part due to attendance decline. After his removal, organizers of ShoWest ’99 made it clear that they had reopened the event for all participants. See Kim Williamson, “Special Report: ShoWest 1997: Showman,” *Boxoffice* 133, no. 4 (April 1, 1997): 36 and “ShoWest ’99: 25 Years of ShoWest: Watching the Growth of the Exhibition Industry’s Convention,” *Boxoffice* 135, no. 4 (April 1, 1999): 102.

domestic theater owners (or international companies) obtain NATO membership for various reasons including arguments based on value-added and equal representation between small and large operations. These issues are further analyzed in the following chapter in addressing the differentiation in CinemaCon’s stakeholders.

Table 7: NATO Membership Fees for 2018

Territory	Cost Per Screen	Minimum Payment
US Domestic (50 states)	\$50	Minimum payment of \$100
US Territory (Puerto Rico, Guam, the US Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Northern Mariana Islands)	\$20	Minimum payment of \$100
Canada	\$20	Minimum payment of \$100
International (Outside of the US and Canada)	\$500 (between 1-9 screens)	\$1000 (10+ screens)

Source: Data based on NATO’s membership levels.²⁰⁹

Furthermore, the categorization and access levels for each participant is regulated by the schedule and affiliation. Major event players, such as the MPAA President and the various Presidents and VPs of Distribution may have limited access points, as do the many producers, directors and celebrities who participate in the event. NATO’s exhibition members obtain the most access to these event players through special invitations to exclusive distributor gatherings that are not on the main CinemaCon itinerary. These are invitation-only events with personal access to celebrities behind closed doors. Invitations are not reserved for only large chain operations, though they may be most likely to attend based on exhibitor and distributor relationships, access is available to small and independent exhibitors just the same.

²⁰⁹ “Become A Member,” *NATO Online*, Accessed August 6, 2018, <http://www.natoonline.org/about/become-a-member/>.

Prior to registering for the 2014 event, I reached out to NATO's CinemaCon planning team to try to ascertain which registration and affiliation best fits an academic. I wanted to be able to talk to the full spectrum of attendees and ask research questions. At first, we discussed obtaining a press membership, which is a separate category and badging outside of those presented in Table 5. However, as glamorous as it might have been to be able to gain access to press junkets and the like, this research needed to be among film exhibitors in both socially bound and unbound scenarios as well as being able to participate in and experience the event for this study. In the end, I chose the non-member affiliation and the International Day package in order to experience the full event. What I discovered though was that I was immediately identifiable by the black badge and name tag which said the name of my university instead of a film industry organization. The badging served well in areas such as the trade show, where salespeople were happy to discuss new technologies and innovations in the industry to help my study as well as during the sit-down events like the luncheons where table talk wasn't badge-oriented. I did find it most difficult at first during the large open-functioned activities where it was common for participants to look at your badge before inviting conversation. Despite this, I learned how to maneuver through the event over repeat participation and found many opportunities to speak with many exhibitors, affiliates, and businesses in socially bound and unbound scenarios as identified in sections below.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Once I identified myself as an academic researcher, I was met with different responses among badged members. The most willing to share information were sales agents at the trade show and breakout rooms. Architects, food suppliers, seating companies, and technology-based industries were eager to provide me with samples, pamphlets and business cards to ask further questions if needed. Ticket-selling companies like Fandango as well as alternative content entities also provided more open access in answer questions and talking about services to movie theatres. For exhibitors, smaller independent theatre operations were the most accessible because they either came to the event by themselves or in small groups. It was easier to mingle among them at tables or in lounged areas. Larger chains and exhibitors were by far the most difficult to gain access. Companies like AMC often had tables 'reserved' exclusively for them in ballrooms and banquet halls. Of these larger corporations, only Carmike Cinemas, now an AMC property, was open to conversation and exchanging business cards. I perceived this difficult to be due to the size of the theatrical operation, its management structure, and ownership. AMC, for example, is considered an

Functionally Unbounded Hybrid Event

CinemaCon targets a domestic and global film exhibitor audience, whose choice to attend may vary depending on their interests and needs. Some may attend to network, make purchases or get samples, gain educational or business insights, or for the social events. For example, Tim League, CEO of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas, said, “I go because everyone is there.”²¹¹ Similarly, an Australian exhibitor’s primary reason was that it was the one every they attend each year.²¹² While an independent exhibitor from Texas said she was attending because she was in the market for theatre seating upgrades and the trade show is the only place where you can demo a wide variety of seats.²¹³ Both exhibitor responses demonstrate the ritualistic aspects of attending CinemaCon. Exhibitors go because they are expected and encouraged to go. CinemaCon is viewed as the primary (domestic) industry event and place where exhibitors can shop, network, and participate in the experiences of the event in this temporally constructed communal activity.

CinemaCon offers these functionally unbounded opportunities for its participants and agents, such as the exhibitors, distributors, celebrities, insurance representatives, charities, architects, ticketing services, alternative content providers, etc., access to exhibitor industry-minded activities. As a hybrid event, this section splits its discussion of CinemaCon’s functional activities into its two areas— trade show and convention events—in order to demonstrate the FCE’s framework of “information exchange and collective sense-making” opportunities that help

American-based company, but is now owned by Dalian Wanda Group, a Chinese media conglomerate since 2012. I Obtaining access to company-level information, which I had attempted to pursue in 2014, was met with grave difficulty.

²¹¹ Tim League, in discussion with the author, April 24, 2014.

²¹² 2014 conversation during a luncheon event.

²¹³ 2015 conversation prior to a film screening event.

reinforce the messaging that reinforces the film exhibition industry's positions and practices via NATO.

CinemaCon Trade Show

CinemaCon's trade show is an event where information is exchanged and attendees and salespersons participate in collective sense-making activities based on business transactions and updated knowledge-sharing each year.²¹⁴ The trade show exists because it provides a one-stop-shop for exhibitors to fulfill all of their business needs, as it has served its long-standing tradition as a necessary accompanying part of film exhibition conventions and expo events articulated in Chapter 2.²¹⁵ In his research of global television trade, Timothy Havens writes, "Sales markets provide a ritual space that allows participants to think of themselves as members of a coherent global television business community."²¹⁶ The CinemaCon trade show provides a similar ritual space as site for evaluating what Caldwell terms 'semi-embedded deep texts' where participants can buy, sell, sample, educate, and network through a shared experience that privileges the exhibition community.

Unlike television sales, film distribution sales are not an integral part of the CinemaCon event. Rather, exchanges between distributor and exhibitor focus on primarily on the pre-marketing and generating hype for new product during the Colosseum presentations. The closest market exchanges in terms of filmed product trade may come through networking opportunities posed in some of the invitation-only events for exhibitors by distribution companies to explore

²¹⁴ Lampel and Meyer, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms," 1026-7.

²¹⁵ After each event, CinemaCon management sends an emailed survey to all event participants to provide qualitative and quantitative feedback. I too received these emails and participated in the survey in 2014, 2015, and 2016.

²¹⁶ Havens, *Global Television Marketplace*, 71.

business transactions post-event, or through information exchanges with visiting alternative content companies at the trade show. Instead, CinemaCon's trade show is focused on tools, technologies, fixtures and fittings, and concessions as a bazaar of exhibitor-desired necessities to drive theatre attendance and profits.

The CinemaCon trade show is the largest domestic film exhibitor show hosting up to 500 exhibits and 14 suites for products and sales (Figure 21, 22, 23).²¹⁷ In the Caesars Palace Convention Center, the trade show occupies all three levels of the center including the largest ballrooms. The organization of the two major sites are separated by vendor type—concessions and technology—though these rooms are intermingled with exhibitor stalls related to seating, ticketing services, lighting and other companies trying to break into the film exhibition industry market with new products and services. Additional breakout rooms are outfitted by individual companies, generally technology-based, to showcase special screening rooms with the latest projectors, digital 3D, and sound systems (Figure 24). Based on post-CinemaCon feedback, the event schedule was modified in 2015 to create more time for attendees to visit the multi-level trade show floor.

CinemaCon's trade show floors function as mini-storefronts for companies and services. Trade show exhibitors establish their own identities or brands through aesthetics within their designated stalls. The stall sizes vary depending on cost and CinemaCon trade show rules govern construction possibilities within each space.²¹⁸ Some companies, like Barco undergo construction in order to create their own staged storefront and experience. Other companies use signage, curtains and displays to self-identify their brand. Depending on the type of commodity or service

²¹⁷ "FAQ," CinemaCon.

²¹⁸ Trade show exhibitors utilize a different registration and website to make choices on how much space they wish to occupy at the show. Space is dictated by cost. Visit the Trade Show site for more information: <https://s36.a2zinc.net/clients/NATO/CC2019/public/MainHall.aspx?ID=578&sortMenu=101000>.

offered, there may be a counter for sales transactions, tables and chairs for conversations, and display areas for demonstrations. Many companies also occupy the same location every year, which makes them easy to locate and part of the ritualistic experience of visiting and socializing with repeat sales persons.

Gift-giving, freebies, or giveaways are established marketing practices used to promote what Donald Getz identifies as symbolic value that provides a “favourable [sic] and enduring perceptions of [a company’s] brand.”²¹⁹ These items may be food and beverage consumables or small tokens, business cards, branded tote bags, samples, etc. For example, at the entrance of the Forum, Coca-Cola sets up a large-scale exhibit with several self-serve machines and tables. They also have branded tote bags that attendees take to house all of the gifts and materials offered as they make their way around the trade show booths. To further promote their commodities and products, some companies choose to sponsor items that becomes part of the official CinemaCon ‘goody bag’ also called *swag*. The official ‘goody bag’, as it is identified, is one of the most anticipated components that blends into the ritualistic aspect of the conference and only offered to those who purchased the International or Domestic packages.²²⁰ It is a large, movie-themed bag filled with merchandise and promotional marketing paraphernalia from studios such as toys, books, t-shirts, and jackets, as well as trade show sponsored concession samples and company tokens such as lip balm and notebooks (Figure 25).²²¹

²¹⁹ Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*, 244.

²²⁰ Acquisition of the ‘goody bag’ requires a signature and stamp in the appropriate passport in order to receive it from a special room at Caesars. It also serves as a form of status and recognition as those who paid for the appropriate package tote the bag around the casino, identifying their participation in the exclusive event.

²²¹ Erin Hanna’s dissertation research of Comic-Con further identifies the exchange of swag between trade show exhibitors and paraphernalia-collecting fans in her chapter titled, “Chapter 4 Showing the Business: The Exhibit Hall as Industry Space.”

Technology companies on the other hand are more notorious for creating spaces to demo materials.²²² Dolby Laboratories is one brand that occupies the same location in the Augustus Ballroom at the trade show every year, in addition to having its own breakout room (Figure 26). In 2016, the custom-designed breakout room presented its entry into the market as Dolby Cinema, a complete cinema experience design in screen, projection, audio, and seating.²²³ Their room had several different stations with replica 3D cinema models, new ADA compliant technologies, and a room to experience Dolby Cinema technologies on a small scale (Figure 27).

The constant changes and upgrades in technological and cinemagoing trends have been highlighted every year in thematic panel sessions and events, during the product screenings in the Colosseum, and highlighted at the trade show where exhibitors and affiliates have opportunities to experience new products first-hand and ask questions or make inquiries. These transient developments have created a sense of urgency in that going to the trade show each year provides one-chance opportunities that may only be experienced on any given year depending on their success. The trade show at CinemaCon is a testing ground for legacy companies to experiment with new products to see if theatre owners desire to expand their offerings, especially when it comes to smaller investments not entirely dependent on the film exhibition industry alone, like confectionaries. In 2015, for example, a small business called EdaMovie attempted to introduce edamame to film exhibitors as a healthy concession food option. I overheard many exhibitors say that while it tasted good, they could not imagine serving it at the movies.

²²² One of the most common technologically-themed giveaway is a pair of promotional movie-themed 3D glasses, like ones shaped as *Minion* (2015) goggles from *Despicable Me* (2010) franchise or glasses that look like the face of Red from *The Angry Birds Movie* (2016).

²²³ For more information see “Dolby Cinema,” Dolby, Accessed September 4, 2018, <https://www.dolby.com/us/en/platforms/dolby-cinema.html>.

Ultimately, the product did not catch on and the company is no longer in business.²²⁴ Other test products, like the Oreo Churro, ended up being a hit.

Some technology trends, such as immersive sound has found success, while others have faded away over time. In 2014, much of the push in the industry was still towards finalizing the digital conversion to d-cinema as well as provide digital 3D options. Companies like XpanD and RealD had booths with several types of 3D glasses and products (Figures 28, 29). In 2015 and 2016, the concept of 4D cinema was driven by companies such as 4DX and MX4D with interactive 8-person screening rooms on the trade show floor (Figure 30). Regardless of whether an exhibitor desired to outfit a screen to 4D or 4DX, people stood in line to ‘experience’ motion seats, fog machines, and mist from watching a clip from the movie *Exodus* (2014). As the trend of 4D cinema has declined, these companies too have limited their participation, with no 3D companies scheduled for 2019 and only one 4D company representing its industry. The trade show remains a functionally unbound, ritualistic site where participants congregate to fill a variety of needs (Figures 31-34), however, not all exhibitors buy into those ‘presented’ needs as highlighted in the example below as well as in Chapter 4’s discussion of the homogenization of privileged digital technologies.

One example is an exhibitor I met during my first experience at CinemaCon 2014. I introduced myself as an academic researcher and he owned a micro-cinema or pop-up cinema company out West. This exhibitor revealed that he did not believe that cinema and moviegoing was relegated to a theatrical site. He believed that movies should be available anywhere and everywhere, which supported his business endeavor. We walked through the first day of the convention together, where he repeatedly advocated against NATO and the activities of the event

²²⁴ The only remnants of EdaMovie remain on their Instagram account @EdaMovie. Their website has been taken down.

as being ‘fake’ and ‘commercialized,’ though this exhibitor paid to attend the event in order to ‘experience’ for himself what NATO and CinemaCon offered. The exhibitor was also somewhat appalled to learn that I wished to demo new technologies, such as 4D, as part of my ongoing research of film exhibition. I think he felt that my position as an academic meant that I too would oppose all activities of this ritualistic event and its trade show. This was the only exhibitor that I ever encountered who adamantly voiced his discontent for CinemaCon and exhibition via the traditional cinema site at the event.

The bottom-up approach of being a participant-observer at CinemaCon allowed me to gain valuable insights from exhibitors whose ‘voices’ were not always heard, such as this individual, in trade magazines, publications, or through organizational discourses. It also highlighted the fact that there are other ‘voices’ of exhibition and that these individuals too may desire to contribute to the evolution of the field.

Panels and Sessions

At the same time, programming sessions at CinemaCon offer some of the most integral opportunities of “information exchange and collective sense-making.”²²⁵ CinemaCon has become the primary domestic event for film exhibitors to discuss current issues and trends and address issues relating to its industry (Figure 35). Its educational sessions and panel discussions have been the main arenas for exhibitors to come together on a smaller and more intimate scale in seeking information and advice (through Q&A opportunities) from other film exhibitors and those serving their industry. Each year, the sessions are themed according to topics and issues addressing the current state of film exhibition whether it is in upgrading to new technologies;

²²⁵ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1026-7.

finding new audiences; disseminating updates to general business operations, new laws and regulations; or presenting opportunities to take more calculated risks in areas of showmanship and viewer experience.

Between 2011 and 2015, the film industry as a whole was still pushing through mass digital conversion of movie theatres in efforts to eliminate the distribution of film stock for projection. Many panels and sessions focused on new technologies and d-cinema conversations. Some of these sessions were presented by d-cinema solutions companies, such as MKPE Consulting's presentation "Technology Movies Forward" in 2011, whose presentation focused on setting exhibitors at ease in answering common questions of security, accessibility, and lower costs in attempts to convince more owners to invest in upgrades to DCI compliant technologies, such as the first DCI compliant digital cinema system on the market, the Sony SRX-R220 and SRX-R320 digital cinema systems.²²⁶ In 2014, immersive audio was a central component of technological shifts in sound systems by Barco and Dolby followed by new projection and screen technologies in 2015 with HDR (High Dynamic Range) systems. When speaking to various exhibitors about these coming changes, many representatives from smaller cinema companies and independents were very skeptical about committing to new projection and sound upgrades, since many had just fared the expensive conversions from film to d-cinema with costs between \$70,000-\$100,000 per screen and the additional \$15,000-\$25,000 costs per screen to add the now-declining cinematic experience of digital 3D.²²⁷ They did not see the cost benefit in terms of exhibitors paying for a new technology upgrade, when the audience member may not even notice the difference from a consumption standpoint. Plus, there is the added fear that comes with

²²⁶ Mark Karagosian, "Technology Moves Forward" (presentation, CinemaCon 2011, Las Vegas, NV, March 26, 2011).

²²⁷ Lauren Streib, "3-D's New Dimension," *Forbes*, 20 March 2009, <http://www.reald.com/Content/In-the-News.aspx>.

digital technology in that it can (and will) continually upgrade based on innovation, something that film and film projection did not have to consider.

