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Intro to MIAP

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Digital Realities: Dogme95, Mumblecore, & Beyond

The digital reality of our modern world is both expansive and refined. What took so long in establishing preservation and storage standards for film stock, now sees an expansion to the world of wholly digitized media. 2016 and the near future can be viewed through the prism of 4K formats and the upstaging of an already impressive Blu-ray, not to mention the numerous developments in feature filmmaking cameras that continue to take place. As our devices keep getting bigger in scope and potential, they also simultaneously become smaller and more manageable in size. With an everyday environment, such as this, it is important to look back at the steps which brought us to this new frontier. So, in honor of the filmmakers that took the technologies of the past and made art with them, I am proud to present “Digital Realities: Dogme95, Mumblecore, & Beyond.”

Dogme95

Let us set the scene for all of this. It is March of 1995. Perched all throughout the Odeon Theater in Paris, France, a group of brilliant film minds discuss the Centennial of cinema. One of those minds was Lars von Trier (Stevenson 67). An already seasoned veteran of the film world, he brought more than just behind the scenes stories and candid thoughts on the anniversary to this gathering; he brought a manifesto. This kind of act, we will soon learn, was not uncommon to von Trier. Dressed in a “plaid flannel shirt” amongst the esteemed masses in formal wear, he

tosses out into the crowd a collection of papers. The subject of such projectiles was soon to be read and interpreted as the founding manifesto and Vow of Chastity of a brand-new film movement. So, the setting is established for the first public acknowledgment of Dogme95 (70).

The creation of this now essential film movement, which set the late 1990s and early 2000s ablaze with brash and uncompromising pieces of filmmaking from artists that spanned the globe and backgrounds, came from a surprising place: Denmark. Many of the contributors were relative industry insiders with experience under their belt. That is certainly true of the forefathers or original four “Brothers” of said movement: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, and Kristian Levring. Each had made films before. In Vinterberg’s case, it was just one, and barely, but still, all were looking in a forward direction on an industry worth sprucing up. They saw themselves as a continuation of the failed French New Wave. To quote their manifesto directly, “The New Wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck” (MacKenzie 202).

In his essential book on the matter, “The Name of this Book is Dogme95,” and my source for pushing the 95 directly onto the back of Dogme, Richard Kelly writes in depth about the films and the people behind them that now constitute this cherished movement of cinema. He offers his opinion about the state of cinema around the time of Dogme’s creation when shortly after viewing *Michael Collins* in 1996 he began to believe, “Roughly a century after the invention of cinema, the USA had succeeded in colonizing the global market in film. Fat, foolish, ruinously expensive and ideologically hateful, Hollywood movies were the world’s dominant cultural product” (Kelly 2). The idea is not that *Michael Collins* represents all that is wrong with cinema in the mid-1990s, but more so that it is an uninspiring film, by a talented director, in a time that calls for more adventure and invention. Kelly was ready just as The

Brothers were.

This anti-American theory gains reinforcement through a Danish scholar who specializes in the study of Lars von Trier himself, along with Dogme95. In “Film According to Dogma: Ground Rules, Obstacles, and Liberations,” Peter Schepelern states quite frankly, “The main purpose of the rules was to create a countermovement against (primarily American) mainstream film’s adoration of genre clichés and special effects...” (74). The rules in which he speaks references the Vow of Chastity which von Trier so kindly dispersed to his peers in Paris. As we will focus on that matter later, I will briefly say one thing on the matter now. The Vow was flashy and pretentious and exactly necessary for Dogme to work. The rules, in their way, link one movement to another. The rules are the conscious write-up, by one group, of what another group must subconsciously think about when formulating a movement of their own.

