For a Sociology of the Cinema

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On December 28th 1895, in the Grand Café in Paris, the Lumière brothers screened the first ten short films that they had made with their recently patented *cinématographe* machine, an occasion customarily, if debatably, identified as the birth of the cinema. Earlier that year, also in Paris, Emile Durkheim had published his manifesto for the newly legitimate discipline of sociology, *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique*, and, in 1896, as the Lumières toured the world with their show, he became the founding director of *L'Année Sociologique*, a journal which continues publication to this day. In Germany, also in 1896, Max Weber took up a chair in sociology at the University of Heidelberg and, by the time that the new medium was beginning to develop its narrative potential in *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903, he was in the process of writing what would become his best known work: *Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus* (1905). Two decades later in the USA, Hollywood had become the centre of a rampantly capitalist, world-wide film industry, while the American variant of the discipline of sociology was attaining professional and academic respectability in the likes of the Chicago School in the 1920s, and, in the following decade, the influential Harvard sociology department. So, although it is the case that Comte's initial prescription for a scientific discipline of sociology far predates the founding moments of cinema, there is a real sense in which the cinema and sociology grew to maturity together.

It is therefore all the more striking that there has been so little systematic sociology of the cinema. Sociology, *the* discipline born of a desire to properly comprehend the rise of modern

society, might well have been expected to seek out the new medium which was seen by many as one of the most distinctive products of modernity itself. Yet, by and large, it has never done so in a sustained way, making only intermittent contributions to our understanding of the social role and cultural significance of film. As we shall seek to show here, there are discernible theoretical and empirical reasons for this puzzling omission, as well as problems arising from the kind of inter-disciplinary boundary disputes that have so often dogged those focusing in areas where the social sciences rub up against the humanities. One of us (Tudor, 1998) has previously explored some of these questions, primarily in the context of sociology's troubled relationship with film studies. Here, however, we shall focus primarily on the history of sociological approaches to the cinema – especially during the early era of movie dominance when more of a contribution might have been expected – as well as on the conceptual reasons for their comparative rarity.

Beginnings

That history is probably best begun in 1914 with the appearance of Emilie Altenloh's pioneering study (Altenloh, 1914). Though there are other early texts which purport to examine the new medium's social role, they are essentially moralising works – and negative ones at that – rather than sociological reflections founded on systematic evidence. Altenloh's dissertation, however, is quite distinctive. Conducted under the supervision of Alfred Weber at the University of Heidelberg, it runs to 102 pages in the original German of which some 80 pages are available in translation (Altenloh, 2001, 2004). In Part I she examines film production, its economic organization, the national source of exhibited films, and the film genres which dominated the industry at the time. Sections 3 and 4 of this discussion form the translation in Altenloh (2004). Part II examines the contemporary audience, its social composition, its tastes and its cinema-going practices. The entirety of this Part, plus some elements from the dissertation's overall introduction, are translated in Altenloh (2001).

The study is based primarily on survey research conducted in the city of Mannheim during the course of 1912/13, some of the data derived from brief self-completed questionnaires and some from verbal responses.[1] One way or another, 2400 responses were obtained, and, while by modern standards no clear sampling frame is elucidated, Altenloh evidently sought to cover as wide a range of respondents as possible across the familiar face-sheet dimensions of age, gender and (occupational) class. In pursuing the systematic collection of empirical materials in this way she was leaning on a tradition of survey research that had developed in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century (Oberschall, 1965), and she was no doubt much influenced in this respect by Alfred Weber's concerns with political economics, the urban environment and social geography.

We have no need here to summarise her findings in any detail. More interesting for present purposes are the kinds of presuppositions implicit in her presentation and analysis of the survey data. While there is no systematic theorising as such in her study – hardly surprising given the intellectual context in which she was working – certain general assumptions are apparent. Throughout the analysis there is both a presumption of, and an attempt to demonstrate empirically, the central significance of class in forming cinema-going behaviour. Embedded in this discussion is a relatively elaborate model of occupational class segmentation. So, for example, when considering 'young male workers' she distinguishes three sub-categories whose cinema-going tastes differ: a 'bottom group consisting of those not tied to any particular occupational group'; a 'characteristically proletarian' group of metalworkers; 'a petit-bourgeois group' of clerical assistants, technicians and the like (Altenloh, 2001: 264). The adult audience is even further sub-classified, distinguishing among artisans (urban and rural), trade unionists, rural labourers, working-class women, male clerical workers, female clerical assistants, and 'women of the higher social classes' (*ibid*: 285). Along with the fact that her data enables her to demonstrate different patterns of cinema-going and film taste among and between these groups, the systematic concern with class segments serves to problematize the well-entrenched conventional view that early

cinema-going was largely a homogenous lower-class pursuit. While it is clear from her study that upper echelons of the class system are not frequent cinema-goers, the audience from the lower and middle sectors vary significantly in patterns of taste and attendance. As Loiperdinger (1996: 44) observes, Altenloh's work suggests that 'the most significant feature of the cinema-going public before World War I was not its proletarian origins (however significant a proportion this represented) but its class and gender diversity'.

