

Ian Christie: Courses for Stockholm University, September 2012

And what does the audience think?

(Undergraduate course)

Course description:

Academic study of film has traditionally been text-based (like the study of literature and art), using box-office performance and critical commentary as proxies for audience response. So what do we know about *real* audiences, and how they did and do respond to films? Much of what we think we know about early cinema is folklore, or hypothesis, and interpreting what hard data there is, from the 1930s onwards, requires analytical techniques. An important source of psychological evidence has been studies of supposed 'harm' caused by film (horror and sex); and since the 1990s more sophisticated analysis of attitudes and preferences has been used in marketing, although perhaps underused by academics. More recently, a 'social turn' in Film Studies has emphasised film consumption in all its diversity, challenging the concept of 'universal' spectators and insisting that films have a wide spectrum of meanings for individuals in different places and times. This course will first survey the history of trying to identify 'the spectator', before examining three main forms of analysis: economic analysis of box-office data-sets; sociological investigation of audience samples; and attempts to map 'cultural impact' from a range of indicators, including web discourse. Another feature of current thinking about audiences is the idea of 'locality', and the course will include a small-scale practical investigation of how Swedish citizens experience film today.

In addition to required viewings, the course consists of lecture and seminar presentations, reading and writing assignments, discussions (all in English), plus field-work investigating local audience habits and preferences.

Study goals:

After taking the course, students will

- Be able to discuss critically concepts of 'audience', according to different disciplinary perspectives
- Appreciate the main phases of film exhibition history and how these have been studied
- Understand the contemporary field of audience research and impact measurement
- Have practical experience of investigating local audience behaviour and preferences

Topics and Screenings:

1. Identifying the spectator. Scr: Early shorts; ext. *The Last Machine* (BBC, 1994); *Sherlock Jr* (Keaton, 1924)
2. The era of the 'mass audience'. Scr: *Sullivan's Travels* (Sturges, 1941)
3. Scattered audiences after the 60s. Scr: *Le mépris* (Godard, 1963)
4. Working with economic data. Scr: *tbc*
5. The sociology of the film audience. Scr: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001)

6. 'Cultural impact' on film viewers. Scr: *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996)
7. Locality and film (1): where we see films and why this matters Scr: London and Stockholm archive shorts
8. Stockholm on screen. Scr: *tbc*

Indicative Reading:

Barker, Martin, 'Crash, theatre audiences, and the idea of "liveness"', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 23:1, 2003, pp. 21-39

----- 'The Lord of the Rings and "identification": a critical encounter', *European Journal of Communication*, 20:3, 2005, pp. 353-78

Hiley, Nicholas, 'At the Picture Palace: the British Cinema Audience, 1895-1920, in Fullerton, John (ed), *Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema*, Libbey, 1998, 99. 96-103.

Maltby, Richard, Stokes, Melvyn and Allen, Robert C., (eds) *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, University of Exeter Press, 2007. Introduction and selected chapters

Sedgwick, John, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*, University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 35-83, 102-142, 180-205

Smith, Murray, 'Transnational Trainspotting', in Jane C. Stokes, Anna Reading, eds, *The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments*, Palgrave 1999

Stories We Tell Each Other: the Cultural Impact of UK Film, 1946-2006, Christie/Moullier et al, UK Film Council 2009 https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/f/i/CIReport_010709.pdf&embedded=true&chrome=true

Opening Our Eyes: How Film Contributes to the Culture of the UK, report by Northern Alliance and IpsosMORI, British Film Institute, 2011 <http://www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes/>