Lars von Trier, who served as a headmaster of sorts for Dogme95, would likely have agreed with these types of assertions. In fact, his revolutionary manner pre-dates any such kind by Richard Kelley. As a drafter of three separate manifestos before 1995, Trier has always had an eye for shifting tides and the publicity that it can bring. The first of his noted manifestos began with the words “Everything seems to be all right,” while the second with “Everything seems fine,” and the third using “Seemingly all is well” (MacKenzie 173-174). These first sentences alone speak to a man seeking a change in people’s collective mindset. Each manifesto saw inclusion as an aspect of the release for one of Trier's movies. There are no rules or overly long drawn out declarations in these works, which is in stark contrast to the ‘call to arms’ kind of tone that his ’95 variation had. Apart from the third manifesto, released in 1990 with his film *Europa*, they are just a couple of paragraphs of musings each (174).

The scope of my project cannot allow for the depth of knowledge and research required to

understand why Lars von Trier does all the things that he does. I am aware of his controversy and his detractors. It is not the intent of “Digital Realities” to tell any narrative other than that of history and its relevance. In this specific case of a film series, that history is seen in two movements put together by filmmakers that still demand attention today. That said, I find the presence of all these manifestos in Trier’s timeline an interesting clue into all the possible depths just eluded to. He has never seemed satisfied to remain dormant or safe, and that makes for fascinating viewing, at the very least.

While the number of original members in Dogme was four, all of who were Danish men, only two will I spend much time on going forward. The movement saw itself gain traction all throughout the country and around the world as well, which brought a much-needed diversity. Not included in my series, but worth noting is Harmony Korine and his entry *Julien Donkey-Boy*. The story goes that, “he caught the attention of the Dogme brothers and was asked by Thomas Vinterberg to make a Dogme film. He accepted” (Stevenson 241). Simple as that, I guess. Another connection and one of the more significant of them is the Danish Film School. Many figures in Dogme’s history graduated from the school, including Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Anthony Dod Mantle, Kristian Levring, and finally, another major force, Susanne Bier.

Bier, to my knowledge, was not sought out in any way, and if so, it was not nearly as publicized as Korine's courting. She nevertheless put forward one of the strongest entries of the bunch. Her *Open Hearts*, starring Mads Mikkelsen and Nikolaj Lie Kaas, two regular contributors in Dogme, was released in 2002. That year would turn out to be a decisive one in the history of Dogme—a little bookkeeping first. Her story varies a bit from others in that she was not like Korine, who always had been working in Dogme-type mode. Bier was an established

director, sometimes even working within genre filmmaking. In fact, “Bier was the kind of director for which Dogme had been made—an experienced veteran seeking a new challenge and a new way to tell and film a story” (Stevenson 140).

This seemingly perfect fit could not save her from the sin of going against the Vow of Chastity (allegedly) and suffering the wrath of some sort of God—in this case, Lars von Trier. In short, after the film was released to great success, much more than many of the founding films, a claim of Bier breaking Rule #2, which stated “sound must never be produced apart from the images” came out. She blew it off, explaining her innocence, The Brothers remained unconvinced (Stevenson 143).

Amongst the release and slight controversy surrounding Bier’s film, Trier and company decide to end their 1995 movement with the publication and distribution of “The Closure of Dogme.” Included in Jack Stevenson’s book “Dogme Uncut,” the press release from The Brothers reads in part like this: “The manifesto of Dogme 95 has almost grown into a genre formula, which was never the intention. Therefore, for our part we will stop mediating and interpreting how to make Dogme films, and are therefore closing the Dogme secretariat” (291). Bier’s connection, though it seems unrelated, is given greater validity when one reads this from the same time, “It is impossible for The Brothers to concern themselves with the maintenance of the rules in specific incidents. It is thereby very strongly recommended that the directors exercise self-discipline, and that, most importantly, the media and the public exercise vigilance” (Stevenson 143).

Mumblecore

It is fitting that the series links one film movement to another just ten years later. It is true that ten years on, after Lars von Trier’s manifesto stirred up trouble in Europe, a group of guys

and girls converged on Austin, Texas with a collection of films that would go on to define their careers. 2005 is the year, the South by Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) the place. The stage was set for the likes of Joe Swanberg out of Chicago, Andrew Bujalski from Boston, and Jay and Mark Duplass out of the Austin, Texas scene by way of Louisiana, to come together, forging friendships and working relationships which give Mumblecore a body at all (Van Couvering).

