Introduction: Audiences, cultures, histories – Contexts and comparisons

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Four plus decades ago, British cultural studies took the lead in transforming audience studies from the then predominant effects and uses approaches, both of which took the individual as the unit of analysis. Cultural studies instead began re-thinking audiences in cultural terms, examining how some audiences re-purposed mass-produced cultural products to pursue their own practices and purposes and express their own subcultures. This has led us to re-figure our concept of audiences not only as more active than re-active, but also to think of our topic not as people but as cultural practices.

The starting point for understanding the practices of audiencing is everyday life, but we cannot understand that outside the contexts that constrain and enable everyday actions: the larger forces of culture, social structure and history. But contexts are many and varied beyond these vague terms, and contexts do not constitute a harmonious whole. There are myriad aspects and linkages that contextualize actions and events. For example, we also should bring together audiences with those not of the audience but involved with audiences, such as producers and distributors, moral entrepreneurs, government regulators, and global markets.

For these reasons, this section focuses on the intersection of audiences, cultures and histories, spanning a variety of times, places and modes of media and communication. The purpose is to reveal something about the conjunctions among these. The papers range from ancient Western history to the twenty-first century, and from hand written letters to print, movies, radio, television, and digital media. Each of the papers, in one way or another, places audiencing not only in cultural and historical contexts of a particular time and place, but also in relation to other specific contexts, such as media industries, national economics and politics, colonial and post-colonial struggles, migrations and diasporae, community, urban/rural differences, class, gender and ethnic issues.

While some of the papers present case studies focused on particular moments and events, they also bring to us an opportunity to reflect on larger issues suggested in the data. A useful way to begin that is to read these diverse histories comparatively, using one as

background or baseline to highlight the aspects of the other. Several papers explore uncustomary areas of research in other disciplines through which we can seek new insights. We might even say that they fruitfully raid these other intellectual villages for valuables of use to our own work. I have arranged the papers chronologically by the medium of communication. In the following discussion, however, I will refer back and forth to papers, making comparisons, highlighting how they complement each other, and suggesting other connection and thoughts.

Last, I thank all the contributors for their work, and their gracious cooperation and thoughtful responsiveness to feedback from me and the reviewers. I also thank the reviewers who lent their expertise and time to provide knowledgeable, helpful and quick feedback to authors: Heike Becker, Paul Booth, Jerome Bourdon, David Henkin, Peter Manuel, Marissa Moorman, John Nerone, Judith Thissen and Wendy Willem.

A MODEL OF METHODS

Kirsten Drotner ('Media audience practices beyond living memory: Modeling theoretical and methodological issues') echoes and elaborates the goal of the section to expand horizons of audience studies, specifically to times and media before electronic communication. She develops a thoughtful framework for imagining what such work would look like and what historical methods they call for. She does this through an examination of an array of examples of existing research, enough to stand as a selective review of the literature, mapped on to her framework. In doing so, she brings order to a jumble of choices about research methods, data sources and manners of interpretation and presentation, constituting a variety of combinations and possibilities. The examples draw our attention to histories of past audiences not institutionally tied to media studies while also ancillary to their own respective fields. I refer, for example, to unmediated performances such as stage and sport, where spectatorship is seldom central to the field. Both are recorded as far back as the ancient Greeks in the West and no doubt that long ago in India and China. Unfortunately, they are mostly unfamiliar to media and communication scholars.

Drotner begins with some existing historical research in three subfields that address audiences: literary reception theory, the history of reading and visual anthropology. She then uses these to construct her framework for organizing, comparing and selecting methods for research on pre-electronic audiences. She distinguishes between direct and indirect sources of data, analytic perspectives, and styles of presentation. While reading the other papers, it may be useful to reflect on what categories and dimensions they exemplify, and whether they suggest other categories or dimensions.

