

Cultivating the Cult Experience at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema

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Why, with HD, DVDs, Netflix, BitTorrent, TiVo, ever-expanding flat-screen televisions, and home entertainment systems with surround sound, would anyone go out and pay \$80 or even \$20 for a second-run movie to which they have to bring their own seats? Patrons of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, an independently owned group of theaters in Austin, Texas, are doing just that, and the events repeatedly sell out. Perhaps Alamo customers are curious about the early days of traveling exhibitors and drive-in theaters and want to try to live or recapture those experiences by going to a Rolling Roadshow; perhaps they simply desire to be part of a hip social scene, or perhaps they are bored with traditional movie viewing practices and are looking for a different experience.

Creating a cinematic spectacle, an event that goes beyond the mere screening of a film to include audience participation and exhibitionism, is one of the ways the Alamo has chosen to compete with the proliferation of home movie viewing, multiplexes, and the complacency of the contemporary media consumer. In addition to offering gourmet refreshments during screenings and events, [\[1\]](#) the Alamo staff has built a far-reaching reputation and dedicated fan base by appropriating and modernizing retro-style movie-going experiences (for example promotional gimmickry and a drive-in theater atmosphere) and imbuing them with their own idiosyncratic personality. They differentiate themselves from other theaters in Austin with their amenities, program offerings, and personal level of involvement on the part of the owners and programmers.

In this article, I identify the historical practices of exploitation, promotional gimmickry, and "full immersion" film events, such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), as precursors to Alamo programming and advertising. I also demonstrate that although varying motivations to attend events drives dedicated Alamo patrons, they are all connected in their (cult) fandom for the Alamo Cinema, which is based firmly on a feeling of community. Additionally, I discuss the Alamo's role in sustaining the cultural practice of movie going in a time when box office attendance numbers are dropping steadily and propose several reasons for their success while other independent theaters close—a success that is rooted as much in fan loyalty and word-of-mouth reputation, now via local and national press, as it is in profit. [\[2\]](#) My focus will remain mostly on the Alamo's participatory events, specifically Rolling Roadshows and Sing-alongs and solely on the three Austin city theaters; however, I also provide an overview and analysis of the Alamo phenomenon in general.

The Business of Programming

The Alamo's entrepreneurial approach has been and continues to be one based on trial and error. The Alamo owners, Tim and Karrie League, are not afraid to take risks, and their willingness to lose money or just break even (on certain events) for the sake of more daring programming is at the heart of their success and is, consciously, in direct opposition to the corporate theater business model. The Leagues want to remain personally involved in their business and offer their patrons an experience that is more special and fun than seeing a movie at a "big box" theater, which is why, after franchising their restaurant/theater concept (causing Alamos to pop up throughout the state of Texas), they decided to reduce their holdings to just three theater locations in Austin—Ritz, [3] South Lamar, and Village. The Leagues specialize in quirky, radical, and sometimes unprofitable programming, and the franchise demanded more generic entertainment. Consequently, the League-owned venues maintain the offbeat personality that spawned their cult-like fan base while the other franchise locations simply adopted the restaurant/theater concept, screening mostly mainstream Hollywood fare with tamer program offerings if any. For example, the downtown Alamo once had a screening of the 1961 sexploitation film *Nude on the Moon*, which people were encouraged to view completely naked. The franchised cinemas situated in the Austin suburbs and elsewhere in Texas have no interest in hosting such transgressive events; they tend to limit their offerings to family-friendly programs.

As this example demonstrates, Alamo programming content is quite varied and partially dependent on each particular theater. The original downtown location was the primary locale for participatory events and screened mostly "trash" cinema, exploitation, and "bad" popular media in the form of television programs and music videos, drawing paracinophiles, cult fans, and pop culture enthusiasts. Similarly, the current downtown venue, the Alamo Ritz, remains the main venue for paracinema, while all three locations screen a variety of art, foreign, and independent films for cinephiles, as well as first-run features and cult blockbusters. All offer an extensive menu, including alcoholic beverages, which is served to customers at their seats while viewing. Because the programming at the downtown site has often been risky and unprofitable, the Leagues have had to rely on food and drink sales (and now income from the two less risky theaters) to support their venture. While they advocate creative programming, they are still running a business, and like any business, their goal is to keep the doors open.

At the heart of the Alamo's cult programming is nostalgia for the films, viewing experiences, and promotional gimmicks of a bygone time. That is to say, the programmers' own sentimental desires for and affinity with the tactics and aesthetics of the itinerant film exploiters of the 1920s through 1950s and the shrewd, innovative producers of the 1950s and 1960s directly influence the films selected and the way in which they are exhibited and promoted. However, the various audiences who attend the Alamo's diverse array of event offerings are not necessarily conscious of the programmers' historical inspirations. The Alamo represents something different to its distinctive constituencies, and the theaters are continually renegotiating their relationships to their customers, to the niche markets they serve, and to the film industry in general. The Alamo programmers

are masters of exploitation gimmickry, the poaching of ideas (from other venues), and the recycling of old texts, and have used these skills to build their identity as a hip and singular place to go (as opposed to the multiplex experience). As the Alamo shapes its audiences' needs and desires, the audiences in turn contribute to the various directions in which the Alamo goes, including regular screenings, marathons (for example Harry Knowles' birthday Butt-Numb-A-Thon), and "full immersion" participatory events. In this multi-dimensional terrain of flow, the mutual interaction of national or commercial elements of film exhibition with the local culminate in a distinctively Austin cultural scene, one that is carefully cultivated and managed by Alamo staff.

Typically organized around a cult film or popular culture text, Alamo film events have turned the focus back onto the audience, a participatory and spectacular audience. The Roadshows and Sing-alongs are the best examples of this full immersion film experience. Roadshow events, for example, always take place outside of the theater space and include some or all of the following: pre- and post-show contests and activities, costumes, drinks, food, site tours, and travel (often outside Austin city limits). [4] The film, then, is no longer the single focus of the evening and often just serves as a backdrop. The audience and other sideshow attractions take turns with the exhibition of the movie in serving as the site of attention. Past Roadshows have included a canoe trip down the Colorado River, a pig roast, and live banjo music preceding the screening of *Deliverance* (1972). The first Roadshow ever, *Jaws* (1975), screened at Lake Travis while guests bobbed in the water and scuba divers swam below the surface grabbing people's legs. One of the most popular and recurring Roadshow events, which takes place on Halloween, is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) shown in the farmhouse where it was filmed, now in Kingsland, Texas. Attendees are treated to a tour of the site and a dinner of Sawyer chili; they may also camp out or stay overnight in the Antler Hotel. Roadshow events usually cost about \$20 but can be as much as \$80 and almost always sell out. The crowning achievement and, by far, the most ambitious Alamo film event is the Rolling Roadshow Tour, consisting of numerous screenings of different films in relevant locations (to the plot of each film) throughout the United States (Alamo website).