The skepticism over any new technological add-on was something that resonated even into 2015 with a company like Timeplay trying to bring a new interactive gaming experience to pre-shows. Exhibitors at my table, who averaged around ages 50+ years, did not see the value in offering interactive phone app experiences; while I sat at the table, representing a more subjective viewpoint, saw the value in a product that could potentially entice younger audiences, especially those considered part of a gaming culture. This experience demonstrated a sort of disconnect between exhibitors and their young, digitally-savvy audiences, a marketable group that is needed to sustain long-term film exhibition health, even if it meant making small scale investments into newer technologies. However, fears driven by the speed of change in technological development overall and the constant debt and difficulty in achieving full depreciation of assets and break-even points has left many exhibitors cynical about digital technologies.²²⁸

In addition to cost and seemingly limitless upgrades, producers and filmmakers within the production industry send mixed signals to film exhibitors as they contend with changes in technologies themselves. For example, the luncheon with Christopher Nolan and his discussion and presentation of the much-anticipated film *Interstellar* (Paramount Pictures, 2014), actually revealed his hesitations with the digital transition. He was very honest about his love for 35 mm film and distrust of new technologies that have not proved they can outdo that format. Nolan also

²²⁸ Cinemas have recently been imploring video gaming experiences as of late. A recent experience in fall of 2018 at Regal Cinemas had a preview for a new pre-show gaming system called Noovie ARcade. For more on these augmented reality (AR) and gaming experiences being incorporated into cinemas see Tony Palladino, "Mobile AR News: Theatres Turn to Mobile AR Gaming to Reclaim Pre-Show Movie Experience," *Next Reality*, February 20, 2018, <https://mobile-ar.reality.news/news/theaters-turn-mobile-ar-gaming-reclaim-pre-show-movie-experience-0183024/>.

professed his desired presentation of *Interstellar* to be shown in theatres on film due to the creation and projection technologies being extremely important to him as a filmmaker.²²⁹ People around me were both excited about his latest IMAX-driven project, but also commented how they were already making investments into technologies that he claimed were not yet perfected.

Film exhibition is a mature business structure in the industry and exhibitors have faced decades of change in the economy, socially, technologically, and through fads, trends, and gimmicks in creating moviegoing experiences for their patrons. Yet, my evaluations of the panel and sessions illustrate the need for movie theatre owners to take risks, think outside of the box, and step outside of their comfort zones of traditional modes of operation in finding new audiences, increasing offerings, embracing social media and phone technologies, and being part of their communities. Presentations like “Breaking Through The Social Chatter” by Christina Warren, Senior Tech Analyst at Mashable (2015); “Driving Business Your Way in the 21st Century” presented by Joel Cohen, CEO of MovieTickets.com (2015); “Adapting Our Organizations and Tools to Succeed in a Digital World” by Julien marcel, CEO of Boxoffice Media and Webedia Entertainment (2016); “Step Up Your Game With Hispanics: Enticing the Country’s Most Avid Moviegoers To Your Theater” a panel moderated by Pete Filiaci of Univision featuring Elizabeth Barrutia of BARU Advertising, Christine Cadena of The Walt Disney Studios, Javier Delgado Granados of Walmart, and Daneyni Sanguinetti of The Coca-Cola Company (2015); “Unlocking the Millennial Mindset” presented by Scott Hess of Mediavest (2017); and “An Industry Think Tank 3.0: Meeting The Expectations of Today’s Savvy Moviegoer” moderated by Anne Thompson of IndieWire with a panel consisting of Jon

²²⁹ *Interstellar* (2014) was released in multiple formats but none of these would include digital 3D, another investment theatre owners were making and desired high-quality content to recoup costs. See Kirsten Acuna, “There are 6 Different Ways You Can See ‘Interstellar’ – Here’s How To See It,” *Business Insider*, November 7, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/interstellar-how-to-see-it-2014-11..>

Landau, producer of *Avatar* (2009) and *Titanic* (1997), Stacy Snider, Chairman and CEO of 20th Century Fox, and Mark Zoradi, CEO of Cinemark, all demonstrate these aspects of collective sense-making that cinema owners are encountering and engaging in domestically and in some areas internationally.

As an international conversation, the International Day program participants gather from over 80 countries to attend the event. The needs of cinema owners vary significantly in different markets, especially in China and the Middle East, so there are sometimes disagreements among panelists and attendees when it comes to how to best serve patrons and which technologies and upgrades are successful. In a panel titled “Exhibition and Distribution: Collaborating & Partnering For The Greater Cause” (2016) Bernardo Rugame, Commercial VP of Cinépolis told the audience that his theatres had been installing beds as new cinemagoing experiences and that all theatre owners should consider this as a new option for bringing the comforts of home to the cinema. When VOX Cinemas CEO, Cameron Mitchell took the microphone, he reminded his colleague that his cinema operations were in the East and Middle East and that putting beds in a cinema would be punishable in various degrees should they decide to change seating arrangements. His theatres required more conservative approaches for his market. These sense-making conversations help educate the domestic and global audiences about the diversity of business operations around the world. They also illustrate the variation of industry ‘voices’ in that not all theatres can buy into an assimilated or uniform luxury, technology or commodity due to differences in culture, location, region, and ownership.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the origins of CinemaCon as the premiere domestic film industry convention and trade show event under the ownership of the trade organization NATO. It applied a case study analysis based on several years of participant-observation research as an attendee at the event in identifying four principal characteristics of field-configuring events. In its temporal approach, the chapter looked at the duration of the event and its situation within the calendar year. As a springtime event, CinemaCon reaps the benefits of promoting new summer and fall material through the generation of hype and industry ‘buzz.’ Its occupation of the entire Conference Center at Caesars Palace demonstrates its growth and sustainability as a large-scale industry event of domestic and global attendees. Through its branded signage and Hollywood-themed décor the site promotes exclusivity and excitement. Participants come for a variety of reasons and gain access to event activities through packaging and badged identification. This classification process privileges NATO-affiliated members who gain additional opportunities based on their paid membership into the organization. The trade show and sessions offer opportunities to explore, educate, inform, and share knowledge related to current industry practices and trends. The next chapter further identifies the controlled messaging that is promoted and produced by NATO through its analysis of the Colosseum and the dramaturgical activities presented to its audience. It is in this space that the ‘voice of the exhibition industry’ is personified through representatives and industry stakeholders.

Chapter 4: The Colosseum: An Industry Exclusive Cultural Arena

Introduction

The previous chapter explored in its case study of CinemaCon four of the six field-configuring event characteristics outlined by Lampel and Meyer (2008). These FCE areas were identified as: 1) a limited duration; 2) the assembly of actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds in one location; 3) providing unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interactions; 4) the exchange of information and occasions for collective sense-making.²³⁰ Building upon this immersive research, this chapter applies the final two FCE features to its industry analysis: 5) the event includes “ceremonial and dramaturgical activities” and 6) that the production and distribution of “reputational resources” are a byproduct of materials created to reinforce the activities, statements, and mission of the organizational stakeholders.²³¹ The first aspect is explored through the site of The Colosseum, the main entertainment venue at Caesars Palace, as an industry space where rituals play a significant role in bringing together multiple stakeholders in shaping field evolution. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, linking the three industry areas—production, distribution, and exhibition—together both pre- and post-Paramount decision has remained an important relational component for film exhibitor conventions despite the existence of “complex and often hidden relationships” of power.²³²

The site of The Colosseum becomes a confluence of different agents—distributors (studios), exhibitors, and affiliates—that share the stage with similar and sometimes conflicting

²³⁰ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1026-27.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Røling and Pedersen, “Film Festival Research from an Organizational Studies Perspective,” 5.

agency messages and agendas. The stage is the active platform which Erving Goffman (1959) describes as dramaturgical sociology.²³³ However, this chapter draws upon Peter Kivisto and Dan Pittman’s sense of “dramaturgical” activities in their application of the concept to personal sales and operatives working in a commercial society.²³⁴ For CinemaCon, each “actor” or stakeholder whether distributor, exhibitor, filmmaker, celebrity, etc. must understand the role they play in addressing the global motion picture industry and film exhibitors in attendance, a group that is regionally, nationally, and commercially diverse, as well as representing their industries and constituents. As the site where CinemaCon’s most exclusive “ceremonial and dramaturgical” events occur throughout its 4-day program, this chapter focuses on *what* happens on The Colosseum stage and *how* these activities promote exclusivity, prestige, industry knowledge-sharing, and hegemony.²³⁵

The chapter begins by identifying the site of The Colosseum as a unique and exclusive ‘cultural arena’ functioning as a “contact zone for the working-through of unevenly differentiated power relationships.”²³⁶ Through an analysis of three distinct activities that utilize The Colosseum as its platform—studio presentations, the “CinemaCon State of the Industry” address by NATO’s John Fithian, and CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards final ceremony—these sections address *how* ceremonial and dramaturgical rituals function in

²³³ Peter Kivisto and Dan Pittman, “Goffman’s Dramaturgical Sociology: Personal Sales and Service in a Commodified World,” in *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited*, 5th Edition, ed. Peter Kivisto (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 328.

²³⁴ Peter Kivisto and Dan Pittman apply Goffman’s research in analyzing how airline flight attendants, insurance salespeople, and Disney workers inherently represent certain things because of their occupations. They address how players need to understand their roles, scripts, dress, performances, locations, etc. in order to manipulate and maneuver in the commodified world. Similarly, as we will see, the stakeholders who take the stage in The Colosseum are operatives that push technological and commercial homogenization and global unification as championed by consolidation.

²³⁵ Lampel and Meyer, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms,” 1026-27.

²³⁶ Julian Stringer, “Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy,” in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, eds. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 2011), 138.

reinforcing global standards and mandates for the entire film exhibition industry. These activities promote the industry's focus on globalization of both the privileged Hollywood film product and the need for global movie theatre expansion. They also serve as exclusive industry-building activities that insert the film exhibition industry as a lucrative partner in contributing to the field at large. The scheduled events in The Colosseum represent and endorse the active 'voice' of film exhibition.

Finally, the chapter proposes *how* the field evolution of the CinemaCon FCE is solidified through the dissemination of NATO-created "reputational resources," the final FCE defined by Lampel and Meyer (2008), in articulating and acting as the final aspect of CinemaCon's and NATO's solidification of its activities and mandates in representing the 'voice' of film exhibition. These materials generate a NATO-curated reflection on the event and share industry-related knowledge that was produced in affecting field evolution.

The Colosseum As an Exclusive Industry Space

CinemaCon is what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) term a 'transorganizational' event that brings together multiple stakeholders that influence the field. It is at the site of The Colosseum that these parties are brought together in the promotion and production of exclusive industry knowledge. Unlike its predecessor, ShoWest, whose program separated studio presentations and events across two hotel venues, CinemaCon brought together the entire ensemble of industry producers, distributors, exhibitors and talent to one centralized space. The Colosseum has become the premiere venue for CinemaCon's most exclusive, must-attend rituals, its dramaturgical and ceremonial activities.²³⁷

²³⁷ Lampel and Meyer, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Field-Configuring Events as Structuring Mechanisms," 1026-27.

In their study of the Grammy Awards as a ‘tournament of rituals’, N. Anand and Mary Watson demonstrate that rituals are important in shaping field evolution (Anand and Watson, 2004). According to their findings, rituals allow for the perception of prestige, attract attention to the field, can identify and/or resolve conflicts, and have the ability to tighten horizontal interlocks.²³⁸ Likewise, The Colosseum functions as a cultural arena where film exhibitor convention rituals in the form of advanced screenings, studio showcases, industry speeches, and an end of the event awards celebration promotes prestige and hype and gives voice to the agenda of the exhibition industry.

Due to its vast size and eloquent viewing space The Colosseum delivers an impressive Hollywood-esque feel for its primary exhibitor-oriented audience who are normally separated from the hoopla of stars, industry awards and other studio-oriented activities (Figures 36, 37).²³⁹ The Colosseum is this premiere site with “increasing interaction among a set of organizations, fostering the sharing of information-processing routines, engendering the formation of coalitions and patterns of domination, and heightening mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise.”²⁴⁰ At CinemaCon, The Colosseum is the site where power relationships are continually exchanged between stakeholders through their corresponding presentations on stage. As an exclusive industry space, this section identifies how access, technology and security measures control and maintain the experience of CinemaCon rituals as part of its ceremonial and dramaturgical events at The Colosseum.

²³⁸ N. Anand and Mary R. Watson, “Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards,” *The Academy of Management Journal* 47, no. 1 (February 2004): 77.

²³⁹ Exhibitors have made efforts to create their own production and or distribution arms since the Paramount Decree. See “TOA To Receive Plans For New Film Production Company,” *Boxoffice* 77, no. 21 (September 12, 1960): 8. In recent years, exhibition companies such as the Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas have created their own distribution avenues. Drafthouse Films is the side company that distributes films across the small cinema chain, a direct to cinema market avenue stream, as well as markets them for exhibition to other theatres. Having their own distribution function allows the theatre to avoid renting fees and cost sharing that is part of the studio-distribution practice.

²⁴⁰ Anand and Watson, “Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards,” 60.

Exclusive Access to The Colosseum

Of all of the CinemaCon packages detailed in Chapter 3, only two options provide the attendee with access to the exclusive studio presentations, industry addresses by NATO, and the final awards night activities happening at The Colosseum: the International and Domestic packages (see Table 5 in Chapter 3). It is through this badged identification via the specified passport that one can even enter into The Colosseum (Figure 19). The entrance of The Colosseum is one of the few sites within the casino floor where one can visibly note the presence of CinemaCon. Prior to each studio presentation The Colosseum interior and exterior is decorated with print, fabric or LED signage and marketing materials for up and coming films that will be screened during the exclusive presentation (Figures 38, 39). With the main activities of the convention positioned in another section of Caesars Palace in the levels of the Convention Center, as soon as sessions end everyone with the designated passport makes their way to The Colosseum.

Entrance to The Colosseum is based on a first-come-first-serve access with no real line or designated pathway. Attendees fill up the stairway and mezzanine in front of the two main entrance doors and spill into the casino floor filled with slot machines. Erin Hanna's research of Comic-Con identified the concept of the 'economy of waiting' where attendees exchange their time spent in lines with an exclusive experience or special promotion.²⁴¹ However, unlike Comic-Con and large-scale conventions (where attendance can exceed 100,000) such as the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) or the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the size of the venues selected for CinemaCon have enough space to accommodate all of its badged

²⁴¹ Erin Melissa Hanna, "Making Fandom Work: Industry Space and Structures of Power at the San Diego Comic-Con" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), xiii.

attendees.²⁴² Once inside, finding a seat with a decent view of the stage seems non-essential.

However, due to the number of celebrities and stars that adorn its platform and sit among exhibitors (in a very protected and reserved section on the floor), attendees line up early at The Colosseum doors in order to sit in closer proximity to the stars in seats and on stage.

Security practices have recently become an essential topic for film exhibitors after the mass shooting at the Cinemark-owned theatre in Aurora, Colorado in 2012.²⁴³ It was a non-issue at CinemaCon until 2016, when after 20-minutes into a Lionsgate advance screening of *Now You See Me 2* (2016), the film shut off and a calm voice coopted the speaker system instructing us to evacuate The Colosseum. Everyone remained composed as we all quietly walked out of the theatre not knowing what the exact emergency was at the time. As we waited away from the entrance doors and spilling throughout the casino floor, we learned that there was a reported “bomb” threat. Though it turned out to be an unfortunate accident by a CinemaCon attendee who had left a bag behind from a prior event, the time it took to evacuate the theatre and call in a security team to check the suspicious baggage, meant it was too late for the screening to resume

²⁴² Having attended CES in 2018, I can ascertain that there is a definite ‘economy of waiting’ incurred upon attendees waiting to gain access to panels and sessions where celebrities are part of the paneled presentation. With advanced knowledge of how early one must get in order to get to the front of the line to be one of those badges who gets scanned for entrance (access is based on fire-coded attendance for the site or designated by the event), I arrived at a location four hours in advance to be able to get scanned for the morning panel and keep my seat until it was time for the panel I actually wanted to hear, “Headliner Conversation: The Walking Dead,” on January 10, 2018. Many around me did the same, as we discussed our intentions and helped reserve one another’s seat if one had to go to the bathroom, an activity that gave you exit and re-entrance abilities. For more on the ‘economy of waiting’ at Comic-Con, see Erin Hanna’s chapter titled “The Liminality of the Line: Comic-Con’s Economy of Waiting,” pp. 127-181.

²⁴³ For more media coverage of the recent theatre shootings since 2012, see Robert Mitchell, “Biz, Nation Reel From Colorado Shooting,” *Variety*, July 20, 2012, <https://variety.com/2012/film/news/biz-nation-reel-from-colorado-shooting-1118056834>; Ted Johnson, “Police: Missouri Man Threatened Theater Shooting,” *Variety*, November 16, 2012, <https://variety.com/2012/film/news/police-missouri-man-threatened-theater-shooting-1118062341>; Associated Press, “Texting Argument Leads to Fatal Movie Theater Shooting,” *Variety*, January 13, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/film/news/texting-argument-leads-to-fatal-movie-theater-shooting-1201053366>; Ted Johnson, “Theater Security In Focus Again After Tennessee Attack,” *Variety*, August 5, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/film/news/antioch-theater-shooting-mad-max-1201557541>; Alex Stedman, “Suspect Identified in Tennessee Theater Shooting,” *Variety*, August 5, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/biz/news/tennessee-theater-shooter-pellet-gun-1201557706>; and Gene Maddaus, “Cinemark Not Liable in Colorado Theater Shooting, Jury Finds,” *Variety*, May 19, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/news/colorado-theater-shooting-cinemark-not-liable-1201778884>.

given the tight CinemaCon schedule (Figure 40). The next year, CinemaCon introduced the first K-9 unit and bag check as a form of security precaution by announcing it on the CinemaCon website and then addressing security measures onstage at the event.²⁴⁴ Though person and bag checks have become standard practices at events and other arenas post-9/11 in the United States, this added security check is the new standard procedure at CinemaCon and planned part of the ‘economy of waiting’ to gain entrance at The Colosseum.²⁴⁵ It also marked the last time that studios included an advanced screening of a full film at CinemaCon, something that has broken tradition in practice at exhibitor FCEs.

