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

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Introduction

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. These archives 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 performance and the interest of fans in key cinema figures has been centred upon the presence of the subject. Even when it is considered how directors during this period develop an iconography it is important to remember the importance of the icon within that identification. 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, this focus on the performance can be witnessed even more so, with renderings of music by different musicians compared and contrasted by music journalism for the audience and with the merits of composition debated more hotly within the music media. Yet, in film, the image of the star actor (or director, when Alfred Hitchcock, Baz Luhrmann or Peter Jackson is considered) is immortalised on film and in the press as an image which retains the presence and power of the icon.

In this paper, I shall discuss stardom and what it is we can learn from the cinema collections made by fans and film societies during the mid-twentieth century by examining 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 tells the research about changing tastes over a decade or more of cinema spectatorship? The answering of these questions and the analysis which emerges shall, throughout this paper, be rooted in close knowledge of the Chris Roby Archive of Film Texts at Edge Hill College of Higher Education in Ormskirk, Lancashire and the work undertaken therein.
Audience Culture and the Creation of Stars

At the heart of understanding why film societies exist and why film viewers collect memorabilia of varying kinds, is the importance of addressing what is means to appreciate, like and indeed love, films. In short, what it means to be a fan.

It is common knowledge that the root of the word ‘fan’ is fanatic and, in terms of the viewers within film societies this is a more pertinent, more focused application of the term rather than the more generalised response ‘fan’ elicits from the average filmgoer who watches films as a television viewer watches their favourite soap and not as the fanatic who collects and exhibits the posters, models and books on their favourite star. Basically, to be a film fan, a certain level of obsession needs to be admitted by the viewer. The viewer within a film society does not share the abstract liking of films that the average filmgoer would cite but, essentially, has a specific response to films, their directors, producers, stars and second banana actors that s/he wants to share and discuss with like-minded spectators: they desire the shared cultural references of a not so secret society of film nerds.

Cinema fandom differs from theatre and music in its focus on the centrality of the image and the presence of the subject within the cinema culture – of which the film audience culture is part. It is a social phenomenon but is individuated into personal responses to stars. Thus, social and personal as a ‘culture’, a way of behaving and responding to films and their contributors is agreed; and film societies exemplify the formalisation of this cultural environment.

Film specialists (whether professionally or as amateurs) assume a definition of film societies which is recognised by all when discussing such matters. It is a model, in many ways, based upon the pioneering London Film Society of the 1920s – amongst whose membership could be found John Grierson, Ivor Montagu, Alfred Hitchcock and Anthony Asquith – which brought Sergei Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin to its filmmaking membership at a time when the 1925 film was still banned in the UK. This model is based upon regular meetings in a delineated portion of time at a regular place, with formal modes of approaching the screening and discussion of film and with a set of ‘officers’ who look after organisational and financial matters. Yet, when it is considered what a film society actually is, it emerges as a much more plastic socio-cultural grouping: a group of people, film fans, who meet on a regular basis to screen and discuss films, creating within the group a social identity specific to that cohort. A film society, because it sets certain boundaries of behaviour, is a formal film culture, but it is not necessarily a formal group. It does not need to adopt formal mechanisms and procedures for its operation although it may do so if its membership wishes. A film society can be an ad hoc meeting or a regular occurrence: it is simply defined by its members’ habitual interaction concerning the cinema. A formal film society is clearly typified by the London Film Society yet could also be comprised of the students in a class, especially one taken as an optional module; but an informal society may be epitomised by the informal front-room groups of friends or family who sit, watch and argue about films.
over snacks and drinks. Formal or informal, an audience culture and behavioural pattern is established within these film societies which is marked by their fanatical love of cinema.

