

NOT GAZING, BUT WATCHING: THE ENIGMA OF THE FILM AUDIENCE

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Abstracts

Martin Barker (University of Wales)

Betokening John Malkovich

This paper reports on a small body of research with audiences at Brighton's Duke of Yorks cinema who had watched Being John Malkovich. This is a film which circulated mainly in small independent and art-house cinemas, and was identified by reviews as an 'off-centre', slightly off the wall and very clever comedy. The research - amounting to just 18 interviews with people who had seen the film - was particularly interested in the question: as audiences watch this film, how do they go about several related processes? First, simply, linking events, and making plausible sequences of events, and motives; second, finding pleasure for themselves in the manner of their participation in the film; third, identifying themselves as particular kinds of people who know how to work with a film of this kind. The interviews were carried out at various places in and around Brighton, in 2000.

Brigid Cherry (St Mary's College, University of Surrey)

“Not only is it British, it's also a horror film”: genre audiences, national cinema and fan taste.

Genre films have long been a staple of British cinema, though in the area of horror, fantasy and science fiction, they have tended (with the exception perhaps of Hammer horror) to be overshadowed by their American counterparts. Of concern here is that American cultural forms elide the national culture. British audiences are limited in the range of national texts which they can see and their choice of viewing is often restricted – at least as far as new releases – to predominantly American products supplemented with the occasional British or foreign film. This is no less true of genre cinema. How, then, do British genre audiences respond to British genre films? And are the tastes of domestic audiences affected by this American-dominated monoculture?

In addressing these questions, qualitative data obtained from an ethnographically-based study of British genre fans in the science fiction and horror communities are analysed. At least since Hebdige's study of subcultures, oppositional communities have been regarded as a cultural force. Oppositional or subcultural groups are now recognised as an important aspect of the relationship between interpretive communities, resisting audiences and mainstream culture. Research into fan audiences in order to ascertain the range of audience responses and experiences remains important. Audience studies are recognised as being fraught with difficulties. Nevertheless, such studies can, in directly accessing the audience, contribute to accounts of the relationship between the viewers and the film text (Jancovich, 2001).

My work therefore focuses on the activities of genre audiences, their tastes and preferences, and their responses to key genre films. A number of questions have arisen with respect to genre fans and their behaviour both as audience members and as participants in fan cultures. Of paramount relevance here is the need to ascertain whether nationality and other aspects of identity are factors either in patterns

of taste amongst genre audiences or in the reception of particular films. In order to begin to answer such questions, this research is centred around a study of the reception of the British sci-fi/horror film, *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) by British fans.

In this analysis, then, I examine whether the fan responses to the film might be related to national or cultural identity. Factors related to identity – including ideas of taste – are crucial in respect of the formation of discourses circulating amongst genre audiences. Of particular note here are the fans' privileging of the 'Britishness' of the film, particularly in terms of aesthetic and narrative breaks with the dominant forms of Hollywood genre, their identification with its characters and locations, and their fondness for British filmmakers. This presentation is not an analysis of the text, but rather focuses on aspects of the text of interest to the audience. In this context, national cinema audiences are foregrounded – particularly in respect of questions of taste in a popular culture dominated by American texts.

Anna Claydon (Edge Hill College of Higher Education)

Learning from the Audience: Cinema Studies, Archiving and Film Societies' Collections from the 1930s to the 1970s

The majority of the Britain's film collections, of films themselves and the documentation and artefacts surrounding them, have been private collections that have entered the public domain. They offer film researchers a perspective on what it means to be a fan and, especially in the mid-period of the twentieth century, how an audience culture has developed for cinema which is quite different from theatre or music fandom. This audience culture is one grounded in the power of the image as opposed to the power of the performer or author and the interest of fans in key cinema figures has been centred around the presence of the subject. Even when we consider how directors during this period develop an iconography it is important to remember the importance of the icon within that identification. Would Hitchcock or Huston or Ford have become well known to the public if they did not have an easily identifiable look? In theatre, whilst the performer is fêted and photographed and judged visually, the audience's applause and interest are fundamentally rooted in the ephemeral qualities of the never-to-be-repeated performance on the stage and the abilities of the actor or director or designer. In music, even more so, with renderings of music by different musicians compared and contrasted for the audience and with the merits of composition debated more hotly within the music audience's medias.

