

globalization is now so pervasive that understanding culture at this level is untenable. He acknowledges his own 'critical eye mired in parochialism' (p. 169), which is inevitably the way in which most people examine their own relationship to the nation. Yet such parochialism may, in a few instances, result in a glossing over of comedic texts which, in their popularity and success, perhaps require at least a little attention, if only for their inadequacies to be outlined in more detail.

However, this is not to deny the incisive persuasiveness of the arguments and readings on offer here, or the significance *A National Joke* has for debates about culture, representation, nationhood and identity. Because of the vagaries of the academic community, it is likely that this book will be understood as one relevant only to those with an interest in the analysis of comedy; if this is the case, it will merely reiterate how comedy is marginalized within academia, despite Medhurst's convincing demonstration of its centrality to national culture as a whole.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp008

Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley (ed.), *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008, 276 pp.

Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008, 250 pp.

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Histories of film exhibition and audiences have for a while now focused on major US urban centres, predominantly New York and Chicago, during the silent film era. Many of these studies grew out of a historiographical need. The reevaluation of silent cinema over the last thirty years has raised substantive questions requiring an understanding of exhibition practices and audiences. Given the presence of producers and distributors in cities like New York and Chicago, the extensive historical records and newspapers available in local city archives, attention to urban centres in the trade press, and the vast number of questions prompted by urban film exhibition – especially those film studies' stalwarts race, ethnicity, class and gender – film historians quite understandably have furnished detailed and diverse pictures of filmgoing in these metropolises. Despite the value of such historical research, it does give an incomplete picture of how cinema developed and functioned across the rest of the USA and in other parts of the world. Consequently, when considering general histories of film exhibition and spectatorship we need to be cognisant of the fact that our knowledge is partial, and conclusions reached about film exhibition in urban locations cannot, at least not without further research, be applied generally. To

understand the bigger picture of the development of film exhibition and spectatorship, historians must examine a variety of locations throughout the history of the medium. Both books considered in this review provide significant contributions to this historical project.

In his essay in Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley's *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, Robert C. Allen notes that this bias towards urban centres is not just a problem for film history but is ingrained in wider historiographical practices. Adopting Timothy Gilfoyle's term 'Gothamcentric', Allen maintains that film history has been hampered by 'tendencies to place the metropolis at the center of historical narratives of moviegoing' and by the presumption that small-town and rural exhibition practices simply reproduced on a smaller scale those of major cities (p. 20). Gothamcentrism undermines the very need to study small-town and rural exhibition since it implies nothing new is to be gained from such an endeavour; yet it fails with the first sign of evidence. Allen argues that one of the reasons for the bias towards cities in film history is the belief that a substantial proportion of the population resided in the cities. Here Allen provides historians with an important reminder that evidence taken at face value can be deceptive. The definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' used by the Census Bureau differ from our current understandings and thus give historians a false impression of the extent of urban populations in early twentieth-century America. Major cities like New York, Chicago and Philadelphia housed just over nine per cent of the population, not the near one-third that the definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' used in the census may prompt historians to believe (p. 22). Allen's assertion in this essay that local histories are essential to flesh out a robust understanding of cinema is not new. Already in 1985 he and Douglas Gomery, in their book *Film History: Theory and Practice*, had asserted the need for studies of local film exhibition to better explain not just how film exhibition developed across various locations but also how film integrated into and affected social and economic systems.¹

In *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun*, Paul S. Moore provides an in-depth analysis of film exhibition in Toronto between 1906 and the end of World War I, demonstrating how it integrated with local politics and social practices.² The extent of the research in this book is impressive. Moore draws on a wide array of newspapers, legislation, local archival material and established research to elaborate how in Toronto – a city that lacked a film production base – film exhibition developed between the pressures of local sensibilities and the nascent US film industry. The difficulty of such a project, though, is positioning the research within a fruitful and apposite historiographical framework. Herein lies one of the challenges of Gothamcentrism. Although Moore argues that local exhibition must be considered on its own terms, he often relies extensively on research and arguments about New York and Chicago. This is understandable to a degree; good research makes use of established discussions. Consequently, he pays close attention to issues such as fire safety, reform agendas, leisure,

1 Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (London: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1985).