In the same immersive vein as Roadshow events, during Sing-alongs, guests sing along to the lyrics in each musical with the help of on-screen subtitles. Past Sing-alongs have included *Moulin Rouge* (2001), the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) television series episode "Once More, with Feeling" (2001), and *R. Kelly Trapped in the Closet: Chapters 1-12* (2005). These events often incorporate props, costumes, contests, or other movie-related activities. For example, before screening *Moulin Rouge*, Henri (an Alamo programmer), wearing a top hat and acting as emcee à la Harold Zidler, selected contestants from the audience and brought them on stage for a Cancan dance-off. Before dancing to a two-minute version of the tune, participants, both male and female, were asked to don skirts with petticoats. They then bounced and twirled their skirts while the audience watched, coaxed, and evaluated them. After the performances, the crowd clapped for the person they thought best. The three contestants were then asked to pass out the props for the evening: top hats, garter belts, spray bottles, and cameras. The garter belts were to be flung during the Cancan scene, the spray bottles squirted during the teary, sappy moments, and cameras were meant to flash at the moment the fireworks

explode behind Satine and Christian during their first kiss. The event showed people enthusiastically engaged in the activities, which brought the film alive in a way that is special to the Alamo setting and to a communal viewing of fans in a public space.

Is this just successful 21st-century hucksterism, a form of carnivalesque media spectacle? Or have the Alamo owners tapped into a need within a sector of the film fan population for collective and active viewing and dining experiences in a world in which individualistic modes of media consumption are ubiquitous? What role does the Alamo and its programming play in the socio-cultural lives of its audience members? Can there exist a cult fandom for an exhibition site, mode of programming, or programmer, and if so, what are the manifestations of that behavior, and are they evident in the Alamo case? These are just some of the questions that have guided my research of the Alamo phenomenon.

In order to answer these questions, I conducted surveys (see Appendix), interviews, [5] and focus groups with Alamo customers (ranging from the newly initiated to habitual attendees) in addition to observing special events: Sing-alongs, Food and Film, and Roadshows. I also had interviews with the owner, Tim League, to acquire some background history on the Alamo, and with other members of the Alamo programming team to determine their inspiration for program planning and their opinions of the Alamo phenomenon, particularly the relationship of fans to the theater.

For the purposes of my research, I employ the term fan to identify a member of the more dedicated group of Alamo customers (who repeatedly attend any one or more of the various types of Alamo events), rather than more general terms such as viewer, spectator, and audience, which are used in a broader sense in reception studies. Not everyone in attendance at an Alamo event is necessarily a fan, and every event is likely to draw both fans and non-fans—first-timers and occasional visitors—to the theater. Additionally, I apply the term participant to those individuals who are in some way participating in the extra-textual activities that take place at Roadshow and Sing-along events, be it singing, dressing up, or engaging in counterpoint dialogue. These categories and the subcultural fan groups present at the Alamo are neither neat nor precise and much overlap exists among them.

Audience Motivation and Cultural Capital

According to Janet Staiger, audiences have always acted differently according to movie genre and content, exhibition site, and the demographics or social dynamics of audience members. In fact, she proposes that modes of address, or the way in which the film "speaks" to the audience and modes of exhibition, how the film is presented, work together to produce modes of reception, the manner or strategies by which individuals interpret the text (Staiger, 2000:19). This model stresses the importance of cognitive and affective activities of spectators (identities, interpretative strategies, and cultural groups) that influence their modes of reception. Several scholars including Barbara Klinger, Jackie Stewart and Gregory Waller, whose work transitions from general theories of spectatorship to ethnography, have begun to explore the effects of context on film viewers (see also Griffiths, 2008; Friedberg, 1993). While there exists much

reception research on these various contexts of media, be it in the home, museum or mall, far less empirical research has been conducted in this area. A notable exception within film studies is Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire and Sarah Stubbings' study of British moviegoers.

In *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, Jancovich et al. emphasize the importance of theater spaces and people's connection to them when studying audiences in Nottingham, England. Like Jancovich et al., I am interested in more than film consumption and people's understanding of texts. For the purposes of this project, these concerns are secondary to people's attitudes toward the theater itself and their consumption (and, in many ways, creation) of the site's "personality" and its position within the community. Through their site observations and conversations with patrons, Jancovich et al. found that the choice of venue is a choice of experience, perhaps even a political choice, and that exhibition sites have the power to transform the reception of the films shown there. Moreover, the choices of the exhibitor or programmer also influence a text's reception and the development of taste cultures. I have found this to be true in the case of the Alamo, where programmers of exploitation have excited a room of people, not all fans, with their knowledge and enthusiasm for commonly under-rated texts. [6]

Jancovich et al. stress the fluidity of people's motivations for attending movies, and because they associate different types of experiences with different theaters, they are able to shape their viewing experience through their venue selection (Jancovich et al., 2003: 12). Moreover, theater patrons have expectations based on their prior experiences at each cinema or based solely on the identity/personality of the theater. Focusing on the history of cinemas in Nottingham, Jancovich et al. found the cinemas of the early 1900s not only advertised themselves as being local and run by local syndicates as opposed to bigger chains but also sought to distinguish themselves from other local theaters by fostering a unique identity (*Ibid.*: 87). Furthermore, as cinemas tried to outdo one another by offering bigger and better spectacles, "individual cinemas became objects of consumption as much as the films that they showed" (*Ibid.*: 115). In this manner, the Alamo Drafthouse strives to distinguish itself from other theaters partially through spectacle. By choosing to be a fan and regular consumer of Alamo programming, an individual supports the profile, identity, or personality of the theater and may even engage in the exchange of cultural or subcultural capital with other fans and audience members. [7]

The term cultural capital has been used by many socio-cultural scholars to describe the social and economic benefits of investing in certain cultural practices and possessing non-monetary material and symbolic goods. A term first used by Pierre Bourdieu, it has proved extremely useful in cultural studies of various populations from the rave scene to homeless shelters. Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of cultural capital occurs almost completely within the realm of class, while John Fiske (1992) broadens the concept by considering the factors that intersect with class, such as age and gender.