In this paper, I will discuss what it is we can learn from the cinema collections made by fans and film societies during the mid-twentieth century and what the choices made about what to collect in the first place tell the film researcher about the peculiarities of film society membership. Does the kind of image collected by one audience member tell you that he or she liked or disliked an actor, or does it tell you something about the obsessiveness of the collector? What do a series of scrapbooks tell the research about changing tastes over a decade or more of cinema spectatorship? This discussion I shall then extend to consider how archive collation and audience collections can be used to make film history and its enigmatic audiences less mysterious to the student of film.

Central to this paper will be the inclusion of archive materials from the archive for which I am academic co-ordinator and research documentation used with students in studying the use of archive material in everyday teaching, all of which I plan to exhibit within the talk using PowerPoint.

Theresa Cronin (Goldsmiths College, University of London)

The Promises of Monsters

Contemporary Hollywood Cinema, and particularly the modern 'blockbuster' cannot simply be reduced to the psychosexual encounter that much of film theory would suggest. Cinema is often a profoundly physical and bodily event. Moreover, this corporeal cinematic experience is one that is created, managed and policed by the institutional 'arrangements' of cinema

This paper sees cinema as an 'apparatus', or perhaps more accurately, as an institutional 'arrangement' that acts upon the body of the individual to create the profoundly subjective experience of cinema. It suggests that we should not view cinema as a rigid ideological or psychological mechanism, but as a more fluid deployment of power. This more Foucaultian view of the apparatus of cinema allows us to focus not only on the texts, the technologies and the material conditions of viewing but enables us to consider the system of relations that exist between a "heterogeneous ensemble...of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions."

Such a notion of the cinematic apparatus does not depend on a universalistic or essentialist notion of the psyche. Rather it sees the body as the central mechanism through which the effects of cinema are achieved. Cinema, in this view, can be fruitfully seen as a disciplinary practice concerned with the production of a 'docile body';

a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body...entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it.

The body of the viewer then, is subject to the power of the institution; a productive power capable of generating "sensations, and pleasures". Cinema then, uses its discourses to invest the viewer's body with sensational potential; areas are intensified and surfaces are electrified by cinema's power. In many ways, the viewer of contemporary cinema becomes what Deleuze might call a 'body without organs': an empty, hollow sphere; a site of pure potential; subject to a constantly shifting arrangement of potential intensities.

This paper then, will seek to show how cinema uses its discourses to promise and provoke a bodily response within the viewer. Through an examination of film posters and trailers, of press releases, previews, reviews and editorials, it will show how cinema as an institution often promotes itself on the sheer physicality of the experience. It fans urban myths about extreme responses like fainting in response to its imagery or narrative, helping to inspire the myth, as well as create a desire for 'total cinema' in which the individual's physical control is forgone in response to the text.

On the other hand however, there is a strict regulation of what counts as a 'legitimate' experience/ physical response within cinema, and widespread social concern over the effects of cinema, particularly on those considered to be either vulnerable (ie children), or 'dangerous' (ie offenders, or the mentally ill). The moral panics and strict regulation of certain kinds of imagery can therefore be seen as a demarcation of the social limits of what might be considered 'acceptable' experiences within cinema, as well as a kind of crisis that surrounds 'appropriate' or 'normal' responses to certain kinds of imagery. In this instance, the cultural anxiety grows out of the recognition that the viewer's response is not 'universal' – for example, that one cannot guarantee that an individual will react to violence with 'horror', 'dismay' or 'anxiety'. The discourses of cinema then can be seen to 'police'

the individual's response to certain kinds of filmic imagery by rigidly enforcing the binary opposition between normal and abnormal experiences.

