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Film audiences

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Why are audiences interesting?

When the hundredth anniversary of cinema was celebrated in 1995, 'cinema' was defined as the screening of moving images for a paying audience. The presence of an audience is, in other words, an essential part of the very definition of the medium. Very different kinds of film scholarship are concerned with film audiences or relations between film and its audiences. In quantitative terms, scholarly research and writing about film audiences, or some dimension of film–audience relations, clearly outnumber (and outweigh!) publications about any other aspect of the film medium, such as film production or the aesthetics of film.

Film's early status as a paradigmatic mass medium is a major part of the explanation for this. Its colossal popularity with working-class people and women and children of most classes gave various 'responsible' people reasons to worry about the impact of the movies on the minds and behaviour of these social groups. Given the intense and pleasurable experiences that people seemed to get from the cinema, it appeared obvious that the influence on people's minds would also be intense. Modern, social-scientific mass communication research was to a considerable extent developed in response to such fears through projects launched to document and substantiate them (even

though these did not necessarily deliver the expected results).

But film's enormous potential for influencing the masses was also central to seminal contributions to theories of film as a textual form. The leader of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, V. I. Lenin, proclaimed that film was the most important of all the arts since it was the most efficient medium for propaganda, and Soviet film theory (and that of Eisenstein, in particular) was very much concerned with how to move the mass audiences of film to perceive the world in certain ways—and act accordingly. The basis for a long tradition in film theory is precisely a Marxist conception of film as a medium for changing people's way of thinking

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in 'progressive' directions, or, on the contrary, for the reproduction and dissemination of ideology in the sense of 'false consciousness'. The semiotic and psychoanalytic *Screen* theory of the 1970s represented a particular development of this tradition.

A more recent, quite heterogeneous body of work favours a more pragmatic theory of meaning, according to which determinate meaning is not inherent in the filmic signs or texts themselves but is constructed by spectators in accordance with certain context-dependent conventions. This position can take a variety of forms, drawing on diverse theoretical traditions such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, the semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce, or eclectic formations such as British cultural studies. Cognitivist approaches, focusing on the 'processing' of film in the human brain, have also gained some prominence (see King, Part 1, Chapter 23).

All of the above approaches to film audiences and the encounter between audiences and films share the idea that it is through the existence of an audience that film acquires social and cultural importance. The production of a film provides a raw material which regulates the potential range of experiences and meanings to be associated with it, but it is through audiences that films become 'inputs' into larger socio-cultural processes.

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The following overview will largely concentrate on the tradition of research on actual film audiences, as it has developed in response to the history of the medium. (For reasons of space, I have had to exclude the otherwise very interesting forms of audience studies conducted by or for the film industry. A good overview is provided in Austin 1989.) This emphasis is chosen partly because other entries in the present volume will cover the other, text-centred approaches, and because there has been a revived interest in empirical audience research since the early 1980s, not least in

studies of film history. Much of the prehistory of such work has been little known, however. Empirical audience research has often been regarded antagonistically by scholars in text-oriented film studies—and vice versa. However, creative scholarship can only benefit from a broad knowledge of different traditions.

The movies as a social problem: the first audience studies in context

The first public complaints over the moral standards of films were heard in the 1890s both in the United States (cf. Jowett 1976: 109–10) and the United Kingdom (Kuhn 1988: 15), but public reactions against the medium did not gain momentum until after 1905. It seems reasonable to assume that it was the explosive growth in the number of more or less permanent movie theatres from about 1905 that really brought the cinema to the attention of public authorities and the social groups that actively participate in public debates. Importantly, the repertoire of the cinemas was also beginning to change at about the same time, with fiction formats such as anarchic farces, crime stories, and melodramatic love stories becoming increasingly prominent.