2 A quibble perhaps, but the title of this book is unfortunate. Given the US-centric practices in film history, a book about moviegoing in Toronto would benefit from the city's name placed prominently in the title. Maps illustrating the geography of the cinemas referred to in the argument would also have helped to orientate the reader.

ensorship and citizenship. Moore does an admirable job elaborating the specific flavour these issues have north of the border. Nevertheless, his argument at times seems driven by a need to contextualize Toronto with New York and especially Chicago, but often with no clear methodological explanation to justify such comparisons. For instance, he does not explain the significance for Toronto film exhibition of the regulation of film shows in the Chicago suburbs or the presence of tie-ins between film serials and Chicago newspapers. He argues that Toronto's position as a commonwealth city with substantial immigration from the UK inflects it with a British sensibility. It would have been worth exploring this hybrid position more extensively.

Moore provides an important argument about evidence. Film historians rely extensively on local newspapers, but few elaborate the significance and limits of this form of research. Newspapers do more than simply report, he argues; they signal, implicitly and explicitly, local mores and map out the social and cultural life of a city. The combination of news, commentary and advertising fosters collective sociocultural engagement which can then be traced by historians.

Hollywood in the Neighborhood provides numerous case studies that demonstrate the detailed accounts of film exhibition and spectatorship that can be gleaned from newspapers and trade publications. Contributors to this book produce a variety of historical accounts explaining the spread of cinema into the 'hinterlands', from the early travelling show to the established theatres of the 1930s. If one theme resonates throughout these essays, it is that to succeed, local cinemas could not be simply local businesses but had to play a central role in the community. Examining Wilmington, NC, Anne Morely contends that film exhibitors' need to be considered as part of the local community began with the travelling exhibitions. Exhibitors had to gauge and cater for the sensibilities of the local clientele – a practice that persisted with the construction of permanent theatres. This does not imply, however, that small-town audiences embodied provincial attitudes. Audiences also required of their showmen that they exhibit the same films available to the major urban centres. These recurrent themes of the community as simultaneously a local collective and a part of the nation, and the local film exhibitor as member of the local community and part of a national industry, are evident in a number of the essays in this volume, notably those by George Potamianos, Terry Lindvall, Richard Abel and Leslie Midkiff DeBauche.

Fuller-Seeley demonstrates in her own essay that trade journals did more than report on the industry. In her study of 'What the Pictures Did for Me', published in the widely-circulated journal *Motion Picture Herald*, she discusses how small-town exhibitors used the column to provide feedback about the problems their businesses encountered, including the types of films that did and did not work well in their cinemas. Her study indicates another reason why it is important that film historians understand properly the audience serviced by urban and

regional theatres: the vast population catered for by small-town cinemas had economic clout. One must first grasp the significance of regional cinemas for the industry, as Fuller-Seeley does, before one can recognize that this column is not the beatings of a few insignificant hicks.

Kevin Corbett takes this notion of the *vox populi* one step further, endorsing an ‘ethnographic analysis of film audiences’ (p. 233). He suggests that to learn about experiences of spectatorship and running cinemas we should ask the people who were involved. He notes that questionnaires and interviews are often discussed but rarely utilized in film historiography. He is right that ethnographic methods should be considered when appropriate. What is striking about his essay, though, is his near exclusive use of interviews. Corbett offers scant explanation of how he determined his sample, any bias inherent in his sampling method or questions, significant historical developments in film exhibition experienced across the wide age range of people he interviewed, or how accurate we should expect forty- or sixty-year-old recollections to be. Nostalgia, for instance, can be quite effective in tinting our perspective on the past. Consequently, the conclusions he reaches – for example that audiences support old local cinemas ‘because they appreciate the historical significance of the buildings themselves and/or because they enjoy the social and cultural benefits of going to theatres like these’ – are not, as he presents them, terribly convincing (p. 246). Corbett asks his readers to accept, without evidence, first that his sample is sufficiently representative and second that the excerpts he provides from the interviews accurately encapsulate the broader sentiments elaborated in the full versions. These interviews certainly are interesting and valuable, but require a more rigorous methodological frame and need to be validated against other forms of evidence, such as newspapers, trade journals, diaries and a host of other records generated by the film exhibition trade.

