

International film audiences: Industrial and academic perspectives – Part 2

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As the world and, in particular, cinema slowly but steadily begin to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we once again turn our attention to international film audiences, distribution and exhibition to address the ever-shifting realities of film consumption. The articles, included in this themed section, are particularly sensitive to recent topics of interest in the industry, raising questions such as: How should we conceptualise viewing practices in order to better understand them?; Will video-on-demand continue to compete with cinema-going over audiences and release strategies?; What can we learn from past cinema-going traditions, especially in underexplored territories? How do non-Hollywood films travel beyond the borders of their country of origin? And what is the impact of national productions and specialised film on identity and value formation, film-going impulses and communal engagement? The work, featured here, covers all of these questions and more.

The second special themed section on academic and industrial perspectives on international film audiences stems from a conference organised online in September 2020 at Oxford Brookes University, whose distinct feature was the interaction between academia and industry.¹ This approach is also adopted in the section, which features a collection of studies into film consumption, audience practices, memories of cinema-going, the use of local archive in audience engagement and the impact of documentaries on audiences together with a series of interviews and reflections on film distribution, exhibition and cultural heritage beyond mainstream, Western perspectives. From the UK through Estonia, Belgium and the Bahamas to the Caribbean, Brazil, Senegal and India this collection is particularly rich with international voices and experiences. We are grateful to each and every one of our contributors for sharing their rigorous work and varied expertise.

¹ See: Nedyalkova, M. and Treveri Gennari, D., 2021. International film audiences: Industrial and academic perspectives – Part 1. [online] *Participations*. Available at: <<https://www.participations.org/Volume%2018/Issue%202/19.pdf>> [Accessed 25 April 2022].

This themed section includes six academic research articles, three interviews with film and media specialists and one reflective piece which sits between academic and industry research. We were purposefully inclusive of topics and formats because we believe that much is to be learned from an open-minded and comprehensive approach to film audiences, which transcends traditional sector divisions and methodological stringency.

The issue of audience engagement seems to run through several of the academic articles as well as the interviews. The opening piece - titled "The dynamics of audience practices: mobilities of film consumption" and written by Matthew Hanchard, Peter Merrington and Bridgette Wessels - develops a new theoretical approach to address audience practice in engaging with film and understanding film consumption. This contribution to audience studies is important in the way it articulates ways of consuming and relating to films (from going to the cinema to watching film on long-haul flights). Through Hartmann's (2006) notion of a triple articulation of media and Urry's (2008) concept of 'mobilities', Hanchard et al. argue that film consumption is best explored not just through a focus on the film as text, or on the social, temporal and/or spatial environments in which film-watching takes place, but through an understanding that the two are related and framed by wider cultural and economic factors.

Another piece, focusing on the intricacies and multiple forms of contemporary film consumption follows. As the title suggests, in "Young Flemish audiences' cinema-going intentions and VOD streamed viewing practices during COVID-19" Stephanie Tintel and Tim Raats interrogate the impact of the pandemic on the film-viewing habits of young Flemish audiences. The authors highlight the safety and comfort preoccupations shaping intentions to return to the cinema and the positive relation between cinema-going and streamed viewing of films (which could be considered more complementary than substitutive), but argue that future pricing strategies will be decisive in attracting viewers back to the big screen.

A very different audience study follows – empirical work presented by Monique Toppin in her contribution: 'Memories of Cinema-going in Little Nassau'. This time cinema memories are the central theme of the article through an overview of cinema-going in Nassau, Bahamas, in the 1950s. Using a new cinema history perspective, Toppin triangulates memories of narrators, news and advertisements from local daily newspapers, and trade journals to examine local cinema-going experiences and, in particular, the impact of race on the leisure activity of cinema-going and the broader everyday lives of the narrators.

Another piece which draws on communal history is "From the Periphery: Voices from the New Towns" – where Angela English's practice during a long career in the film archive sector, both as a lecturer and practitioner, informs her article's approach to local archives and their role in engaging with audiences. English's perspective makes use of a methodology of screenings and training sessions with volunteers in four New Towns on the periphery of London to

interrogate creative ways of using local archive film with community audiences, highlighting issues of accessibility, identity and audience expectations. The case study of Stevenage is explored through two local films with emphasis on radical interventions and innovative audience and reception work.