To be completely honest, and to have this fit even better in with Dogme95, it is worth noting that Bujalski made *Funny Ha Ha* in 2002. It did not see release until that time in Austin circa 2005 when he was screening his second film *Mutual Appreciation*. So, the beginning of Mumblecore is noted and understood to be the same year in which Dogme ends. The two could not be a better fit! Things that end always must be taken up by something else. But I digress and will get back to the story at hand.

Everybody had their film in the same place. A handful of young people from several varying major cities all around this country came to the same festival with films that had inescapable similarities and points-of-view, then started working together right after. That is a good story to illuminate the opening of a film movement. I find the starkness of its opposition to Dogme's start an interesting aspect of two periods of filmmaking that relate, almost in spite of themselves.

Swanberg brought to the festival his sexually explicit and frankly honest portrayal of one woman's post-collegiate journey of discovery, *Kissing on the Mouth*. Bujalski, indeed, finally saw his first film screened, which also features an unsure female protagonist. Despite this, his film relies far more on observational oddities than erotic actualization. It was noted, "As in most artistic movements, there is cross-pollination and tacit one-upmanship. Mr. Swanberg said he made "Kissing on the Mouth" partly in response to Mr. Bujalski's "Funny Ha Ha," whose

characters he found passive-aggressive” (Lim). Important in equal measure, considering all that is to come, are the Duplass Brothers. They arrived at SXSW with *The Puffy Chair*, which got significant notice from Hollywood and Netflix but also introduced to the world one of Mumblecore's best and most reliable of actors and figures going forward: Mark Duplass (Lim).

The term Mumblecore was uttered, in passing, by Eric Masunaga, a sound mixer who had worked with Bujalski on those first projects. It was in a bar and has been explained as a slight joke that now has refused to leave these filmmakers and all their subsequent work behind (Lim). That story, a drunken utterance turned permanent state of being, is one of the beautiful peculiarities of Mumblecore. Having such a name, full of patronization and power in spite of it, prompts discussion of these films and filmmakers as part of a movement. They often deny it, claiming, “If it’s going to be called a movement,” says Swanberg, “it’s important to stress that it’s not exclusive.” Adds Duplass, “It’s not like Dogme 95 or something, with a leader and rules” (Van Couvering). Such a claim by Duplass will not stop me from continuing with my comparison.

The new-found exposure did not come without backlash. In his piece on the movement, Paul O’Callaghan writes, “But almost as soon as mumblecore became a known entity, a backlash began. The term quickly became synonymous with smug hipsterism, suggestive of endless, self-indulgent navel-gazing from characters who were almost invariably white, straight and middle-class” (O’Callaghan). Any collection of films, or single film for that matter, can be taken out of the context it was made in. The negativity leveled against Mumblecore films is understandable from an aesthetic point-of-view. Not everyone will jive with the stripped down, seemingly thrown together, “do it yourself” (DIY) vibe. Those same people will fail to see the beauty in these films. As documents of our time, they will live forever. That leads well into discussing how

Dogme and Mumblecore relate.

Connections

I want to discuss Dogme95's Vow of Chastity in greater detail now. It is significant for Dogme, as it informed every film's production, but in a parallel sense, it informed movements like Mumblecore without any literature or quotes to say so. The supportive literature, so to speak, are the films themselves. As a part of the original '95 manifesto, the Vow of Chastity dictated the way in which to approach making any film that desired to be considered as Dogme, but as we slowly fall into 2017, the rules become ideas in the mind of more than just *The Brothers*.

Of the ten rules or points, I will mention a few in no specific order. Genre movies are outlawed, and like many of the rules, this tends to be a bit vague. One stipulates the denial of “temporal and geographical alienation” with the use of guns, or acts of murder. Another requires one to shoot on location with no added elements of production. Together, you begin to see 'genre' means imprecisely, 'not of this time' (Stevenson 23). Dogme95 films had to speak to the time they were made in. Without guns and extreme acts of genre, the focus remains on the characters and the themes of any given story.