Technology and Stakeholders

“Let’s face it, CinemaCon lives or dies by the quality of the theatrical experience that we’re able to deliver in The Colosseum.”²⁴⁶ – Mitch Neuhauser, managing director of CinemaCon

The coordination of the presentation and outfitting of The Colosseum is complicated by the varying stakeholders and staged activities involved including NATO’s management team; the numerous distributors; and the sound and project technology companies. As an event space, The Colosseum is the costliest Vegas theatre built to date at \$95 million. With a 22,450 sq. foot stage, the theatre was built for live-performances with the purpose of hosting Celine Dion in a

²⁴⁴ It is actually surprising that security measures at entrance checks were not in place in prior years due to the possibility of anyone being able to “slip” their way past the passport check. The passport check to gain access is a quick flip of the badge to an individual at the door whose entrance can take in 3-4 people at a time. Carolyn Giardina, “CinemaCon Employs Bomb-Sniffing Dog as Part of New Security Procedures,” *Hollywood Reporter*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/cinemacon-keanu-...fans-behind-2016-evaluation-new-security-procedures-place-98922>.

²⁴⁵ It is uncertain how global attendees felt toward the new security procedure, as a journal article on the subject could not be found for years 2017 and 2018.

²⁴⁶ Mark Mayfield, “Converting The Colosseum: Leading Tech Companies Transform a Live-Performance Space into a State-of-the-Art Movie Theatre,” *Film Journal International*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.filmjournal.com/features/converting-colosseum-leading-tech-companies-transform-live-performance-space-state-art>.

permanent Las Vegas residency.²⁴⁷ In terms of architectural design, Dion’s desire to create an intimate performer/audience experience contributed to its circular shape with no obstructing columns, where each of its 4,296 seats within the three levels—the floor, first mezzanine, and second mezzanine—are all within 120 feet of clear view of the stage.²⁴⁸ Its curved architecture is also reminiscent of the Roman Colosseum, as exemplified by its exterior façade. The site of The Colosseum is then a representation or construction of a “fake” Roman Empire within Caesars Palace, which is attune to the illusion of Hollywood and the unified industry constructed through staged performances of CinemaCon and its film industry stakeholders discussed further on.

What is extraordinary about the space is that its interior is transformed in a day and a half from a live-performance site into a state-of-the-art movie theatre operation under the management of Boston Light & Sound, whose other contracts include the Sundance and Tribeca Film Festivals.²⁴⁹ The company works close with Dolby, Christie, Barco, RealD, Harkness Screens, QSC, MasterImage 3D and others in delivering the latest technological innovations (upgrades)²⁵⁰ being promoted to film exhibitors each year.²⁵¹ The site then serves as a vetted promotional space for NATO endorsed technological innovations and upgrades for its exhibitor constituents.

²⁴⁷ The Colosseum Venue Info, *The Colosseum Caesars Palace*, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://www.thecolosseum.com/venu-info>.

²⁴⁸ “Palatial Colosseum Matches Shows Grand Scope,” *Las Vegas Sun*, March 21, 2003, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2003/mar/21/palatial-colosseum-matches-shows-grand-scope/>.

²⁴⁹ Mayfield, “Converting The Colosseum: Leading Tech Companies Transform a Live-Performance Space into a State-of-the-Art Movie Theatre.”

²⁵⁰ In 2011, the technological push presented by James Cameron was high-frame rate in addition to Christie DLP Cinema projectors. In 2013, the major installation was Dolby Atmos, immersive sound.

Carolyn Giardina, “Colosseum at Caesars Will Get Atmos Install for CinemaCon Demos,” *Hollywood Reporter*, April 15, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/cinemacon-colosseum-at-caesars-get-439076>.

²⁵¹ Mayfield, “Converting The Colosseum: Leading Tech Companies Transform a Live-Performance Space into a State-of-the-Art Movie Theatre.”

NATO has supported both directly (by mandate) and indirectly (through showcase) specific companies and their latest digital projection, screen, audio, and stereoscopic technologies (Figures 41, 42). In terms of directives, John Fithian's "CinemaCon State of the Industry" addresses in both 2011 and 2012 warned exhibitors that 35 mm film distribution would cease in the next year or two forcing domestic theatre operations to upgrade to a digital format.²⁵² By 2014, the message of imminent conversion was no longer part of his main address as studios were already contacting theatres and announcing their elimination of film prints over that year.²⁵³ Instead Fithian's message shifted toward the marvel of the latest digital screen formats and sound, many of which would be featured on stage, in special sales rooms, and on the trade show floor.²⁵⁴ Embracing technological advances as part of the viewing experience has become commonplace in subsequent addresses, as theatres have all embraced the transition through advanced digital modes.

At the same time, studios and filmmakers have used their time on stage as a platform to promote their NATO-endorsed, featured new technologies through exclusive presentations and advanced movie screenings in The Colosseum. Technology companies, studios and filmmakers'

²⁵² It is also noteworthy to point out that the end of 35mm film distribution did not begin its discussion at CinemaCon, but had been a regular part of John Fithian's addresses at ShoWest and in news media. For CinemaCon see Pamela McClintock, "CinemaCon 2012: Fox Will Stop U.S. 35mm Film Distribution Within Two Years," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 24, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cinemacon-2012-fox-35mm-john-fithian-chris-dodd-distribution-digital-exhibition-315688>.

²⁵³ In 2014, Paramount became the first announce that it would be stopping all 35mm film print distributions in December with the release of *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* (2014). See Richard Verrier, "End of Film: Paramount First Studio to Stop Distributing Film Prints," *LA Times*, January 17, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/jan/17/entertainment/la-et-ct-paramount-digital-20140117> and

²⁵⁴ Digital conversion was not only a domestic issue, though the major studios targeted the end of domestic film distribution first. Theatres all over the world have faced the same conundrum as studios have worked to obtain a global digital conversion. The same plights of cinematic struggles to afford these transitions have been unequivocally felt around the world. See Gary Susman, "How Digital Conversion is Killing Independent Movie Theaters," *Rolling Stone*, September 4, 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/how-digital-conversion-is-killing-independent-movie-theaters-89265/>; Stuart Rintoul, "Australia's Last Single-Screen Cinemas," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 26, 2014, <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/australias-last-singlescreen-cinemas-20140925-10lx3g.html>; and Nick Vivarelli, "Report: Almost 90 Percent of the Planet's Movie Screens are Now Digital (Exclusive)," *Variety*, February 6, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/film/global/report-almost-90-percent-of-the-planets-movie-screens-are-now-digital-exclusive-1201426239/>.

campaign for each new innovation in encouraging theatre owners to upgrade to the latest industry standard in order to remain on the cutting edge of film exhibition and as they term to ‘meet the standards’ of the moviegoing audience, an audience that needs a (technological) reason to see a film on the big screen verses one of the myriad forms of home entertainment consumption.

In 2011, filmmaker James Cameron showcased High Frame Rate (HFR) capture and projection with footage shot at 24, 48, and 60 frames per second as one standard he was pushing with IMAX and other cinemas to showcase his projects (Figure 43).²⁵⁵ In 2012, Barco demonstrated laser systems followed by Dolby Atmos immersive sound in 2013.²⁵⁶ Even though other technology companies were producing similar products at the same time, like Barco’s Auro sound systems, only one company was selected to showcase their product in The Colosseum potentially gaining an industry edge. Walt Disney Studios took advantage of its exclusive premiere screening of the highly anticipated film *Inside Out* (2015) to showcase Dolby Vision, a new high-dynamic range (HDR) technology featured as the signature innovation for projection technologies.²⁵⁷ As digital technologies evolve—4K to 8K, HDR, immersive sound systems, high-dynamic range, and various digital 3D format improvements, etc.—NATO continues allowing privileged companies (often event sponsors and partners) to promote their products on the Colosseum stage, while others are relegated to trade show exhibits and breakout rooms.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Kevin Lally and Andreas Fuchs, “Loud and Clear: Technology Marches On At CinemaCon 2011,” *Film Journal*, April 20, 2011, <http://www.filmjournal.com/content/loud-and-clear-technology-marches-cinemacon-2011>.

²⁵⁶ Mayfield, “Converting The Colosseum: Leading Tech Companies Transform a Live-Performance Space into a State-of-the-Art Movie Theatre.”

²⁵⁷ Pete Hammond, “Disney Loves its Brands, But Pixar Steals The Show With Debut of ‘Inside Out’ – CinemaCon,” *Deadline*, April 22, 2015, <https://deadline.com/2015/04/disney-brands-pixar-inside-out-debut-cinemacon-1201414386/>.

²⁵⁸ As a participant-observer I have often wondered there is a perpetual pedaling of the latest digital technologies, each one promising a better “image” or “sound,” when theatre owners have only recently made such large investments in their current equipment. Does the industry expect a continual upgrade to occur, like replacing your iPhone with the latest model? There really seems to be no end in sight for when production, distribution, and

The Colosseum is then heralded by CinemaCon event promoters as the site of exclusive access in experiencing cutting edge technological innovations.

As discussed in Chapter three, advances in digital technologies in production, distribution or exhibition are not slowing down and theatre owners have felt these pressures already in digital cinema (digital cinema) upgrades. Yet, the pressure to create technological uniformity among all exhibitors is continually reinforced in The Colosseum each year. In this cultural arena, the separations between larger cinema chains and smaller, independent counterparts may not be visible, but theatres with lower fiscal budgets may not be equipped to make repeat investments. Instead, The Colosseum represents a further separation between those who can partake in upgrades for their cinemas (large chains and theatre conglomerates) from those smaller fiscal operations who may only experience these grand innovations at the CinemaCon event.

Studio-Hired Security Presence Promoting Exclusivity and Product Elevation

In her dissertation on Comic-Con and the evaluation of its industrious Hall H, where studios present never-before-seen promotional previews for upcoming movies and television programs, Erin Melissa Hanna concludes that this exclusive experience is contradictory in that the material is “presented as *exclusive* [sic] content for the *exclusive* [sic] collection of individuals in attendance, but it is ultimately intended to reach a much wider audience.”²⁵⁹ These paradoxical experiences are similarly represented in The Colosseum where strict security measures are in place to protect filmed properties, the privileged asset, yet the consumption of these materials are meant to generate excitement and produce word of mouth promotions via

technology companies will be satisfied with a format or mode of projection. Of the theatre owners I talked to many were resistant to replacing technologies with such urgency as the continued argument focuses on whether the audience will notice the change and how they can recoup this cost (where increasing concessions or ticket prices seems to be the only viable options).

²⁵⁹ Erin Melissa Hanna, “Making Fandom Work: Industry Space and Structures of Power at the San Diego Comic-Con” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 186.

hype and buzz throughout news outlets, social media, and among global exhibition and exhibitors. However, this element of ‘sharing’ is managed through protective security measures. For one, all of the facets of the industry are unified against piracy and redistributing content in an unintended (non-studio/distributor sanctioned) format. Secondly, the CinemaCon event is different from Comic-Con in that some content is screened in its entirety or large portions that are still in various phases of post-production. Despite being at a convention of film industry operatives, the film is still valued as privileged and protected text through security measures as well as through the declaration of the distributor. The property is used to promote, entice (as a marketing ploy for future distribution deals), and excite those exhibitors acting in-part as audience participants.

The sanctity of the film text is demonstrated through high-levels of internal and external security precautions. Where the inside of The Colosseum has been heavily surveilled since CinemaCon’s inception, as stated it has only been years 2017 and 2018 that the event has enacted security measures for those entering the theatre. Once inside vocal reminders tell the audience that no recording (video or audio) or photography of trademarked content is permitted. Suited security guards are positioned throughout the aisles with night-vision glasses in order to see lights from devices. If an offender is suspected, they shine a flashlight on the person as a warning to put a device away.²⁶⁰ One would imagine that the entire film industry would understand their common fight against piracy and that these protective measures would be redundant, yet the variety of stakeholders within the theatre, the exclusive nature of the

²⁶⁰ I was able to talk over a short coffee break with one of the security guards. He said that sometimes guards are hired for the event only or by a specific studio. The security of the content is serious due to piracy and illegally exposing content that may or may not actually make it into a final cut of a movie. When he was in the auditorium, he was very focused on ensuring the protections of the studio. This experience felt reminiscent of earlier exhibitor practices of hiring ushers who monitored patron behaviors during a film.

spectacle, and the prioritization of the film product necessitates this practice in elevating the value of Hollywood production.

Despite these highly visible protections, the actual rules governing the security of the content in The Colosseum are quite vague. While the auditorium is being seated the screen on stage proclaims in still or rotating images the logo and name of the presenting studio, sometimes accompanied by audio recordings to store devices. During my first two years attending, I took photographs of the stage and audience prior to the start of each performance and then never took out my phone or camera again. In recent years short trailer clips or sound bites have played along with this notification. Once the program starts, a key player or stakeholder with the distributing company may emcee the show, rotating in actors and performances as they promote their films. Sometimes a series of trailers are shown, clips of scenes or a 20-minute segment, or unfinished animation composites as they are sequenced out in the cutting room. In 2016, we learned that the stars could be photographed on stage as well as any of the performances or people talking. This transformed how individuals selected their seats with many vying for floor seats in order to be closer to the stage. However, the film text itself remains of utmost value. Rarely has anyone been removed from the theatre for not following security protocols, but several people have been asked to delete content when they videoed rotating clips prior to the show's start when the houselights were on. During these times security guards stood next to the person, watching to ensure that content was deleted from devices.

Studio Presentations as Ritual & Spectacle

“[The Colosseum] is a very, very exciting place to show off what’s coming in the way of Hollywood movies.”²⁶¹ John Fithian, CinemaCon 2011

²⁶¹ Reich, “NATO to Transform ShoWest Into CinemaCon.”

At CinemaCon, The Colosseum is the site where power relationships are continually swapped between stakeholders presenting on stage. For Studio Presentations, the studio becomes the power-driven spectacle on stage administering its carefully selected slate of upcoming films tailored for exhibitors through talent-laden performances and musical numbers (Figures 44, 45). Since these films are marketed as “advanced screenings,” “upcoming slate,” and “sneak peeks” they are promoted as exclusive premiere opportunities for the CinemaCon audience in order to generate hype and buzz in building distributor connections with exhibitor partners as well as “leak” or “expose” this information to participating media outlets in hopes that reviews create excitement for moviegoers (Figure 46). Some studios also play into the ritual of the experience by distributing exclusive promotional products for its movies in special gift bags or packages as attendees exit The Colosseum (Figure 47). However, as described below, the studio participation at CinemaCon is represented by both legacy partnerships and vetted by NATO.

Where ShoWest had a decline in distributor participation over time, CinemaCon has seen growth in studio participation with The Colosseum cited as a space of studio adoration for showcasing their film products. Since 2011, eleven different studios and distribution operations have participated at CinemaCon. Of these, only the privileged ‘major’ or legacy studios have been granted the opportunity to showcase their exclusive content at The Colosseum (Table 8). Other minor studios have instead been offered smaller breakfast and luncheon events within the Conference Center’s ballrooms.

Table 8: Studio Presence at CinemaCon, 2011-2018

Studio	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Amazon*						X	X	X
Entertainment Studios Motion Pictures**								X
FilmDistrict***	X							
Focus Features							X	X
Fox Searchlight Pictures	X							
Lionsgate	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Paramount Pictures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sony Pictures Entertainment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
STX						X	X	X
20 th Century Fox		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Universal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Walt Disney Studios	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Warner Bros. Pictures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Data culled from CinemaCon event programs between 2011-2018

*Amazon Studios has repeatedly previewed its content as the host of the final day's luncheon event in one of the Conference Center's ballrooms.

**Entertainment Studios Motion Pictures is a small distribution company that presented at a breakfast event.

***FilmDistrict was a small distribution company featured at luncheon event.²⁶²

The newest player invited to participate at CinemaCon is Amazon Studios (attending 2016-2018) (Figures 48, 49). This approval may come as somewhat of a shock given Fithian and NATO's history with Netflix and other alternative opportunists, like MoviePass and Screening Room, that have been regarded as anti-exhibition and anti-release window, an ongoing issue that has been at the forefront of NATO's lobbying efforts.²⁶³ Addressing this issue post-CinemaCon 2016, after Amazon's first appearance, Fithian said that,

²⁶² FilmDistrict's website appears to be in defunct with no updates since 2012. The few films under its USA distribution include Johnny Depp's feature *Rum Diary* (2011) and Ryan Gosling's *Drive* (2011).