(Cult) Fans and Paracinephiles

In "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," Fiske (1992) expands upon Bourdieu's model of consumption, popular taste, cultural capital, and public space by giving more attention to the variations among the subordinate group. Fiske explains fandom as the subordinate class' response to being excluded from the dominant class' institutionalized canon of high art activities and objects. Bourdieu refers to each of these spheres of socio-economic and cultural distinctions—distinguished by taste, discrimination, and attitude—as a "habitus." Those deemed successful in their elitist habitus are often the richest in cultural capital, which is gained through acquired knowledge about whatever cultural objects and artists the group venerates. Fiske, in turn, proposes the concept of popular cultural capital, which is produced and used as "currency" amidst the subordinate class. Others use the term subcultural capital (see Jancovich, 2002; Thornton, 1996), which serves a similar purpose amongst a subculture's members.

Whereas Bourdieu and Fiske discuss popular taste in opposition to or as a result of its subordination by official high culture, in the case of the Alamo, a contingent of fans embrace an exhibition site and viewing experiences counter to, and even in resistance against, popular mainstream culture. This group of paracinema fans typically frequents events centered on trash cinema and campy pop culture texts and purposefully rejects the middlebrow fare and commercialism of the local megaplex, which could be considered a political motivation.

For a more nuanced discussion of hierarchies of fandom and taste cultures, Jeffrey Sconce's scholarship on paracinematic texts offers a detailed description of the types of movies on which paracinephiles focus and the camp and ironic reading strategies they employ, which provides useful insight into one of the dominant film subcultures that exist at the Alamo. Sconce argues in "'Trashing' the Academy" that paracinephiles, a highly educated cinematic subculture "organized around what are among the most critically disreputable films in cinematic history," are also a type of interpretive community, one that is politically motivated against the academy (Sconce, 1995: 374). He argues that the paracinematic obsession with excess "represents an explicitly political challenge to reigning aesthete discourses in the academy," thereby making the mere preference and consumption of particular texts a political act in the loosest definition of the term (*Ibid.*: 380). The ironic reading strategies of this community are acquired through many hours of viewing and reviewing of the trash canon of works (for example, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* [1959]). By embracing objects the cultural elite (academics, critics, aesthetes) and cinephiles deem unworthy of study and praise, trash enthusiasts seek to challenge the prevailing discourses about film by subverting the legitimate canon. "The paracinematic audience likes to see itself as a disruptive force in the cultural and intellectual marketplace" (*Ibid.*: 372). In their cultivation of a counter-cinema, they position themselves in opposition not only to the academy but also to Hollywood and mainstream U.S. culture in general. Paracinephiles share some of the same reading strategies and texts as cult fans, and the two groups often overlap. In fact, paracinephiles could be considered a subgroup within cult fandom.

Even within a seemingly unified group such as paracinephiles, there exist cultural differences and power struggles. The terrains on which these struggles play out differ from one group to the other. Scholars such as Matt Hills and Sarah Thornton speak of levels of fandom or a continuum, from the more casual participant to the very involved. Fans often construct these hierarchies among themselves, constantly seeking to make distinctions between themselves and other fan groups, the mainstream or popular culture, which often results in positioning themselves as good/authentic, while other fans or mass consumers are bad/inauthentic. In his discussion of cult fandom, Mark Jancovich describes this effort as emerging "from a need to produce and protect a sense of rarity and exclusivity" (Jancovich, 2002: 309), echoing Thornton's assessment that "subcultural capital is defined against the supposed obscene accessibility of mass culture" (Thornton, 1996: 121). But he points out that while the cult movie scene depends on distancing itself from dominant forces (the media and the academy), it emerged from the same sources as academic film (e.g. art cinemas and film societies) "and hence employ[s] similar discourses and reading strategies" (Jancovich, 2002: 308). As Stuart Hall points out in his work on subcultural youth groups, cultural forms are not coherent, neither wholly corrupt nor wholly authentic; "they are deeply contradictory" (Hall, 1981: 233). The same can be said for (sub)cultural formations. This is especially pertinent to film cultures as any group considering itself resistant to mainstream or Hollywood products or modes of production/consumption is dependent on those systems for its own identity (for example, paracinema and indie film).

According to Hills, dominant forces eventually co-opt alternative practices. Observing from an industrial perspective, Hills comments on the inevitable incorporation of supposedly resistant fan behavior or cult fan audiences through the business practice of target marketing, which culturally and economically disempowers through the isolation of the niche audience from the wider, more financially viable mass appeal texts. He argues, "initially unexpected consumption practices, far from challenging the interests of TV producers, and the power relationships through which capital circulates, are rapidly recuperated within discourses and practices of marketing" (Hills, 2002: 36). At the same time, he suggests a form of power resides in fandom as a niche market because individuals can see their "own values of 'authenticity' mirrored" (*Ibid.*: 37). In the same vein, Thornton maintains that while the notion of authenticity is crucial to subcultural ideology, media and businesses are "integral to the authentication of cultural practices" (Thornton, 1996: 9). In her study, the mainstream and the media are monolithic tropes from which young clubbers and ravers distance themselves. Likewise, film fans are aware of similar binaries within the film industry and are constantly negotiating the terms of their fandom in relation to these ideological distinctions. These observations are particularly useful when considering the "alternative-ness" of film scenes, such as those of the Alamo, which are sometimes based on an assumed authenticity and shared values that differ from the mainstream or commercial. While the Alamo seeks to set itself apart from other theaters and cultivate a cult fandom through the experiences it offers, other film industry sectors, such as DVD manufacturers, broadcast cult film programs and some commercial theaters (offering midnight movies and *Rocky Horror* at weekends) also seek to cash in on this market, making it difficult for the consumer to distinguish the authentic from the disingenuous, if this distinction does indeed exist.

Despite the fact that once singular spectator practices often become ubiquitous, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show (RHPS)* being a prime example, the study of the fan activities that accompany viewing, which Alamo programmers have mined for their participatory events, provides critical insight into sociological aspects of fan worship and identity related to cult film texts. Particularly incisive is the argument made by Robert E. Wood in "Don't Dream It: Performance and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*" that some cult film experiences mobilize an important facet of the movie-going experience that has been lost with the proliferation of at-home viewing—"the cultic nature of film itself" (Wood, 1991: 157). The ritual of partaking in a shared viewing experience in a public space is different than watching the same text individually on a personal viewing device (and then perhaps partaking in online community activity). In an attempt to have this immersive group experience, the live cult film audience counters the contemporary trend for film viewing to be more of an individual activity and less of a special social event.