All the rules set out by Dogme speak to precisely what Mumblecore was—stories about life as it is lived. Another aspect of Dogme that sees itself returned in Mumblecore is the stripping away of vanity and artistically minded gestures. The original manifesto itself reads, “Furthermore, I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a “work,” as I regard the instant as more important than the whole” (Stevenson 23). The films in the canon of Mumblecore are observational, slight, interpretive, and far more focused on people than the gadgetry of filmmaking.

Lasting Impacts

If one were to look at the film world today, the mark of Mumblecore and Dogme, along with their individual and respective contributors, would be all over it. Twenty years and ten years on, respectively, the filmmakers involved are not just relevant today, but in many cases, power players in an industry they were once rebelling against. Susanne Bier, director of *Open Hearts*, the 28th overall Dogme film, has now won an Academy Award and an Emmy for her work. She has gone on to make several English-language films, working with stars such as Halle Berry, Tom Hiddleston, Benicio del Toro, and Pierce Brosnan.

Her forebears in Dogme and the creators of the movement, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg both have moved onto bigger and often critically lauded projects. Vinterberg's *The Hunt* garnered an Oscar nomination. Lars von Trier became a staple at Cannes, winning the Palme d'Or for his follow-up after Dogme, *Dancer in the Dark*, before being kicked out due to controversial comments about Hitler. Following up on a point made earlier; in the same video footage that has von Trier claim sympathy for Hitler, he also expresses regret over any possible Jewish heritage, which he somehow turns into an insult leveled at Susanne Bier (*Lars von Trier*). The tension over *Open Hearts* seems to have never settled.

As for Mumblecore, let us consider this: "mumblecore's somewhat tarnished reputation is unjustified – after all, it launched the careers of some of the most vital and distinctive voices in contemporary American independent cinema" (O'Callaghan). Joe Swanberg has not only made a lot of work; he has grown with it, producing larger films with better-known actors, while keeping the integrity and honesty he is known for. Along with The Duplass Brothers, he has gone on to work in the medium of television. Swanberg wrote and directed all episodes of Netflix's *Easy*, while HBO's *Togetherness* is a Duplass Brothers production, with Mark as one of the stars and both brothers as co-directors on some episodes.

Lynn Shelton, a significant member of Mumblecore who I will discuss in greater depth later, has gone on and succeeded in similar ways. Her last three films, all involving strong female characters, have starred actresses such as Ellen Page, Emily Blunt, and Keira Knightley. Greta Gerwig, star and major contributor in Swanberg's early work, has become an Indie starlet of sorts. She has appeared in numerous projects by successful directors on the festival circuit. Her starring vehicle, *Frances Ha*, was co-written by herself and Noah Baumbach. Swanberg's excellent *Alexander the Last* was produced by Baumbach just shortly after, which marked an end to Gerwig and Swanberg's working relationship. Arguably the biggest jump forward in commercial success is seen in Colin Trevorrow, however.

In an illuminating interview of The Duplass Brothers, Mark reveals that Trevorrow came to them for help with his *Safety Not Guaranteed*. The film itself has only this slight connection to Mumblecore, though it does star Mark and future *Drinking Buddies* star Jake Johnson. The important thing to note, though, is that film got made through the help of Mumblecore filmmakers that found a home near the Hollywood system. Now, Trevorrow has gone on to direct *Jurassic World* and is working on the ninth *Star Wars* film, scheduled for release in 2019 (*Hyperrealism*).

While many of these filmmakers have continued with much success, what about their works? I must say that I entered this project with an opinion that the DV-tapes used, when such a format was opted for, served as the original just the same as film negative served and still does serve. These films were printed onto 35mm, as it was required, but those original tapes still hold importance. There are complications, though. I can trace prints relatively easily. As I will outline later, there are steps, involving rights and changing companies, that one can follow to get something screened. The more precious originals are a much harder bargain. That must fall to

these individual filmmakers. The hope is that any organization housing prints for any of these works, there is consideration for all other elements as well. My research proved inadequate.