²⁶³ On October 26, 2013, Ted Sarandos, chief content officer for Netflix, made a comment at the Tribeca Film Festival that theatre owners were going to 'kill' theatres and movies. Seeing that Fithian and NATO were already engrossed with a VOD and a release window battle with the studios since 2010, the feud between the two escalated back and forth through 2018. In 2017, Netflix signed a deal with iPic, a luxury theatre chain to release ten simultaneous movies in theatre and streaming, which was met with objections by NATO. In 2018 Netflix announced that they were interested in purchasing their own theatres. By late 2018, in a panel at the Toronto International Film Festival Fithian announced a signaling of a truce with the online company saying that Netflix's films were

“Some NATO members questioned us about the appearance of an Internet company at the convention. But as their presentation progressed, Amazon made it clear they won’t be another Netflix, and that they are committed to a theatrical release window with very interesting movies.”²⁶⁴

One consistency across all studio presenters at The Colosseum is that each showcase is a large-scale, elaborate spectacle. In addition to the privileged filmic presentations, significant funds are spent on performances and personalities brought on stage with the primary goals of generating hype and promoting exclusivity of the showcase event. In my three years of participating as an audience member at these rituals, the sheer number of A-list and supporting actors and actresses who have adorned the stage are impressive. Participants have included Sylvester Stallone, Johnny Depp, Keanu Reeves, Angelina Jolie, Drew Barrymore, Jason Statham, Seth Rogen, Melissa McCarthy, Jada Pinkett Smith, etc. These stars might present on their own or with their full cast ensembles for films such as *Jurassic World* (Universal Pictures, 2015), *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros., 2016), and *Bad Moms* (STX Entertainment, 2016). Sometimes these stars even come out in character like Arnold Schwarzenegger, who reprised his

welcomed at theatres and that they would find ways to co-exist. For more on the Netflix and NATO feud see Tom Lowry, “Tim Warner Ramps Up Premium VOD: Firm Explores New Digital Distribution Technologies,” *Variety*, November 3, 2010, <https://variety.com/2010/digital/news/time-warner-ramps-up-premium-vod-1118026821/>; Tom Lowry, “Cinema Chief Warns Against VOD: Early Premium Releases Tempt Pirates,” *Variety*, March 17, 2011, <https://variety.com/2011/film/news/cinema-chief-warns-against-vod-1118034027/>; Ted Johnson, “Ted Sarandos Backs Away From Day-and-Date Movies With Netflix,” *Variety*, November 4, 2013, <https://variety.com/2013/digital/news/ted-sarandos-backs-away-from-day-and-date-movies-with-netflix-1200794822/>; John Fithian, “John Fithian: Exhibitors and Distributors Continue to Debate Windows,” *Variety*, January 28, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/film/news/john-fithian-brawl-between-exhibitors-and-distributors-over-windows-isnt-done-1201416530/>; Todd Spangler, “Netflix CEO Reed Hastings Blasts Theater Owners As ‘Strangling’ Movie Business: Exec Also Says Streaming Provider’s Entry Into China ‘Doesn’t Look Good’,” *Variety*, October 7, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/digital/news/netflix-ceo-reed-hastings-theater-owners-strangling-1201881671/>; Brent Lang, “NATO Chief Sounds Alarm Over Netflix Deal With iPic,” *Variety*, October 5, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/news/netflix-ipic-1201879058/>; Brent Lang and Ramin Setoodeh, “Netflix and Bryon Allen Could Be Getting Into the Movie Theater Business,” *Variety*, April 19, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/netflix-byron-allen-movie-theater-1202761265/>; Brent Lang, “Movie Theaters Can Co-Exist With Netflix, Filmmakers, Executives Argue,” *Variety*, September 7, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/movie-theaters-can-co-exist-with-netflix-filmmakers-executives-argue-1202932041>.

264 John Fithian, “Executive Suite: CinemaCon 2016: Five Key Takeaways,” *Boxoffice* (May 2016): 18-19.

role as Guardian and rode his motorcycle on stage to a roar of approval from the audience for his *Terminator Genisys* (Paramount Pictures, 2015) reboot.

In terms of musical acts, Twentieth Century Fox stands out having kicked off several of its events with spectacular lightshows and costumed back-up dancers for Vanilla Ice, who performed “Ice Age Baby” from *Ice Age: Collision Course* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2016) and showgirls in feathered costumes that filled the auditorium aisles and stage to “Rio Rio,” the soundtrack number by Ester Dean and B.o.B., celebrating the release of *Rio 2* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2014). Even though these film exhibitors are part of the industry, they are still separated in distance from the production of films and contact with filmmakers and stars. Film exhibitors then are situated as both industry operative ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ as they embrace their fandom caught up in the spectacle and “woo” of these presentations.²⁶⁵ In conversations with attendees, seeing the stars or “star gazing” and going to The Colosseum for studio presentations was one of the CinemaCon experiences that they look forward to.

For the most part, CinemaCon activities in The Colosseum are meant to bring distribution and exhibition together as well as present a unified film industry. Recognizing their audience and the network of film exhibitors, both distributors and their stars use common rhetoric in thanking theatre owners for showing their films as the premiere site for consumption in efforts to highlight film exhibitions place at the Hollywood industry’s table. However, there have been several instances on stage where the seams of this unified façade were broken. For example, in 2014, its fourth year of CinemaCon operation, Dwayne Johnson, The Rock, ran onto the stage and thanked “Comic-Con” before realizing he said the wrong name. Stars throughout the event continued to forget where they were, repeatedly calling it “Comic-Con.” Were these stars really

²⁶⁵ Exhibitors, as fans, are swooped up into the excitement of star-gazing with photographic attempts made at The Colosseum as well as through limited ‘sightings’ around Caesars Palace.

too busy being flown from press junket to press junket to remember which event they were at before taking a major stage in front of 4000+ film exhibitors? Do celebrities really take film exhibition and film exhibitors seriously? These repeated moments of ‘forgetfulness’ demonstrated a fissure separating the ‘glitz and glam’ of Hollywood—studios, stars, and distributors—and the film exhibitors.

Another moment in The Colosseum that sparked intra-industry controversy was during John Fithian’s “CinemaCon State of the Industry” presentation during that same year. During his speech John Fithian revealed that he did not see *12 Years A Slave* (Fox Searchlight, 2014) because it was too intense for him to see in a theatre.²⁶⁶ This revelation was startling because here he was, on the main performance stage, telling his audience of film exhibitors, whom he represents that he didn’t support them. It also sent shockwaves to studios and distributors, as it went against the business practices and marketing of theatrical movies in general. Industry trade magazines were quick to report on this blunder and so did distributors. During its Studio Presentation, Twentieth Century Fox distribution president Chris Aronson fired back with, “All of (our) films are meant to be seen in the best possible venue, the cinema, your cinema and that includes movies that win the Oscar for Best Picture like *12 Years A Slave*.”²⁶⁷ These cracks in the seams of CinemaCon’s industry-building, unified event have sometimes been subtle, while at other times The Colosseum serves as a site for airing grievances and promoting clear stakeholder agendas.

²⁶⁶ John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry” (presentation, CinemaCon 2014, Las Vegas, NV, March 25, 2014).

²⁶⁷ Pete Hammond, “CinemaCon: 20th Century Fox Fires Back at NATO Chief For ‘12 Years A Slave’ Remarks,” *Deadline*, March 27, 2014, <https://deadline.com/2014/03/12-years-a-slave-comments-anger-fox-john-fithian-cinemacon-705304/>.

The Colosseum: Unity, Conflict, and Agency

Of all of the ‘voices’ that are represented on stage, it is the dramaturgical “CinemaCon State of the Industry” addresses by NATO’s president, John Fithian, that garner the most attention regarding the position, goals, and expressions of the (primarily) domestic film exhibition industry. Historically, the “State of the Industry” speech has been presented on the morning of the event’s second day. Fithian takes the stage to describe and identify key issues for film exhibition that are often protectionist positions that NATO is taking on behalf of exhibitors as the direct and representative ‘voice’ of exhibition in the regulatory environment.

In targeting his studio and distributor counterparts, his speeches have called for the protection of the release window for cinemas; a broader distribution of movies over twelve months; more family-friendly films; and films that cater toward diverse audiences and represent these audiences. Post-Paramount, exhibitors have remained the business partner with little to no say over which films are made, who stars in them, and what audience demographics they will target. These decisions have been left to the creators. When films are unsuccessful, the losses are felt over the entire industry. Theatres have made attempts to organize their own distribution and production channels, but these early efforts were not sustainable.²⁶⁸ In recent years, exhibitor companies like the Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas have had more success. Drafthouse Films was launched in 2010 as an ancillary distribution company by Tim League to circulate its own content in-house and distribute these smaller independent projects to wider audience markets.²⁶⁹ AMC and Regal made their own attempts to partner in funding and distributing films as well. On the other hand, in 2018, the Supreme Court announced that it was reopening the Paramount case

268 See Deron Overpeck, “Out of the Dark: American Film Exhibition, Political Action and Industrial Change, 1966-1986” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007).

269 “About,” *Drafthouse Films*, Accessed August 10, 2014, <http://drafthousefilms.com/about>.

to see if the original decision still held or whether studios would once again be able to own theatres allowing the reintroduction of vertical integration.²⁷⁰ In these ways, NATO's representation of film exhibition takes on a macro approach in championing the larger issues that affect all members, while it is unable to address the multiple smaller-scale issues faced by individual operations on stage.

The 'Global' Message of Unity

“The most important issues we face today are globally, and we must act globally. . . . There's a need for strong local trade organizations, and NATO wants to work in collaboration with them.”²⁷¹

The Colosseum is an arena where multiple industry stakeholders—studios, distributors, exhibitors, NATO, the MPAA—have the opportunity to applaud the industry with unifying messages as well as use the opportunity to address issues, debates and conflict in promoting the evolution of the field that is often from a hegemonic position. These rituals in The Colosseum allow stakeholders to “acknowledge their interdependence” while providing a “means of expressing the conflict and contradiction inherent in a field.”²⁷² As demonstrated, it is a celebratory space where exhibitors are made to feel the connection with its studio counterparts, as well as part of the larger global market. In promoting unity, The Colosseum is then a platform where significant focus is placed on the previous year's global box office successes and the globalization of the film industry.

270 The United States Department of Justice announced on August 2, 2018 that it was reopening the United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., 334 U.S. 131 (1948) court case to reevaluate its decision. It provided a 60-day notice for interested opinions to be submitted. NATO's main webpage contained a full-screen image announcing the news with a place for exhibitors to learn more and participate in an act of expressed agency in submitting documentation for the case. At the time of writing, the case has not been reviewed or its final verdict decided. For more on the subject visit The United States Department of Justice site <https://www.justice.gov/atr/paramount-decree-review>.

271 Sharon Swart, “Fithian Touts Global Plan At Expo,” *Variety*, June 28, 2000, <https://variety.com/2000/film/news/fithian-touts-global-plan-at-expo-1117783142>.

272 Anand and Watson, “Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards,” 63.

The ‘global box office’ and ‘globalization’ are commonly referenced terms used in presentations to frame the Hollywood film industry as a global film industry. Graphs, charts, numbers and dollar amounts are highlighted through PowerPoint and visual media-driven presentations on stage by all stakeholders in pointing out various points of national and international market successes (Figures 3, 4). On a macro-level, numbers illustrate overall box office figures and which countries generate the most profits, while on a micro-level, presenters point out age, gender, ethnic, etc. demographics of cinemagoing audiences (Figure 5). The diversifying audience has become a topic at the forefront for marketing exhibition, something that exhibitors have not addressed in the past.

“Historically, three of the biggest cinema markets were the United States, Europe, and Australia. And in the old days those territories weren’t nearly as diverse as they are today. Now, the overseas theatrical markets with the fastest growth rates are found in Asia and Latin America. And here in the U.S., Hispanics have the highest rate of cinema visits.”²⁷³

As noted in Chapter 3, many panels have tailored their topics to help exhibitors expand their marketing to target wider audiences (versus the old mindset that cinema audiences will come to theatres because of the marketing by distributors). Exhibitors have been challenged to take up their own marketing initiatives in order to meet their broadening audience needs (see the fiscal spending trends of domestic consumers in Appendix D).²⁷⁴

²⁷³ John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry” (presentation, CinemaCon 2016, Las Vegas, NV, April 12, 2016).

²⁷⁴ Some theatre operations have become more community-minded in efforts to reach their specific markets. AMC created international film programs for Indian Cinema, Asian-Pacific Cinema, and Pantallas, a Spanish-language cinema segment. Using these links, patrons can search for specific cinemas where featured programming is tailored toward population segments. Similarly, a Cinemark Theatre and B & B Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri features regular Bollywood films catering towards the Indian populations that exist in the city. See “AMC Theatre’s International Films,” AMC Theatres, Accessed November 6, 2018, <https://www.amctheatres.com/programs/international-films>.

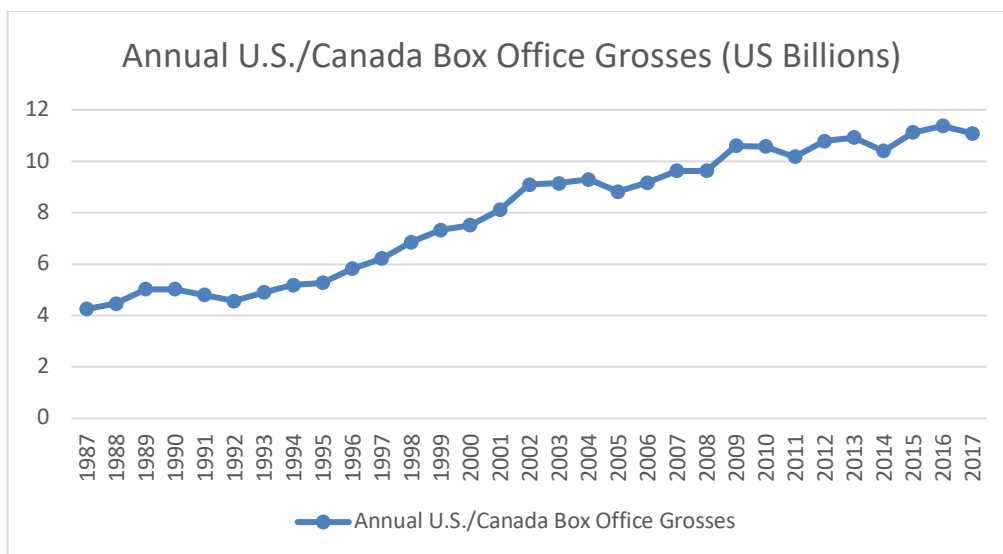


Figure 3: Annual Domestic Box Office Grosses

Source: 1992-1997, AC Nielsen EDI; 1998 and later, Rentrack Corporation. AC Nielsen uses an industry calendar beginning the first Friday of the year; Rentrak data employs a Jan. 1-Dec. 31 calendar.²⁷⁵

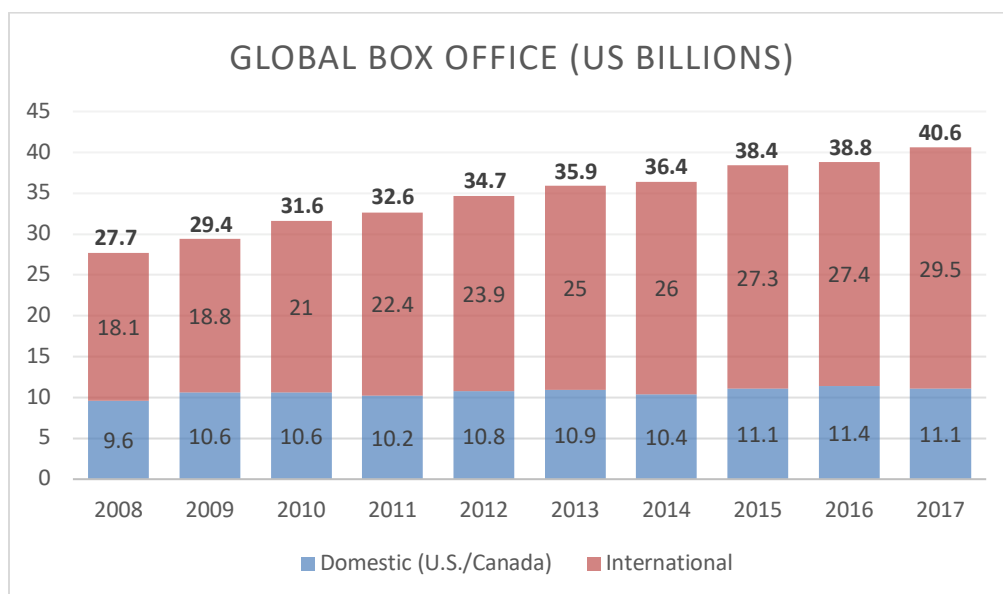


Figure 4: Global Box Office Gross

²⁷⁵ “Annual U.S./Canada Box Office Grosses,” National Association of Theatre Owners, Accessed June 3, 2018, <http://www.natooonline.org/data/boxoffice/>.

Source: 2008-2012 Rentrak Corporation, calendar year from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31st.²⁷⁶ 2013-2017 Comscore, calendar year from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31st.²⁷⁷

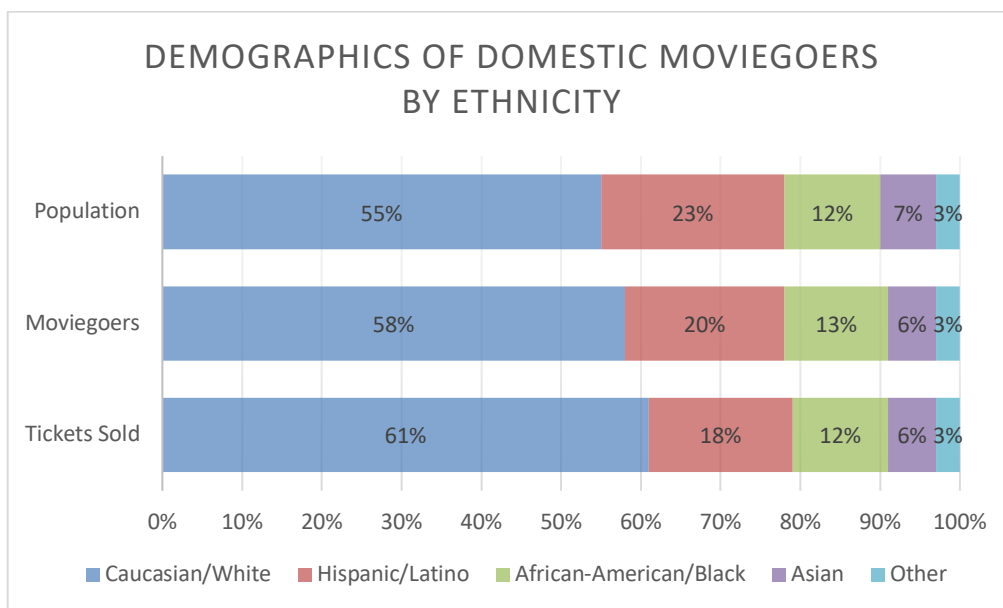


Figure 5: Ethnicity Share of Total Population, Moviegoers, and Tickets Sold Domestically in 2017

Source: Motion Picture Association of America, Inc.²⁷⁸

Cinematic audiences are changing as are the global markets where film trade has expanded. After the success of *Avatar* (2009) in China, the country opened its market to expanded cinema development and studios and cinema developers rushed in to take advantage of the trade opportunity.²⁷⁹ Suddenly, all of the industry pushed into China with the MPAA and Fithian reminding their audiences that record numbers of cinemas were being opened every year in the country, while the domestic industry, a mature market, saw small incremental growth with most of it due to consolidation of the industry with major chains acquiring others (see

²⁷⁶ Theatrical Market Statistics, Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., 2012, p. 4.