The role of film societies, formal and informal in nature, is that they encourage discursive responses amongst even the most reticent: everyone who has seen a film will always have an opinion and any viewer is potentially a member of a film society. The average filmgoer can become a film fan and vice versa. Indeed, it is quite possible for the fan of a genre or star to be a more abstract passive viewer of other genres or actors. It is commonplace to hear film academics and students sigh, with a sense of something lost, that they can no longer watch films for ‘pure pleasure’ and there is something in this generalisation of how the film viewer experience alters for those who make it their business to analyse films but the statement must be recognised as a generalisation and, it can be argued, the overstatement of academics and students with a martyr complex. All film academics and most students specialise in specific areas and make choices about the films they find most interesting on the basis of enjoyment. It may be fruitful to analyse films that are not a pleasure to watch but it hardly credible that an interest in cinema in the first place has been elicited on the basis of displeasure. Consequently, whilst for their area of specialisation, an academic may be a fanatic, for other areas, they are still capable of watching more abstractly if it is an area beyond their professional interest.

Whether the audience, fans or otherwise, watches for one reason or another, the one key aspect which can shape and reshape the spectator’s response to a film is the relationship between the viewer and the actor: or more powerfully the star. Audiences make choices about watching films based upon a multitude of snippets of information: what a reviewer says or does not say is only a small component of that decision making process. However, the concoction reduces to a simple question: will the standard of the film be such that an evening in its presence is worthwhile? Part of how the potential viewer judges this is by considering the cast and their artistic and economical merits or failures; and the presence of a star should be a useful indicator of film quality (although this is not always the case as being a star is not a measurement of acting ability). Consequently, when analysing film viewing practices, it has become a crucial part of film research into how and why the filmgoer watches and revisits the cinema to examine and define what it means to be a star.

Film stars are the products of many texts, including pin-ups, publicity releases, interviews […] and press coverage of both their public and private lives. Star texts then are intertextual: many texts all referring to ‘one’ person. But these texts are not necessarily equal, some have or can have greater importance than others (depending of who reads them), and they can evolve over years.

(Susan Hayward, 1995, 67)

Above, Susan Hayward states that the star is fundamentally an intertext in which each contributory text has helped to create the star as text. The star, therefore, signifies many
signatures within the image as a sign of media success. This sign should consequently be read in iconographical terms as an image standing for something greater than its parts: the image of Christ as ‘three in one’ – Father, Son and Holy Ghost – as the traditional religious icon functions and, as a representation of God, a worshipped image, viewed as blasphemous by Christian fundamentalists. Yet, secular society, stripped of its religious iconography, searches for icons elsewhere; for images of people who are held up to be near perfect in the eye of the beholder (if not within normative behaviour or social morés): and icons they create within the cathedrals of leisure culture: the cinema.

A film icon is the paragon of the perfect presence on the screen. Typically, it is not a status ascribed at the same time as the actor’s peak on screen but is awarded in later years or after their death as a recognition of their strength and impact on the screen within a given period. Consider, for example, Carl Reiner’s spoof tribute to film noir, *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid* (1982), in which Steve Martin is super-imposed into the mise-en-scène of so many admired noir thrillers of the 1940s and plays out scenes ‘with’ Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Ingrid Bergman and Lauren Bacall. This film is exemplary of the cinema industry’s identification of its own icons: the actors it has worshipped as role models and upon whom many a performance since has been based. More recently, and atypically, actors who are still comparatively young but who have contributed massively to the post-classical Hollywood cinema, as forged by Arthur Penn, Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, have become identified as icons, such as Robert De Niro (who has created in a fine line in self-parody in films like *Meet the Parents* (Jay Roach, 2000) and *Analyze This* (Harold Ramis, 1999) or Warren Beatty. These actors are undoubtedly icons of the cinema and therefore, as signs, are held up to be worshipped; but they are also stars and have an economic and social function within the film industry and cinema spectatorship. Hayward’s statement earlier implied that all stars, as intertexts signifying something greater than their parts, are automatically icons yet this implication can only be true with regard to some stars. She writes that the texts “are not necessarily equal” depending upon the reader of the sign – and this is true – but what needs to be configured in order for the star to become the icon is that the texts upon which the most importance is placed are visual, primary texts, the images, the films themselves, rather than the written, secondary texts, the interviews and unauthorised biographies. Thus, the icon is the worshipped imago for the star whilst the star him or herself is the admired performer. As Richard Dyer argues in his book *Stars* (1980), as paraphrased by Hayward: “The attraction of a star for the audience […] is that s/he speaks in the name of the individual (not the industrial complex such as Hollywood or capitalism), and articulates what it is to be a human being in contemporary society” (Hayward, 67). The star, therefore, is the individual with whom the audience can identify, whilst the icon is placed beyond that. Yet, in between these two positions and these two levels of signification for the audience is the super-star: attainable and ordinary, unattainable and extraordinary “inhabiting a life beyond our dreams but which they must act out for us” (Ibid).