The introduction of censorship which occurred in a number of different forms in most Western countries in the course of just six to seven years around 1910 is an indication of how seriously the 'dangers' of the movies were perceived. All such measures were preceded by public debates which to a greater or lesser extent also involved forms of research on movie theatres and movie audiences. The first film audience research was, in other words, motivated by anxieties about the social consequences of the medium's immense popularity, especially with children and adolescents. Numerous attempts were made in many countries to estimate audience numbers and social patterns of attendance before 1910, often in methodologically crude surveys conducted by teachers' associations, school authorities, social workers, and the like (see e.g. Jowett 1976: 45–6). Such efforts characteristically sought to verify the intuitive feelings of educators, religious leaders, and many social reformers that movies were for the most part detrimental to the psychic, moral, and even physical health of those who regularly went to see them. The forms and results of these early studies were to be repeated again and again in later, and methodolo-

gically more sophisticated, studies. A research tradition was formed in which the medium of film was (is) conceived primarily as a social problem. It was seen as an isolated, primary cause of a number of negative effects. This cause–effect (or, rather, stimulus–response) conception of the relations between movies and audiences was drawn from mechanistic and biologistic psychological theories in vogue in the early decades of this century. Seeing the movies as a social problem was also related to widespread theories of the mass as a characteristic social form in modern societies. Individuals who had moved to rapidly growing cities had been cut off from their traditional bonds, norms, and authorities and were now seen to be basically vulnerable to mass persuasion. Moreover, for the first theorist of the mass, Gustave Le Bon, writing in 1895, the mass or crowd was 'distinguished by feminine characteristics' as it tended to move very easily into emotional extremes (Huyssen 1986: 196). One might suspect, therefore, that the cinema was conceived as a social problem precisely because central parts of its *audiences* were experienced as a problem for teachers and other authorities. That the problem was in part conceived as *feminine* is highly significant: for the threat of the movies was, not least, about a loss of control and a tendency towards self-indulgence and weakness.

The cinema became a privileged sign of social and cultural changes which made élites worried. As such, it played the role of a much-needed scapegoat which rational arguments could hardly do much to change. In 1917 the British National Council of Public Morals undertook an 'independent enquiry into the physical, social, moral and educational influence of the cinema, with special reference to young people' (quoted in Richards 1984: 70). A 400-page report, based on numerous sources of information, was published, in which the general conclusion was that 'no social problem of the day demands more earnest attention', and that the cinema had 'potentialities for evil' which were 'manifold' (even though cinema could also become 'a powerful influence for good'). And on the question of links between movies and juvenile crime, the commission of inquiry concluded 'that while a connection between the cinema and crime has to a limited extent in special cases been shown, yet it certainly has not been proved that the increase in juvenile crime generally has been consequent on the cinema, or has been independent of other factors more conducive to wrongdoing' (Richards 1989: 71). Still, the issue was

not settled, and the same anxieties motivated new inquiries well into the 1930s.

The movies as social force: the Payne Fund Studies

By the 1920s the cinema was well established as the major form of entertainment for the larger part of the population in all Western countries. An 'art' cinema was developed in, for instance, Germany and France, and cinema's increasing respectability could also be seen in many countries from the emergence of film criticism in major newspapers and magazines. However, in the United States, especially, it seems that the earlier moral panics over the influence of the movies were still in evidence. Unlike many other countries, the United States had not established forms of public censorship which would have calmed the nerves of those most worried. Moreover, as the prohibition of alcohol between 1920 and 1933 indicates, the so-called 'roaring twenties' was a period when puritan morality was particularly strong, perhaps in reaction to the number of social and cultural changes then challenging traditional values, such as women's entry into the labour force and new relations between the sexes, and the emergence and spread of consumerism (involving spending rather than saving).

In this situation, the movies were still very much suspected of being a primary source of inspiration for delinquency and general moral decay. This was so even if a 1925 study of 4,000 'juvenile delinquency' cases showed that only 1 per cent of these could in some way be tied to movie influence. (The study was conducted by Healy and Brommer and referred to in Blanchard 1928: 204; cf. Jowett 1976: 216.) Alice Miller Mitchell published the first major scholarly survey entirely devoted to children and the movies in 1929, and concluded that, even if 'the delinquent does have a wider cinema experience than do the other children studied', the survey did not provide any conclusive evidence for a causal link between movies and delinquency (quoted in Jowett 1976: 219). However, such sensible reasoning was not to deter activists who perceived the movie repertoire in much more offensive and threatening terms.