Though *RHPS* and the cult activities it generated are hugely influential to the participatory, full immersion events of the Alamo, the influences of the Alamo programmers go even further back in film history. With heroes such as William Castle, Kroger Babb and Joe Bob Briggs, Alamo programmers relish in exploitation, cult, and B films. Moreover, they have adopted and adapted the promotional showmanship that accompanied the historical screenings of these types of films. [8] The exploiters and producers of the early to mid-nineteenth century shared a certain experimental and dramatic flair often tinged with recklessness, a style the Alamo programmers have harnessed, finessed and turned into the "bad ass" reputation they currently enjoy.

Alamo's Influences: Exploitation and Gimmicks

Around the turn of the century, poet Vachel Lindsay (1922) argued for an approach to exhibition that resembled "conversation theater," and in fact, early movie houses provided introductory activities, derived from vaudeville and other nineteenth century amusements, before the feature. Lasting until the 1950s, the format of movie exhibition programs within the context of the movie house or palace included shorts, newsreels, and lectures and coincided with the era of the exploiters, producers, and distributors who took the notion of the supplementary gimmick to new extremes when promoting their traveling roadshows. [9] In turn, the advertising and exhibition techniques of exploitation films strongly influenced film producer William Castle, who, beginning in the 1950s, elaborated on the use of promotional gimmickry at movie theaters to lure customers to his films. I recall these histories of early and mid-century film exhibition in order to provide the historical context for the Alamo's approach to promotion and exhibition and the concept of the Rolling Roadshows in particular.

Most importantly, exploitation films were about spectacle, evident in both their taboo content, with their focus on the marginalized "other," and in the mode of exhibition. These films are not pornography, or Hollywood B movies, or "low-budget genre pictures made by Poverty Row outfits," though they may share some stylistic elements of all three, especially a threadbare look, minimal set design, costumes, and effects, and stiff, some might say, unskilled acting (Schaefer, 1999: 2). [10] The audience for exploitation films was fairly specific

and was generally the clientele of grindhouse theaters and seedier independent and Poverty Row theaters in the skid row sections of urban environments, not mainstream America. Exploiters, those who produced, distributed, and exhibited exploitation films, were businessmen, often coming from the motion picture industry, and sometimes hucksters who believed they could make a reasonable profit on the high turnover of moderate to low-quality products as long as they offered, or promised to offer, the spectator unique and titillating content, which consisted of "sex hygiene, drug, nudist, vice, and burlesque films" (*Ibid.*: 6).

Today, the audience for exploitation films is composed mostly of fans of "bad movies." Eric Schaefer claims these fans appreciate the films "for their cinematic ineptitude," using reading strategies that stand "in opposition to middlebrow and elite taste" (*Ibid.*: 2-3). This description fits well the paracinephiles described in Sconce's work and could describe a segment of the audience members who attend the Rolling Roadshows and midnight screenings at the Alamo each week.

One of the main distribution mechanisms for exploitation films was "roadshowing," which was used by early motion picture practitioners until a shift away from independent distribution toward a vertically integrated model of distribution took place during the 1920s (*Ibid.*: 96). Roadshowing was rooted in earlier traveling entertainment industries, such as carnivals, medicine shows, and vaudeville, and consisted of exhibitors traveling around the country bringing film and entertainment to the people. Itinerant showmen of early motion picture history adapted this practice to exhibit films in areas without permanent picture shows. The Alamo has co-opted this manner of film exhibition for their Rolling Roadshow events, which are a direct descendent of the roadshows offered by traveling exhibitors of the early twentieth century.

Like Alamo participatory events, the exploitation film was not the only feature of roadshows, usually just the core attraction. Producers and distributors often packaged films with other sideshow activities and sent complementary materials, in the form of news reels, square-up reels, informational pamphlets, advertising, and lobby displays, and provided notes with suggestions for promotion and exhibition of the film (*Ibid.*: 101). Both Dwaine Esper and Kroger Babb "foreshadowed modern day merchandising tie-ins by peddling everything from sex-education booklets to miniature Bibles" to willing consumers across the nation (*Ibid.*: 22). The ad hoc and showman-like approach to the business of film exhibition led to the spectacular quality of exploitation screenings.

During their heyday, exploitation film screenings were a spectacle. Often chaotic, with audience members reacting with a "range of 'unacceptable' responses," Schaefer compares the experience to "attending the theater, the carnival, and the lecture hall" (*Ibid.*: 122). [\[11\]](#) Perhaps in anticipation of the titillating moments of the film, audience members would engage in call and response activities, groaning, hooting, and other verbal and non-verbal activities that were a departure from mainstream movie viewing responses of the day but recall the behavior of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century live theater audiences.

Perhaps the most influential aspects of exploitation exhibition and promotion on Alamo strategies are the extra materials and effects that traveled with the show. The Alamo has used lobby displays and other attractions for movie premieres, such as *The Amityville Horror* (2005), for which the theater erected a wooden house filled with 25,000 flies through which patrons could pass to attend the movie. For the opening night of *Rocky Balboa* (2006), the Alamo trucked in sides of beef, which they chained up in the lobby so attendees could use them as punching bags. These added features are what continually draw fans back to the Alamo and away from big box theaters, despite the fact the latter may be screening the same films.

In addition to the influence of exploitation's exhibition techniques on Alamo programming, the promotional methods used by exploiters have greatly informed those used by Alamo programmers. Though exploiters took their promotion cues from mainstream Hollywood's techniques, such as posters, lobby displays, and window cards, they managed to pervert and expand upon these methods, taking promotion to a new level. Alamo programmers mimic the improvised promotional methods used by exploiters, which are reminiscent of turn-of-the-century attractions like carnivals and circuses. The Alamo's promotional approach is clever in its reflexivity, use of the audience as spectacle, and recycling of texts. The following is an excerpt from their bi-monthly calendar for an event entitled *The 100 Best Kills* ("All the Violence. None of the Plot") which illustrates the exploitative tone of their advertising:

For as long as there have been movies, there have been people dying in movies... To celebrate all of this psychotic behavior, we have decided to put our heads together to compile the definitive list of the best kills... back to back to back to bloody back... we're gonna do for violence what SHOWGIRLS did for breasts. We won't bog you down with plots or characters...we're only delivering the payoffs. You'll see shocking kills... graphic kills... vintage kills, and every other freaking kind of kill you can imagine. DEFINITELY NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART. (Alamo Calendar, 2005: 11)

The way in which this passage is written sends the message that the event is for serious fans of violence. These strategies are remarkably reminiscent of the promotional tactics used by purveyors of exploitation, grindhouse, and roadshow movies. The challenge to spectators at the end reverberates throughout Alamo promotional materials and helps create its persona as a "bad ass" movie theater (a slogan used on their employee T-shirts).