Central to the transition from star actor to super-star icon is the recognition by the audience of the character a star plays being immutable – thus how the spectator views an actor, not a character, defines the extent to which empathy is created between actor and
audience when viewing a film: which provides a return to contemplating the relationship of the film fan to the object of their affections: the star.

Feminist psychoanalytical spectatorship theory which draws on the work of Laura Mulvey (especially her seminal 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’), would argue that the male actor/star is the subject of the male gaze whilst the female actor/star is the object of that same examination. Much work has been carried out in the intervening years which addresses and challenges Mulvey’s assertions (for example Judith Mayne’s 1993 book *Cinema and Spectatorship*) but this prioritisation of the male spectator has echoed repeatedly and, even within queer theory analyses of spectatorship (e.g. Brett Farmer, 2000), maintained the gender divide in spectatorship if not the sexual differentiation, with spectators being assigned feminine or masculine viewing positions. In other words, irrespective of who the spectator is, the masculine viewer must occupy a position in which the male star is framed as subject and the female as object, whilst the feminine viewer, influenced by patriarchal ideologies, confusedly oscillates between seeing both the man and the woman as fetishised objects of desire. The problems raised by the Oedipus complex analysis of the psycho-sexual relationships between people continue to frustrate an understanding of female subjectivity without needing to resort to the archaic mother scenario (explored by Carol J. Clover, 1992, and Barbara Creed, 1993, amongst others). Sociologically influenced audience work, however, has helped to refocus the female spectator as empowered, especially Jackie Stacey’s *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994) in which she undertook a large scale of female spectatorship during the high classical period, the 1940s and ‘50s. Stacey’s work, and those of socio-historians like her, has opened up the recognition of the spectator as being engaged in a relationship with the star which is specific to the individual’s social context and builds on Dyer’s assertion in *Stars*, written fourteen years earlier, that audiences, in part, produce the star (cited by Hayward, 67). The relationship of the spectator to the image on the screen cannot, therefore, be generalised as being a consistently elicited response, either psycho-sexually or socially but is, rather, one which, although defined through the reaction to the imponderable ‘star quality’, is a response in flux, based upon the individual viewer in real-world society responding the individual star in film-world society; articulating “what it means to be human” but also articulating what it means to be a model of humanity. Thus, what truly counts in understanding how a spectator develops a liking for a star is the extent to which empathy is created between actor and audience and how identification with the star is encouraged through the performance and mise-en-scène.

Thus far, the terms filmgoer, viewer, audience and spectator have been used interchangeably but, within Brechtian theories of audience engagement, there is a clear differentiation between the concept of the audience and that of the spectator. This difference can be summarised by evoking the audience (Brecht’s spectator within the dramatic theatre who is “drawn into the plot” (Brecht, 1964, 37) - listeners who are passive and homogeneous - versus the spectator of the epic theatre who is “placed opposite the plot” (ibid) as a watcher in an active, individuated position: “[The Epic
Theatre] turns the spectator into an observer, but arouses his capacity for action, forces him to take decisions [...] the spectator stands outside, studies” (Brecht, 64).