The most comprehensive and also probably most influential of all empirical research projects on film audiences—the so-called Payne Fund Studies—was organized in 1928 by the Reverend William H. Short,

who was executive director of something called the Motion Picture Research Council. A group of psychologists, sociologists, and educators from a number of institutions, directed by Dr W. W. Charters from the Bureau of Educational Research, Ohio State University, began work as soon as a grant of $200,000 was secured from the philanthropic foundation the Payne Fund. Investigations took place between 1929 and 1932, and the results were published in at least twelve volumes—eight books in 1933, three in 1935, and one in 1937. In addition, a journalist, Henry James Forman, wrote a popularized summary of the studies, *Our Movie Made Children* (1933). This book focused completely on results which seemed to support the view that movies had detrimental effects, and it became very influential in the public debate which preceded the much stricter enforcement of Hollywood's so-called Production Code from the summer of 1934 on. The actual studies themselves also had an undertone of anxiety or concern, but they were far more nuanced than Forman's outright attack on the movie industry suggested.

The Payne Fund Studies employed all the research methods then available to 'scientific' studies of sociological and psychological phenomena, and developed some of them further. Methods included quantitative 'content analyses', large-scale surveys, laboratory experiments, participant observation, the collection of written 'movie autobiographies' from large numbers of people, and so on. The studies can be grouped in two categories. The first consists of studies which tried to determine the size and composition of movie audiences, and to assess the 'contents' of films. The second category of studies were attempts to assess the various 'effects' of viewing.

One series of studies of this latter sort was conducted by Ruth C. Peterson and L. I. Thurstone (1933). They were interested in whether films influenced the general attitudes of children towards ethnic or racial groups and certain central social issues such as crime, the punishment of criminals, war, capital punishment, and prohibition. The results were very clear: even single films seemed to have considerable influence on children's attitudes, and the cumulative effect of several films with a similar view of groups or issues was even more striking (Lowery and DeFleur 1995). Despite their sophistication, these studies, nonetheless, displayed a number of severe theoretical and methodological problems. The very term 'attitude' is problematic, the methods for 'measuring' the phe-

nomenon are debatable, no so-called control groups were used—and so forth. Still, the evidence presented could well be seen as quite convincing, particularly since the children had little or no experience of, or insight into, the respective areas under investigation. Very few, if any, of these small-town kids had ever known black or Chinese people, for example. Films portraying these groups positively or negatively, therefore, could be all the more influential. It is similarly unlikely that they had given much thought to the issues of war or the treatment of criminals. What was demonstrated, then, was the impact of films in a situation where other sources of information were more or less lacking and opinions and attitudes were therefore relatively easy to influence.

The most interesting of the Payne Fund Studies, however, was methodologically very different. Herbert Blumer collected 'motion-picture autobiographies' from over 1,100 university and college students, 583 high-school students, 67 office workers, and 58 factory workers, who were instructed to 'write in as natural and truthful manner as possible accounts of their experiences with "movies" as far as they could recall them' (Blumer 1933: 4). In addition, about 150 students and schoolchildren were interviewed, and accounts of conversations ('taken nearly as verbatim as possible', 11) between students at different levels were collected. Finally, questionnaires were distributed to 1,200 children in the fifth and sixth grades of twelve public schools in different areas of Chicago, and the behaviour of children at neighbourhood cinemas and in play after these visits was observed. The voluminous material gathered in these ways was not primarily intended for sophisticated statistical treatment. Rather the point was to explore the ways in which cinema audiences themselves thought and felt about their moviegoing, the films they saw, and how they influenced them. The published report, *Movies and Conduct* (Blumer 1933), is full of vivid descriptions of movie experiences and of how young people picked up tips on anything from play, kissing, fashion, and table manners to attitudes and daydreams. Just one random example from a female high-school student's contribution:

I have imagined playing with a movie hero many times, though; that is while I'm watching the picture. I forget about it when I'm outside the theater. Buddy Rogers and Rudy Valentino have kissed me oodles of times, but they don't know it. Oh, God bless 'em! Yes, love scenes have thrilled me and made me more receptive to love. I was going with a fellow whom I liked as a playmate, so to speak; he was a little

younger than me and he liked me a great deal. We went to the movie—Billie Dove in it. Oh, I can't recall the name but Antonio Moreno was the lead, and there were some lovely scenes which just got me all hot 'n' bothered. After the movie we went for a ride 'n' parked along the lake; it was a gorgeous night. Well, I just melted (as it were) in his arms, making him believe I loved him, which I didn't. I sort of came to, but I promised to go steady with him. I went with him 'til I couldn't bear the sight of him. . . . I've wished many times that we'd never seen the movie. (Blumer 1933: 223)

Blumer's conclusions were relatively careful. However, the material had convinced him that 'the forte of motion pictures is in their emotional effect', and that 'their appeal and their success reside ultimately in the emotional agitation which they induce'. A successful production was one which managed to draw 'the observer' into the drama so that 'he loses himself' and, in such a condition, 'the observer becomes malleable to the touch of what is shown' and 'develops a readiness to certain forms of action which are foreign in some degree to his ordinary conduct' (Blumer 1933: 198). Blumer also argued that the movies were so emotionally demanding that the audience could be left 'emotionally exhausted' and, instead of ordinary emotional responses, they would experience an emotional and moral confusion: 'Insofar as one may seek to cover in a single proposition the more abiding effect of motion pictures upon the minds of movie-goers, it would be, in the judgement of the writer, in terms of a medley of vague and variable impressions—a disconnected assemblage of ideas, feelings, vagaries, and impulses' (199). Blumer's conclusion was that films could confuse people morally in various ways: for instance, by presenting immoral behaviour as attractive even if the film's overt moral 'message' was impeccable. In a methodologically similar study of inmates, ex-convicts, and young people in various reform schools and so on, he pointed to the obvious importance of social-background factors both in the choice of films and in reactions to them. But he remained convinced that movies could 'lead . . . to misconduct', and that this inevitably raised the issue of 'social control' (Blumer and Hauser 1933: 202).

The Chicago School sociologist Blumer was thus no simplistic 'hypodermic needle' theorist, even if there are clear traces of the stimulus–response model in his work, and his conclusion is that movies had a powerful influence on young people's lives. His observations of strong emotional experiences, and identification as 'losing oneself', have links to both previous and later scholarship on film (and television). Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), which Hansen (1983: 154 n. 14) describes as 'the first systematic attempt to theorize spectatorship', provided, for example, a sort of theoretical basis for ideas of film as a 'strong' medium which could be used both for better and for worse. Films could, Münsterberg argues, be an 'incomparable power for remoulding and upbuilding the national soul', even if '[t]he possibilities of psychical infection cannot be overlooked'. 'No psychologist', he continues, 'can determine exactly how much the general spirit of righteous honesty, of sexual cleanliness, may be weakened by the unbridled influence of plays which lower moral standards' (May 1983: 42). With somewhat different, and far more impressive, theoretical underpinnings, the whole theorization of 'the spectator' in cine-psychoanalytic studies from Christian Metz onwards is also centred on the persuasive ideological functions of 'identification' (see Creed, Part 1, Chapter 9). In this respect, Blumer was probably less blind to the importance of contextual factors in determining the 'effects' of cinema than some of the work in the *Screen* tradition appeared to be.