According to Jack Stevenson, a self-proclaimed B-movie archaeologist, "film was [...] prone to gimmickry from the word go," but from the mid-fifties through the seventies, the art of the gimmick truly flourished (Stevenson, 2003:21). Many exploitation gimmicks were adopted by later film producers for screenings of mainstream and Hollywood-produced movies, particularly those geared toward the newly defined youth market of the 1950s. The gimmicks of this era consisted not only of lobby displays and pre-show activities, such as signing waivers and life insurance policies, but also included happenings during the viewing of the film. William Castle is among the best known of the movie producers/directors who used a variety of promotional strategies and on-site gags to enhance the movie-going experience. Continuing the trajectory of the

exploiteers for the expanding middle class and teenagers, Castle honed the art of creating a spectacle.

After observing a crowd of excited teenagers' desire to "have the shit scared out of them" at a screening of *Les Diaboliques* (1955), Castle realized a niche existed in the market (Castle, 1976: 133). Around this time, he went independent, which offered him the freedom to promote his pictures in any manner he chose and thus begun the reign of the "King of the Gimmick." For *Macabre* (1958), Castle decided to offer audience members a one-thousand-dollar Lloyds of London life insurance policy against death by fright. Before the movie, a clock projected onto the screen counted down sixty seconds and a voice told viewers that at the end of the countdown they would be insured. Castle believed it was the insurance ploy that drew crowds to the theaters in droves. He reported each theater that screened the film had people cued for blocks, and the lines were longer and buzzed with more excitement than those for *Les Diaboliques* (*Ibid.*: 143). As the film toured the country, Castle added new gimmicks. He had nurses situated inside theaters and ambulances stationed outside theaters for the feint of heart. At one screening, Castle arrived in a black hearse and, wearing a black cape, proceeded to shut himself inside a coffin propped up in front of the theater (*Ibid.*: 144).

Many of Castle's early gimmicks either involved pre-show warnings or in-house stunts the audience witnessed or felt, like seat buzzers that delivered electric shocks for *The Tingler* (1959). He eventually moved from these somewhat passive occurrences to those that involved more participation from the audience. For *Mr. Sardonicus* (1961), a film over which he and Columbia disagreed about the ending, he struck a compromise with the studio by filming two endings. The gimmick for the film emerged from this compromise in the form of the Punishment Poll, which allowed viewers to choose the ending of the film. Castle achieved what he had set out to accomplish—to heighten people's experience at the movies.

Obviously influenced by carnival promoters and exploiteers before him, Castle tapped into the curiosity of a generation and their need to be thrilled. Using successful exploitation tactics from earlier motion picture history and embellishing and manipulating them for Hollywood's courtship with the teenage population, he became an icon in the film industry. During a time when movie going was becoming a more serious matter and as attendance declined, he focused on the entertaining, popular, and spectacular nature of movies, much like the Leagues' approach to Alamo programming. The campy, sci-fi horror genres Castle cultivated, along with other producers, directors, and studios of the era, Roger Corman and Hammer Studios being prime examples, paved the way for the cult phenomenon and most extreme example of audience participation in film history—*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

A long tradition of audience participation and exploitation through marketing and promotion exists in U.S. entertainment history. From the lively carnivals and circuses at the turn of the century to the darkened theaters of the mid-1900s, producers and sellers of entertainment have used a variety of gimmicks, stunts, and attractions to lure people out of their homes during their leisure time and to separate them from their money. Some exploiteers were motivated by profit,

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others by a love of cinema, and still others by the pleasure the audience received from these experiences, and together these producers, entertainers, shysters, and exhibitors have created a rich and varied chronicle that modern-day programmers, like those at the Alamo, use as inspiration for their own experiments in exploitation.

When I interviewed Tim League, I asked "why these programming decisions?" Tim simply replied he and the programming team want to "make the movie experience more special." They want to "create a unique, fun movie-going experience," but he admits market forces are also involved. Independent exhibitors/theater owners, of which only 450 existed in the U.S. as of 2003, are not only battling the DVD and home theater systems phenomena, which has resulted in people often waiting for new movies to be released on DVD, but also the proliferation of digital megaplexes with all their technological bells and whistles. Though the Leagues have invested in more elaborate sound systems at the newest theater, they are not attempting to compete with the million-dollar megaplexes. Their goal is to fill a different niche in the movie market, one in which people possess an appreciation for alternative films and film experiences, and some curiosity for exhibition methods of old, like traveling roadshows and drive-in theaters. The South Lamar theater murals of long-gone Austin drive-ins directly reference these almost extinct exhibition practices. Even if people were not alive to experience these events first hand, remnants of the past have been kept alive in the media, via movies and photographs, as well as through the last holdouts from those eras.

Audience Feedback

After having been both an observer and participant at several "full-immersion" events at the Alamo Drafthouse, I generated a survey (see Appendix) and distributed it to attendees of several different types of Alamo events: Sing-alongs, Food and Film, and Roadshows. [12] From the eighty-six individuals who completed surveys, eight volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. [13] I will now attempt to synthesize my findings.

Alamo fans attend events for multiple reasons but largely for the type of experience provided by the Alamo—socially, culturally, aesthetically, and gastronomically. Fans assume a like-mindedness or imagined community among audience members, which was defined as leftward leaning and more appreciative of the medium of film than mainstream theaters. Survey respondents hinted at a cultural capital element to the Alamo allure—the social boost of being seen at a cool and trendy place—and some even identify themselves as Alamo fans on online networking sites. No matter which audience I examined, the Alamo attracts patrons with their cynical yet humorous irreverence and tongue-in-cheek attitude toward programming. As for participatory programs, like Sing-alongs and Roadshows, fans indicate an attraction to the spectacular nature of these events. Ultimately, however, fans choose to return to the Alamo in their leisure time for the promise of fun it delivers.