At the heart of the ‘activity’ of the spectator in juxtaposition with the audience’s ‘inactivity’ is the alienation of the spectator from the text to ensure a critical and analytical response via *verfemdsungeffekts* (alienation devices) or ‘distanciation’ as it is better known in film theory through Colin MacCabe’s work (1974, 1975, 1976). Nevertheless, these contrary political positions articulated by Brecht are positions occupied in the spectator’s relationship to two kinds of theatre, the dramatic and the epic, and whilst there is clearly a distinction to be made between realist and non-realist film, it has to be acknowledged that the cinema is designed to address the ear and the eye, the heart and the mind. When watching a film, the viewer can both suspend disbelief and engage with the ideological statements made within a film if the narration of the film is largely coherent. That is why the discussions which take place socially after a screening are enlightening critical experiences for the film fan. Already interested in the mechanisms of film, the film fan is able to recognise and observe the techniques of narration, whether through naturalism or through alienating devices, but s/he is also able to involve him or herself in following the narrative and looking for ‘the message’ by more conventional means. As such, the empathy which is needed for identification with the star actor is not elided via any distancing devices the director might use because these further emphasise the relationship between the attainable actor and their audience: creating a ‘bond’ of alienation between the performer and the spectator. A recent example of this process can be seen in Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* (2004), in which Nicole Kidman (super-star), Lauren Bacall (icon), James Caan (star) and Paul Bettany (rising star), acting naturalistically within a set simply marked on the floor of a warehouse in white paint, rose above the power the mise-en-scène has to assist in the suspension of disbelief to emphasise, in this manifestation of theatrical artificiality, that a film is nothing more than events being (re)created on an imaginary set. As with the self-reflexivity of *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) and *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999), the empathy created between fans and stars was not diminished but increased by their participation in films which questioned the audience’s belief in the filmic reality; and film societies of all kinds have discussed these films at great length, collecting cuttings, compiling scrapbooks and arguing about what exactly postmodernism in film means.

The documents collected by film societies reveal these temporally specific interests and reiterate the film society as the manifestation of an audience culture above all else. In the remainder of this paper, the specifics of what can be learnt from these film societies, these film audiences, will be discussed via an analysis of the documentation and texts to be found within the Chris Roby Archive of Film Texts, CRAFT, and how the proactive integration of such potential research material can enhance the learning experience of students of film history, both formally and informally.
The Chris Roby Archive of Film Texts was donated to Edge Hill in 2002 by a local businessman and former treasurer of the Edge Hill Film Society (which ran for over 20 years from the mid-‘60s to the early ‘90s at the college), Chris Roby. The collection had formerly been known as the Contemporary Film Collection and had been kept at the North West Film Archive (NWFA) at Manchester Metropolitan University after being given to them in 1987. Having seen publicity about the then new BA Film Studies at Edge Hill, and with the collection being little utilised by researchers at the NWFA, the archive was generously presented to Edge Hill’s library for its better employment in educating students and local researchers. CRAFT comprises, for the majority, the collections of personal members of various North-West England Film Societies, including Southport Film Society and Liverpool Film Society, from the mid-1930s to the late 1990s and is replete with a wide range of material collected by avid filmgoers, including personal scrapbooks, charting the films and stars of particular years, periodicals (including 1930s and ‘40s Photoplay, 1950s to mid-‘70s Films and Filming, Screen in the 1970s and Sight and Sound from 50s-90s), books, film festival programmes, clippings, posters and other ephemera, such as the marketing material distributed within movie theatres. The remaining minority texts cover a similar range of material but have been personally donated by individual members of the public and academics.

The collectors represented by such as mass of documentation span a large area of interests and illustrate the eclecticism of film society membership, for, unlike music society membership, where being an instrumentalist implies a set of common experiences for the musician since childhood typically, film society membership implies no such common technical background and simply a love of the cinema.