The Payne Fund Studies, however, are all quite insensitive to film as a form of *art*. They chop up filmic texts in so many 'themes' and 'content elements', with total lack of respect for a film's wholeness and the interrelations of a variety of aesthetic means and potential meanings. This provoked the neo-Aristotelian philosopher Mortimer Adler to formulate a fundamental critique of this whole approach to what he considered an art form in his *Art and Prudence* (1937), subsequently popularized in Raymond Moley's *Are we Movie Made?* (1938). Nevertheless, at least some of the Payne Fund Studies were more nuanced and theoretically reflective than much post-war research. Sociologist Paul G. Cressey (1938) summarized the experiences gained in the project as follows:

'Going to the movies' is a unified experience involving always a specific film, a specific personality, a specific social situation and a specific time and mood; therefore, any program of research which does not recognize all essential phases of the motion picture experience can offer little more than conjecture as to the cinema's net 'effect' in actual settings and communities. (Cressey 1938: 518)

It is worth wondering where such insights went in the following decades. Research along similarly intelligent lines had in fact been done almost twenty-five years earlier, in Germany. But for a number of imaginable reasons, it remained unknown to Anglo-Americans until Miriam Hansen referred to it in a 1983 article in English.

The cinema as cultural resource: Emilie Altenloh

The German sociologist Emilie Altenloh's doctoral dissertation, *Zur Soziologie des Kino* (1914), which she wrote at the age of 26, is in fact one of the most interesting contributions to empirical audience studies. This is particularly so because of her general approach. The dissertation is marked by a holistic sociological and historical perspective on the cinema and its audiences. Almost half of its 102 pages are devoted to film production, including the product itself, distribution, and the legal framework. The second half is about the audience, and their attendance at the cinema is understood in relation to both their other cultural preferences (theatre, music, and so on) and their gender, class, profession, and political interests. A historical perspective runs through the whole text; and both social developments (industrialization, modernization) and the changes in the domain of popular culture are brought into her interpretive and explanatory reasoning. What also makes it strikingly different from, say, the Payne Fund Studies is that worries over 'harmful effects' are hardly expressed at all. While the author openly distinguishes between more and less 'primitive' movies and tastes (the genre preferences of many young male workers were expressed in answers that 'smell of blood and dead bodies'; Altenloh 1914: 66), the tone is generally one of sympathy, not moralizing.

Altenloh's primary material for the audience study was movie theatre statistics and 2,400 simple questionnaires which were distributed via professional organizations, trade unions, and schools of various kinds in the city of Mannheim and, in part, in Heidelberg. The study provides a detailed picture not only of the social composition of audiences but also of the differences between various sections of the audience in terms of genre preferences and the overall context of their going to the movies, including their relations to other cultural forms and media. The survey demonstrated, for instance, that male audiences varied a lot in their generic preferences and general attitudes to the cinema, in ways which clearly related to their membership of particular social groups, while female moviegoers seemed to be more homogeneous in their tastes for music, melodrama, and particular kinds of documentary material (waterfalls, waves, ice floes. . .). What was striking in all of the questionnaire material, however, was how little people could say to explain why they were so drawn to the movie experience. The reasons were as many as there were individuals in the audience; they were, however, all out for something their everyday experiences did not provide. Altenloh thought that 'the cinema succeeds in addressing just enough of those individuals' needs to provide a substitute for what could really be "better"', thus assuming a powerful reality in relation to which all questions as to whether the cinema is good or evil, or has any right to exist, appear useless' (Hansen 1983: 179).

Altenloh's study suggested that the cinema functioned as a social space for experiences and forms of communication that were largely excluded from other public arenas—not least because central parts of the audience were in practice excluded from these other arenas. It was, to a degree, a public sphere for the unspeakable, where those otherwise spoken *for*, without a voice of their own, felt at least spoken *to*. And whatever else one could say about Altenloh's questionnaire methodology, it did, even if within strict limitations, allow cinema's core audiences to speak for themselves—and through a sympathetic interpreter.

British observations—and two blank decades

In Britain the early 1930s brought a series of local inquiries into the 'effects' of cinema, particularly on children and youth. Most of them sought to justify the hostility towards the movies which motivated their efforts, and were generally deficient in scholarly standards of research and argumentation. While reports like these played an important role in public debates, the more interesting work on cinema audiences was of a different nature. The statistician Simon Rowson conducted the first systematic survey of cinema attendance in 1934 (Rowson 1936), and a number of other surveys were also conducted throughout the decade. But the most fascinating of British studies of film audiences in the 1930s and 1940s were of the kind now

referred to as 'ethnographic', i.e. mainly based in various forms of participant observation.