Research into local film exhibition aims to fill a substantial void in our Gothamcentric outlook. It is nevertheless worth considering the use-value of such histories. Studies of local exhibition frequently produce interesting accounts of local practices and values, but will find real worth when they can help to reveal and reevaluate the bigger picture.³ Studies in both volumes discussed here quite successfully enable reevaluation of the centrality of urban America to the story of film exhibition. However, the contributors to Fuller-Seeley’s book frequently resist examining the methodological tools used to sculpt their histories. We may ask, for instance, if the comparable conclusions in many of these essays are in any way determined by the general use of newspapers and trade journals? I do not want to suggest we should avoid these invaluable sources, only that we should be more attentive to the limits and biases of our evidence, and to how even the most commonly used sources affect the conclusions we can draw. Furthermore, *Hollywood in the Neighborhood* would benefit from an introduction that better contextualized the variety of histories in its pages. The book is composed of new and reprinted essays;

3 Carlo Ginzburg argues similarly that ‘micro-history’ is about generalizations, and not a ‘cult for fragments’. His comments can be heard in the *Open Source* podcast ‘The Hunter’s Evidence: Carlo Ginzburg’, <http://www.radioopensource.org/the-hunters-evidence-carlo-ginzburg/> [accessed 5 January 2009].

an explanation of the methodological and historiographical significance of the earlier works, and an evaluation of how the newer essays utilize or challenge their lessons, would have helped to exemplify the intricate and essential relationship between histories and historical methods.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp009

Barbara J. Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture (Emerging Media: History, Theory, Narrative Series)*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008, 210 pp.

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Television Studies has in recent years seen a renewed interest in transnational and international television programming. This has been partially fuelled by the increased digitization which has allowed more television content to be available beyond national borders. At the same time, the apparent increase in availability has also sparked a historical interest that challenges notions of national hegemonies and highlights how fundamentally transnational most broadcasting is and has been.¹ Barbara Selznick's *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* is a welcome addition to this scholarship, particularly as it focuses a whole monograph on one issue that often receives only marginal attention: international coproductions.

Selznick discusses coproductions of the late 1980s and 1990s that involved US money. Although her historical period is set quite tightly, the book's focus is nevertheless relatively broad as Selznick investigates action dramas, drama series which are marked as distinctly British despite their coproduction status, children's television and documentaries. Unlike much of the contemporary scholarship, Selznick uses only institutional and economic explanations as a background for an intensely cultural scrutiny of a range of television programmes, some of which have been much neglected. The focus on trying to understand the cultural implications of coproductions – what cultural values they contain, how they teach and conceptualize such important issues as citizenship, national identity and history – is an interesting and valuable one and usefully adds to work done by, for example, Jeffrey Miller.² Nevertheless, Selznick's book requires a more thoroughly considered approach to develop its full potential.

Selznick attempts to unravel what culturally distinguishes coproductions but does not offer a comparative analysis that would give further clout to her arguments. Chapter 1, for example, suggests that coproductions reject nationalism in favour of a stronger focus on building identity and historical memory upon family connections. Although her two sample programmes, *The Odyssey* (American

1 Valerie Camporesi, *Mass Culture and the Defence of National Traditions: the BBC and American Broadcasting, 1922–1954* (Florence: European University Institute, 1990).

2 Jeffrey S. Miller: *Something Completely Different: British Television and American Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).