Other key factors emerge from an analysis of the kinds of texts collected by film societies. The collation of periodicals, for example, can be sporadic: complete runs of important periodicals such as Films and Filming are assembled by mixing the individual collections but no one collector has provided a complete set of any periodical, despite their stated aim to do so. This sporadic collecting does not, however, necessarily indicate a wane in interest (although it might) but can be seen as a reflection of the societies’ membership’s place within life beyond the cinema screen. Periodical subscriptions can be expensive and dips in certain journals in CRAFT can be observed around key times of year: Christmas and during the summer – implying that the film societies’ membership as reflected in the archive generally has familial obligations. The fact that the collections reveal their relationship with wider society is, of course, an important strength which substantiates the use of such archives in learning about the audience and film history; many of the interests expressed within the collections reflect the viewing habits of mainstream cinemagoers yet, at the same time, the critical material gathered clearly sets the film society spectator as viewing more analytically that the average filmgoer.

Another important aspect which emerges from the scrapbooks in particular is the diary quality that the records of regular cinema appreciation connote: the collection becomes a
representation of the personal self through the manner of archiving and the comments beside cuttings, as well as certain film viewing trends that can be spotted (a preponderance of romance films for example).

The archive materials held in CRAFT can be divided into 3 groups of varying sizes:

**Group A:** Texts already in the public domain. Again subdivided into the critical material (periodicals, books and clippings) and the marketing material (‘souvenirs’ - film festival programmes, booklets accompanying specific road-shown films, production stills and posters) - 75%.

**Group B:** Personal interpretations - such as the scrapbooks which, although the cuttings they contain originate in the public domain are largely unsourced and reveal more about the collector’s approach to the cinema than the films themselves – 20%.

**Group C:** Society business – programmes for society screenings and clippings concerning the societies place within the community - 5%.

How these materials can potentially be used varies according to the specific needs of the researcher. Group A is of the most use for traditional film history research but the discoveries which can be made about how films and their stars were critically approached from the contemporary material can be enlightening to the student unfamiliar with original source research. Meanwhile, Group B opens out the socio-personal perspective upon the collector and the nature of the texts within can exemplify the media’s approach in general to specific genres or subjects at the time - unlike purely critical material. Lastly, Group C reveals the day to day running habits of the societies, what their self-reception was and how significant their players were in community film viewing and education.

Of these three groups, it is the material found within the scrapbooks which reveal most about audiences and spectatorship: they also, as with Jackie Stacey’s research via questionnaires and interviews, reveal the personal qualities of film fandom. The scrapbooks, their contents, presentation and organisation are subjective texts which, in addition to their sociological revelations, divulge more about the collector’s approach to the cinema than the films themselves. The clippings contained within, depending admittedly upon the archivist and the specificities of the moment, tend to be publicity material leading up to a film’s release and/or reviews of the film in which the fan is interested. In many scrapbooks, there can be clearly seen continuity of subject and, in books that have been put together after the actual collection, patterns of interest can be traced. These continuities and patterns are best demonstrated by the single star foci represented by repeated images and clippings across scrapbooks from a number of years: for example Errol Flynn or Margaret Lockwood. With regard to some stars or directors, the fan’s loyalty can be mapped out across decades as the star or director becomes increasingly popular. In the case of one scrapbook archivist this is embodied by the
tracking of both Vivien Leigh and Alfred Hitchcock as they moved from being promising British talents to cinema stars of the 1940s. Necessarily a factor in this kind of film fan activity is, as stated earlier, a level of obsessive behaviour and, within a film society, the encouragement of positive obsessive habits such as regular data collection (hence the film nerd described before). Film societies provide a network of data collectors for the individual film fan within the specific audience culture the film society makes available and thus both film knowledge and discourse are promoted.

When analysing the content of the personal scrapbooks within CRAFT, the texts can be seen to typify the media’s general approach to the cinema and, unlike the purely critical material within Group A, the act of collection has resisted the analytical; thus emphasising the extent of interest as opposed to the level of engagement. The difference between these two concepts (interest and engagement) is best explicated by a considering that the extent of interest is a personal indicator and the level of engagement is an indicator of society driven discursive activity. Engagement can, of course, be a personal activity, but in order to engage with a text a social and scholarly process is implied: informed conversation and analysis.