Sociological studies such as E. W. Bakke's *The Unemployed Man* (1933) and H. Llewellyn Smith *et al.*'s *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* (1935) included observations of the role of the cinema in the everyday lives of ordinary people in particular social milieux, as did a number of other books and articles with both scholarly and other kinds of authors (Richards 1989, ch. 1). The interest in an 'anthropological study of our own civilization' also lay behind the establishment of Mass-Observation in 1937. This was a unique organization devoted to the gathering of knowledge about everyday life in British society, and was based on the voluntary observational work of ordinary (if, predominantly, middle-class) people. Mass-Observation grew out of the same intellectual milieu as the documentary film movement associated with John Grierson, and cinemagoing was first studied in what was known as the 'Worktown' project—a study of Bolton, Lancashire—which was obviously inspired by Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell's *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (1929). Survey methodology, loosely structured interviews, and participant observation were employed in this project, and the material collected provides a richly detailed picture of moviegoing in Bolton. Both before and during the war Mass-Observation continued to collect information from its volunteers all over Britain about cinemagoing (including that of the volunteers themselves), reactions to particular films during screenings (laughs, comments, etc.), favourite stars and films, and so on. Material was also gathered through popular newspapers and the film magazine *Picturegoer*, the readers of which were asked to write letters about their cinema habits and preferences (Richards and Sheridan 1987: 1–18).

This last procedure was also used by the sociologist J. P. Mayer when working on his *British Cinemas and their Audiences* (1948), which includes sixty of the letters Mayer received from readers of *Picturegoer*. This book, however, seems to be the last of its kind to arrive for decades. From the early 1950s on, television largely took over the cinema's role as the major source of popular entertainment and, as a result, became the object of very similar concerns to those previously directed at the movies. Social scientists generally lost interest in film and its 'effects', while an individualistic and consumer-oriented 'uses and gratifications' approach evolved as a new paradigm in mainstream communication research. When film studies became

established as an academic discipline in the 1960s, it was as a purely aesthetic discipline, devoted to studies of films-as-texts, of masterpieces and 'auteurs'. Having film accepted as a worthy object of study entailed a qualification of it as 'Art'. Sociological studies of the audience were regarded as irrelevant—as philistine activities, which were only of interest to aesthetically insensitive social scientists, politicians, bureaucrats, and the movie business. When the audience reappeared in film theory around 1970, it was at first as a generalized textual construct only. But in 1978, at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Tom Jeffrey published a paper entitled *Mass-Observation: A Brief History*. Mass-Observation and empirical studies of actual audiences were, in other words, 'rediscovered' in the context of the ethnographic studies of contemporary (youth) culture conducted by the so-called Birmingham School. The 1980s then brought a new wave of interest in film audiences.

From textually derived spectators to actual audiences

The politically inflected theorization of spectatorship in the 1970s can be seen, to use a psychoanalytical metaphor, as a 'return of the repressed' after a period of purely aesthetic approaches. But the political interest in film spectators may also be seen as a kind of 'displacement', in that the central audiovisual medium had for a number of decades been television. From a political point of view, it is also striking that most of the films analysed were made decades before—they were not what contemporary audiences went to the cinema to see. An interest in contemporary movie audiences is still relatively rare in film studies.

This is not at all to say that the theories in question were irrelevant and that all the efforts of *Screen* theory were a waste of time and energy. Ideas about 'spectator positions' suggested by filmic texts are in line with ancient rhetorical theory and also with more recent phenomenological and hermeneutic theories of literature. However problematic it may have been, Laura

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The position of the spectator—a film audience of the classical era

Mulvey's 1975 article about the structural gendering of mainstream film was a seminal attempt at grounding a feminist theory of film in more fundamental matters than the simple counting of stereotyped sex roles. On the whole, psychoanalytic theory in the tradition of Christian Metz is still the only significant theory which seriously approaches the 'deeper' reasons for our desires for and pleasures in film experiences. It deals with phenomena we cannot expect to explain either through direct observation or through interviews, but which still remain essential. The tradition of empirical studies of actual audiences can only, like Emilie Altenloh in 1914, conclude that people have few and hardly satisfactory answers when asked why they go to the movies again and again.