LETTERS & PRINT

Jerome Bourdon ('The Internet of Letters: comparing epistolary and digital audiences') investigates epistolary history from ancient Rome to eighteenth century France. He compares past eras of letters to the email and social media of the present. The default

assumption has been that letters are private correspondence between two people. But Bourdon shows that letters also have long been disseminated, voluntarily and involuntarily, as public communications, and notes that problems of the border between public and private are not new with the internet. Letters have differed in terms of address, in some cases addressed explicitly to a broader audience than an individual. Once literacy became widespread, ordinary people also wrote letters to send 'news from home,' that often were read to others beyond the addressee.

Concerning involuntary dissemination, Bourdon notes the fear of state surveillance systems. In premodern eras, the state and religion, mostly aligned, were the only powerful institutional forces for whole populations to fear. Nowadays, the internet, email and social media have greatly enhanced this capability for corporations as well as ill-willed hackers. By comparing the variety of epistolary forms and their cousins in digital media, Bourdon demonstrates the limitation of the dichotomies between private or public, and between one-to-one or one-to-many communication, arguing for a more diverse and complicated typology.

Bourdon's insights also draw our attention to the question of topical boundaries. One may ask whether letters, like telephony, cross a border from audiencing to social interaction, since audiencing, as generally understood, implies some form of witnessing an event, short of full social interaction with those engaged in the event. Of course, much research over the last few decades has documented how interactive audiencing can become. On the other hand, Goffman re-formulated social interaction as people alternating their roles as performers and audiences. And, as Bourdon notes, internet use itself has torn down this border. Nevertheless, there are observable differences that we should not erase, even while we loosen traditional definitions of audiences on the one hand and interactive communication on the other.

Christian Oggolder ('Media for the crowds: Audiences beyond dispersed masses') explores collective use of broadsheets and woodcuts 400 year ago, while Bourdon highlights letters of 200 to 2000 years ago. Both compare the unstable public/private borders of communication, old and new.

Oggolder studies illustrated broadsheets and woodcuts, which were becoming widespread in German towns by the sixteenth century. He explains that reading these prints was not solely private or restricted to the literate, not unlike letters. Prints were sold in public markets and fairs by purveyors traveling from town to town, dispersing the prints widely. To sell and attract interest beyond the literate minority, printers often featured illustrations of spectacles and current events using familiar figurations drawn from the Christian Bible, folk tales and ancient Greek stories. Adding to this dispersion, each item was read by or read to multiple people beyond the purchasers.

Both their purchase and consumption often occurred among crowds in public spaces. Also certain forms of early print, like certain ancient hand-written letters, were read aloud and publicly, thus reaching much larger audiences in eras when most were illiterate.

Sovereigns and religious denominations used public representations of their power and legitimacy before and after the spread of print. Erving Goffman delineated rules of such displays that Habermas termed representational public spheres. Such representations required audiences in order to fulfill their purposes and the broader the audiences the better. By the sixteenth century such representations in the form of public celebrations and executions before crowds often were amplified by broadsides depicting the events to a much wider population than the eyewitnesses.

While Bourdon accents the similarities of letters to the internet, Oggolder contrasts sixteenth and seventeenth century crowd audiences for broadsheet readers with dispersed twentieth century mass audiences and today's internet audiences.

STAGE

Evelien Jonckheere ('In search of identities: 'Foreigners' in fin-de-siècle Belgian café-concerts') examines a form of live entertainment just before recorded and amplified entertainment arose. She studies fin de siècle café- concerts as a site of multiple, intersecting contexts and issues: gender and class, business travelers and local workers, urban/rural relations, and market-based urban renewal. She focuses on prominent Belgian venues that attracted multi-national audiences and involved multiple layers of cultural institutions and audience experiences. They flourished within the moment's political and economic structure of Belgium. All this created a mélange of urban modern culture, neither Belgium nor foreign, but yet something integral to the times and place.