Not all of the texts found within the scrapbooks are referenced, something which initially frustrates the researcher, but general solutions can be extrapolated that mean the reader can determine a limited number of source texts (typically 5 to 6 local, national tabloid and/or broadsheet newspapers) have been gleaned. Ultimately, the limited information regarding the original sources actually aids the development of general arguments concerning the wider public response to films and stars and can take the private task of compiling the scrapbook in the first place, as an individual spectator, into the public realm of the audience at large. Consequently, not only are the individual’s changing tastes chronicled but also those of the viewing community: the scrapbooks reveal the nature of audience cultures beyond the film society.

Evidence of altering tastes, however, are not the only changes which can be pursued within the collectors’ private archives. Other changes can be followed through which are indicative of alterations in the media and culture. Some scrapbooks trace a change in the viewing habits of audiences from the theatre in the 1930s to the cinema in the 1940s, changes related to the coming of war and the rising cost of theatre-going. By the 1950s, only clippings about film are deemed worth retaining by one individual. Above, the consistencies of collectors were discussed but the scrapbooks also illustrate the inconsistencies of film fandom and how actors or directors might fall out of fashion: a good example of this being found in the clippings gathered on the child star Shirley Temple during the 1930s but which disappear, like her career, by the mid-1940s. It is en vogue nowadays to describe society as existing in a constant ‘change culture’, an empty term which has arisen from business and then entered planning terminology throughout academia but, because these scrapbooks, at their richest, narrate the years of, debatably, the greatest sociological change in the British twentieth century, from 1936 to 1957, they can truly be said to reflect the ‘change culture’ of the mid-century period and articulate transforming costs and tastes, developments in the film industry, shifting publication
interests reflecting public interest and lastly, the ageing collectors’ personal variations in opinion.

None of the scrapbooks, with the exception of a single volume, identifies its compiler and, distanced by time from the benefactor, the albums are effectively anonymous. Nevertheless, it is possible to personalise the anonymous spectator beyond the initial stage of recognising patterns of collection which point to star, director and/or genre preferences. These signifiers of subjectivity can be found here, as in the rest of the archive, by an inquisition of the source documentation as a whole. To personalise the film society spectator and the audience culture of which s/he was part, the following aspects need to be analysed:

- Patterns of collection
- The reading level of the preponderant source material
- The mode of presentation

These three factors can lead to the answering of important questions when it comes to understanding the audience from which the researcher learns:

a) What the collector(s) liked (can indicate the nature of their fandom and/or the gender of the collector depending upon the kind of images kept)

b) When they collected (why then?)

c) What they collected from most frequently (visual emphasising one level of interest in film, journalistic or biographical another level, critical yet another)

d) The regularity, or otherwise, of collection (indicative of a consistent or an inconsistent relationship with the cinema)

e) The intelligence (based upon reading level) of the collector

f) The extent to which the collecting itself was of value versus the content of the collection

So, all in all, what can be learnt from these real world documents hinges upon the identification of the spectator as not simply the theoretical construct found in psychoanalytical spectatorship studies but as a tangible access point for the analysis of cinema-going trends within an audience culture. The work of writers such as Jackie Stacey looking at female spectatorship emphasised, through her methods of data collection, the individual and broader conclusions were then drawn from the massed information to create the ‘average response’. As such, this kind of sociological cinema research coherently adopts the approach that the spectator is the Brechtian active individual viewer whose responses are driven by critical processes. In analysing the evidence of spectatorship within the specified audience culture of the film societies, however, what is revealed is the discursive communal spectator who occupies the space between the individuation of the filmgoer and the socialisation of the passive audience.
Consequently, the audience culture of film societies becomes representative of other audience cultures and is made tangible through the personal responses recorded by their membership.