The special issue then moves from a local to an international perspective in Huw D. Jones' research "Achieving an intimacy of knowledge and effect? The impact of documentary films in Europe". This article analyses the findings of a recent survey of documentary film viewers in Spain, Greece, Iceland and other parts of Europe, corroborating previous studies on the effects of films, while revealing new trends in documentary viewing and preferences. Jones concludes that the documentaries most likely to encourage respondents to change their lifestyle or behaviour are emotionally engaging expositional or performative pictures that deal with animal rights, environmental issues or modern consumerism and most likely to affect young people and those without a university degree. The study, commissioned by Moving Docs (a partnership managed by the European Documentary Network and supported by Creative Europe) offers implicit insights into aspects of academic-industry collaborative work as well.

Remaining in Europe, but with the specific case-study of Estonia, Sten Kauber focuses on a small Eastern European film market and the reasons underlying its consistent growth in cinema admissions. This empirical study investigates how Estonian film audiences form and perceive the imagined affordances (Gibson, 1979) of cinema-going and perceptions of national cinema to understand the ways in which audiences make sense of, approach, and shape the practice of cinema-going. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, Kauber uncovers how cinema-going is encouraged by film-specific aspects, cinema theatre-specific aspects, social aspects, situational aspects, and media and promotion.

The focus on traditional film exhibition remains throughout the first two industry interviews which follow. The first piece in the industry perspectives part of the themed section is a conversation between scholar, filmmaker, journalist and festival organiser Estrella Sendra and Armand Fall, manager of the Complexe Cinématographique Ousmane Sembène in Dakar, Senegal. In it Fall discusses his passion for film, his vision for the theatre and his approach to engaging local audiences and reviving film culture in Dakar. The interview offers insights into film programming, as well as the role of film festivals in bringing not just cinema experiences back, but also, African cinema to Senegalese audiences. Since African film has been largely marginalised and inaccessible beyond international film festivals, this raises larger concerns about distribution and exhibition on the continent.

Following from it is a conversation between film scholars Daniela Treveri Gennari and Maya Nedyalkova and Photographer/Cinematographer Hemant Chaturvedi on changing film exhibition in India, with a particular focus on its forgotten theatres and people. Chaturvedi's

initiative of documenting close to a thousand endangered single-screen movie theatres across India, racing against time as they are closed down and/or demolished, offers a significant point of reflection on the importance of preserving local cinema memories. His tireless photographic work and the memories he collects on his journeys across the country often remain the only link to the elaborate history of Indian film exhibition prior to the dawn of the multiplex.

Another fascinating initiative is explored in the interview that researcher Hanna Klien-Thomas conducted with cross-platform storyteller Lisa Harewood and film programmer, curator, and writer Jonathan Ali, of The Twelve30 Collective, an independent film curating initiative with the aim to reframe Caribbean cinema for UK audiences. In this piece, Harewood and Ali explain how their work aims to bring classic and contemporary films from the Caribbean and its diaspora to the screen, with the intention of changing the perceptions of Caribbean cinema in the global film landscape and the challenges which they face along the way.

The final piece of this section – “Mapping Out Contemporary Brazilian Film - Reaching New Audiences” – is another reflection on how non-Hollywood film travels. This work, conducted by Hadija Chalupe da Silva, offers an analysis of the archival research of Brazilian films exhibited in the UK between 1995 and 2019 in order to shed light on the factors which help such productions reach an international audience and the challenges they face. Chalupe da Silva explains that, while the search for financing and partners in other countries should allow the creation of works that possess storytelling appeal and more inviting identities to circulate internationally, the majority of Brazilian films released on UK screens rely on stereotypical depictions, well-known authors and/or powerful international distribution companies. Brazilian national institutions, such as Ancine, and international festivals, such as BFI London Film Festival (LFF), have helped increase visibility for Brazilian productions abroad but more could be done to foster new directorial voices, release strategies and co-production partnerships.

With this, our two-part themed section concludes. By highlighting the similarities in topics and questions relating to audiences and film consumption across not only national borders but also sector divides, we hope to inspire more dialogue and opportunities to bring together fruitful industry and academic collaborations. The value of such work lies in its diverse perspectives, flexibility of approaches, practical usefulness and united resources. We dare dream this to be the brightest of futures for audience research!