As Dogme was always an outsider's film movement, and Mumblecore too, the distribution methods and companies were not always the most stable of things. To provide a sneak preview of what I will detail in my breakdown of the actual series, I will say, in short, that it was quite difficult to find and communicate with people in charge of providing prints for screenings. That is due directly to the shifts in organization and control of companies that house whole histories of film prints.

In a larger and more comprehensive series, I would love to cover more ground in the screening of such continuation of careers. As divulged in the below section, I think the ground covered in "Digital Realities" is positive, despite its shorter length.

Now to the series itself. I have organized a three-day event, with each day featuring a double bill of films. I have pieced together prints and digital copies from several different sources. I will discuss the process in which I undertook to do so. Settling on a location for the screening, the Steven Spielberg Theatre at The Egyptian in Hollywood, California, I could focus more on the pairing process. Discussion of the Spielberg Theatre is to be taken up in fuller detail later, as well.

Screening 1: *The Movements*

For the first day of the series, I wanted to show two films that defined the movements. I chose *The Celebration* by Thomas Vinterberg, and *Hannah Takes the Stairs* by Joe Swanberg. The former was one of the original four Dogme films. It was released first and therefore gained the moniker Dogme #1. It is a story of family and the deepest depths that secrets can pull people into. Featuring a multi-character narrative, like a large portion of films in both movements, *The*

Celebration takes on a darker tone than all the Mumblecore fare put together. That said, there is an undeniable comedy in it. I would consider it a chamber piece drama that is fully aware of itself.

Hannah Takes the Stairs is a special film in the history of Mumblecore. Released in 2007, two years after the all-important convergence at SXSW, the film brings together many of the disparate parties together in one film. Directed by Mumblecore legend Joe Swanberg and starring Greta Gerwig and Mark Duplass, along with Andrew Bujalski and Kent Osbourne, the film has been called, or at least could be considered, a kind of Mumblecore all-star film.

For these first two films, I discovered two separate issues related to the researching and requesting of film prints. With *The Celebration*, I had to trace a whole history of parentage regarding the rights to the film. That started, with every film in the series as well as this one, on IMDb. In the Company Credits section, I would look for the rights holder in the United States. From there I would Google as much as I could. I would look to see if said company existed anymore, if they had been bought out, or if they had changed names. In this case, the film was distributed upon its release in 1998 by October Films. In my subsequent research, I discovered that October Films existed, but was not the same company as the one for which I was looking. Through mergers, October Films became USA Films then through another combination of properties, became Focus Features (*October Films*).

Any such rights to the film that I could find do not appear on Focus Features' site. I have reached out to them and have had no word back. The only link is through a DVD edition of *The Celebration*. On the top of the artwork is Focus Features, thus confirming the connection. I am unaware if they have distanced themselves from the film or if theatrical rights belong to someone else. I still hope to hear back, just out of pure curiosity now.

For *Hannah Takes the Stairs*, a newer film, I succeeded in locating the rights holder, IFC Films, but was unable to get through to anyone in charge of theatrical bookings. That is where Swank Motion Pictures Inc. comes into my story. They are a company that rents out prints for screenings. I found both films on their site and discussed the series with one of their team members. They informed me that “throwback films,” which both of my movies would be considered, would cost anywhere from \$300 to \$500. They also broke down the shipping rates for each format the film could come on. They charge \$63 to ship 35mm, \$146 for DCP, and \$28 for a Blu-ray.

Screening 2: *Female Impact*

The second day would celebrate the work of prominent women in Dogme95 and Mumblecore. Both films are by women directors that not only made their mark within their adopted film movement but transcended it and continued to succeed and grow in the industry they were subverting.