²⁷⁷ Theme Report: A Comprehensive Analysis and Survey of the Theatrical and Home Entertainment Market Environment (THEME) for 2017, Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., 2017: 7.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁷⁹ Clifford Coonan, "Chinese Audiences Embrace 'Avatar'," *Variety*, January 5, 2010, http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1118013377&categoryid=3599.

Appendices A, B).²⁸⁰ By 2016, the Chinese box office performance had declined and its movie theatre development slowed down, which was also representative of overall global box office performance during that year due to fluctuations in economic markets. With the fluctuation of the industry, and the variation in requirements for each country and region, NATO began asking whether it alone could serve the entire global industry as a domestic trade organization, despite its representation of 67,000 screens, the now standard unit of theatrical measurement for growth, in over 96 countries.²⁸¹ The global industry was evolving due to trade expansion, as was the exhibition field.

In his 2017 address, Fithian made a rare move in making a distinct politically-toned speech aimed at the current presidential administration's protectionist and isolationist agenda.

Fithian stated,

“NATO's second theme is a new one for the CinemaCon stage. Earlier we discussed global records at the box office. We should also talk about how our business benefits from a global world view. Open and diverse societies can drive movie attendance.”²⁸²

He started first by providing data representing the diversity of American moviegoing audiences. Then he shifted to discuss how this translates to global trade saying that, “A global world view also allows for the freer movement of goods.”²⁸³ NATO, exhibitors, and the MPAA, which represents studios and distribution, benefits from the global exchange of Hollywood films. Not only this, but Fithian pointed out that Mexican-based company Cinépolis buy popcorn and nacho cheese from the United States, so restrictive trade practices in general will hurt more industries than simply film products.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Patrick Frater, “China Adds 5,000 Cinema Screens in 2013,” *Variety*, January 14, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/biz/asia/china-adds-5000-cinema-screens-in-2013-1201062132/>.

²⁸¹ Membership, *NATO Online*, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://www.natoonline.org/membership/>.

²⁸² John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry,” (presentation, CinemaCon 2017, Las Vegas, NV, March 28, 2017).

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

These views are not new, as political economists have studied the issues of domestic film trade, globalization, hegemony and its effects on national cinema industries and cultures around world.²⁸⁵ However, using CinemaCon and The Colosseum stage as an industry event space to voice these ideas and concerns demonstrates the power and significance that NATO has in representing film exhibition as a key player and stakeholder in industry-related issues. It is recognized that John Fithian is a lobbyist serving the primary needs of the industry he is paid to protect. Through these “CinemaCon State of the Industry” addresses Fithian identifies the perceived needs of film exhibitors and protectionist areas as being against piracy; securing a profitable theatrical release window; requiring a full and diverse calendar of films; the production of movies for all ages; expanding access for patrons with disabilities; maintaining affordable tickets; upgrading and sustaining premium sound and image technologies; and promoting excellent customer service standards for theatres.²⁸⁶ While other film exhibitors exist on the periphery—Art House Convergence, the League of Historic Theatre Owners (LHAT), United Drive-In Theater Owners Association (U.D.I.T.O.A.), etc.—there is only NATO with the capabilities of fighting legislatively and working in tandem with major studios and distributors in protecting the needs of the domestic film exhibitor. Throughout its history, the organization has come under fire time and again for its relationships with large cinema chains and representing their interests at the expense of smaller operations who may not have been given an active ‘voice’ in the organization through membership or in the industry at-large. In recent years,

²⁸⁵ For more research on the effects of the Hollywood film industry’s globalization strategies I recommend the following texts: Colin Hoskins, Stuart McFadyen, and Adam Finn, *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Ting Wang and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2005); and Paul McDonald and Janet Wasco, *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

²⁸⁶ These areas were identified by John Fithian in his 2014, 2015, and 2016 “CinemaCon State of the Industry” addresses.

NATO has made efforts to draw in independent operators and now the aforementioned membership options for nonprofits operations in attempts to unify the domestic film exhibition industry, utilizing CinemaCon as an FCE that aides both a domestic and global agenda.

As Fithian closed his 2017 speech, he argued that “exhibition is itself becoming a global business.”²⁸⁷ For example, AMC has become a significant global powerhouse in expanding its chain over several continents. Fithian pointed out that the domestic-run, Chinese-owned company had acquired the Odeon and Nordic European theatre companies as well as Hoyts in Australia (see Appendix E, Giants of Exhibition and Global Giants of Exhibition).²⁸⁸ Similarly, CJ-CGV, a Korean-based company had purchased Mars theatres in Turkey with plans to open cinemas in the United States; and Cinépolis, a Mexican-based company, has cinemas in India, Spain, Latin America and the US.²⁸⁹ These issues and trends challenged whether NATO, a domestically-inclined organization, could serve the interests and needs of the international cinematic community signaling field evolution for film exhibition organizations and stakeholders.

After the 2017 CinemaCon event, delegates from representative film exhibitor organizations around the world met that summer, to formulate and announce the establishment of a worldwide exhibitor organization, the Global Cinema Federation (GCF). This new organization, of which NATO is a member released a series of “Position Papers” on topics of exclusivity and preserving the theatrical release window; international trade and investment and

²⁸⁷ John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry,” (March 28, 2017).

²⁸⁸ While this expansion might be fiscally favorable for a conglomerate like the Dalian Wanda Group, consolidation for a market in stasis, also signifies a loss for the consumer. Variety becomes limited. Pricing becomes fixed or inflated based on the lack of competition.

²⁸⁹ John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry,” (March 28, 2017).

legal information for those interested in investing across borders; and piracy, music rights, and accessibility. Reinforcing the position of all three film industry branches, its site proclaims

“Cinema going today is a global and dynamic phenomenon, with growing annual box office returns of \$ 40.6 billion increasingly evenly spread across the World. With the rapid development of the industry in Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, the operators involved recognize the extent to which the business opportunities and policy challenges they face – such as film theft, technology standards, theatrical release practices, international trade practices and the highly valued relationship with partners in film distribution – are shared by counterparts across territories.

To address these issues and raise the profile of cinema with global regulatory bodies and industry partners, eleven leading cinema operators and the two most internationally-active trade bodies have come together to found the Global Cinema Federation, a federation of interests intended to inform, educate and advocate on behalf of the sector worldwide.”

In 2018, the schedule for the International Day included presentations organized by members of the Global Cinema Federation. Programming by the GCF echoed Fithian’s address in recognizing the growth potential of the film industry, and film exhibitors specifically, with the reopening of the Saudi Arabian market after 35 years.²⁹⁰

In all of the hype and commentary for the global box office and global industry, sitting among the large theatrical conglomerates and chains are small independent theatre operations which cannot be ignored. These operations may be enchanted to see stars, excited about the successes of films that went through their cinemas, and interested in the industry knowledge that is shared about the global market. However, the argument since the organization of movie theatre exhibitors has been in how one organization, NATO, and one national event, CinemaCon, can serve the interests and needs of all domestic and international operations. On one hand, The

²⁹⁰ AMC became the first theatre company to gain access to the Saudi Arabian market opening its first cinema on April 18, 2018. See Jake Coyle, “AMC to Open Saudi Arabia’s First Movie Theater,” *Star Tribune*, April 4, 2018, <http://m.startribune.com/index.php/amc-to-open-saudi-arabia-s-first-movie-theater/478794603/?section=politics>; and Patrick Corcoran, “NATO Hails Opening of Saudi Arabian Movie Theater Market,” *CinemaCon Press Release*, December 11, 2017.

Colosseum represents the globalization and conglomeration of the industry. On the other hand, it represents a form of access to knowledge and information. Smaller operations have instead taken advantage of events such as the Art House Convergence annual convention that caters towards arthouse and independent theatres or through membership with the League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT) and attendance at their national convention.²⁹¹

These industry presentations have served to continue the promotion of industry-related knowledge across all markets, while also promoting messages of unification, homogenization, and the globalization of film exhibition. As the Hollywood industry has maintained a globalized view of film trade, exhibitors have joined in championing the global expansion of movie theatre businesses into current and new markets. These efforts to promote favorable views of industry development are inhibited by ritual events and ceremonies that continue to unify stakeholders, privilege the film product, and garner prestige for key participants and talent.

Awards Ceremonies as a Cultural Economy of Prestige

For its first national convention in 1966, during its inaugural year as an organization, NATO included an awards ceremony as part of its event programming. NATO awards were given to actors and actresses at the time in what they held as ‘bringing the industry together.’²⁹² This tradition has been maintained throughout its national conventions into its partnership with ShoWest. As Anand and Watson have argued, ceremonial industry events are important for field evolution because they draw ‘transorganizational’ stakeholders together for joint sensemaking

²⁹¹ A forthcoming paper on the Art House Convergence FCE will analyze the event as a small-scale film exhibitor function that serves the needs of its niche membership, where some are known to attend both domestic industry events.

²⁹² In 1960 the Theatre Owners of America (TOA) national organization created its own Oscar Awards liaison committee to see how film exhibition could provide support and be included as part of the industry’s ceremonial event. See “TOA, Academy Set Up Oscar Awards Liaison,” *Boxoffice* 78, no. 3 (November 7, 1960): 15.

activities.²⁹³ As ‘tournament rituals’ these events are opportunities for stakeholders to acknowledge, affirm, and adapt to changes in the field.²⁹⁴

Over the course of the CinemaCon convention, the tradition or ritual of giving awards honoring various national and international exhibitors and representatives are delivered over breakfasts, luncheons and dinners. However, it is the final “CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards” that garners the most attendance and attention. In the world of film awards, festivals and ceremonies (the Academy Awards, Golden Globes, etc.), film exhibitors and the exhibition industry appear far removed from the hype and validation of these events. This is due to the attention and prestige having been directed on the film property, its studio/producer, filmmakers, and above-the-line participants (producers, writers, actors and actresses, etc.). Yet, as film exhibitors may argue, without film exhibition sites these films could not obtain such a vast global audience or critical acclaim. The movie theatre is still touted as the premiere site for bringing these filmed products to audiences and generating the box office revenues that feed the largest film earnings back to the producer, and as mentioned, is continually referenced by distributors, filmmakers, actors and actresses, and exhibitors on stage at The Colosseum. The question then becomes why CinemaCon, a film exhibitor event, hosts an award ceremony where accolades are given to producers and artists as its final end of the event function?

The research of James F. English explores this very concept of the economy of prestige and cultural capital gained by various fields fashioning awards ceremonies for the purpose of generating industry influence and notoriety. He writes, “

“Every field (by virtue of its recognition *as* [sic] a field) is possessed of its own forms of capital, its own rules of negotiation and transaction, its own boundaries and constraints, above all its own unique stakes, and none may be simply reduced to any of the others. . . . Yet every field may be understood as part of a general economy of practices, a broad

²⁹³ Anand and Watson, “Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards,” 76.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

social logic that involves interested participants, with their varying mixtures or portfolios of capital, in the struggle over various collectively defined stakes, and above all in the struggle for power to produce value, which means power to confer value on that which does not intrinsically possess it.”²⁹⁵

In the grand scheme of film awards and prizes, the “CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards” may not have extrinsic value in the economic sense nor does it wield direct power toward industry change, but it may be perceived as holding a “place within the ‘weightless economy’ not only in the category of entertainment but in the equally critical and even more rapidly expanding category of ‘business knowledge.’”²⁹⁶ In their research, Anand and Watson found that ceremonies construct “prestige hierarchies that both enable and constrain actors’ abilities to form relationships with others in the field.”²⁹⁷ In this way, awardees may gain access to labor over those who do not win. The CinemaCon award may not hold the same value as an Oscar, but it can shape how industry stakeholders view exhibition and exhibitors and build that relationship across fields.

In all appearances, the “CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards” ceremony is a highly organized, technologically enhanced event with industry-level glamor and production values (Figures 50, 51). Advertised as a dress-up occasion, there is a break in the schedule to allow attendees time to prepare for the event. Entrance to The Colosseum follows the same procedure as the other activities, but the main floor is reserved for studios, partners, celebrities, and representatives of large cinema companies with the remaining audiences sent to the balcony. For its production, the stage is re-designed with multiple projection screens bringing audiences closer to those on stage through close-ups on the action. Since Coca-Cola is the principle event

²⁹⁵ James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 9.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁹⁷ Anand and Watson, “Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards,” 76-77.

sponsor, lighted marketing signage and LED screens promote its partnership with NATO. The event is guided by an emcee, in similar format to other awards shows, flowing from one award to the next with speeches that shower accolades upon CinemaCon and film exhibitors.²⁹⁸ Appendix F includes the awards given at CinemaCon between 2011-2018.²⁹⁹ There is also a special category, the NATO Marquee Award, that is designated for an outstanding film exhibitor—cinema owner or chain representative—each year. This internal award promotes loyalty among its members by honoring one of NATO’s own. After the awards show attendees are shuffled to the Caesars Palace garden where the Coca-Cola After Party has live music performed by famous artists, several food and dessert tables, and an open bar (Figure 52).

The inclusion of such an event is an attempt to solidify the film exhibition industry and NATO’s status as a valued player and active voice in the industry as it plays a role in selecting and recognizing actors, directors, producers, and studio representatives.³⁰⁰ This cultural arena, The Colosseum, allows the film exhibitor to feel a part of the created hype and excitement, despite its spectacle, while contributing to industry knowledge-building and the production of culture.

²⁹⁸ Billy Bush, of NBC’s *Today* show, was the emcee of the event until 2017, when Natalie Morales of *Access Hollywood* took over. Bush fell into public disgrace when fired in 2016 from NBC for his role in a 2015 *Access Hollywood* tape where disparaging comments were made towards women. See Hilary Weaver, “Billy Bush Says That ‘as a man,’ Being Fired from the *Today* Show was the ‘Ultimate Degradation,’” *Vanity Fair*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/01/billy-bush-calls-being-fired-the-ultimate-degradation>.

²⁹⁹ The CinemaCon award categories have fluctuated from year to year. Part of this could be due to the event being relatively new and working toward finding its place in the awards-giving arena of ceremonial activities. Another reason might be that CinemaCon and John Fithian, as represented by his “State of the Industry” addresses, have maintained a level of relevancy in recent years in response to industry-related messages and activities. For example, Fithian has championed diversity in film as well as the need for more female presence in all aspects of the industry. It created a special award in 2015 “Breakout Filmmaker of the Year” for Elizabeth Banks and awarded the entire female cast of *Bad Moms* (2016) for Female Stars of the Year, a category generally reserved for one winner. Yet, there is still areas for award diversity, such as the inconsistently given Action Hero of the Year award that has remained biased toward the male gender.

³⁰⁰ ShoWest, Show-A-Rama, NATO’s national conventions, and the early conventions of the TOA, Allied and the like all included some sort of ceremonial awards aspect to their annual conventions. Yet, only CinemaCon and ShoWest awards are recognized on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) next to the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes and all of the elite film festivals, such as Sundance, Cannes, and Telluride, etc.

Dissemination of CinemaCon Industry Knowledge

The events at The Colosseum, and throughout the entire CinemaCon FCE, are opportunities for all industry partners to build and share knowledge, ideas, and values relative to the field. While these events and ‘happenings’ are captured and immediately published by journalists and news media outlets, NATO also generates its own publications. Referred to as “social and reputational resources” by Lampel and Meyer (2008: 1026-27), these resources are examples of what Caldwell calls “semi-embedded deep texts” that reveal inter-group relations and activities to the public (2009: 202). As part of the CinemaCon ritual, exclusive copies of CinemaCon-themed special issues of *Boxoffice* magazine are distributed to all attendees, additional issues are also sent to all *Boxoffice* magazine subscribers (Figures 53, 54). Fithian’s “CinemaCon State of the Industry” speeches are subsequently transcribed and distributed through the organization’s main website, as well as articles written by him published in *Variety* and *Boxoffice* recapping the event. These texts are semi-promotional works that highlight the event’s activities, programming, awards, celebrity attendees and performances. There is little self-reflection or dissent in these stories, meaning the unity, exclusivity, and ritualistic aspects of the CinemaCon narrative is maintained.

Another tool used by CinemaCon and NATO throughout the event is their CinemaCon App and social media accounts (Figure 55). These tools draw both attendees and non-participants toward elevated activities as they occur. Social media and the Internet could then be viewed as significant resources for NATO in expanding its digital reach and controlling its visibility and presentation instead of relying on outside media sources, such as *Variety* to be its mouthpiece. In this way, NATO is able to dictate and control the messaging, ideas, and recaps of its event as the official ‘voice’ of the film exhibition industry.

However, as discussed previously, not all exhibitors operating in the industry are NATO members or have been eligible for membership in the organization. Small independent operations, arthouse, historic theatres, and nonprofits have remained on the periphery until only recently. Even large corporations, such as AMC had quit NATO membership for a period of time until it reentered to the organization in 2004.³⁰¹ CinemaCon in this way, is an FCE that has enabled NATO to reestablish networks—internal and external—in order to further advance its position in the film industry and maintain an active and visible voice for exhibition.

