

Editorial Introduction

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Issue 16.1 is upon us, and it is by some margin the most voluminous we have published. This is because we will persist in following the risky – but apparently welcomed – strategy of publishing work as quickly as possible after completion of reviewing and editorial processes. It is also another issue with a wide span – this time (in the Themed Sections) focused on the history of film audiences, and two separately-generated but slightly overlapping sets of essays on reading and its research as social practices. In our Open Section, we cover a range which includes wrestling fans, opera attenders, rebetiko music lovers, film consumers, local Australian cinema audiences, and online debates about Chinese TV dramas. We are proud to be hosts to such a diverse range.

But I am fascinated by the issue of what we *don't* get – and in some cases, what appears not to exist at all. Where is the research into poetry's audiences (readers, listeners), other than worried reports of statistics on falling interest (or occasional celebrations of recovery, tinged with regret that it is the *wrong kind* of poetry)? What about the (mainly women's) world of textile art, quilting and embroidery, and the thousands who attend exhibitions as well (in many cases) taking part in local groups? How about ceramics – there are undoubtedly folk for whom attending, buying and collecting various kinds of ceramics is a significant part of their lives. Vintage cars, stamps, guns, memorabilia: in fact, nearly all the kinds of things that are particularly associated with the term 'collector'. Country shows and local community get-togethers: all the kinds of things targeting senses of belonging and localness.

Other fields do of course publish some work. Various sociological and anthropological Journals carry occasional work that is certainly cognate to what we particularly focus on: the ways in which kinds of culture and media are taken up by different groups for their meanings, pleasures, and resources for thought and identity. But whereas certain 'favoured' topics (let's cite, for instance, new digital modes of communication; or contemporaneously, the problems of 'fake news' and political persuasion) gather oodles of attention (and resources, and jobs, others hardly get off the ground). Try Google Scholar searches for a whole range of kinds of cultural and media forms and see what you get. Among the rare scatter of publications come the small begging letters – such as this one I found recently:

... many other worthy topics have been neglected for want of space (eg., children's toys and games, fashion, film, memorabilia, pop fiction, retro pop culture, and counter-culture). Hopefully, other anthropologists will address them in the future. (Fedorak, 2009, p. xiii)

So, a simple question – which I will not attempt to answer here: what range of factors *does* drive which particular areas, and kinds of audiencing, draw our gaze and interests? Why the recent explosion in fan studies – unmatched by studies of 'high culture', even if my sense is there has been a notable increase there as well (theatre, dance, classical music) – but why now?

It has been pointed out by a number of people that the foundational language we use to characterise the people in whom we are interested makes a great difference to what we think to ask about them, and the kinds of 'issues' they pose for us. Audiences, visitors, readers, listeners, attendees, recipients, spectators, participants, fans, buffs, aficionados, collectors, enthusiasts, and so on indefinitely. And as Jensen and Pauly nicely put it:

Every theory of the media works with an image of the audience. For the researcher the audience may appear as a market of consumers, a jaded mob, a nascent public, a lumpen proletariat, textual poachers, situated spectators, 'the people'. With each image come assumptions about who the researcher is in relation to the audience – who 'we' are in relation to 'them'. (Jensen & Pauly, 1997, p. 155)

I offer this one thought. Audience research appears to get its kick-start from moments when *cultural, moral or political uncertainty* sets in, *and there is a need to further investigate the assumptions implicit both in the image of the audience and the position and role of the researcher*. Why some fields don't run up against this, at least from time to time, is an issue that needs a lot of (self-)reflection...

References:

Fedorak, Shirley, *Pop Culture: the Culture of Everyday Life*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Jensen, Joli & John P. Pauly, 'Imagining the audience: losses and gains in cultural studies', in Marjorie Ferguson & Peter Golding (eds.), *Cultural Studies in Question*, 1997.