The first film, *Open Hearts*, is a 2002 romantic melodrama by Susanne Bier. Very similar to the film accompanying it, *Humpday*, it came near the end of its respective movement. Like the creators of Dogme, Bier was already established in the Danish film world. Unlike von Trier, who had great international success before making his Dogme film, Susanne Bier would only grow in popularity and influence after her *Open Hearts* was released. She has won an Emmy for her direction of the AMC mini-series *The Night Manager*, and her film *In a Better World* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

My journey in finding a copy of her film mirrored many of the steps taken when uncovering *The Celebration*. Through even more extensive Google research, I discovered the original rights holder to be New Market Films, who were then bought by EMG, who then saw

themselves incorporated by AMBI. I reached out to AMBI and got a message back from a Chris Chouinard. He works for a company called Park Circus Inc. My email to AMBI somehow got to him. Not quite understanding it all, since Park Circus never came up in my research, I was grateful nonetheless. Through a brief email correspondence, I was informed they had a 35mm print of Bier's film. Not working with or through third parties, he would not inform me of the price for loaning out the print. I could only find that out if I went through my proposed location for the event.

The second film is *Humpday* by Lynn Shelton. As mentioned before, Shelton was an outsider to the core group that launched Mumblecore, yet her film is still mentioned in its history as a very positive note. *Humpday* is a film about sects in society that people find themselves in. Through that, it brings into conversation ideas as distant and similar as identity, regrets of the past, and desires to be more than you are. It is all framed within a lighthearted genre plot involving two men who make a promise to have sex with each other on camera, all because they said they would, no matter that they were indisposed and reeling off just recently reuniting for first time in a long while. It is a joy.

Released in 2009, the film's lifespan was far easier to track. Distributed by Magnolia Pictures, one email to their generic bookings email, and I was quickly in contact with their reliable and affable Neal Block. In an earlier variation on the series, I provided an extensive list of films worth considering. He responded quickly and told me that Magnolia charged a flat rate for their films and \$100 for shipping. *Humpday* was available to me on 35mm and Blu-ray. The price for 35mm was \$400. Prices for DCP and Blu-ray varied by just one hundred dollars. A DCP copy, which becomes relevant in the third screening, costs \$350, while a Blu-ray costs \$250.

Screening 3: *Transition from Then to Now*

The third and final day of the series will take a slightly different approach. I took two films by directors associated with Mumblecore and chose films at vastly different stages of their careers. The first film is the oft-mentioned *Funny Ha Ha*. It is an essential piece in the historical timeline of Mumblecore. I have said plenty about it already, but I will say one more thing in connection to the second film, *Drinking Buddies*. Both films feature a female heroine, who is stuck between several uneasy romantic strands, created by her inability to communicate adequately enough with any one of them. *Drinking Buddies* came out in 2014 and was directed by Joe Swanberg. If *Funny Ha Ha* was the start, then this film by Swanberg could be considered the end, or at least a transition into the future for Mumblecore.

Drinking Buddies features well-known actors, boasts a far bigger budget (relatively speaking), and saw a much wider release than any film made by its director before. It also happens to be one of the purest examples of the strength inherent in Mumblecore. Featuring a large group of characters, a casual narrative, and a good deal of talking around key issues, the film is measured and shot like much of the what came before it, but with a few added elements, it gives birth to something special. If celebrity actors bring validity to a project, but are also dedicated to the process of creating real people, which with Swanberg means improvising much of the story, do you then experience a movie miracle? If so, this is the film. It has all the subtlety and ‘reality’ of Mumblecore, with the extra boost of truly talented performers giving life to these characters. I would not want to end the series with any other film.

Through Neal Block at Magnolia, I procured knowledge of a DCP copy of the film. The prices remain the same. \$350 plus shipping, with a grand total of \$450 to get *Drinking Buddies* screened at my series. At Magnolia, there is always the option to use a Blu-ray, for lower prices.

To me, DCP, in a strange way, is the new 35mm. Theaters no longer get dozens of reels from a studio—they get clunky, plain as can be hard drives. In the end, “Digital Realities” will only be screening films in their original format, and if that means DCP, then so it goes.

Funny Ha Ha was a more difficult task, away from the warm embrace of *Magnolia*. There was not a wealth of information about the film in the Company Credits section on IMDb. So, instead, I turned to something just as simple and available: Google. A basic name search found a few good sources. I discovered New York City-based Anthology Film Archives had a screening of the film in 2012. To celebrate the film’s 10th anniversary, they screened a new restoration of the print (Rosenblum). Going deeper, I found that the director’s Alma Mater, Harvard University, and their film archive performed the restoration.