Perhaps the most articulate survey response regarding fan motivation for attending a film screening at the Alamo was the following:

I'm probably more of a geek but so is everyone else so I don't feel out of place. For example, if you go to a late night screening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, you are going to be there with some hardcore fans. You clap at the best bits, whoop and holler sometimes, but its [sic] ok because everyone understands. Its [sic] part of the reason you go to see it in a theater and don't just watch it at home on DVD.

This viewer feels comfortable at the Alamo because of a perceived sense of community and shared interests and tastes with other fans but recognizes a hierarchy (or at least a difference in level of involvement) exists among these fans. The respondent also alludes to the acceptable behavior at Alamo events and screenings and indicates a sense of ease in the accepting environment of the theater. The survey respondent has touched upon several issues crucial to this study: cult fandom and degrees of fandom, fan behavior, interpretive communities, and the communal viewing experience.

Alamo patrons are a predominantly young, white, educated, and creative population who like to have a good time. [14] They are avid media consumers who tend to enjoy going out to the theater slightly more than watching movies at home. They consider going to the Alamo a special social experience where people-watching, drinking, eating, vocalizing, and acting out at events are all pleasurable activities in which they engage. Of all the events, Sing-alongs rank the highest in preference, likely because they are the most interactive. People enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to be part of the spectacle or, at the very least, to observe others participating in the spectacle. Patronage differs according to each event, but crossover often occurs among the different groups of fans. Many respondents consider their preference in theaters to be a bonding feature, which may explain why I found no evidence of fractures within or among the Alamo film-going groups, the likes of which can be found at Comic-con, for example, between Twi-hards and fanboys. Like other fan cultures, there exist hierarchies among audiences at Alamo events as the respondent above alludes to, but I have neither witnessed nor been told of any overt displays of intolerance. [15] Perhaps due to the alcohol consumption or the temperament of this segment of the Austin community, the atmosphere is generally laid-back and friendly.

The data revealed the success of the Alamo is rooted more in cult fandom than in nostalgic sentiments for the historical film traditions to which the Alamo programmers pay homage. Fans continue to return to the theater for the fun it provides and the social nature of the combined theater and restaurant concept. Underlying the social quality of the space is the cultural capital that is inherent in being a regular Alamo patron, or fan. Alamo patrons are aware of each other but claim not to put as much effort into impressing one another with outward appearance as I, and those interviewed, anticipated. The consumption of the other plays out more in the exhibitionist displays of the participatory events where audience members make spectacles of themselves in response to the coaxing of event hosts. Both those surveyed and interviewed thought the audience to be higher in intelligence, more knowledgeable about film, and more creative than the audience at a corporate multiplex theater.

Because the audience, texts and types of programming for Alamo events change and thus dictate the type of fanship for a particular evening, it is not possible to identify just one subculture for the Alamo Draffhouse. Those who attend The Hobbit Feast may achieve enjoyment from revisiting these films with other "Ringers" while attendees of the *Mommie Dearest* Roast might engage in a camp reading of that 1981 movie. Based on interviews and my observations of events and screenings, I have identified at least three groups who regularly attend the Alamo—paracinephiles, cinephiles, and pop-culture fans. These categories compose the clientele of the Alamo's participatory events; however, the fans of these events could also be considered discrete fan populations (i.e., Sing-along fans and Roadshow fans). I consider these fan groups, or genres of fans, to be fluid and mostly dependent on the type of text and/or program. The midnight screenings draw a dedicated core audience with programming content and the allure of the programmer who offers fans a brief education about exploitation film with each introduction to the screenings. Yet another faction of Alamo fans exist who will go see any movie at the Alamo just for a night out at their favorite theater; this is the broadest classification of Alamo fan, fans of the theater (experience) itself.

Though I did not collect data on what Alamo patrons are doing with the texts during participatory programs, I believe from my extensive observation at Alamo events and some interviews, that the notion of deconstructing and reconstructing texts is an important one in the case of the Alamo phenomenon. According to Robert White, in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing a text, an audience creates an alternative view of society in terms of its cultural identity. Most important in the deconstruction of a text is the exploration and appropriation of one's personal and cultural identities which White explains is accomplished through decoding, knowing about production processes, reevaluating cultural capital, "affirming independence from dominant cultural patterns," and engaging in oppositional and resistive readings (White, 2000: 220-222). Deconstruction is therefore a cultural practice that mocks the political economic interests at play in the media—"the cheap production quality, the shifts in programming for financial reasons, the improvised scripting, the abuse of advertising, and all of the other hypocrisies of the media" (*Ibid.*: 222)—and parodies culture, thereby allowing the participant to declare an independence from the dominant culture. This practice, in many ways, describes the manner in which Alamo fans, the paracinephiles in particular, approach the texts during certain events and their reasons for liking the Alamo theater as a business in opposition to more commercial corporate theaters.

Reconstruction, on the other hand, consists of a collective reworking of the media, attempts at influencing content, and the creation of alternative culture industries by fan groups. It is apparent when attending participatory events that Alamo fans are engaging in an alternative culture industry that has been created by the Alamo owners and programmers in response to a perceived need within the movie-going community. At Alamo events, the deconstructed film can become an expression of a subculture, a group identity celebrated by people who identify with it, which may manifest itself in special clothing or style of dress, props or symbols of the subculture, or vocalizations aimed at the text. In doing this, participants feel connected to each other and/or the text, which is harder to achieve in the mass mediated environment. I do not believe Alamo

fans are necessarily aware of what they are doing at events, that they are deconstructing texts, or the significance of the social activity in which they take part, the process of forming new (sub)cultural identities. Much of the time, Alamo patrons attend the theater purely for a fun night out; however, those fans who have formed an attachment to the theater and to the programmers/programming are taking part in more significant social behaviors than only enjoyment of leisure time. The motivations for these behaviors vary for each individual, but members of each fan group share certain motivations that link them in a subcultural community.

