



**“Who are these people?”  
Enquiring after the audiences**

**2nd Edinburgh Film Audiences  
Conference**

**22/23 March 2007**

**Abstracts**

Conference organisers: Dr Ailsa Hollinshead, Ms Nicola Hay.

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# Conference Programme

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## ***Thursday March 22nd***

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**0900 - 0945 Registration**

**0945 –1000 Opening speaker – David Bruce (Chair of Glasgow Film Theatre)**

**1000 -1130 Session 1: Making sense of movies**

Charlotte Haines Lyon

*Kill Bill 2: A “Worthy” Film for Meaning-making?*

Vincent Bouchard

*The Role of the *bonimenteur* in the Film Reception in Zaire.*

**1130 -1145 Coffee**

**1145 -1315 Session 2: Self identity and film**

Tomas Axelson

*Movies, Mind and Meaning – Studying Audience and Favourite Films.*

Brigid Cherry

*Gothics and Grand Guignols: The Female Audience and the Gendered Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror.*

**1315 – 1415 Lunch**

**1415 – 1545 Session 3: Constructing cultural identities**

Adan Avalos

*The Naco in Mexican Film: Border Cinema and Migrant Audiences.*

Oluyinka Esan

*Audience Pleasures and Nollywood Success.*

**1545 – 1600 Coffee**

**1600 – 1645 Session 4: Work in progress**

Melanie Selfe & Martin Barker

*Researching ‘Risky’ Audiences.*

## ***Friday March 23rd***

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### **0900 – 1030 Session 5: Nationality and audience responses**

Martin Barker  
Researching Audiences Across Countries and Cultures.

Gail Ashurst  
“Made in Summerisle, conceivably: Made in Britain, most definitely!” National Identity and Responses to the US remake of *The Wicker Man*.

### **1030 – 1100 Coffee**

### **1100 – 1230 Session 6: Popular taste and stardom**

Lisa Shaw  
Stardom and Memory in Brazil: Remembering the Stars of 1950s' Brazilian Musicals

Maria Antonia Vélez-Serna  
The Construction of Popular Taste According to Colombian Film Makers of the 1940s.

### **1230 – 1330 Lunch**

### **1330 – 1500 Session 7: Audiences – challenges for exhibition**

Amy Hardie  
Analysis of Cross-European Focus Groups on Cinema Documentary Audiences.

Emily Munro (Work in progress)  
Managing 'The Audience'

### **1500 – 1530 Coffee**

### **1530 – 1630 Plenary Session**

### **1700 End of the Conference**



# **Conference Abstracts**

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## **1. The Construction Of Popular Taste According To Colombian Filmmakers Of The 1940s.**

María Antonia Vélez-Serna, BA Film and Television, Universidad Nacional de Colombia., MA student, History and Theory of Art, Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

This paper aims to understand the notion of the “popular” and the “national”, as it was used during the first period of sound films in Colombia (eleven feature films made between 1939 and 1945). It argues that the commercial success of Mexican cinema at the time motivated filmmakers to invent a style that merged Mexican musical comedy with a constructed definition of Colombian folklore. Although filmmakers intended to make popular films, they never achieved a commercial success comparable to that of Mexican movies. This paper argues that this “failure” can be partially explained as the effect of the social point of view of the filmmakers, which distorted their understanding of “popular taste” through a populist filter, closely related to the political ideology of the day. A social space is constructed, in which the distance between filmmakers and audiences is highlighted, in order to show the different perspectives held by social groups and their visible effects on aesthetic choices. This paper is part of a wider research project on this period of Colombian cinema, which tries to locate these films in the context of the selection and definition of a “national tradition”, a process which was being actively encouraged by several interests in the 1930s and 1940s.

## **2. Analysis of Cross European Focus Groups on Cinema Documentary Audiences**

Amy Hardie, Director, Docspace

This presentation analyses focus groups set up by Amy Hardie and Ron Inglis as part of the Docspace audience research carried out from 2004 – 2006. This investigates attitudes to documentaries screened in cinemas. Focus groups were carried out through partners of CinemaNet Europe in Austria, the Netherlands, Spain and Scotland. Rural and urban audiences were selected, with further subdivision into keen documentary attendees and those who prefer mainstream fiction cinema.

We are currently finalising the results of the focus groups and our pan-European audience questionnaires, but some preliminary findings, may be of interest:

The audience for documentaries in the cinema is older than the average cinema audience (even art-house), predominately female, very highly educated and target their viewing with care. It seems likely that documentaries’ appeal for the audience does not correspond with fiction: the ‘star’ attracting the audience is the subject matter. Audiences are no longer buying the product of the film in the cinema; they are investing in the experience: so quality of film screened is paramount.

