

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Counterpublics Theory - Nancy Fraser (Fraser, Nancy 1990: Rethinking the Public Sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. Social Text 25/26: 56-58.)
- Publics and Counterpublics Theory - Michael Warner (Warner, M. (2005) 'Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version)', Quarterly Journal of Speech, 88(4), pp. 413-425).
- Attention and Temporality in Modern Society - Jonathan Crary (Crary, J. (2013) 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep. London: Verso)

When the lights dim

ARSENAL KINO & THE COUNTERPUBLIC SPACE IN THE STREAMING ERA

This ethnographic study examines how Arsenal Kino in Tübingen functions as a counterpublic sphere in the age of streaming platforms and individualized media consumption. Through participant observation at screenings and interviews with regular attendees and staff, this research explores how audiences actively create alternative cinema culture through shared practices and community formation. The study investigates how the physical and temporal experience of collective film viewing serves as resistance to always-available digital media, drawing on Michael Warner's theory of counterpublics and Jonathan Crary's work on attention and temporality. Findings suggest that Arsenal maintains its cultural significance through the sensory and social experiences it provides—the ritual of gathering in a dark room with strangers and shared temporal commitment to cinema. As art house cinemas struggle to survive in the post-COVID streaming era, understanding how spaces like Arsenal sustain their relevance offers insights into the persistence of collective cultural practices in an increasingly individualized media landscape.

METHODOLOGY

- Participant Observation at Arsenal Kino screenings
- Semi-structured Interviews with regular attendees and staff
- Ethnographic Fieldwork
- Programming Analysis of film selections and curatorial patterns
- Informal Conversations with audience members

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- **Declining Attendance:** Arsenal has experienced a 40% reduction in audience numbers
- **Generational Shift:** Younger audiences less likely to attend new art house film screenings
- **Streaming Impact:** Home viewing preferences significantly affecting theater attendance for new releases
- **Community Disruption:** Even regular attendees not consistently attending Kino Atelier after Arsenal's closing
- **Ritual Resistance:** Despite declining numbers, remaining audiences value collective viewing as counter to individualized streaming
- **Programming Challenges:** Art house films struggle to attract audiences compared to pre-streaming era
- **Spatial Significance:** Physical cinema space remains important for dedicated film enthusiasts despite overall decline