Essentially a service retail sector brought together contrasting classes as servers and customers, to a degree absent in manufacturing. The venues transgressed class borders in selling the company of lower class women waitresses and entertainers to higher class men customers. The transgression was furthered yet by the anonymity of foreign men unattached to the community and its sanctions. Customers then were not passive audiences but very much active in their appetites, condoned by the message of the entertainment and tolerated by authorities in the interest of building Belgium's international trade.

The study addresses two contextual factors not often seen in studies of entertainments and their audiences: the importance of foreign business travelers as audiences, and their links to urban and economic development centered on market funding and attracting capital, as a small European nation set at a crossroad of commerce sought to establish its reputation. These features highlight problematics of small nation competitiveness in a colonial era global climate. The café was more than entertainment, an expression of the market ambitions of the young nation at the crossroads of northern Europe, equipped with train transport and attracting foreigners.

FILM

Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey's paper ('"A Great Generic Conspiracy": Classical Hollywood's protection system') shows us the benefit and necessity of linking audiences to

media industry structure. Audience and exhibition studies have thrived together, notably in case studies of the nickelodeon era. Maltby and Vasey take that next step to link audience experience to film distribution, which had considerable influence on exhibition (and financial and corporate entwinement with studios), constraining or transmitting certain film texts to viewers, and thus on audiences. Their paper details just how efficient the system was in doing this, providing a solid base upon which a socially and culturally grounded (not individual or psychological) reception studies can be contextualized.

They make the argument that, while exhibitors may have controlled the venue, distribution controlled what films were shown in those venues during Hollywood's classic period. Distribution also controlled what audiences did not see, making it a powerful gatekeeper, passing thru images consistent with industry purposes and shutting out alternative images. To the extent allowed by the often-contested legal and political contexts of the period, distribution also established and maintained the major studios' monopoly of access to audiences, enabling them to garner 95% of rentals and shutting out other companies. Distribution is therefore a foundational necessity for understanding audience reception, the baseline at which their interpretations begin.

Such central control over what people see revives questions about propaganda and ideology. As John Clarke once wrote we should not substitute one for the other – both are important and are inseparable. We have also learned to think in terms of subtler, cultural hegemony, and for those thousands busy in deciding and producing the films, the product is more understandable not as an intentional effort to deceive, but rather most often the unthinking recycling of well-rooted dominant cultural values. The distribution system described by Maltby and Vasey had the power to transmit a mainstream world view compatible with the status quo, adding to the Hays Office's explicit exercise of moderating and modulating film content to fit that mainstream. The zone, run, clearance system also prioritized urban/suburban middle class audiences, which at that time also meant mostly white America, over rural, working class and black populations. In effect the distribution system established 'separate and unequal' audiences. It helps then to place in this context the many working class and small town cinema audience studies produced over the last few decades.

Judith Thissen ('Faith, fun and fear in the Dutch Orthodox Protestant milieu: Towards a non-cinema centred approach to cinema history') takes as her context the milieu in which some Netherland audiences lived, examining film going through a complex of their socio-cultural practices and demographic characteristics. This approach is particularly suited to Netherland society of the time. For much of the twentieth century, Dutch society was divided into political and structural 'pillars' of Protestants and Catholics, Socialists and Liberals. Each pillar was organized to incorporate much of daily life outside work and commercial activity within its institutions and reduce contact with contradictory views. Pillars included not only the members, but such cultural organizations and services as their own schools, leisure activities, youth groups, publications and even radio/television broadcasts.

Thissen focuses on Orthodox Protestants because of their stricter rules and disapproval of cinema. Much of the commercial entertainment sector was not pillarized, including cinemas, which made cinema-going a fraught activity. In the post-war period, Orthodox Protestant youth, under stricter control in their home town, resolved this tension by frequenting cinemas in other towns, where they could take on a more relaxed or deviant persona while maintaining a strict persona at home.