This audience is time-hungry – the cost of the ticket is less of an issue than the cost of their time. Most of our audience watch very little television – nonetheless, they like to have the programme endorsed, preferably by critics in newspaper and radio. Screenings do particularly well when they are presented as part of an event – either a Q & A with director, film subject, or high profile ‘expert’.

That there are still strong audience preconceptions about the word documentary was made clear in the focus groups: when participants were asked to describe words they associated with documentary they cited ‘worthy’ and ‘school’; but when asked to remember the experience of the last documentary they watched they said ‘rollercoaster of emotions’ ‘riveting’ and high-lighted the power and privilege of watching ‘something actually unfold for real in front of you’.

### **3. “Movies, Mind and Meaning – Studying Audience and Favourite Films”**

Tomas Axelson, Doctoral student, Uppsala University , Dalarna University

Meaning construction outside traditional religion has become more interesting for religious studies and what individuals in the audience do with all messages circulated through media in everyday life has attended increasing interest within media studies (White 1997, Stout and Buddenbaum, 2001, Schofield Clark, Lövheim, 2004). The ways in which the development of media has effected the daily lives of individuals is interest as is the nature of the self and the ways in which the process of self-formation is affected by the profusion of mediated and symbolic materials (Thompson 1995, Hoover 2003, Rothenbuhler 2006).

Film and religion are my interest within this larger frame. The topic is not exactly new but the combination of film and religion has during the last ten years resulted in a rapidly growing number of books by scholars interested in this field (Lyden, 2003). One growing focus is on the role that films can and do play in the changing values and gradually evolving belief system of people in the West today (Marsh, 2004). Viewers bring to a film life-experience, immediate concerns and world views and the exploration of this interplay between movies and the interpreting process of meaning making is the very focus in this paper. Theoretically, the semeiological model of Alf Linderman is combined with socio-cognitive approaches used by a number of Scandinavian media scholars developing perspectives in audience theory (Linderman, 1996, Höijer and Werner, 1998).

#### **13 Individuals, Their Favourite Movie And What It Means To Them In Their Life**

In this paper I present the outcome of 13 interviews with young people about their favourite film. I suggest how it is possible to interpret how they interrelate film comprehension with their personal beliefs and their culturally constructed world view from a socio-cognitive point of view. Examples of films chosen range from Disney's *Lion King* (1994), science fiction and fantasy successes like *The Matrix* (1999) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001) or the next best movie ever according to [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) as well as the Swedish blockbuster *Så Som I Himmelen* (2004), aka “*As It Is In Heaven*”.

### **4. Researching Audiences Across Countries and Cultures**

Professor Martin Barker, University of Aberystwyth

The 2003-4 international research project on audiences for the film of *The Lord of the Rings* sought to explore the role of film fantasy in the lives of different kinds of audiences across the world. Its core questionnaire generated almost 25,000 responses in forms that allowed both quantitative and qualitative analysis. This gave us a rare potential to compare reception in very different contexts. Recently, we have been developed a way of exploring how audiences within 12 different country and cultural contexts received this film, which came by turns from England (in its story-origin), New Zealand (in production and image), and Hollywood (in funding, and promotion strategies).

In this presentation, I will try to show both how we managed to conduct this analysis, and the striking continuities and differences it has revealed. These show a complex interaction between the extent and kind of penetration of the books within different countries, the impacts of marketing and publicity, and the ways in which fantasy plays a role in situating people within the wider world.

## 5. *Kill Bill 2*: A “Worthy” Film for Meaning-Making?

Charlotte Haines Lyon, Independent researcher

In 2004 forty two people in their twenties and thirties from the UK and Ireland participated in research regarding their film-watching over a period of three months. The main purpose of the research, supervised by Dr. Clive Marsh, was to examine the role played by film within viewers' lives. How, if at all, did their film-watching shape or influence their world views?

Participants completed three types of questionnaire. The first asked about basic demographics and film-watching habits. The second was completed for each of between four and eight films watched at a cinema during the research period. It explored participants' responses to films including connections made with characters, and between films' subject-matter and life-experience. The third asked participants to reflect on the process of the research.