Mark Goodall (University of Bradford)

Trashing the net: subcultural practice online

This intention of this paper is to critically examine uses of the World Wide Web by fans of cult movies. The paper seeks to explore how and why fans of cult films are utilising the internet as a site/tool for the dissemination/ distribution, historicization, consumption and reception of materials attributed to their particular interest in various 'shock cinemas'. The paper begins by outlining how cult movies and their audiences have been, and continue to be, categorised- and notes the problems that this engenders. Then the developing relationship between technologies and subcultural practices is observed with special reference to cult film audiences and cult product. Vivid examples and case studies are presented from the history of cult cinema to illustrate questions relating what (through, for example, remediation processes) such practices can tell us about forms of contemporary communication and consumption.

Peter Gray and Ailsa Hollinshead (University of Stirling; University of Edinburgh & Napier University)

Being Audiences: embodied practices

The film audience has been enumerated and has been the subject of academic speculation but has rarely been researched in and of itself. This paper reports on a small-scale project, which seeks to explore the experiences of the audience of a specific type of cinema who are members of the Edinburgh Film Guild. The project is the culmination of a five-year ethnographic study by the authors, who are themselves members of the Edinburgh Film Guild.

The Edinburgh Film Guild is the longest running Film Society in the UK and was the founder-organisation of the Edinburgh Film Festival. Membership of the Guild offers a choice of two films once a week with physical space for discussion and socialisation before and after the films. Membership also confers concessionary status for Filmhouse screenings. The low cost of membership means that the socio-demographic profile is not confined to the economically active.

The project sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the specific viewing trajectories of Guild members?
2. Were there specific aspects of the cinema space (as opposed to videos/DVDs) that were important?
3. What (if any) difference does genre make to the individual and collective viewing experience?
4. How does knowledge of the filmmaking process contribute to the viewing experience, and does membership of a film guild/society contribute to that knowledge?
5. How do discussion and the social experience of membership contribute to the audience experience?

This paper reports on our findings from the ethnographic work, focus groups and interviews conducted in early 2004 with Edinburgh Film Guild members. The focus groups comprised both recent and long-standing members, whose experiences in some cases extended back as far as the 1930s.

Our findings challenge much received wisdom about audience responses to film. Confident viewers are likely to be as transgressive as they are complicit, in that they actively demonstrate agency and refuse to be “sutured” into a particular position. Furthermore, we suggest that some of the assumptions of film theory about directorial intentions, audience decodings and interpellation are flawed. Collective film viewing in the cinema, on the other hand, is seen as an important aspect of the cultural and social capital of guild members.

We conclude by suggesting that there may be hybrid ways of conceptualising the film audience, which take viewing to be a product of specific personal and social trajectories within an historical context.

Graham Holderness (University of Hertfordshire)

‘The Passive Audience: Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* as Cinema and Liturgy’

This paper, which is part of a project on the representation of Christ in film, will argue that *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) provided a new kind of cinematic experience for its audience. Pre-screening (even pre-production) marketing of the film invites both comparison and contrast with normal methods of promoting films, and also marks *The Passion* out from its predecessors in life-and-death-of-Christ cinema. It will be argued that the systematic marketing of the film to specific constituencies overdetermined the context of viewing. Textually the film proved unintelligible to the conventional methods of film criticism, whose proponents were wholly out of line with the strength and commitment of audience response. It will be argued that the film stretched the functions of cinema well beyond its usual limits, and successfully engaged the audience in a ritual comparable to that of the Eucharist.

Methods will include: comparative analysis of *The Passion* with previous Christ-films by Zeffirelli, Pasolini, Scorsese etc., in terms both of cinematic impact and public profiling; analysis of the marketing of *The Passion* to churches and religious groups; and comparative studies of the heuristic responses of viewers and critics.