These circumstances share common threads with other groups and organizations that felt threatened by various social and cultural forces of changes. In other European nations and the US, structures similar to these pillars formed, perhaps most thoroughly and most widespread by the Catholic Church, which established its own school systems and colleges, dances and other youth activities, hospitals, publications, and ratings of movies. Stretching the comparison a bit, one might see elements of this in efforts across the post-colonial world to resist Westernization and Americanization. What these have in common is moral panic about and rear-guard actions in defense of traditions and against encroachments of modern society and values. Often this is intertwined with class differences. These groups and organizations increasingly become outsiders in rapidly modernizing consumer societies, as was the case with the Orthodox Protestant milieu that Thissen studied. Comparisons among such variants could reveal dimensions of difference that may deepen our understanding of audiences even further.

Hanna Klien-Thomas ('Historical disjunctures and Bollywood audiences in Trinidad: Negotiations of gender and ethnic relations in cinema going') explores how colonialism created diasporas and shaped Indo-Trinidadian film-going through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She addresses two contextual aspects of Trinidadian Bollywood audiences: on one hand, the 1990s the development of Bollywood as a globally marketed commodity; on the other, unique Indo-Trinadadian audiences descended from generations as colonial indentured servants. The historic conditions of colonialism destabilized their diverse identities from India and unified them instead as a Trinidadian ethnic group. Hindi cinema served to solidify this new identity in place of traditional ones and counter to Afro-Trinidadian dominance in Trinidad's political sphere.

Klien Thomas traces the ebb and flow of cinema-going and its differing meanings, first from the 1930s thru the 1960s as an expression of Indo identity, then the decline of cinema-going with home video and private screening. At the turn of millennium, romantic family films depicting tensions – and often their resolution – between Indian tradition and Western individualism tended to feminize Trinidad's Hindi cinema. Finally, 2010s cinema going depends upon mobility (cars) to reach 'malltiplexes,' excluding lower income groups and combining with consumerism (shopping), making for class-uniform audiences of affluent Indo-Trinidadian young women. They went not only to Bollywood but also Western films, blending Indo identity with consumerism and individualism, as if to melt the tensions between the two.

Klien Thomas' study invites comparisons to other Indo diaspora around the world, both other forced migrants, as in former British African colonies, and more recent 'voluntary' migrants, as in Britain and the US. Although generations since migration raises different issues, what they share with recent migrants is the problem of navigating between two cultures, just as with many other migrations, such as East European immigrants in early twentieth century and Hispanic immigrants today in the US. Such navigation is complicated by strains between parents and children, not unlike those in Thissen's study. Such navigation often involves some degree of nostalgia about the home culture. That may be compared to nostalgia by those who do not migrate, in adjusting to cultural changes within the same society over time, as touched upon in Asthana's paper on memories of India's state television network, Doordarshan.

RADIO

Robert Heinze ('Dialogue between absentees? Liberation radio engages its audiences, Namibia, 1978-1989') takes a macro issue, a colonial war of independence and examines radio as a means to that end. In this context, aspects of radio broadcasting and listeners arise that are not in the forefront of usual circumstances. European colonialism was an extremely powerful shaper of history from the early modern era thru the twentieth century, and its forms and consequences still reverberate today. Colonial powers attempted to use film and radio to propagandize to native populations, white colonials and citizens in the ruling nation. Liberation radio, like colonial radio, tried to influence the same native population, but with different purposes.

The Voice of Namibia broadcasts to two target audiences. They hoped to recruit Namibians to the cause, most effectively by building a national Namibian culture that transcended ethnic identities. Among Namibian listeners were a substantial local elite who could influence others in their community. The second audience was composed of arbiters of world opinion and of international policies whom they hoped to recruit as material and diplomatic supporters. Their focus on multipliers in both audiences is a striking application of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues' classic two-step communication process of persuasion, from radio to local opinion leaders to others in their circle. In addition however, listening alone was for some average Namibian listeners a 'first step' to identify with and participate in the movement. The two-step process originally applied to conveying a specific message encouraging a specific action, to vote for a specific candidate. Heinze concludes that Voice was less effective in persuading listeners of specific facts or acts, but more effective in developing a culture of resistance among Namibians, which also prepared a post-colonial national identity.