The resulting data enabled exploration of the hypothesis that viewers make meaning via the experience of film-watching. The findings challenge the common assumption that meaning-making occurs only with respect to particular genres or 'quality' of film. The data also reveal that participants themselves often collude with assumptions about meaning-making and the 'quality' of films. Yet much can be gleaned from the inconsistencies evident in viewers' responses. Films perceived as 'unreal' (and hence assumed to be 'meaningless') nevertheless stimulated significant reflection. Tension also exists between the 'escapism' sought through film-going and the 'engagement' in the task of life-related meaning-making evident in the thought-processes apparent through viewers' responses.

This paper will present and explore these findings with direct reference to the 47% participants in the research who responded to *Kill Bill 2*. The evidence from the responses to this particular film reveals that some viewers related profoundly to the subject matter, and characters, especially with respect to the themes of motherhood and revenge.

## 6. “Made In Summerisle, Conceivably: Made In Britain, Most Definitely!” National Identity And Responses To The Us Remake Of *The Wicker Man*.

Gail Ashurst, Doctoral student, Manchester Metropolitan University

Umberto Eco's dictum that „all cult films eventually become a commercial success, has the power to strike with prophetic resonance if we consider recent developments in the cinematic history of Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973). Considered by many to be the definitive British cult film, *The Wicker Man* has in recent years acquired international commercial and critical acclaim. Moreover, given the recent release of Neil La Bute's remake, the life-span of this particular cult film can perhaps be said to have come full circle. Drawing on research conducted over the past five years, this paper charts the overwhelmingly negative responses of predominantly British fans to this latest development. Crucially, the fan responses discussed were obtained both before and after the release of the remake. This is significant since it highlights the differences between fan expectations (imagined) and the actual. One of the main criticisms levelled at La Bute's remake, before its release, was his decision to jettison the original's British, and in some cases, specifically Scottish, location for an American one. Why does moving the story to an American setting pose such a threat to fans?

Typically, theorisations of cult resistance tend to get mapped onto a mainstream/subcultural binary whereby cult fans supposedly object to their text's loss of marginal (and hence authentic,) status as it moves into the commercial (inauthentic,) mainstream. This discourse, while undoubtedly present in some fan testimonies, is nonetheless relatively subdued in the findings presented here. Noting the frequency with which fan protestations towards the impending remake are articulated through claims to the original film's Britishness,, I am more concerned here to examine the ways in which national identity is mobilised, negotiated and performed across fan discourses. In observing the significance of national identity in the emergent criticism of what is perceived to be the 'Americanisation' of a home-grown cultural artefact, I will be seeking to challenge the predominant line of thinking about the cult audience.

## 7. Gothics and Grand Guignols: The Female Audience and the Gendered Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror.

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

This paper discusses a feminine aesthetic of cinematic horror informed by ethnographic study of the female horror film audience. Such an aesthetic includes horrific, and yet sometimes arresting, images of monstrosity and aberrant femininity, and offers a range of emotional affects around these images which are not restricted to gore and disgust. In particular, this analysis of audience responses focuses on the forms of violence and terror present within feminine forms of the horror genre, contrasting these with the accepted models of masculine horror and representations of violence against women.

Undoubtedly, the horror film is a heterogeneous genre, and in addition to its predominant forms of the gore film and the slasher, it draws on a wide range of literary, theatrical and art traditions including the Gothic, the melodrama and Grand Guignol. Recent transformations and hybridisation within the various cinematic forms of horror have increasingly led to more and stronger representations of femininity, principally including developments in the characters of female hero and monstrous feminine, that have revelled in blood, gore and violence, and which the female audience has responded positively to. Feminine horror is clearly a significant strain of horror cinema, reflecting the fragmentation of identity and gender of the Gothic, the aggressive and frequently sexually transgressive behaviours of the monstrous feminine and the morbid fascination with sympathetic or sensual monstrosity.

With this background in mind, the presentation focuses on three horror films highly regarded by the female fans, *Hellraiser*, *Alien* and *Interview With The Vampire*, and the ways in which the dynamics of horror and violence are represented in films with central feminine elements. Analysis of the aesthetics of these films is based upon the responses of the female viewers and the findings suggest that whilst violent and gory content is frequently seen (and disliked) as a trait of masculine horror, violence and gore remain a central feature of the feminine aesthetic of cinematic horror, and further, that it is one that produces a complex set of emotional and intellectual responses.

