

Introduction: Edinburgh International Film Audiences Conference, 2011

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I am delighted to introduce this selection of papers from this year's EIFAC <http://www.filmaudiencesconference.co.uk/>. The quality of the presentations is more than matched by the full length versions included here. The 'title' of the conference was a quote from Wilson Mizner, (1876 – 1933) "I still think the movie heroes are in the audience." Following in that spirit, all of the papers deal with actual audiences and their responses to a range of movie related experiences.

There are a number of overlapping themes throughout the papers, which was more serendipitous than planned. The papers by Hipkins et al, Krämer, Skopal and Toffel deal with historical audiences either through oral history, accessing archives or a combination of both. Within them is the notion of the creation of social identities, sometimes in the sense of officialdom/ 'authority' wanting to educate and create a particular form of social identity and sometimes the subversion/rejection of those plans. There is also an indication of the mental work that elements of audiences engage in when viewing movies as opposed to blindly accepting a 'clear message'. The theme of social identities relates well to a number of other papers. Aveyard (whose paper won the best student paper at the conference), Evans, Phillips, Cochrane, Gregoli, Monk and Hollinshead all explore the relationship between social identity and movie related experiences. Whilst some look at the way movies serve to highlight social distinctions amongst audiences and the impact of different forms of capital on their responses/readings others look at the physical space of cinemas and the ways in which that impacts upon engagement or non-engagement with those spaces and the films on offer there. There is also discussion of what could be described as life after the cinema experience in terms of on-line discussion/communities and the richly creative ways in which members of those fora extend their enjoyment of the cinematic experience. Hardie takes the idea of an active audience to a new level in her discussion of the making of and thinking behind her own documentary film. What I think is particularly interesting about the majority of the papers is the way in which movie experiences contribute to a sense of community, which in some instances seems a much more appropriate term than social identity alone.

I have said nothing about the different theoretical positions that people have adopted because the most important theoretical point is the empirical nature of the research presented here and a desire to understand the audiences' experiences. In their own way they have each engaged with the basic idea of *verstehen* in order to contribute to increasingly nuanced ways of understanding the great diversity of audiences' reactions, and which is the *raison d'être* that underpins the whole film audiences conference. We are currently discussing the next conference and if you would like further information or to make suggestions please feel free to contact me. I would like to conclude by thanking everyone who was involved in the reviewing process, the contributors and to give especial thanks to Martin Barker for his on-going support of the conference and the not inconsiderable support he has given to me.