Namibian liberation radio, in some senses, parallels India's use of a state broadcaster, Doordarshan, the subject of Sanjay Asthana's paper, used by the post-colonial government for nation-building, e.g. presenting 'development telenovelas,' in the 1980s. The former was at any early stage of the transition to post-colonial independent nations, the

latter at a late stage in that nation-building. It would be an interesting next chapter to explore what happens to liberation radio, once independence is gained.

TELEVISION

Janet Staiger ('The Audience of *Perry Mason*, or the Case of What People Write to Famous Authors') studies viewers of *Perry Mason*, a 1950s American television courtroom drama series. She uses their letters to the show in a manner that lets us reconsider the distinction between ordinary viewers and fans, categories that, while valuable tools, tend to erect rigid rather than fluid boundaries. The term 'fans' was created to contrast fan(atic) audiences to 'normal' ones. Fan studies produced valuable knowledge on subcultural communities, in the tradition of cultural studies, but it also tends to reify the category. However, Staiger treats the letter writers simply as audiences, inclusive of a range of interests in the TV show, erasing the boundary and opening the door for us to think in terms of a spectrum of participation. Some may have had a keen interest in the show, and some may have desired to play a part in shaping future episodes of the show, yet others that she quotes were moved to write by something only incidental to an episode but resonant for them and their personal situation.

Bourdon shows too that a wide variety of reasons and intentions motivate people to write letters. Staiger's data is a form of letter that, although sent privately, often was made public, a re-purposing that has a long history, according to Bourdon. This of course should caution us to not use rigid categories to label audience participation. But what else might this spectrum approach reveal to us that has remained dormant in fan studies and those of 'ordinary' audiences?

In another vein, we might look for a comparison across another disparate medium. Bourdon and Oggolder consider how letters and early print entered forms of early public spheres. How are these similar to or different from TV and its mass medium public sphere? Is there something here to be learned beyond the specifics of these articles by exploring their comparisons?

Sanjay Asthana ('Television, memory, and history: 'Informal knowledge' of Doordarshan) takes as his data today's equivalent of fan mail, people's memories of their television experience in 1980s posted on the internet in 2009 during the fiftieth anniversary of the Indian state television network, Doordarshan. Staiger uses fan mail written at the time, 60-70 yrs ago. Asthana uses these memories posted on the internet and made public 30-40 yrs after the initial experience that they chronicle. The memories recall two categories of experience, the shows they watched and the domestic, familial settings in which they watched. In addition, the memories integrate family in the domestic setting with nation in the show content. Doordarshan represented the voice of the nation, so that elements of citizenship and national identity were integral to watching television.

Extending the current study, Asthana's data could do double duty, to document the present as well as the past. Both family and nation were remembered fondly for the most

part, adding a nostalgic aura. Fond memories of the state of the nation often are powered by concern about the present, an Everyman's comparative history motivated by a yearning for an idealized past. While Asthana's current paper is an oral history of past audiences, we might re-interpret the memories for what they say about these people's feelings about the present. This requires, as a start, a comparative history of 2009 when the memories were posted, and the past, 1980s when the events of the memories occurred.

In the 1980s satellite and cable television had not yet spread in India. Doordarshan was the only television network, was well-funded and not dependent on advertising income. The network was enlisted by the government to gain support by the masses for development policies, including modernizing cultural values. By 2009 Doordarshan received less state funding and was competing with private media as well as the internet. Politically the long rule of the Congress Party was declining and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was on the rise. Symptomatic of this change was a shift to neoliberal economic policies, including those concerning media. So, do the posts have an underlying political dimension?

Biographical note:

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