Many factors contribute to what I argue is a cult fandom of the theater and its programmers. The theater's irreverent persona (the collective identity of the programmers/owners as expressed through program choices and in-house trailers and pre-show announcements), [16] the availability of high-quality food and drink, the personal involvement of the owners and programmers (and their obvious passion for film), the spectacular nature of participatory events, the social scene, and the promise of fun the Alamo offers its patrons all contribute to maintaining and expanding the dedicated fan base the Alamo has established. Alamo fans partake in many of the same activities as cult fans do with the texts they enjoy. For instance, Alamo fans make pilgrimages, either for Roadshow events (the Roadshow Tour is a month long pilgrimage) or to the theater from other parts of the country. Repeat visits, an obvious necessity for a fan and an initiator, is another key cult fan element similar to repeat viewings of texts. The data showed that the majority of Alamo patrons visit the Alamo at least once a month and many of them go twice a month or more.

Fans see the Alamo as a hip place with which to be associated. One respondent mentioned the Alamo is used as a buzzword on dating sites and online social networking forums. To communicate to others about their identity, Alamo fans reveal not just that they like movies but that they specifically go to the Alamo and are part of its subcultural scene. In this manner, fans' desires to be perceived as a member of a cool social scene become a motivation for attendance. The knowledge gained from experiences at the Alamo and interactions with other fans and the programmers contribute to fans' acquisition of cultural capital, which is particularly important in a film-focused city like Austin. Furthermore, the mere act of being seen there may feed their need to be conspicuous consumers of cool culture. The role of the other is imperative in an individual's sense of self. The "consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of other's consciousness [...]. One needs the other's gaze to constitute oneself as self" (Stam, 1989: 4-5). Without peers witnessing one's actions or possessions, those activities, behaviors, and objects do not benefit or help to advance the individual in the social group.

Conclusion

"Fanship is about both engaging in activity and managing identity," which allows one to rethink "the sociological understandings of subculture" (Harrington and Bielby, 1995: 6-7). Harrington and Bielby question "not just what fans do but who they are" (*Ibid.*). I have extended this by asking fans who they *think* they are and who they think other fans are, from a sociological perspective rather than a psychoanalytical one, and furthermore, what role the Alamo theater, as

event organizer, plays in the fan's social identity. This touches upon a distinction between public and private fandom, how fans demonstrate their fandom in the public sphere as opposed to the way in which they manage their identity as fans. I have observed the Alamo fans' public fandom; through surveys and interviews, I have gained a better understanding of their identities as Alamo fans and/or patrons and their views on other Alamo audience members. The most dedicated of Alamo fans take pride in their association with the theater and view it almost as a home away from home, or as a second living room where they would gather with their closest friends. They include the owners and programmers in that familiar social group because even if they do not know them personally, and many do, they believe they would be the type of people with whom they would socialize.

My findings pertaining to the success of the full-immersion film events at the Alamo are that many of the same motivations for cult films are at play at these events. Alamo events provide an eclectic yet mildly exclusive sense of community—a community that is for the most part unified by a mode of interpretation based on irreverence toward highbrow art and an ironic sense of humor in relation to trash cinema and popular media. Moreover, they encourage the audience to become part of the spectacle. The idea of viewing a film in a way that is in opposition to the mainstream (or common multiplex environment) is particularly attractive to cult film fans and to Alamo fans. Alamo fans have formed a cult-like attachment to the theater, certain programming, and the programmers, and this fandom has shaped the Alamo phenomenon and is largely responsible for the theater's success.

I have written on the motivations of Alamo fans and the varied fan populations within the umbrella group of "fans of the Alamo theater," but it is the activities that take place at participatory events that lead to the formation of these communities and, according to Tim League, help combat the complacency of today's media consumer. As technology for television and movie viewing has become more varied, easily portable, and highly individualized, and as viewers, particularly younger media consumers, grow evermore tolerant of various formats, the future of the movie theater venue as we know it seems transitory. One of the few experiences traditional venues can provide that new consumption practices cannot is the communal viewing event. It is difficult to predict whether the practice of group viewing in a large venue and interacting with texts as a group will remain important to upcoming generations of media consumers. But at this point in time, these activities are still a reason for people to leave the comfort of their homes to view movies at the cinema. The Leagues are responding to (and perhaps fostering) this need among filmgoers by offering viewing environments and experiences that cannot be replicated at home. Events like Roadshows and Sing-alongs, by their very nature, necessitate being outside the home (and outside the theater in the case of the former) and among a large group of people. These events offer fans the opportunity to participate actively in their leisurely consumption of media and, beyond that, to shape their own experience by contributing as much or as little as desired. Participation takes a variety of forms, including vocal responses, attire, and props, and allows those viewers prone to exhibitionism to exercise their desires and become central to the spectacle of the event. Alamo fans, programmers, and the texts around which they gather develop decorum for film viewing similar to those of

the paracinephile. Very specific behaviors are agreed upon for cohesion of and inclusion in the community. In some cases, the programmer attempts to dictate the acceptable behaviors and becomes the guide in the spectacular participatory experience, but the result is always one of collaboration between audience members and programmers. These symbolic elaborations of gesture, or what Thorstein Veblen refers to as "manners," are "an expression of the relation of status, – a symbolic pantomime of mastery on the one hand and of subservience on the other" (Veblen, 1918: 47).

Alamo events possess characteristics of the turn-of-the-century carnival, making them a carnivalesque spectacle packaged for and consumed by film (and Alamo theater) fans. These distinctive events, the way in which they are advertised, and the identity of the theater are all consciously crafted by Alamo programmers to appeal to a specific segment of the Austin film-going community. However, the types of films screened and the fans themselves also contribute to the unique atmosphere of the Alamo. Some of these fans act as tourists dropping in to be entertained while others actively participate in the creation of the spectacle, and others use the experience to establish social subcultural networks. These theatrical spectacles reveal, on the part of the audience, "the lust for participation in cultural extravaganzas" (Kellner, 2005: 8). In this way, the Alamo is competing against technological spectacle with old-fashioned, low-budget spectacle: the audience and promotional gimmickry.

