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□ Jancovich, Mark & Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings:

The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption.

BFI Publishing (2003). ISBN 0-85170-943-5 (hbk), 0-85170-942-7 (pbk), pp. vi + 281

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A Review by Mike Chopra-Gant

One of my most memorable experiences of the cinema occurred in 1993. The film was *Boxing Helena* (Jennifer Lynch 1993 USA), an unbearably pretentious movie about an obsessive surgeon who amputates the limbs of the woman he desires in order to possess her. At the film's most tense moment, when the camera reveals the horrific spectacle of the woman, post amputation, mounted in a wooden box like a trophy, an audience member shouted out, "jump", causing the auditorium to erupt in laughter, united in contempt for the film's conceit.

It is this aspect of the cinematic experience—the social dimension of cinema and film exhibition—that Jancovich, Faire and Stubbings examine in their excellent new book. Moving in a different direction to the dominant tradition in film studies, with its focus on films as texts, genres etc., Jancovich and his collaborators turn their attention to cinema in its micro-sociological dimension, to look in detail at the sites and practices of film exhibition and consumption in Nottingham from the arrival of moving picture shows at the end of the nineteenth century to the new arenas for film consumption—the multiplex, the art cinema, DVD—that are now commonplace. The authors employ a wide range of archival resources, revealing local attitudes to early forms of moving picture exhibition, and combine their analysis of the archives with ethnographic research, drawing out a rich oral history of the meanings attached by cinemagoers of the present and earlier generations to their own experiences of the sites of cinematic exhibition.

This is not, then, a book about film. Its concern is the place of cinemas in the cultural geography of the urban landscape and so it is more about the economic, political and regulatory currents that determined the location and character and the meanings of sites of film exhibition. It considers the impact of cinemas on the areas where they were located and the implications of design and naming strategies on the public perception of the respectability (or otherwise) of particular venues. It examines the impact of recent developments like the "megaplex" or "urban entertainment centre" on broader strategies for urban regeneration.

The first part of the book contains a consideration of some of the theoretical issues that arise in the study and argues for a shift from a spectatorship model of film viewing to a model of film consumption in which the practice of theatrical film viewing is understood in relation to wider patterns of consumption and in relation to the context in which films are exhibited. Influenced by the work of writers such as Douglas Gomery and Robert Allen, the authors of this book position their own research within a strand of film studies that

places greater emphasis on cinema as the successor to the Vaudevillian tradition of public entertainment, rather than seeing film as an offspring of literature and so available to the methods of literary interpretation that have dominated film studies for much of its history. Part two examines early modes of moving picture exhibition and the varying attitudes of different social classes towards different exhibition venues. Part three continues this cultural history of various sites of exhibition, tracing the development of new venues and exhibition practices from the late silent and early sound era through the 1930s and up to the second world war. Part four looks at the decline in the public exhibition of movies that occurred after the war as the impact of the growth in television ownership began to be felt by exhibitors. It also examines changes in public attitudes towards the newly redundant picture palaces, as nostalgia for a 'golden age' of moviegoing began to develop in the postwar period. The fifth and final part of the book brings this history of film exhibition right up to date, looking at the most recent trends in film consumption. Home consumption of films, via video and DVD, is considered along with the development of multiplexes, "urban entertainment centres" and Nottingham's "regional film centre", The Broadway. The analysis throughout this book is informed by conceptions of taste and cultural capital, and so concentrates on the attempts by various exhibition sites to win and maintain their distinction by cultivating distinct meanings for the venues themselves. This goal of distinction and respectability is no less important in the present than it was at the start of the period examined by the authors. The modes of film exhibition may have changed radically, but the underlying social patterns of class, access and cultural capital remain largely intact, as this book registers in its account of the feelings of exclusion experienced by many of the authors' respondents in relation to The Broadway. Perhaps the greatest merit of this book is that it reveals these underlying social dynamics through its analysis of the meanings attached to the sites of film exhibition in this ordinary British city.

It may seem odd, particularly in such difficult market for academic publishing, to produce a book with such an intensely local focus as this one. But, while the authors are careful to avoid suggesting that Nottingham should be seen as "typical or representative", they do make the point that the ordinariness of Nottingham sets it apart from large metropolitan centres like London. The trends identified by the authors may exemplify experiences of cinemagoing in other British cities. In this respect the book provides an extremely rich resource for identifying areas that deserve further research, and opens up the possibility for the development of a greater understanding of the significance of cinema within British culture.