## 8. The *Naco* in Mexican Film: Border Cinema and Migrant Audiences

Adan Avalos, Doctoral student, University of Southern California

My family of ten brothers and sisters all enjoyed Mexican movies of the 1970s and 80s. I remember watching films such as *Maldita Miseria* (*Damn Misery*, 1979) and *Perro Callejero* (*Street Dog*, 1980), with actors like Valentin Trujillo, Maribel Guardia, and of course Mario and Fernando Almada. These movies, belonging to a genre referred to as “border cinema,” often detail the lives of recent Mexican immigrants in the United States. Because my family and I shared the legal status and challenge of a migrant worker life, we related to these familiar stories replicated in a more glamorous and dramatic fashion. We are just one example of the huge audience of these films – an audience of recent immigrants to the US, mostly from Mexico but also from other Latin American countries. These are people who predominantly work in the service industry – the farm labors, the mechanics, the maids, the gardeners, the custodians.

As a film scholar, I recognize that film critics focusing on Mexican cinema generally dismiss this genre of “border cinema.” Mexican film critics prefer to focus on artistic and “serious” Mexican films from the last ten years. The films that I grew up watching, and the genre they belong to, are largely ignored by the academic community. They are written off as “trash” films. Even in Mexico, these films have been dismissed as being “naco”. (*Naco* is a derogatory term meaning low class, often rural, and uneducated/)

This paper will look at the *Naco* film audience. By studying these films, we can learn about the histories and dreams of the people of the “invisible class,” and about the social, political and economic forces that have shaped their lives. In addition to looking at the social psyche of the

audience, I will investigate the forces behind their immigration. Social and political shifts altered the cinematic landscape as well as the audience. Influences on these films and audience include the Bracero program, the industrialization of the US/Mexico border, the devaluation of the Mexican peso, Ronald Reagan's war on drugs and the amnesty program of the 80s. A close reading of *Naco* Film audience will give the invisible class a voice and will expand the discourse on Mexican film.

## **9. Stardom and Memory in Brazil: Remembering the Stars of 1950s Brazilian Musicals**

Dr Lisa Shaw (University of Liverpool)

This paper draws on and presents the results of a pilot study conducted in Brazil focusing on popular memories of stars of the 1950s musical films, known locally the *chanchada*. Denigrated as imitative of Hollywood musicals, the *chanchada* has received scant academic interest, dismissed as a superficial copy of foreign cinematic forms. Recent work has revised the Brazilian musical genre, highlighting a more complex relationship to the Hollywood cinematic model as well as social and political events in 1950s Brazil. Drawing on these revisions, our particular goal is to explore popular memory in relation to cinema-going in 1950s Brazil, with a particular emphasis on identificatory responses to the film stars of the *chanchadas*. Our initial study comprised informal group interviews with different sets of informants from distinct social and racial groups in Brazil, with questions focusing on memories of film-going and particularly responses to a range of film stars, both male and female, and of varied ethnic and regional backgrounds. Presenting the results of our initial investigations, we will examine the extent to which personal memory of cinema and its stars is socially constructed by its context and figured around ethnic, gendered, regional and class-based identities.

## **10. Audience Pleasures and Nollywood Success**

Dr Oluyinka Esan, University of Winchester, UK

"The audience" is one component that is crucial to the film industry; whether considering box office takings, distribution or popularity of films, there are assumptions being made about what audiences bring to the equation. In this paper, an attempt will be made to establish how audience pleasures in particular, contribute to the success of a film industry. To do this it will explore how audience take-up of Nollywood "films" accounts for the apparent success of this industry. With the high rate of production, Nollywood, as Nigeria's "film" industry is known, is estimated to be the third largest industry in the world; that is after Hollywood in America, and India's Bollywood. Unlike them, Nollywood's growth seems sharp and sudden though it is lacking on a number of production factors that could possibly explain the success of the more established film industries. Nollywood thus offers a fresh view on the study film audiences.

This paper will look at audiences in the light of the developments in film – the impact of new technologies of production, new trends in (global) distribution and new patterns of reception. It will therefore seek to answer the following questions:

- Who are the audiences of Nollywood?

Are there clusters in the consumption of these films?

- What accounts for the patronage of Nollywood?

Will preferences be informed by ethnicity, generation, gender, class, location?

It will rely on documentary evidence from the industry to get a general overview to these questions. Available empirical evidence from an ethnographic study of television audiences in Nigeria will be used to interpret these.

The more novel contribution of the paper should come from the study of the Nollywood audience in diaspora. For this ethnographic methods will be used source evidence from U.K. based distribution channels about the audiences and adoption of Nollywood. It is expected that this approach will shed some light on the issues of film and the construction of cultural identity.