Ernest Mathijs and Mikel Koven (University of Wales)

Film Festivals as Spaces of Meaning; Researching Festival Audiences as Producers of Meaning

Film festivals are rarely researched in film studies; numerous reports on the most diverse festivals appear in academic journals, and festivals are frequently cover page news, either locally or internationally, but academic studies of festivals are virtually non-existent. This paper seeks to remedy this. It is part of a larger project empirically researching several genre festivals (the Melies group of European fantasy festivals, and the *Dead By Dawn* festival in Edinburgh in particular – Edwards, 2004). As part of the project this paper offers a systematic argument on the theoretical functions of and relevant methodological approaches to film festivals as spaces for the production of meaning on film.

Festivals touch on numerous debates. It is possible to distinguish at least five significant theoretical functions festivals have in film culture. (1) As sites for the promotion of indigenous film culture, national and regional festivals have facilitated debates about national/global culture (Diawara, 1994). (2) As rallies for or against ideologies and politics, theme based festivals have campaigned for the recognition of (problems in) the representation of cultural issues (Gamson, 1997). (3) Genre festivals, like *Dead by Dawn*, have struggled for a better understanding of the aesthetic celebration of (highly problematic) popular movie fare (Van Extergem, 2004; Riskala, 2004). (4) As market places focused on the commercial dealing in international entertainment, festivals play a crucial role for the film distribution industry (Sklar 1996; Riemer, 2000). (5) And, throughout, as public events visited by journalists, reviewers, and the general audience they have made possible the development of debates about critical values in the appreciation of cinema worldwide (thereby creating esoteric networks of meaning and competing canons) (Walker, 1988; Romney, 1998; Sterritt, 2000).

Several of these five functions have been identified in small case studies and reports (Nichols, 1994; BIFFF, 2002; Harbord, 2002;). However, in all cases, the festival itself is seen as context for larger cultural debates and discussions. In other words, it is seen as a tool for investigating ‘something else’ – nationalism, aesthetics, ‘issues’. This paper seeks to refocus these debates by examining the festival as a cultural site of meaning constituted by its audiences. Studying the ways in which festivals exist and are attended help understand the processes through which they create meaning as events – not just in creating canons through awards, or addressing issues, but also through the discourses employed by their punters.

This analysis uses a double methodology of ethnography and reception studies (and some discourse analysis). The paper discusses how the careful combination of these two methods allows for a better understanding of the processes of meaning operating in film festivals: ethnography describing the film festival as a cultural event and the community which is generated by such events (Koven, 1999), and reception studies analysing how audiences and festival participants make sense of these events (Mathijs, forthcoming). Through this approach we aim at identifying and explaining the actual processes making up the theoretical functions (and their combinations). In conclusion, the paper offers some very specific research tactics, to be put in practice at the research of the *Dead By Dawn* horror festival (located at the Edinburgh Filmhouse every April).

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James Moir (University of Abertay)

Getting into the Right Frame of Mind: The Cinema Audience in Action

This paper provides a social constructionist perspective on the cinema audience as 'getting into the right frame of mind'. It explores the ways in which being in the film theatre and collectively watching films is constitutive of 'entertainment' as a social practice. This activity is located within an inner/outer dualism with respect to a mind that tries to apprehend, grasp, understand or make sense of an experienced reality. This kind of perceptual-cognitivism is a cultural commonplace, actively maintained in the accomplishment of a range of social practices, including the screening of films. The assumption is made that there are two realms: an external reality which acts as 'raw material' the 'input' for a psychological system which operate upon this in some way to produce an 'output' such as a perception or feeling which becomes treated as an 'experience' or memory to be drawn upon translated into talk and text.

The paper considers how this kind of construction is constituted within the screening of films such that the audience is treated as trying to understand or make sense of their cinematic experience. The

third party status of the film audience provides a means of engaging with the outer status of what they 'see'. Member of the audience are positioned in such a way as to employ their 'mental processes' in order to 'make sense' of the film being viewed. Here visual imagery is associated with the psychological notion of 'entertainment' and 'stimulation'. People often discuss films in psychological terms: being affected, or find something thought provoking or a 'feel-good' film, exciting, depressing, informative and so on. In each case the construction of 'mind' as 'working on' this material is an unreflexive assumption. Here the person brings his or her mind to bear upon the film and this decoupling of cognitive activity and social practice of *being* the audience preserves an ideology of viewing films as a psychological activity. In this way an economy of cinema-going as rooted in psychological discourse is maintained, particularly through the notion of personal enjoyment.