Summary

As a cultural arena and space, The Colosseum hosts the largest and most impactful “ceremonial and dramaturgical” events of CinemaCon. These activities are transorganizational in bringing together multiple stakeholders on stage through direct and indirect communication with one another. This chapter has addressed the complex and sometimes delicate balance between powered relationships of studios, distributors, and exhibitors. Studio presentations have contributed to the promotion and hype for film products and global box office success that have been supported and contested through the speeches of NATO’s president John Fithian. His “State of the Industry” addresses are the representative ‘voice’ of exhibitors and the vetted issues that affect all exhibitor members on a large-scale. Exhibitors who have special interests and needs may not find these part of the CinemaCon experience and instead turn towards niche conventions catering to a smaller theatrical market. The final event, the “CinemaCon Big Screen

301 Since 2004, NATO has maintained active membership of all major chains. See Carl Diorio, “AMC Quits NATO: Fourth-Largest Exhib Cites Need for ‘Flexibility’,” *Variety*, March 26, 2011, <https://variety.com/2001/film/news/amc-quits-nato-1117795976/>; Variety Staff, “Carmike Strikes a NATO Accord,” *Variety*, April 29, 2003, <https://variety.com/2003/film/markets-festivals/carmike-strikes-a-nato-accord-1117885395/>; Gabriel Snyder, “AMC’s Back in NATO Fold After Hiatus: Exhib Returns After Three-Year Break,” *Variety*, November 3, 2004, <https://variety.com/2004/film/markets-festivals/amc-s-back-in-nato-fold-after-hiatus-1117912946/>.

Achievements” award ceremony allows a unification of the industry and film exhibitors to contribute to knowledge in the field in bestowing prestige on NATO-selected awardees. Through this juxtaposition of events, The Colosseum becomes a space of exclusivity, prestige, and industry knowledge-sharing that effects field evolution for film exhibition, the film industry, and the CinemaCon FCE.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Future of CinemaCon and Film Exhibition FCEs

“The movie industry is not a zero-sum game. The more movie lovers we can create, the better off we all are. And it starts with movie theaters. . . . I have worked with NATO members for 26 years. I can’t begin to tell you how often reporters have asked me if the movie theater industry is dying. Every downturn in admissions is a sign of secular decline, every innovation or improvement is intended to “save” [sic] the movie theater business. There has been a lot of hype about the next “disruption” [sic]. VHS. DVD. Streaming. Shortened windows. PVD. Subscriptions and simultaneous release. Yet we never die but remain a strong business in the face of disruption everywhere else in the entertainment landscape.”³⁰² John Fithian, 2018

The film exhibition industry has been a lucrative arm of the film industry since its inception in the late 19th century. It has been subject to technological, aesthetic, social, political, and economic stimuli. While media has often portrayed the industry as struggling to survive since the implementation of the television, film exhibition has maintained consistent market growth by continually reinventing itself from the nickelodeon to single-screen to multiplexes to mega-plex to the contemporary venture ‘cultureplex’ as community-minded, one-stop venues offering alternative content, diverse food choices and ‘cinema eatery’ concepts, and experiences as the cinema itself evolves in the new millennium.

Although many scholars recognize the changes this industry has undertaken and the contributions it has made to the film industry (Gomery, 1992; Waller, 2002; Acland, 2003; and Maltby, Biltereyst, and Meers, 2011), this study argues for an internal approach through participant-observation and immersive field research of the inter-workings of film exhibitors and NATO in order to identify the ‘voice’ of the film exhibition industry operating through its largest FCE, CinemaCon. By applying an event studies model, this research presented a case for the study of film exhibitor field-configuring events—conventions, expos, and trade shows—as

³⁰² John Fithian, “CinemaCon State of the Industry” (presentation, CinemaCon 2018, Las Vegas, NV, April 24, 2018).

mechanisms for understanding exhibitor organizations and stakeholders, and their ability to evoke evolution in the field of film exhibition and effect the film industry at large. However, it was revealed that while exhibitor-oriented events may present and encourage a unified front, there remain fissures in the seams where voices of dissent among exhibitors themselves and their studio and distributor counterparts are evident.

Film exhibitor conventions were predicated upon the need to unify the vast network of film exhibitors from coast to coast partly in response to demands introduced by production and distribution counterparts in the early 1900s via the Trust and the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC). Illustrated in the historical overview of Chapter 2, these first conventions and trade shows were part of the growing field of event industries and convention bureaus forming in major cities nation-wide and trending throughout the world. These early events were viewed as significant means of information sharing, conducting business and settling disputes, as well as showcasing the latest technological trends and film products.

The exhibition industry also faced changes to its economic and organizational structuring as exhibitors struggled to find common ground. By the 1920s and 30s, exhibitors were split between those who were tied to studios and those who were independently operated as identified by their two opposing organizations—Allied States and the Theatre Owners of America. After the Paramount decision, exhibitors finally came together in forming one trade organization, the National Association of Theatre Owners, in 1966 to fight for common interests and needs for the entire film exhibition industry. The unification of the industry still took time, as exhibitors still argued their differences in ownership and state and regional identifications. However, one constant remained, the production of an annual film exhibition industry convention and trade show put on by NATO national, then ShoWest, and finally the primary event today, CinemaCon.

Through a case study analysis that involved three years of participation and observation, this research identified the structure and programming of CinemaCon and its contributions to the field. As a NATO-owned event, CinemaCon is the largest film exhibitor and film industry convention and trade show attended by domestic and international exhibitors in over 80 countries. Drawing upon the organizational research of Lampel and Meyer (2008) and Brian Moeran and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen (2009), Chapter 3 addressed CinemaCon's spatial, temporal, social and functional programming in analyzing its field-specific and organizationally-specific culture of exclusivity. At CinemaCon, the active voice of the exhibitor, via NATO and exhibitor affiliates, are promoted through programming and the generation of knowledge as well as marketing practices that privilege technologies and formats through mandates as well as the generation of 'buzz' and industry hype.

These concepts were further explored in Chapter 4 which analyzed The Colosseum as a space, or cultural arena, where multiple stakeholders take the stage in exclusive ceremonial and dramaturgical activities. The experience at The Colosseum is further heightened through its varied levels of access, security, and technological presentations. The juxtaposition of activities—studio presentations, NATO's industry address and the final awards ceremony—further highlight and promote prestige, differentiation, inclusion/exclusion, and uneven power relationships separating distributors, exhibitors, affiliates and media stakeholders participating at CinemaCon. Yet, these parties work together in arguing for a sustainable global industry of box office success and expansion into untapped markets, though the benefits reaped through globalization are felt more soundly by Hollywood and large, global cinema chains.

As an event, CinemaCon has made significant impacts as maintaining a platform for the film exhibition industry to voice its concerns and issues. Fithian's "State of the Industry"

addresses have a clear NATO-driven and film exhibition-focused agenda in touching on topics of diversity, expansion, and protectionist criteria for film exhibitors. The changing global exhibition market that has seen consolidation, investment, and markets open toward Hollywood film, as well as policies felt by the current presidential administration, has led to exhibition's creation of a new organization, the Global Cinema Federation, of which NATO is a member, in servicing those interests of the international community.

Research of film exhibitor events is only in its beginning with ample opportunities to promote a better understanding of the functions and operations of domestic (and international) film exhibitor organizations, stakeholders, and impacts of their conventions and events. Domestically, events such as ShoWest, ShowCanada, and Show-A-Rama are only a few examples of large-scale film exhibitor conventions that have not been studied on their own. At the same time, there is a need for further research of small independent organizations and their events. Studies on the League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT) and the United Drive-In Theatres of America (UDITOA) could prove significant in their illustrations of the varied needs and interests of all theatre business types. These studies of independent cinema operations also include the forthcoming research of the Arthouse Convergence organization and its annual convention event (2008+) held in Midway, Utah that started in association with the Sundance Film Festival. Where the interests of film exhibitor remain consistent on several high-level issues—retaining the release window, piracy, a broad calendar schedule, family-friendly films, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, etc.—specialty concerns of historic restoration and navigating grants for not-for-profits may be better served in these smaller niche environments. However, the October 2018 issue of *Boxoffice* magazine announced that NATO

had changed its bylaws to give nonprofit cinemas membership eligibility.³⁰³ The effects of this announcement are yet to be seen as ramifications could include programming adjustments or special sessions aimed toward nonprofits, similar to those set aside for the independent theatre operators at CinemaCon 2019 or subsequent events.

The film exhibition industry is one section of the industry that warrants more research and case studies. Understanding field-configuring events, like CinemaCon, provides insights into organizational structures that drive industry goals and interests. Fithian's comments in his 2018 "State of the Industry" address about the dismissive attitudes that exist about the field of film exhibition highlight this need even more. These FCEs serve in providing both a platform for the voice of the exhibitor to be heard, as well as opportunities for building unity in the film industry and maintaining its relevancy and contribution to field evolution.

³⁰³ Kathy Conroy, "Nonprofits Bring A Unique Perspective to NATO," *Boxoffice*, October 2018, p. 24, 26.

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Figures

All CinemaCon photography taken by the author.
Maps were scanned from CinemaCon badge and passport programs.



Figure 6: Advertisement for 1934 MPTOA Convention, *Film Daily*

OFFICIAL CALL, 1919
 NATIONAL CONVENTION
Motion Picture Exhibitors of America
 —————INCORPORATED—————
 HOTEL STATLER, ST. LOUIS, MO.
 WEDNESDAY, June 25th - - to - - SATURDAY, June 28th

Every Exhibitor in America is Invited and Requested to Attend

A Business Meeting

EXCLUSIVELY FOR EXHIBITORS, BY EXHIBITORS, OF EXHIBITORS

Interspersed with

**PLEASURE, A GOOD TIME AND
GET TOGETHER**

More Exhibitors will attend this National Convention than any Convention in our history.
 The National Organizations have been consolidated and re-organized into one body working on a sound business basis. An Exhibitors Organization without entangling alliances.
 The National Organization is offering real aid, protection and benefits that more than pay membership fees and the cost of attending the meetings.

<p>Take your Annual Vacation Attend your National Convention Benefit by the exchange of ideas Some big surprises await you</p>	<p>A hearty welcome is extended you by St. Louis Forward March! to St. Louis, June 25-26- 27-28</p>
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If you are not a member you are all the more welcome to come and join

Motion Picture Exhibitors of America, Inc.

<p><i>National President</i> PETER SCHAEFER, Chicago, Ill.</p>	<p><i>National Vice-President</i> MARCUS LOEW, New York City, N. Y.</p>
<p><i>National Treasurer</i> ERNEST H. HORSTMANN, Boston, Mass.</p>	
<p><i>For full information, address,</i> National Secretary, FRANK REMBUSCH, Indianapolis, Ind., 1108 I. O. O. F. Bldg.</p>	<p><i>For Reservation Address,</i> HECTOR M. PASMEZOGLU, Chairman of Convention Committee, 302 Chestnut Street, St. Louis, Mo.</p>

Figure 7: Advertisement for the 1919 National Convention, *Motion Picture News*



Figure 8: Decorated Entrance to the Caesars Palace Conference Center, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 9: LED Advertising by Coca-Cola and NATO, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 12: Inside Out (Disney, 2015) Movie Poster, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 13: Star Trek Beyond (Paramount Pictures, 2016) Movie Poster, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 14: Movie-Themed Elevators, CinemaCon 2016

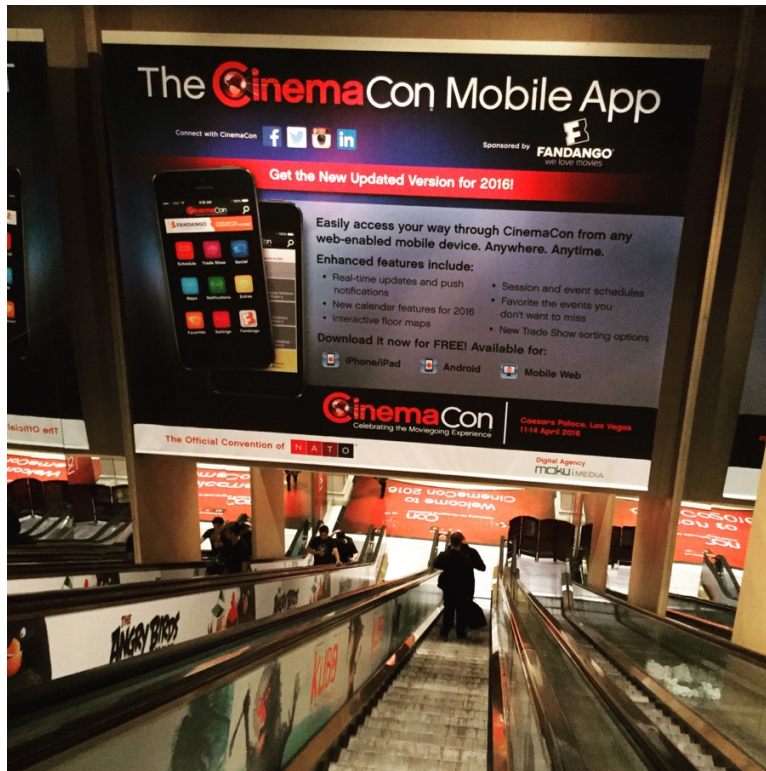


Figure 15: Signage for CinemaCon App, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 16: Pixels Car, *Pixels* (Columbia Pictures, 2015), CinemaCon 2015



Figure 17: Raphael Statue, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows* (Paramount Pictures, 2016), CinemaCon 2016



Figure 18: CinemaCon Registration Area, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 19: CinemaCon Badge with International Day and Domestic Passports, CinemaCon 2014



Figure 20: CinemaCon Booklet and Badge, CinemaCon 2016

YOUR GUIDE TO THE CAESARS PALACE CONFERENCE CENTER

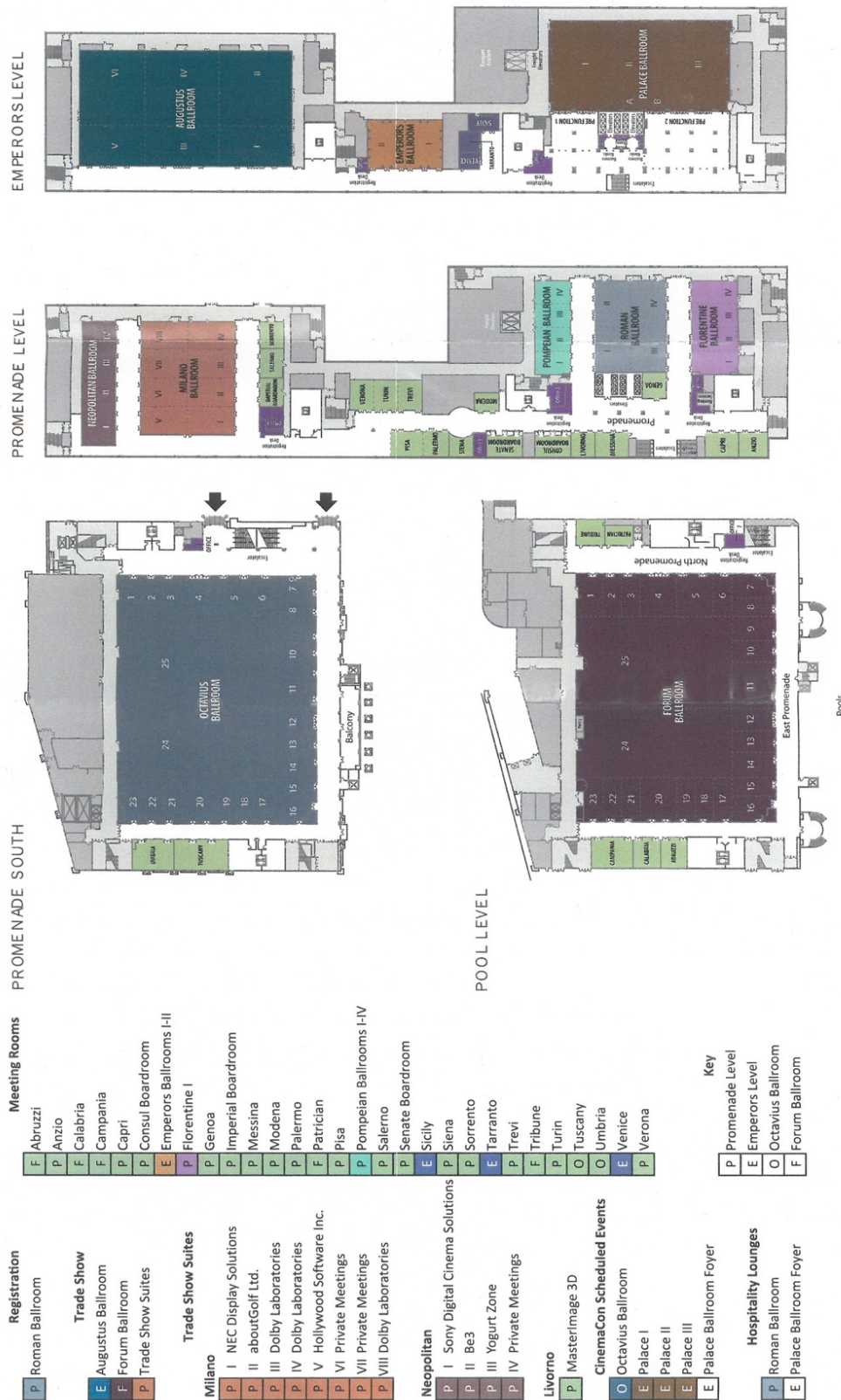


Figure 21: Map of Caesars Palace Convention Center found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014

CinemaCon 2014 Trade Show Booths

For Corporate Suite Listing Please Refer to Milano & Neopolitan Ballrooms Diagram on Back Page