My only question, now, was whether they still held a copy for screenings? I assumed they would, but I had to know for sure. My partial confidence came from reading something on their site. On their Andrew Bujalski-specific page, the archive included this sentence in the brief write-up, “In 2005 Bujalski started depositing his film materials with HF. Currently the collection includes projection prints and production elements for *Funny Ha Ha*, *Mutual Appreciation...*” (*Collections*). The only problem is that I do not know when that was written, how things have changed, or if those prints could be loaned out to an interested party in California.

On the archive’s site, two names appeared for any inquiries into films currently stored in the archive. I emailed both their Loan Officer, Mark Johnson and their Programmer, David Pendleton, but have yet to hear back from either of them. They hold the key to moving forward with any *Funny Ha Ha* related business.

While I waited to hear anything, I continued looking elsewhere. Tracing the history of

Funny Ha Ha, I discovered two more helpful clues. At the IFC Center, back in 2007, there was a film series held dedicated to the then still fresh and new Mumblecore movement. Bujalski's film was included. In something that has become very familiar to me through this project, I got no response when I sent an email to them. I contacted IFC, in this case, the distribution company, earlier in the process about a film I was vetting for a spot in the series and got no word back either.

I remained confident but lacked hope in receiving a guarantee for any possible loan. I then read something about Bujalski and his film that made me fill up with an emotional confusion and come up with only one resounding thought: 'yeah that makes sense.' He had worked independently of any studios when releasing his first films. The New York Times, in their write-up about the movement and the impending IFC series, wrote, "Mr. Bujalski's first two films were self-distributed. Many of the directors have sold home-burned DVDs online" (Lim). There it was exposed to me. I was now confident that the Harvard Film Archive held the key to any possible screening of *Funny Ha Ha*. That was enough to satisfy.

Budget

Beyond just the cost of acquiring prints, a significant portion of any final budget would have to consider theater costs and anything to do with the projection and physical aspects of the film series. After initially considering the Aero Theatre, and doing much research with them in mind, I settled on a cheaper option that would make the series an easier pitch to anyone I might involve. That option materialized in the form of The Steven Spielberg Theatre, which is a part of The Egyptian. A 24-foot by 10-foot screen, with a seating capacity of 77 plus three handicap seats, it would provide not only a cheaper option but a more intimate one (*American Cinematheque Rentals*).

Rather than an expensive flat fee, this smaller venue offers the choice of an hourly rate of \$250. Crunching the numbers of my selected films regarding runtimes, plus a twenty-minute intermission between films on each day, with consideration of cleanup time needed afterward, I decided on two 5-hour days, and one 6-hour day. So, to rent the theater out for the necessary time for the series to take place, it would cost \$4000 (*American Cinematheque Rentals*).

The next step is to consider the fees due to the projectionist team. Luckily, all that information is included online as well. It states a fee of \$350 a day is charged to employ the professional projectionists they have employed at their theaters. This aspect of the project introduces the idea of the role of unions and special interests in events like this. The American Cinematheque employs only professionally trained and accredited people. This aspect seems an obvious one, maybe, but it is something I think is easy to overlook for people planning events like this. I certainly did not consider it at the start. This now considered, paying \$350 a day for a three-day series, I would have to put \$1,050 toward just projection. As the wording is not as precise as I'd like, the possibility of the \$350 applying to each film screened rather than each day; the price could rise to \$2,100 (*American Cinematheque Rentals*).

I will now recap all the costs for the films, adding them to the already considered theater costs. The first screening, "The Movements," will be done completely through Swank Motion Pictures Inc. The information about fees was given to me by one of their associates over the phone. To screen *The Celebration* and *Hannah Take the Stairs*, I would need to arrange \$400 for each print and \$63 for the shipping of each print. These prices consider that both are on 35mm. Total cost for the first screening is \$1,026.