Emily Munro (University of Glasgow)

Who put the 'European' into 'art cinema'? Film criticism, the 'art house' and subtitles: 'For Filmgoers Only'.

In 1934, in its second year, the periodical *Sight and Sound* appeared with the subtitle 'Published by the British Film Institute.' Previously described as 'A Quarterly review of modern aids to learning published under the auspices of the British Institute of Adult Education', *Sight and Sound* had been instrumental in championing the cause for a national film institute that would institutionalise its demands for a 'constructive' debate on the development of cinema for 'the highest service of national education and enjoyment' 1. The case for such a body, as described by the Secretary of the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, was not state control of recreation but 'a new outlook' that would connect 'intelligent public opinion' to the film industry. One objective towards achieving this was to encourage the growing demand for film societies in 'provincial towns' in an effort to improve public taste in cinematic entertainment.

This paper describes the construction of the 'European art cinema' category within the context of 1930s, 40s and 50s Britain. The so-called 'art house' cinema is considered as emerging from a sustained trend of critically informed reception promoted by film magazines and the term 'art-house' is firmly located as referring to a particular mode of film exhibition and reception rather than to a body of films with supposedly shared textual characteristics. *Sight and Sound*, I shall argue, not only addressed itself to but also interpolated the expanding number of cinemagoers interested in film societies and 'serious' film criticism. This continued and developed a tradition conspicuous in other film magazines with a predominantly British readership, such as *Close Up* (1927-1933), *film art* (1933-7) and *Cinema Quarterly* (1932-8, then absorbed into *World Film News*), which fostered and edited a dialogue between publication and public in keeping with hopes the BFI articulated for developing an intelligent and discerning cinema audience.

The paper explores some of the journalistic discourses that encouraged a promulgation of 'specialised cinemas' in the UK. These were cinemas, inspired somewhat by the Film Society movement, which specialised in subtitled, foreign language films (usually European 'Continental'). I refer to film journalism, centrally *Sight and Sound*, as a means to illustrate some themes attending to this phenomenon. These include active spectatorship, education, cinematic canons, cultural exchange and language. It is through the exposure of such motifs, still implicit today in *Sight and Sound's* film criticism, that the subtitling of foreign language films exhibited in the British 'art houses' might be denaturalised. Ultimately, this paper argues that for the 'art house' enthusiast there are pleasures to be bought along with one's ticket to the subtitled film that extend beyond the viewing experience. *Sight*

and Sound documents the status of the foreign language film in British film culture and serves to articulate its still current cultural capital.

1. Cameron, A.C. 1932. 'The case for a National Film Institute,' *Sight and Sound* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring)

Michael Reilly (Docspace)

A Place in the Sun- Cinema Without Frontiers

Improvement in the circulation and attendance of European films beyond their country of origin is critical to the sustainability of a European film industry. Examples of films that travel successfully beyond their own countries of origin in Europe are scarce and this inertia is largely responsible for the ongoing crisis in European Cinema production. Historically, European Cinema has configured itself largely in opposition to mainstream Hollywood Cinema, and has as a result been reluctant to absorb many of the vital lessons of its overwhelmingly transnational counterpart. The theories surrounding transnational cinema in general and transnational European Cinema in particular suggest conceptual components that might contribute to the success of a transnational European film. It is of course vital to assess the success of any transnational film within the context of actual audience admissions, and the fitness of Europe's main non-proprietary sources of admissions data for this purpose is, therefore, worthy of examination and recommendation. New Information and Communications Technology (ICT) projects and the innovations of the Digital Cinema System offer important opportunities for overcoming traditional impediments to the circulation of European films. A case study of Agnès Jaoui's recent release 'Comme Une Image' suggests the usefulness of identifying conceptual components of successful transnational European Cinema and illuminates the pressing problems in both cinema audience research and film distribution in Europe.