A Augustus Ballroom	F Forum Ballroom				
A.R. Mays Construction	332F	Femmes, Falales & Fantasies, Inc.	2819A	Packaging Concepts, Inc.	824F
aboutGolf Ltd.	Milano 2	Figueras International Seating S.L.	2709A	Paradigm Design, Inc.	124F
ACS Enterprises	631F	Filmack Studios	224F	Partner Tech USA	937F
Adaptive Micro Systems	1029F	Film-Tech Cinema Systems	2718A	Peach Digital LTD.	2015A
Advanced Specialty Lighting	2125A	First Audio Manufacturing Co. Ltd.	2217A	Pelican Productions	718F
All Cinema Sales & Services	928F	FOCUX Technology LLC	1008F	PepsiCo Foodservice	101F
American Cinema Equipment, Inc.	2611A	Franklin Designs	317F	Philips Specialty Lighting	2607A
American International Concession Products	825F	Frankston Packaging	117F	Photo Research Inc.	2805A
American Licorice Company	628F	Funacho & Pretzelhaus Bakery	931F	Photon Communications	2822A
AnHui Star Screen Co., Ltd.	2221A	Fuyi Acoustics Products Design		Popcornopolis	919F
Arts Alliance Media	2809A	Development Co., Ltd.	924F	Pot O' Gold	112F
AutoFry - MTI	1032F	GDC Technology of America LLC	2318A	Power Direct	731F
Ballantyne Strong, Inc.	2403A	Gehl Foods, Inc.	816F	Preferred Popcorn	424F
Barco-Digital Cinema	2313A	Gold Medal Products	707F	Prime Ticket	119F
Bass Elements, Inc.	936F	Golden Link Inc.	120F	Proctor Companies	113F
Be3	Neopolitan 2	Golterman & Sabo	918F	Progressive Flooring Services Inc.	2006A
Benchmark Games	137F	Great Western	418F	The Promotion In Motion Companies, Inc.	207F
Betson Enterprises	227F	Greystone Seating Holdings, LLC	2719A	ProSTAR Industries	231F
BGW Systems	2002A	Grupo MCI - Mundocolor Holding S.L.	2817A	QSC Audio Products	213F
Boca Systems, Inc.	720F	Guangzhou Plato New Materials Co., Ltd.	2124A	Quest Cinema Equipment,	
Bright Star Systems Corp.	2325A	GXM	2214A	a division of Thermo-Stor, LLC	2013A
Brintons	829F	Haaga Sweepers	2802A	RadioBoss 2-Way Radios	729F
Brunswick Bowling	126F	Harkness Screens	2411A	RCM Media, Inc.	1031F
Burgeree new Technology Materials Co., Ltd.	929F	HB Optical	2220A	Ready Theatre Systems	2225A
Business Russia, LLC	1019F	The Hershey Company	1004F	Red Hot Chicago	1016F
C. Cretors and Co.	413F	High Performance Stereo	2001A	RedSeat Entertainment	2024A
C2C Environmental, Inc.	2012A	Highlands Technologies Solutions	1028F	Retriever Software Inc.	830F
Caddy Products	521F	Hollywood Movie Money	1005F	Reynolds & Reynolds	817F
Caiz Optonics Ltd.	2119A	Hollywood Software Inc.	Milano 5	Ricos Products Co, Inc.	319F
California Seating + Repair Co. Inc.	836F	Hytex Industries Inc	629F	Royal Paper Corporation	912F
Callahan Digital Cinema, Inc. (CDC)	306F	The ICEE Company	109F	SCA Tissue North America	1009F
Camatic Seating	713F	ICTA - International Cinema		Schneider Optics Inc	2210A
CardioReady	2821A	Technology Association	2218A	Schult Industries	819F
The Cawley Company	108F	Infinite Peripherals	2703A	SE Rising	2011A
Chestnut Identity Apparel	337F	Inorca Seating	913F	Seating Concepts	513F
Christie	2103A	INTEG Process Group	2716A	Senor Tech	130F
Cima Network, Inc.	927F	Inter-Grain & Kadosa Int'l.	917F	Servtson Screens	2010A
Cine Digital Manager	2426A	International Electrical Wire & Cable Inc	1020F	Shenzhen Hengchuangbolai Technology	2725A
Cinecolor	2424A	Irwin Seating Company	201F	Simply Right	437F
Cinedavis GmbH	2724A	Isis	2008A	SLS Audio	237F
Cinema Equipment & Supplies/Cinevise	2211A	J&J Snack Foods Corp	1025F	Sonic Equipment Company	2524A
Cinema Lighting Corp	529F	Jack Roe USA Inc.	907F	Sonic Tier	2115A
Cinema Scene Marketing	831F	JBL Professional / CROWN	301F	Sony Digital Cinema Solutions	Neopolitan 1
Cinema Solutions	219F	JKR Partners, LLC	225F	Soundfold Inc.	916F
Cinemeccanica SPA	2715A	Jolly Time Pop Corn	828F	Spa On The Go	132F
CJ 4DPLEX	2003A	The Kernel Kover	102F	SSDC	2804A
CKGroove Corporation	2406A	Kernel Seasons	920F	Stadium Savers LTD.	129F
The Coca-Cola Company	401F	Kings Command Foods	2307A	Stadium Seating Enterprises	329F
Color Ad Packaging	925F	Kinocreativ	318F	State Fair Mini Donuts USA Inc.	732F
ConAgra Foods	531F	Klipsch Group	2519A	Stein Industries	305F
Continental Concession Supplies Inc.	520F	Krix Loudspeakers	2316A	Summit Foods, Inc.	226F
Creative Works, Inc.	232F	Lancer Corporation	221F	Taste Of Nature, Inc.	320F
CRU	2815A	LBI/BOYD Acoustical Products	324F	Taylor Company	617F
CrunchTime! Information Systems	2309A	LightBulbScaffold.com	2801A	Tempo Industries	525F
Datasat Digital Entertainment	2510A	Logix ICF (Insulated Concrete Forms)	733F	Theatrical Bulb Supply	926F
D-BOX Technologies Inc.	2513A	Look3D Eyewear	116F	TicketNew	416F
DCinemaNOC	2807A	Magna-Tech Electronic Co. Inc	2415A	Ticketsoft LLC	125F
Deafflicks Inc.	728F	MARS Chocolate, North America	701F	Tivoli LLC	813F
DEEL! Media	1007F	Martek Contracts Limited	419F	TK Architects	325F
Depth® 3D / Lightspeed Design, Inc.	2712A	MasterImage 3D Inc.	2706A and Livorno	Toolsie Roll Industries	905F
Diamond Ticketing Systems	100F	MediaMation Inc.	2017A	Touch Dynamic	2710A
Digital Media Solutions	2514A	Mesbur+Smith Architects	1024F	Twin Cities Releasing	2004A
Dippin' Dots, Inc.	717F	Meyer Sound	807F	Ultra Stereo Labs	313F
Dolby Laboratories	2203A, Milano 3, 4 and 8	Michael Wolf Interiors, Inc./		Universal Cinema Services	2619A
Dolphin Seating	429F	DBA Wolf Theatre Services	620F	Ushio America	2425A
Doremi	2503A	Millions	104F	Vantiv	228F
Durkan	331F	Mobiliario SA de CV	801F	Variety The Children's Charity of the United States	1026F
Eisenberg Sausage Co.	307F	Morrison Farms - Nebraska Popcorn Sales, Inc.	632F	Ventura Foods LLC	536F
Embedded Processor Designs, Inc.	906F	Movie Heroes, Inc.	2714A	VIP Cinema Seating	901F
Enpar Audio	428F	Moviead	636F	Vista Entertainment Solutions	425F
Entertainment Supply & Technologies, LLC	637F	Moving Image Technologies	2419A	Vistar	613F
Eomac Ltd.	719F	NAC - National Association of Concessionaires	230F	Vivian Company, Inc.	736F
Epax Systems	730F	Nathan's Famous	1001F	Volfoni 3D	2615A
ERA Architects	2803A	NCR Corporation	2603A	Voss Lighting	336F
Everything Cinema	216F	NEC Display Solutions	Milano 1	Weaver Popcorn	1013F
Eyes Triple Shut	2705A	Nestle USA	512F	Weldon Williams & Lick Inc.	1017F
EZAKI GLICO USA Corporation	630F	Odell's	725F	White Castle Food Products	131F
Fanlight Corp.	2624A	Omniterm	625F	Wulf Installations	330F
Farrow	2110A	Original Gourmet Food Co., Inc.	1018F	X6D USA Inc	2112A
FBD Partnership, LP	716F	Osram	2111A	Yogurt Zone	Neopolitan 3
		Ovention, Inc.	2018A	Yuyu Lighting	2219A

Figure 22: Trade Show Booth List found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014

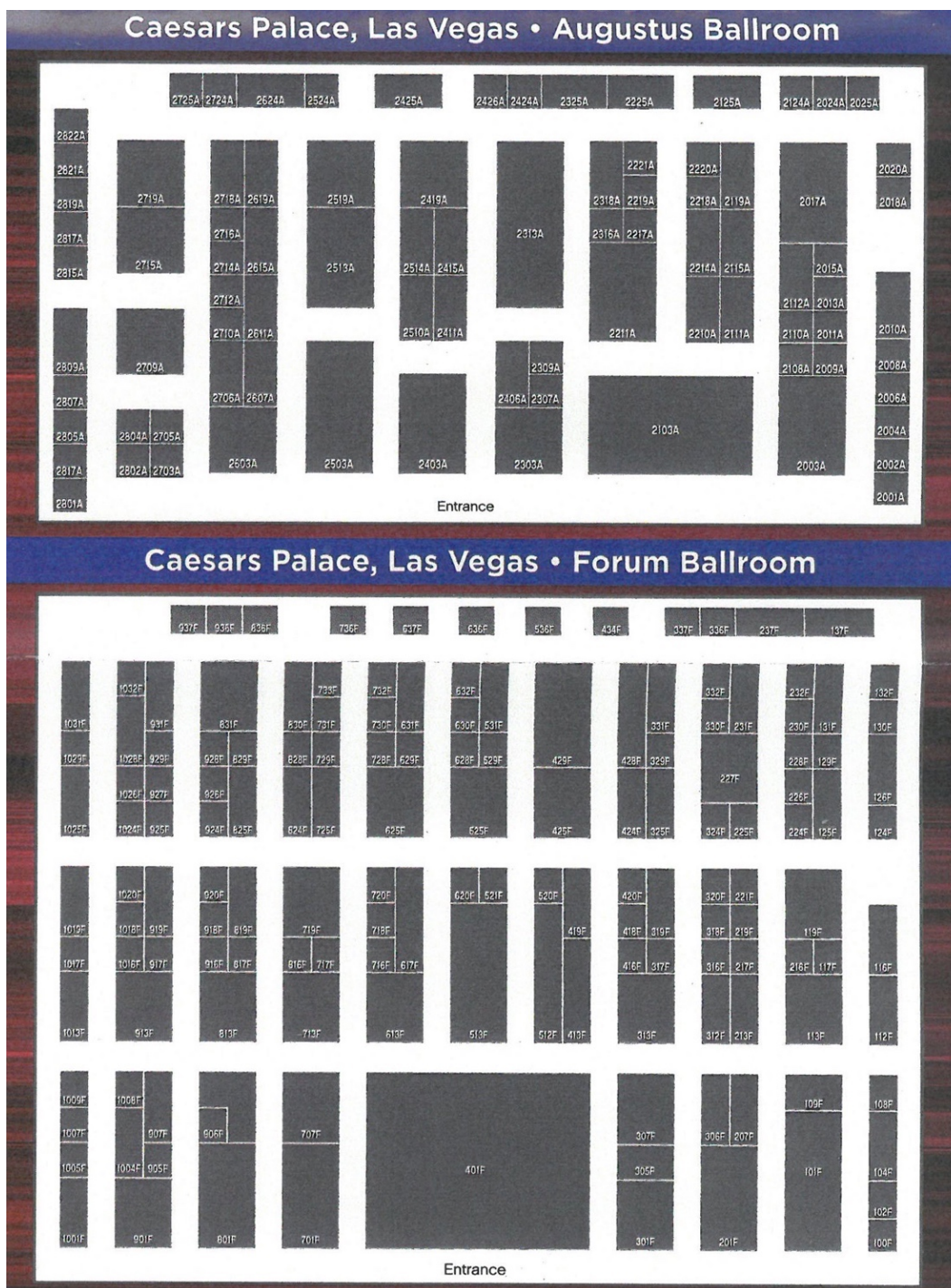


Figure 23: Trade Show Map found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014

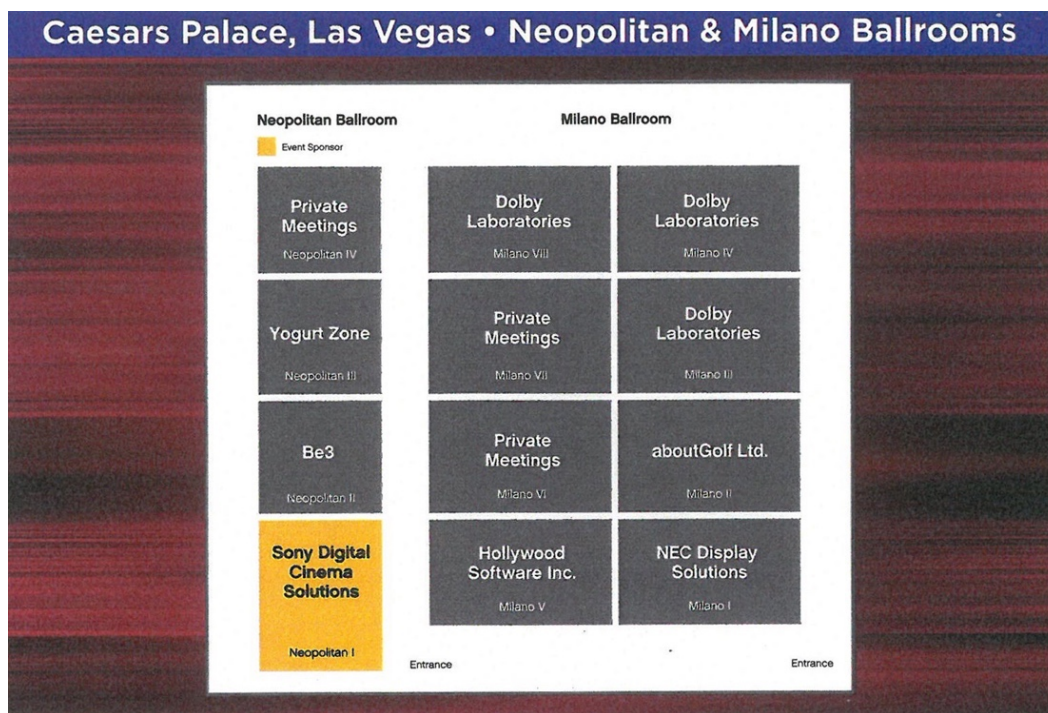


Figure 24: Map of Breakout & Private Meeting Rooms found in Passport, CinemaCon 2014



Figure 25: CinemaCon Goody Bag, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 26: Dolby Trade Show Space, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 27: Dolby Accessibility Technologies, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 28: RealD Breakout Room, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 29: Look 3D Glass Booth, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 30: MX4D Interactive Booth, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 31: CGV Sales Booth, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 32: Trade Show Booth, Movie Buff Game, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 33: Easy to Clean Luxury Seats, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 34: Multi-Grain Bob Pop Product, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 35: Panel Session, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 36: The Colosseum Stage, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 37: The Colosseum Seating Area, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 38: Twentieth Century Fox Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 39: Walt Disney Studios Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 40: Now You See Me 2 (Summit Entertainment, 2016) The Colosseum Evacuation, CinemaCon 2016
Mitch Neuhauser and John Fithian address the crowd



Figure 41: Dolby Vision at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 44: Paramount Pictures Studio Presentation at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 45: Tyler Perry at The Colosseum, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 46: Advanced Screening of Spy (20th Century Fox, 2015), CinemaCon 2015



Figure 47: Studio "Gifts" of Ugly Doll Toys, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 48: Amazon Studios Presentation Sign, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 49: Amazon Studios Presentation Luncheon, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 50: CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards at The Colosseum with Program, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 51: Gina Rodriguez Accepts CinemaCon Award, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 52: CinemaCon and Coca-Cola Final After Party, CinemaCon 2015



Figure 53: Publication Stand for Industry-Related News, CinemaCon 2016



Figure 54: CinemaCon-themed *Boxoffice* Magazines, 2015, 2016, 2018

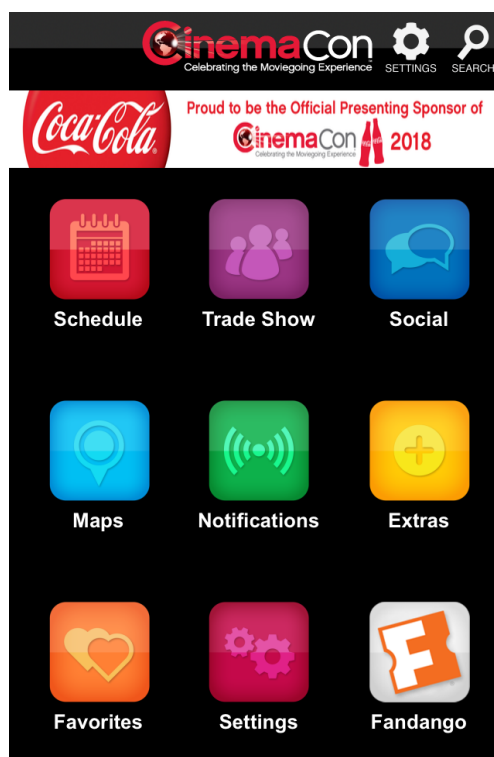


Figure 55: Screenshot of CinemaCon App Interface, CinemaCon 2018

Appendix A

Number of Cinema Sites in the United States, 1995-2018

Year	Indoor	Drive-In	Total
2018	5,482	321	5,803
2017	5,398	349	5,747
2016	5,472	349	5,821
2015	5,484	349	5,833
2014	5,463	393	5,856
2013	5,326	393	5,719
2012	5,317	366	5,683
2011	5,331	366	5,697
2010	5,399	374	5,773
2009	5,561	381	5,942
2008	5,403	383	5,786
2007	5,545	383	5,928
2006	5,543	396	5,939
2005	5,713	401	6,114
2004	5,629	402	6,031
2003	5,700	400	6,100
2002	5,712	432	6,144
2001	5,813	440	6,253
2000	6,550	442	6,992
1999	7,031	446	7,477
1998	6,894	524	7,418
1997	6,903	577	7,480
1996	7,215	583	7,798
1995	7,151	593	7,744

Source: National Association of Theatre Owners, <http://www.natoonline.org/data/us-cinema-sites/>
 Indoor screen/site counts are for the last day of each year. Because many drive-ins are closed for the winter on December 31, drive-in screen/site counts for each year are tallied the previous year.