The problem of *Screen* theory was rather that the issue of *real* audiences was either dismissed as 'empiricist' or postponed indefinitely. This contrasted with developments in literary studies (which film studies

for the most part grew out of), where studies of historical, concrete instances of reception were, so to speak, booming in many countries in the 1970s—inspired, in part, by German reception theorists. Film studies only took a similar turn after the cultural studies of *television* demonstrated that textual analysis and audience studies could be intelligently and fruitfully combined. Charlotte Brunsdon and Dave Morley's work on the programme *Nationwide* (Brunsdon and Morley 1978; Morley 1980) was seminal here. It was followed later by such work as Ien Ang's influential study of the Dutch reception of *Dallas* (1985), and in the late 1980s the 'ethnographic' study of television audiences was generally recognized as the 'sexiest field within the field' in the increasingly interdisciplinary area where mass communication, communication, media, cultural, and film studies converged. This convergence was also fastered by the 'ferment in the field' of mass communication research which opened the way for so-called

qualitative (as opposed to strictly quantitative and statistical) methods in both textual and audience analyses, and forms of critical theory.

It is characteristic of film studies, though, that work on film audiences is still largely of a historical kind. Present-day, actual film audiences get very little attention. Thus, there has been quite intensive research on the exhibition practices, forms of reception, and social composition of audiences between the 1890s and 1960, and research on early film (before 1917), in particular, has flourished, combining solid historical investigation of primary sources with considerable theoretical sophistication (see Elsaesser 1990 on seminal work here). Ways of theorizing 'spectatorship' in a social context that are new to Anglo-American film studies have also been introduced in this area, specifically through Miriam Hansen's use of the concept of (proletarian) public sphere(s) in her *Babel and Babylon* (1991) (see also Gunning, Part 2, Chapter 4).

The general transition in feminist film studies from an interest only in a textually constructed spectator to studies which are concerned at least as much with actual audiences was marked, for instance, by Annette Kuhn's 1984 *Screen* article 'Women's Genres', which called for a rethinking of interrelations between the two. This demand was linked to other work within feminist film theory which had severely complicated the notion of 'the spectator' by, first, distinguishing between male and female spectator positions, and then further deconstructing the apparent unity or singularity of each of these (see Modleski 1988, introduction). In anthologies such as Deidre Pribram's *Female Spectators* (1988), the relations between textual and socio-historical approaches were discussed in new, more open ways, and Patrice Petro's *Joyless Streets* (1989) took to non-filmic sources (magazines, photojournalism) in an attempt to construct historically specific female spectator positions in Weimar Germany.

The convergence between previously segregated approaches has been particularly striking in studies of film stars, previously a phenomenon reserved for fandom and sociology. Richard Dyer's book *Stars* (1979) introduced this area into academic film studies, and it rapidly became a meeting place between historical, sociological, culturalist, semiotic, and cine-psychoanalytical forms of scholarship (Gledhill 1991). In many respects Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing* (1994) represents a coming-together of all of these, integrating (among other things) discussions of spectator theories, statistical information, and the written memories of female

moviegoers of the 1940s and 1950s. She draws on Mass-Observation material, and employs methods similar to those of both Herbert Blumer and (particularly) J. P. Mayer, thus acknowledging the value of the historical tradition of empirical, sociological studies of movie audiences (even if, significantly, neither of these two forerunners are mentioned in her book).

Stacey's book thus indicates that film studies may have reached a point where theoretical and methodological orthodoxies have given way to a more productive, critically informed rethinking of theoretical and methodological boundaries. Such reasoned eclecticism is far from unproblematic, however, for there are, in the current conjuncture, many reasons to suggest the importance of film scholarship which goes beyond empirical studies of historical or current film audiences and their experiences of the movies. Still, it seems clear that the theoretical and methodological developments over the last two decades or so have clearly contributed to making film studies a highly vital, central field within the broader area of media studies.

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