Anna Schober (University of Vienna)

City-Squats: The cinema-space as a cave for politics

The focus of this paper is on the cinema as a city-space (and not so much on film). It is shown, that throughout the 20th century different social and political groups constituted themselves around cinemas and handled them euphorically as spaces which seem, more than other city-spaces, suited to making interventions in ideological frameworks, to educating "the people" and deconstructing dominant myths. They started, for example, social-reform campaigns to change the early cinemas of the 1910s, organized socialist film-showings in the 1920s and 1930s, built artistic bodily spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Niki de Saint-Phalle's cinema in the belly of Hon, a gigantic woman one can enter via the vagina. They organized deconstructive provocative film-programmes in the 1980s and interventionist art-installations in the 1990s. By using the cinema these groups are transforming it – for example into a space that became connected with the abolition of injustice and the establishment of equality between the sexes and classes; a space where one could re-define and celebrate one's own identity, or where one could deconstruct dominant stereotypes. In the practices of these groups, the cinema is transformed into a space where enlightenment and the collective awaking to consciousness should happen, and the beginning of a new and more democratic life could start. But besides this we can find also disseminations of the the myth of the "good cave", that is the cave as a space for corporality, safety, equality, justice, refuge. Here the cinema is transformed by picking up on desires for security, equality, a better world, sensuous gratification and the erotic and making them narratable. In doing so, all these groups differentiate their own cinema-space from the mainstream-cinemas, which are connected with the insufficiencies of the present – with ideological manipulation and

untruth. This interventionist praxis is also accompanied by a new, emerging wider cineastic discourse, which became for example graspable in new magazines and film festivals, but also in publications of the newly emerging film theory-groups and collectives, which claim to investigate films and the cinema by employing new scientific methodologies such as semiotics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

This paper investigates the tactics of these different groups and relates them to other tendencies and developments in urban social spaces of the last century. So for example these cinema movements are examined in relation to a history of perception and of the direction of belief, to a change in public and private sphere and to a history of self-presentation. In this way I demonstrate that both the “cinema” and the city are never given as an unalterable and transparent set of architecture and *mise en scène* but are instead socially made spaces, which create social inclusion and exclusion and are occupied by sensory phenomena, by desires and disavowals, and by products of the imagination such as plans and projections as well as by architectural constructions and different kinds of people. City and cinema are thus spaces that are simultaneously perceived, represented and lived by different groups and it is such a struggle over the domination of perceptions, representations and forms of use, which will be investigated in the present paper. It will thereby be shown that modern and postmodern cities and the cinema are constantly transforming themselves and are nevertheless bound together in a relationship of mutual need – they are both effects as well as agents of a certain change in perception and ways of existing in the western world since the 19th century.

The paper will thus analyse the city and the cinema as a space of a struggle involved in the production of “hegemony”. Perceived in this way, our city spaces appear to be radically ambivalent: they are occupied, perceived and lived in the same time by different agents; they are claimed and contested and crossed by practices of articulation; they are characterized by insurmountable antagonisms and they never fully fit in with the various definitions they are subject to.

Melanie Selfe (University of East Anglia)

“in the best Lejeune manner” : Cultivating the art of critique in a provincial English film society

At present, the small body of academic work on film societies concerns the inter-war period, privileging groups involved in film production. When exhibition is addressed at all, it is in relation to selected societies who are positioned as sites of resistance: both aesthetically - in the case of the The (London) Film Society, and politically - with regard to the workers’ film societies. Although these traditions are important and influential, they are not representative of the majority of film society activity. Many more societies were dedicated to screenings rather than production, and catered for an audience less concerned with radical socio/political change than with access to ‘quality’ and continental cinema.