## 11. The Role of the *bonimenteur* in the Film Reception in Zaire

Vincent Bouchard, University of Montreal, Canada

According to the most common film-viewing convention, the audience in a cinema room must watch the film individually and keep silent. Other viewing practices are however possible. In the popular forms of film projections, the brouhaha and various audience activities modify the reception of the film shown. The interaction between the spectators and the film allows a form of re-appropriation. This type of set-up favours the creation of multiple meanings. A similar effect takes place when an individual (or a group) is mandated to take charge of an oral commentary. Recent research (Lacasse, 200; Pozner, 2004) show how the *bonimenteur* (lecturer) makes the link between the film's production and the cultural context in which the projection is received, by speaking over the images shown. In the case of a film that was not made with the given cultural space (due to language convention or the film's tempo), these practices offer an occasion for a hybridization. The public's reaction to a projection apparatus that is not adapted to the new space is the space for a new form of creation – linguistic as much as staging conventions. In this presentation, I propose to compare a few modes of reappropriation of foreign film productions by the spectators in Zaire. First of all this concerns the activity of the traditional bards (griot) hired by the colonial authorities to translate the French commentary into a local language that is understood by the audience. These practices, inspired by traditional practices, result in an oralization of the cinematographic medium. The same phenomenon occurs when the spectators in a film room exchange vocally their comprehension of the film. A comparative study of various oral spectatorship postures examines the impact of hegemonic cultures on francophone African cultures. Specifically, it will allow to imagine new modes of re-appropriation of a cinematographic work by the spectators, thus observing new forms of cultural fusion.

# Works in progress

## 12. Researching “Risky” Audiences

Professor Martin Barker, Project Director

Melanie Selfe, Research Assistant

In June 2006, we began on a research project, funded by the British Board of Film Classification, into audience responses to five films which include scenes of sexual violence: *À Ma Soeur*, *Baise-Moi*, *House on the Edge of the Park*, *Ichi the Killer*, and *Irreversible*. The aim of the project is to generate knowledge of the broad patterns of responses to each of the films, but in particular two issues are at the centre of our attention:

1. What difference is made to people’s understanding of and response to the film by the scenes of sexual violence? How does the context in the film shape responses? What differences are there between responses to cut and uncut versions?

2. How do ‘positive’ audiences understand and respond to these films? What sorts of enjoyment do they have? How do they interpret the scenes of sexual violence?

The research has three phases: (1) a complex web questionnaire, which should allow us both to situate people’s responses along a number of dimensions, and then to hear in their own words what these mean – this questionnaire is aiming to recruit responses across the English-speaking world, and across the full spectrum of kinds of responses; (2) a systematic study of the patterns of talk around each film which can be accessed through a wide range of websites, in order to find out how each film is perceived and classified, what aspects of each is most debated, the different kinds of language used to describe and explain the events of each film, and of course in particular how the scenes of sexual violence are understood and contextualised; and (3) specially-organised focus groups within the UK around each film with people who are positive/enthusiastic about them.

This is difficult research in a ‘risky’ area, fraught with problems of perception and personal and political fears. We are right at the start of the project, therefore cannot yet report any findings. But by the time of the Conference, we hope to be able to present at least some aspects of the outcomes.

## 13. Managing ‘the audience’

Dr Emily Munro, Independent Researcher

For this presentation I will identify some issues surrounding cinema exhibitors’ approaches to audiences. I will present as a case study a recent European subsidized training scheme for ‘art house’ cinema managers and programmers which I attended as a researcher. The scheme attracted over 300 applications for participants, of which around 70 people were selected from across Europe, the Jordan region and North Africa to offer expertise and to benefit from the networking opportunities provided by attendance. The training sessions took place in Venice around the same time as the 63rd Venice film festival (2006) to which participants were accredited. I will discuss connections between the festival and the training scheme and consider the ways in which audiences were described by the participants and certain invited speakers, including Marco Mueller from the Biennale and representatives from support organizations such as the EU MEDIA programme. In particular I want to address the counterpoint struck by the participants between identifying the audience as a problem and as a solution. The presentation will raise some methodological problems as to how one might fairly assess the opinions of these participants given this unusual setting and the ‘problem-solving’ emphasis of the course. A main objective of the presentation will be to discuss to what extent one can identify contemporary discourses on audiences within the ‘art house’ or ‘independent’ exhibition sector through this sort of observational research. How useful are debates amongst exhibitors for understanding audiences?

# Notes