Film society collections, therefore, in addition to making histories tangible, can be used to: help researchers contextualise social history and follow spectatorship trends within a part of the community. Related to this, the archives can contribute to research upon local society and film societies and, more widely can play a part in research upon film history through the ephemera which survives within personal archives but which infrequently survives elsewhere. Finally, and given the desire of CRAFT’s benefactor that the collections be used more educationally, the material found in the archive, as a local resource can help teach film history and spectatorship to students.

When the Chris Roby Archive of Film Texts first arrived at Edge Hill in 2002, it was immediately recognised as a potentially wonderful resource for teaching and it was decided that, more than simply introducing the texts to the classroom as secondary back-up documents, what would be pedagogically sound would be to teach the students how to research using what are usually determined as postgraduate research techniques, using primary documentary sources rather than purely secondary materials. Linked to this activity was a research project, evaluating the success of using postgraduate research methods in the said teaching.

In the first phase of the research (with first year Film History classes from 2002-3), one class used archive materials whilst another, as a control, used the planned reading only. The weeks used to run the project were when the students learnt about the 1930s’ Hollywood studio system and British cinema during World War II. The subjects for each session were: the coming of sound; the Hollywood studio system 1 (genres and conventions); the Hollywood studio system 2 (innovations and controls); directors and the studio system; film noir; and Gainsborough melodramas and the British war film.

Every week, the class was supplied with a photocopy of material from CRAFT which was relevant to that day’s subject and was something the students would not have been able to find elsewhere, in the library or on the internet. The text for each week was different in function and in what it offered the students relating to the film they had watched or reading they had performed. At the end of each seminar, the students in both groups completed an evaluation form based upon expressing what they had done, what they thought they had learnt and via which methods, and how they would assess their learning styles (auditory, visual or kinesthetic) based upon their experience: the identification of their learning preferences is a useful tool in planning effective teaching and encouraging non-typical student learners to involve themselves in seminars.

The use of archive materials was found to be a useful way to encourage student development of individual skills, analysis skills and discussion skills as the work built from individual reading to a group appraisal of the text’s content and value for comprehending the film or related aspects. The use of CRAFT documents, because of the
manageable chunks in which much of this material comes, also proved a productive avenue for encouraging students who are typically unresponsive to express their opinion of the documentation, both in class and on the evaluation forms. Consequently, the fruits of one kind of film society and their audience culture were utilized to inform and develop the learning of another, which was consistent with the aims of the societies represented by the archive material as a whole.

Thus, the archive work carried out by societies and individuals throughout the North West of England was a source of inspiration to a new generation of film researchers.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the potential for learning from the audience via the documentation film societies leave in their wake is significant for creating analyses of specific audience cultures rather than the generalised views drawn from other modes of data collection which are no less valuable for spectatorship research. These materials enable the researcher to not only analyse the contemporary media responses to films, stars and directors, but also scrutinize the immediate responses of the filmgoer to the same; responses unmediated by time and evidenced by the nature of the materials collated. Additionally, the collection of periodicals over a long period within CRAFT leaves a useful archive of critical and marketing documentation for the film researcher in the North West which, otherwise, would require a trip to the British Film Institute in London. Local film societies, therefore, and their collections, can contribute vastly to the decentralisation of film research and open it out to the local inquisitor of the cinema.

The audience is never homogeneous, it is a grouping of individual spectators who might share a common interest but all too frequently in film theory, conclusions are drawn which might lead the reader to believe in the uniform, passive, viewer. In analysing the archives of film societies it becomes apparent that ‘the audience’ is, in fact, heterogeneous, and what unites spectators is not a sense of audience culture as a blank, watching, face but as the inquiring, expressive, visage of the intelligent spectator. What researchers can learn from the audience and from the film societies, therefore, is that the audience is more powerful than spectatorship theory permits and that its voice should be heard.
Bibliography


Filmography