For the second screening, "Female Impact," I have a couple of sources. For *Humpday*, I will go through Magnolia, and acquire a 35mm print for \$400 plus \$100 for shipping. Since I

could not get Chris from Park Circus to quote me a price, I will side with the going rate of sorts, and say that a 35mm print for *Open Hearts* (which he claimed to have) would run around \$400. So, if I assume shipping is not included and would run around the same price, then the identical tag of \$500 is set. All in, that brings screening two toward a \$1000 price tag.

For our final screening, “From Then to Now,” I have one big unknown and an equally sizeable certainty. For *Drinking Buddies*, I return to the warm embrace of Magnolia. Using their pricing structure, I will be able to set out \$350 toward a DCP copy of *Drinking Buddies* with \$100 for shipping, bringing that film’s total to \$450. *Funny Ha Ha* and the Harvard Film Archive is that great unknown. I would like to think they would be fair in price, if able to loan out anything at all. Since I just do not know, I came up with an estimated price of \$300, hoping for goodwill and kindness. If all holds out to be true, that is a total price of \$750 for screening number three.

In the end, for rental of The Steven Spielberg Theatre, paying the projectionists, renting the films and getting them shipped out, the price of the series would run at \$7,826. If my fear of the projectionists charging \$350 for each film screened came true, that would bring the series to \$8,876. The return shipping for included items and any other possible charges that have eluded my mind could bring the price up. My hope is that it would stay below \$1000. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the price could also go down due to possible favorable relationships between theater and distribution company.

Promotional Material

One of the more useful qualities of working with the American Cinematheque is their online and snail mail presence. As a fan of their business, first and foremost, I was privileged to useful information going into the creation of this series. Members of the Cinematheque receive

monthly newsletters about the upcoming schedule. Highlighting multiple series with write-ups and visual aids, the presence of “Digital Realities” would go up significantly with inclusion in such a promotion.

I reached out to Nancy Winters of The Egyptian with my plan for the series. The decision to host “Digital Realities” at The Spielberg Theatre placed the jurisdiction under her name. To this date, I have not heard word back from her. Disappointing as that is to the overall impact of my research, I feel empowered by the knowledge I have of the Cinematheque in general. To further my idea, and to finish with the Cinematheque, it is significant to know that they show a lot of movies with very little overt grouping restrictions. They also mostly operate in double features that have thematic similarities. All those aspects make the American Cinematheque the perfect place to think of, and eventually go to for this series.

One other aspect of promotion I would count on is an inclusion on the site of the theater itself. Outside of The Egyptian, there is ample space for queuing and general hanging out before and after a show. We could not technically rent this space out, but there would not be a need. Ticketholders will have space here to talk about the series before and after each show. On the walls, closer to the building, there are display cases full of posters and information about what is coming up for the week and the month. My literature and visuals would extend there and hopefully grab all possible patronage of the regulars to the theater and anyone else who happens to go to a show.

On their online source for rentals, the American Cinematheque have provided a healthy amount of information. It is from there that I have gained a further knowledge of pricing and the realities of holding a series, including the option for small and large screens of varying prices. With that in mind, another possibility for added publicity is the option to buy out the concession

stand for each day of the series. The Cinematheque offers a \$6 a head price structure, which would provide a small popcorn and soda for any potential attendee. If my budget allowed for an extra extravagance, the cost for a sold-out theater (80 seats), would only be \$480 (*American Cinematheque Rental Information*).

To conclude this project in some satisfactory way, I began to think about why I chose to do it at all. I came up with the simple answer of, why not? When you think of all the film screenings all over the country, there are endless spots for good and bad movies alike. The American Cinematheque is a non-profit that runs off the idea that people love movies and still want to see them. It takes a collective of like-minded people to come together, or, in my case, go about it separately with the hopes of bringing it to others, to create the pairings and the reasoning behind what the people come to watch around 7:00 or 7:30 on any given night. Mumblecore and Dogme95 might not tickle the fancy of some people, but like all the other screenings that take place every day, for the people that do care, it means everything.

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