There are complex historical reasons for the academic neglect of this audience. Firstly, the active=good/passive=bad binary, through which film studies has commonly theorised ‘the viewer,’ has precluded a positive reading of the ‘art-film’ audience’s undemonstrative auditorium behaviour. While recent audience research has expanded the field of study to include pre- and post-film activity, its proponents have concentrated on fan practices as a means to reclaim the viewers of despised lowbrow formats (e.g. soaps, horror, sci-fi) as active intellects. The ‘art-film’ audience has been neither radical enough to attract the attention of film historians, nor vulnerable enough to be championed by audience research. Perhaps this is both ironic and fitting, for it is in the expansion of

the film society movement post 1945, that we can see the development of formal film study - a film centred approach that would go on to find a home in further education and ultimately in universities - establishing the very tradition the newer approaches kick against.

This paper will explore the role played by provincial English film societies in disseminating and developing film study. Using programmes from Nottingham's first film society (1945-1959) I will show how notions of national cinema, authorship, genre and aesthetic progression were used to add coherence and purpose to the available mix of 35 mm films, and provide the structural foundation for the explicitly educational 16mm discussion group. Key to the success of the both strands were ideas of reading, preparation and discussion. A small library was developed and the society presented good viewing as an active, studious experience, facilitated by the opportunity to rewatch previously seen films. Although the programme notes can be viewed as disseminating the metropolitan led cinematic canon, through the way they explain and illustrate the discourses appearing in contemporary film publications, the views of others are presented as a prelude to further study. Through the juxtaposition and framing of conflicting quotes from established writers, film society members were encouraged to consider and value their own responses to a film, and members' reviews of recently screened films were included in the programmes. In the case of Nottingham it is clear that filmmaking was not viewed as the only creative possibility. Critique and the creation of interpretative meaning provided the society with purpose, identity and evidence of their active viewing.

Stephen Woollock (University of East Anglia)

Discriminating Audiences: Arthouse Exhibition and the Construction of Stratified Consumption

Traditionally 'Film Studies' has bracketed the study of audiences into polarities. Increasingly conscious of claims of over-generalisation and idealism, recent work on audiences have moved away from conceptions of psychologically positioned 'subjects' towards more empirically based studies emphasising the individual agency of actual spectators in negotiating meaning for themselves regarding the film text. What such admittedly valuable work neglects to consider however is the role that policy decisions of the various institutions involved in film exhibition play in the framework of provision within which audiences come to experience film itself, thereby affecting consumption.

Arthouse exhibition primarily positions itself as an alternative to mainstream provision and as such implies discrimination on the parts of both programming and consumption. In deciding the content of programmes for exhibition, arthouse cinemas have a particular clientele in mind, one that may be either supplementing their consumption of more mainstream films or vehemently opposed to such fare. Whichever the case, arthouse exhibition seeks a certain customer and through the vagaries of programming and exhibition policy and the use of various promotional material (programmes, advertising etc) can be argued actually construct a 'preferred' consumer, one readily accepting of its product. In creating an audience that discriminates between mainstream and arthouse films, the arthouse cinema then further stratifies this audience by distinguishing between various sub-sections.

This paper will address the ways in which arthouse cinema differentiates potential audience sections by appeals to various notions of taste, commitment, status and aptitude, thereby creating a variety of reading strategies concomitant with this hierarchal segregation. Focussing specifically upon the three regional film theatres under the auspices of Humberside County Council during the years 1974-1996, the paper will highlight the way in which these arthouse 'theatres' constructed, rather than catered for, an audience supposedly eager for such exhibition and then proceeded to stratify this audience into

further sub-categories. Within an extensive catchment area, appeals to “a minority taste audience” distinguished the theatres’ exhibition policy from that of commercial cinemas whilst further distinguishing the audience in the form of ‘members-only’ screenings, ‘auteur’ seasons, film-related courses, ‘themed’ runs, senior-citizen matinees and children’s screenings, all aimed at specific sub-sections of a potential audience. Often contradicting the stated aim of the regional film theatres remit, this stratifying of the audience resulted in a situation whereby audiences consumed a product in a variety of ways within an environment often at odds with its stated provision. In doing so, this practice ultimately raises fundamental issues concerning the reasoning behind arthouse exhibition strategies – for profit or privilege?