Appendix B

Number of Cinema Screens in the United States, 1995-2018

Year	Indoor	Drive-In	Total
2018	40,313	524	40,827
2017	39,651	595	40,246
2016	40,009	595	40,604
2015	39,411	595	40,006
2014	39,356	656	39,956
2013	39,368	656	40,024
2012	39,056	606	39,662
2011	38,974	606	39,580
2010	38,902	618	39,520
2009	38,605	628	39,233
2008	38,201	633	38,834
2007	38,159	635	38,794
2006	37,765	650	38,415
2005	37,040	648	37,688
2004	35,795	640	36,435
2003	35,016	634	35,650
2002	35,022	666	35,688
2001	34,823	683	35,506
2000	35,696	683	36,379
1999	36,448	683	37,131
1998	33,418	750	34,168
1997	31,050	815	31,865
1996	28,905	826	29,731
1995	26,995	848	27,843

Source: National Association of Theatre Owners, <http://www.natonline.org/data/us-movie-screens/>
 Indoor screen/site counts are for the last day of each year. Because many drive-ins are closed for the winter on December 31, drive-in screen/site counts for each year are tallied the previous year.
 Screens in Puerto Rico are not included in data.

Appendix C

CinemaCon Registration Categories and Costs Between 2012-2019

International Package

Year	Member*	Non-Member**	Eligible Non-Member***
2012	\$895	\$1095	n/a
2014	\$975	\$1185	n/a
2015	\$1035	\$1255	n/a
2016	\$1090	\$1320	n/a
2017	\$1130	\$1365	n/a
2018	\$1130	\$1365	\$1495
2019	\$1185	\$1430	\$1570

Domestic Package

Year	Member*	Non-Member**	Eligible Non-Member***
2012	\$795	\$995	n/a
2014	\$875	\$1085	n/a
2015	\$910	\$1130	n/a
2016	\$960	\$1190	n/a
2017	\$995	\$1230	n/a
2018	\$995	\$1230	\$1320
2019	\$1045	\$1290	\$1385

Trade Show & Seminars

Year	Member*	Non-Member**	Eligible Non-Member***
2012	\$500	\$600	n/a
2014	\$540	\$640	n/a
2015	\$575	\$685	n/a
2016	\$575	\$685	n/a
2017	\$625	\$735	n/a
2018	\$625	\$735	\$800
2019	\$625	\$735	\$800

Trade Show Pass

Year	Member*	Non-Member**	Eligible Non-Member***
2012	\$450	\$550	n/a
2014	\$490	\$590	n/a
2015	\$490	\$590	n/a
2016	\$490	\$590	n/a
2017	\$525	\$620	n/a
2018	\$525	\$620	\$675
2019	\$525	\$620	\$675

Registration on-site costs an additional \$200 toward any package and affiliation.

***Member (National NATO, ICTA and NAC)**

Members must be in good standing. Regional NATO association members and those ICTA and NAC members representing theatre/cinema circuits or operators must also be members of NATIONAL NATO in order to receive reduced member rates.

****Non-Member**

Industry affiliates and companies who are not eligible for membership in NATO, ICTA or NAC (i.e. Distributors, Producers/Filmmakers, Print/Online/Broadcast Media, Financial Institutions, Advertising, Publicity Companies and similar).

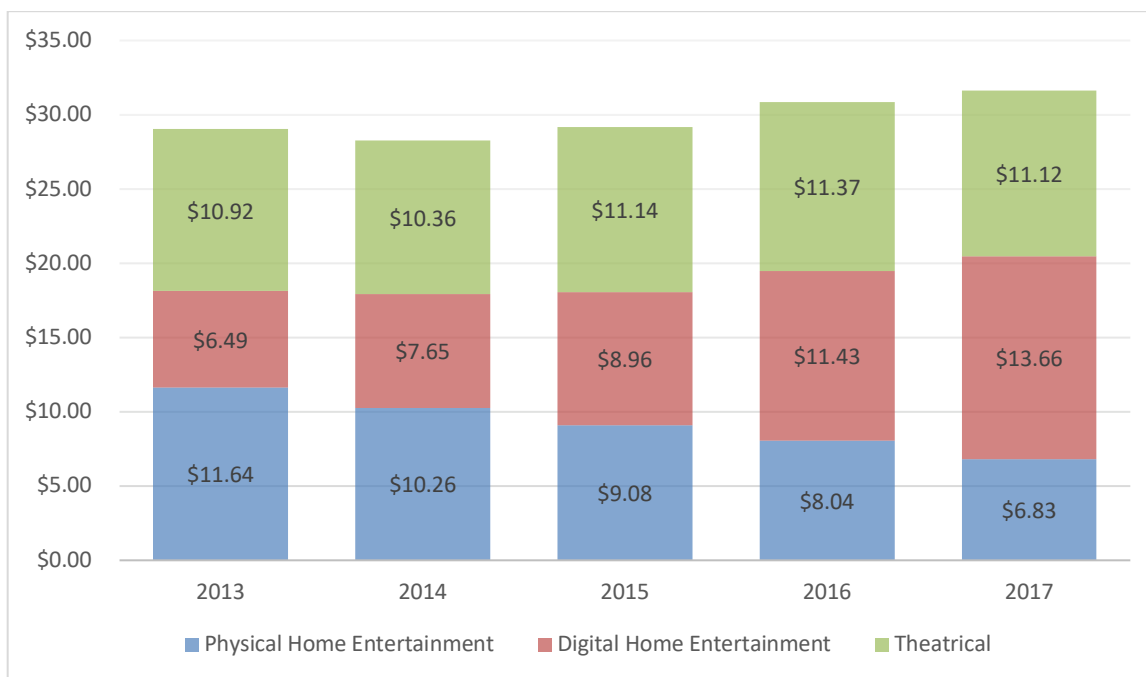
*****Association Eligible Non-Member**

Any company eligible for membership in NATO, ICTA or NAC that hasn't joined or doesn't hold an active membership.

Data culled from CinemaCon registration forms (2012, 2014-2019) including membership level criteria. Author was unable to secure the registration levels for years 2011 and 2013 at the time of publication.

Appendix D

U.S. Theatrical and Home Entertainment Consumer Spending



Source: Motion Picture Association of America, Inc.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Theme Report: A Comprehensive Analysis and Survey of the Theatrical and Home Entertainment Market Environment (THEME) for 2017, Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., 2017, p. 31.

Appendix E

Top Ten Domestic Giants of Exhibition 2018 (Ranked by Number of Screens)

Circuit	Headquarters	Screens	Sites
AMC Theatres	Leawood, KS	8,218	659
Regal Entertainment Group	Knoxville, TN	7,350	562
Cinemark	Plano, TX	4,544	337
Cineplex Entertainment	Toronto, ON	1,683	165
Marcus Theatres	Milwaukee, WI	895	69
Harkins Theatres	Scottsdale, AZ	515	34
Southern Theatres	New Orleans, LA	499	44
B&B Theatres	Liberty, MO	400	50
National Amusements, Inc.	Norwood, MA	392	29
Malco Theatres, Inc.	Memphis, TN	353	29

Source: National Association of Theatre Owners, <http://www.natonline.org/data/top-10-circuits>

Top Ten Global Giants of Exhibition 2018 (Ranked by Number of Screens)

Circuit	Country of Origin	Acquisitions	Screens
WANDA Film	China	AMC Entertainment, Odeon, UCI, and Hoyts Cinema	14,347
Cineworld	England	Regal Entertainment	9,538
Cinemark	United States	None	5,959
Dadi Theater Circuit	China	Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment	5,870
Cinépolis	Mexico	n/a	5,334
China Film Digifilm Cinemas	China	n/a	4,952
China South Film	China	n/a	4,366
China Film Stellar	China	n/a	3,606
Shanghai United Circuit	China	n/a	3,392
CJ CGV	South Korea	n/a	3,346

Source: Daniel Loria and Jonathan Papish, "Global Giants of Exhibition 2018," *Boxoffice*, April 2018, p. 118-19.

Appendix F

CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards, 2011-2018

CinemaCon 2011

Award	Recipient
Action Star of the Year	Vin Diesel
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Blake Lively
Career Achievement	Helen Mirren
Comedy Star of the Year	Russell Brand
Documentary Filmmaker of the Year	Morgan Spurlock
Fandago Fan Choice	<i>Inception</i> (2010), Christopher Nolan
Female Star of Tomorrow	Rosie Huntington-Whiteley
Female Star of the Year	Cameron Diaz
Global Achievement in Exhibition	Miky Lee
Hall of Fame	David Heyman, Harry Potter Film Franchise
Male Star of Tomorrow	Chris Hemsworth
Male Star of the Year	Ryan Reynolds
Female Rising Star of the Year	Julianne Hough
Male Rising Star of the Year	Jason Momoa
Passepartout	Richard Fox
Pioneer of the Year	Dick Cook
Visionary Award	Tyler Perry

CinemaCon 2012

Award	Recipient
Action Star of the Year	Dwayne Johnson
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Josh Hutcherson
Career Achievement	Sylvester Stallone
Cinema Icon	Michelle Pfeiffer
Comedy Star of the Year	Anna Faris
Distinguished Decade of Achievement in Film	Charlize Theron
Excellence in Filmmaking	Judd Apatow
Female Star of Tomorrow	Chloë Grace Moretz
Female Star of the Year	Jennifer Garner
International Achievement in Exhibition	Delfin Fernandez
International Filmmaker of the Year	Timur Bekmambetov
Male Star of Tomorrow	Taylor Kitsch
Male Star of the Year	Jeremy Renner
NATO Marquee Award	Ted Peda
Passepartout	Jack Ledwith, Universal Pictures International
Pioneer of the Year	Jeffrey Katzenberg

CinemaCon 2013

Award	Recipient
Breakthrough Filmmaker of the Year	Joseph Gordon-Levitt
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Aubrey Plaza
Cinema Icon	Morgan Freeman
Comedy Duo of the Year	Vince Vaughn, Owen Wilson
Director of the Year	Justin Lin
Excellence in Acting	Elizabeth Banks
Female Star of Tomorrow	n/a
Female Star of the Year	Melissa McCarthy
Global Achievement in Exhibition	Alejandro Ramirez Magaña
International Filmmaker of the Year	n/a
Lifetime Achievement Award	Harrison Ford
Male Star of Tomorrow	Armie Hammer
Male Star of the Year	Chris Pine
NATO Marquee Award	Amy Miles, Regal Entertainment
Passepartout	David Kornblum, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures International
Pioneer of the Year	Kathleen Kennedy
Rising Star of 2013	Asa Butterfield

CinemaCon 2014

Award	Recipient
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Chris Pratt
Cinema Icon	Kevin Costner
Comedy Filmmakers of the Year	Seth Rogen, Evan Goldberg
Comedy Star of the Year	Leslie Mann
Director of the Year	n/a
Excellence in Acting	Jon Hamm
Female Star of Tomorrow	Shailene Woodley
Female Star of the Year	Drew Barrymore
Global Achievement in Exhibition	Eddy Duquenne
International Filmmaker of the Year	Carlos Saldanha
Lifetime Achievement Award	Ivan Reitman
Male Star of Tomorrow	Chadwick Boseman
Male Star of the Year	Adam Sandler
NATO Marquee Award	Dan Harkins, Harkins Theatres
Passepartout	Craig Dehmel, 20 th Century Fox International
Pioneer of the Year	Tom Sherak
Rising Stars of 2014	Nicola Peltz, Jack Reynor
Vanguard Award	Andy Serkis

CinemaCon 2015

Award	Recipient
Breakthrough Filmmaker of the Year	Elizabeth Banks
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Amy Schumer
Cinema Icon	n/a
Comedy Filmmaker of the Year	Paul Feig
Comedy Star of the Year	Kevin Hart
Director of the Year	Francis Lawrence
Ensemble Award	Jamie Bell, Michael B. Jordan, Kata Mara, Miles Teller (cast of <i>Fantastic Four, 2015</i>)
Excellence in Alternative Content	The Metropolitan Opera
Fandago Fan Choice	Clint Eastwood
Excellence in Acting	
Female Star of the Year	Rose Byrne
Global Achievement in Exhibition	Valmir Fernandes
International Filmmaker of the Year	Baltasar Kormákur
Lifetime Achievement Award	Alan Arkin
Male Star of the Year	Paul Rudd
NATO Marquee Award	Bill Campbell, Cinema Buying Group
Passepartout	???
Pioneer of the Year	Jim Gianopulos
Rising Stars of 2015	Nat Wolff, Cara Delevingne
Star of Tomorrow	Britt Robertson
Vanguard Award	Julianne Moore

CinemaCon 2016

Award	Recipient
Breakthrough Director of the Year	Nate Parker
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Dave Franco
Cinema Icon	Susan Sarandon
Comedy Filmmaker of the Year	n/a
Comedy Stars of the Year	Zac Efron, Anna Kendrick, Adam Devine
Director of the Year	n/a
Ensemble of the Universe	Liam Hemsworth, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman, Maika Monroe, Jessie T. Usher, Sela Ward, Vivica A. Fox, Brent Spiner (cast of <i>Independence Day: Resurgence, 2016</i>)
Excellence in Acting	Bryce Dallas Howard
Excellence in Event Cinema	BBC Worldwide North America
Female Star of Tomorrow	Gina Rodriguez
Female Stars of the Year	Mila Kunis, Kristen Bell, Christina Applegate, Kathryn Hahn, Annie Mumalo, Jada Pinkett Smith (cast of <i>Bad Moms, 2016</i>)

Global Achievement in Exhibition	Moshe “Mooky” Greidinger
International Filmmaker of the Decade	Frank Marshall
Legend of Cinema	Arnon Milchan
Lifetime Achievement Award	n/a
Male Star of Tomorrow	Stephen Amell
Male Star of the Year	Jesse Eisenberg
NATO Marquee Award	David Passman, Carmike Cinemas
Passepartout	Phil Groves, IMAX Corporation
Pioneer of the Year	Donna Langley, Universal Pictures
Producer of the Year	Jason Blum
Rising Star of the Year	Jack Huston
Showman of the Year	J.J. Abrams
Vanguard Award	Keanu Reeves

CinemaCon 2017

Award	Recipient
Action Star of the Year	John Cena
Breakthrough Director of the Year	n/a
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Brenton Thwaites
Cinema Icon	Goldie Hawn
Comedy Filmmaker of the Year	n/a
Comedy Star of the Year	Kumail Nanjiani
Director of the Year	Jordan Peele
Distinguished Decade of Achievement	Naomi Watts
Ensemble of the Universe	n/a
Excellence in Acting	n/a
Excellence in Event Cinema	Turner Classic Movies (TCM)
Female Star of Tomorrow	Sofia Boutella
Female Star of the Year	Jessica Chastain
Global Achievement in Exhibition	Vox Cinemas
International Achievement in Comedy	Eugenio Derbez
International Filmmakers of the Year	Joachim Rønning, Espen Sandberg
Legend of Cinema	n/a
Lifetime Achievement Award	n/a
Male Star of Tomorrow	Ansel Elgort
Male Star of the Year	Charlie Hunnam
NATO Marquee Award	Byron Berkley, Foothills Entertainment
Passepartout	Mark Christiansen
Pioneer of the Year	Cheryl Boone, Academy President
Producer of the Year	Christopher Meledandri
Rising Star of the Year	Isabela Moner
Showman of the Year	n/a
Vanguard Award	Salma Hayek

CinemaCon 2018

Award	Recipient
Action Star of the Year	Taron Egerton
Breakthrough Performer of the Year	Lil Rel Howery
Breakthrough Producer of the Year	Gabrielle Union
Career Achievement	Robert Carrady
Cinema Icon	Samuel L. Jackson
Cinema Spotlight Award	Anna Kendrick
Comedy Filmmaker of the Year	n/a
Comedy Star of the Year	Kate McKinnon
Director of the Year	Ryan Coogler
Distinguished Decade of Achievement	n/a
Ensemble of the Universe	n/an/a
Excellence in Acting	Felicity Jones
Excellence in Event Cinema	
Female Star of Tomorrow	Tiffany Haddish
Female Star of the Year	Dakota Johnson
Global Achievement in Exhibition	n/a
International Achievement in Comedy	n/a
International Filmmaker of the Year	J.A. Bayona
Legend of Cinema	n/a
Lifetime Achievement Award	n/a
Male Star of Tomorrow	n/a
Male Star of the Year	Benicio Del Toro
NATO Marquee Award	Alejandro Ramírez Magaña, Cinépolis
Passepartout	Kurt Rieder, 20 th Century Fox International
Producer of the Year	n/a
Rising Star of the Year	n/a
Showman of the Year	n/a
Vanguard Award	Jonah Hill
Visionary Award	Jack Black

Source: Data culled from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) and CinemaCon Press Releases.