Appendix: Survey Questions

General Viewing Habits

1. How many films a month do you see in a theater?
2. How many movies a month do you rent or receive by mail?
3. Do you estimate that you spend more money overall on going out to movies (including refreshments, etc.) or watching them at home (including membership fees, etc.)?
4. Select which of the following you use for accessing movies for home viewing (all that apply):
5. If you download from net, what web source(s) do you use? (this will, of course, remain confidential)
6. How do you view movies at home (select all that apply)?
7. If you have a home theater system, state what type and list its features:
8. Do you prefer watching movies at home or in the movie theater?
9. Please explain answer to above question:

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Alamo Viewing Habits

1. How often per month do you go to Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas?
2. Which locations do you visit (circle all that apply)?
3. How many Alamo film "events" (special screenings with related activities) have you attended in the past year?
4. What type of Alamo screenings and events do you attend?
5. Do you attend alone or with others?
6. If with others, about how many on average?
7. Why do you attend Alamo events?
8. What are your favorite Alamo events?
9. What is different, if anything, about watching movies at the Alamo compared to other theaters?
10. If you dress differently when going to Alamo events than for viewing films at other theaters, please explain:

Alamo Viewing Habits (cont'd)/Demographic Info

1. When attending special events at the Alamo that include costume contests or other attire themes, do you participate? Please explain:
2. Have you ever used and/or brought props to an Alamo event? Please explain:
3. If you act differently when going to Alamo events than when viewing movies at other theaters, please explain:
4. When attending special events at the Alamo that include singing or other types of vocal responses, do you participate? Please explain:
5. Sex (optional):
6. Age (optional):
7. Ethnicity/Race (optional):
8. Occupation (optional):
9. Political stance (optional):
10. Any other personal characteristics you wish to share:

Notes

[1] They have an extensive beer and wine list, as well as appetizers, entrées, and desserts prepared by trained chefs.

[2] The Alamo continues to win best theater in the weekly independent journal, *Austin Chronicle's* "Best Of" edition eight years running (through most recent "Best Of" issue, September 2009), and it was ranked number one theater in America in *Entertainment Weekly's* August 12, 2005, issue, which called it "one of America's most fanatically unique movie-going experiences, specializ[ing] in oddball repertory programming events [...] and a traveling road show" (Cruz, 2005: 1). Additionally, in a conversation with Jessica Simpson about Austin on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (5 October 2006), Kimmel referred to the Alamo theater as a special Austin experience.

[3] The original downtown location on Colorado Street closed in June 2007 and reopened in the newly renovated Ritz Theater, also downtown, on Sixth Street in November 2007.

[4] In 2002, the Leagues purchased the key feature of the Roadshow: a portable, inflatable, 25x50-foot screen. This, and a truck outfitted with a 35mm projector, made it possible for them to take their shows on the road.

[5] I interviewed twelve people in total. Four were staff or in some way associated with the organization of the theater: Tim League, owner/programmer; Kier-la Janisse, programmer; Henri Mazza, event coordinator and film editor for trailers; and Brent Lyles, board member. Eight were Alamo patrons, ranging from hardcore fans to the newly initiated, who volunteered via the survey.

[6] Here I am referring to the midnight screenings that are introduced and contextualized by a learned programmer of trash cinema. Every Tuesday at midnight, the Alamo hosts \$1 screenings of B horror films called Terror Tuesdays; and on Weird Wednesdays, they screen exploitation and cult films.

[7] In *Club Cultures*, Sarah Thornton adapted Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to a currency exchanged among members of subcultures. At the Alamo, this takes the form of discussing trivia about the media being screened or about previous programs and wearing T-shirts or other visual adornments related to the beloved texts or to the cinema (Alamo T-shirts are available for purchase at Mondo Tees, located at the downtown and South Lamar venues).

[8] This showmanship is especially evident at the immersive events, at which programmers coax the audience to participate in a variety of activities, as was described earlier in my description of the *Moulin Rouge* Sing-along. I provide an example and further discussion of how this plays out in Alamo promotional tactics later in this essay.

[9] Eric Schaefer identifies the period as lasting from 1919 to 1959.

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[10] These stylistic effects were due to scant financing which caused extremely hectic shooting schedules. A long shoot for an exploitation film was seven days, and filmmakers never shot a scene more than three times (Schaefer, 1999: 54).

[11] This multifaceted and multi-sensual concept of movie-going coincides with how interviewees perceive the Alamo as more than just a movie theater (also a performance space, concert hall, etc.).

[12] The link to the survey was e-mailed to participants; they completed them online at surveymonkey.com.

[13] Interviewees are Ellen, Carrie, Ann, Beth, Wayne, Doug, Craig, and Tom (names changed to protect their identities). This information was current at time of interview. Ellen is a recent graduate of the Public Policy program at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas and is in her mid-twenties. She is currently job-hunting and expressed a mild interest in going to the movies (6 on a scale of 1-10). Carrie is a graduate student in the American Studies department at the University of Texas and in her late twenties. She is a huge fan of exploitation and cult films (10 of 10), as well as popular culture in general. Ann is in her forties and works in the non-profit arena. She is currently the acting director of a crime prevention organization that assists prisoners, while incarcerated, and ex-convicts once they are released back into society. She has a fairly strong interest in film (8 of 10) and goes to the movies about once a week. Beth, 39, is a graphic designer, sculptor, and soon-to-be graduate student in counseling psychology. Unusual because she is an artist, Beth expressed the least interest in film (2), actually stating that she is not very interested in movies per se. However, she loves to attend the special events at the Alamo and has been to many of them. Wayne, 48, and Doug, thirty-something, both work in the tech industry; one as a software programmer and the other as a tester. Craig, also thirty-something, is a technical writer and editor and is currently working for the Legislature. Tom is a newly arrived resident of Austin, having relocated from San Francisco where he just completed a graduate degree in psychotherapy; he appeared to be in his mid-twenties. He moved to Austin with his partner, who began the MFA program in the Radio-TV-Film department at the University of Texas. All the men have a fairly strong interest in film (in the 8 or 9 range). Interestingly, none of the interviewees have any children.

[14] Per the 2000 Census, Austin is 68% White, 30.5 % Hispanic or Latino (overlaps with race categories), 11% Black, 5.5% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 18% other race. The median age is 29.6. The overwhelming homogeneity of the Alamo audience given the Census data is a difficult issue to address within the scope of this essay. I could speculate that the Alamo's marketing does not target a diverse audience or that audiences for the particular genres in which they specialize are not especially diverse. However, I did not investigate this issue thoroughly.

[15] The one suggestion of tension among Alamo audiences was raised by a survey respondent who wrote, "I like the people that come to these (usually) minus the sinus show which tends to bring out rich assholes."

[16] The Alamo's announcements for theater protocol are quite clever in their cheekiness; a number of survey respondents and interviewees cited these, pre-show footage and trailers from Tim League's personal trash film archive and homemade ads for upcoming events (often exploitative in their tone) as representative of the Alamo persona and as an alluring element of the theater.

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