And Altenloh does indeed pay close attention to the role of gender in cinema-going behaviour. She examines gendered differences in preferences for particular genres and narratives as well as considering the greater frequency of attendance by women even of the otherwise absent higher social classes. Occasionally she speculates on why this gender specificity is apparent.

> Cinema brings representations of a wider world to small towns, it shows women the new Paris fashions, and the kinds of hats that are being worn. With sensations large and small, cinema helps them to while away those dreary daytime hours that are these days increasing as domestic chores become progressively simpler. Films must be especially accessible to women, and indeed it is said that women tend to absorb cinematic impressions on a purely emotional level, as a unified whole. (Altenloh, 2001: 285)

The implicit theorisation here evidently takes for granted prevailing social attitudes to the sexual division of labour, though the very fact of her close attention to gender differences remains a significant distinguishing feature of the study.

Also apparent among the more general reflections occasioned by the data is a characteristic view of the impact industrial modernity is having on the lifestyles of her survey subjects. Distinguishing between a small elite and the much larger social groupings created by the industrial economy, she argues in familiar terms that '[m]ost people are integrated into the

overall economic system like a small cog in a machine, and this system not only dominates people's working lives but also constrains the totality of the individual' (Altenloh, 2001: 251). As it did for so many other observers of early industrialism, this view leads her toward an often negative assessment of the quality of the culture consumed by those thus constrained, an evaluation which finds expression in an incipient elitism.

> The fact that erotic films and films about criminals attract such large audiences is utterly explicable: surely these films are the only ones that can strike a chord among the mass of people whose intellectual life is often in deep slumber and who have nothing in common with each other, at least as far as more elevated matters are concerned. (*ibid*: 258)

Such judgments are familiar enough, of course, and Altenloh is rather less determined in making them than many of her contemporaries. Partly because her data leads her to recognise the heterogeneity of the growing cinema audience, the elitism which she derives from her own cultural and educational background is more qualified than was then often the norm. Indeed, at times she adopts a position which assumes considerable analytic distance from such value judgments, leading her toward consideration of the processes through which people establish cultural distinction for themselves and thereby anticipating analyses found so many years later in Bourdieu (1986). In discussing male clerical workers, for example, she observes that '…the younger ones will emphasise rather strongly – often unnecessarily so – that they go to a better kind of movie theatre, while for the older ones this becomes a quite natural expression of their distinct group identity.' (*ibid*: 278). And more generally, of older adult workers she notes that '[w]anting to "have a share" in the intellectual property of society motivates them to go to the theatre, to concerts and to museums' (Altenloh, 2001: 270), an observation which carries her quite close to the Bourdieusian concept of cultural capital.

There is, then, a certain ambivalence in Altenloh's work which stems from the tension between, on the one hand, her desire to pay neutral, analytic attention to her extensive body of data and thus follow where it leads, and, on the other, the negative and elitist views of the new medium which were in currency at the time. Accordingly, mixed in with often perceptive observations sensitive to the nuances of audience behaviour we find phrases which reveal firm moral judgments: 'a group as weak, as morally wayward and as irresponsible as this' (*ibid*: 265); 'one cannot fail to recognize the moral threat that the cinema poses to the city's young people' (266); 'the average person needs something that will occupy his senses but requires no effort' (288). Oberschall (1965: 87), in a somewhat dismissive summary of her study, goes so far as to suggest that '[s]he used her data to illustrate the preconceived notions she entertained on the effects of seeing blood and violence upon an audience bent on cheap entertainment.' This allegation, though colourful, is unduly harsh, but there is certainly some truth to it, and her preconceptions are particularly apparent where the presumed negative impact of film on children is concerned, an area in which she suggests state intervention might be appropriate (Altenloh, 2001: 263). In that, of course, she was not alone, and the later Payne Fund Studies, to which we shall shortly turn, were significantly driven by such concerns. Nevertheless, Altenloh's research is distinguished by an admirable commitment to systematic data collection and by her willingness to take seriously the new medium and its audience on its, and their, own terms. As a piece of early work on the sociology of the cinema it remains exemplary.

The next major attempt to formulate a sociological, indeed a social science approach to the cinema, does not arrive until the late 1920s and early 1930s with a series of research projects conducted in the United States and subsequently known as the Payne Fund Studies. These projects were initiated by William Harrison Short, a Congregationalist minister much concerned about the potential impact the movies might have on children's behaviour and moral perceptions, and founding director in 1927 of the National Committee for the Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures. Short saw the products of the by now

extensive film industry as a moral and practical threat to the youth of America, and in search of concrete evidence to support his views he recruited W. W. Charters, then Professor of Education at the University of Chicago, as overall research director for the project. The studies that they initiated were mostly conducted between 1928 and 1932 in a variety of disciplinary contexts, though clearly much influenced by what is now seen as the Chicago School approach to social science. Seven volumes reporting the research were published in 1933, ranging across such topics as film content, effects on children's attitudes, the social conduct of fans, the cinema's relation with juvenile delinquency, and so on. A notional popularization of the research by Henry James Forman was also published ahead of the studies themselves under the somewhat tendentious title *Our Movie Made Children* (1933), evidently directed at influencing social policy and 'giving the false impression that the researchers had lent themselves to a moralizing crusade' (Jowett et al, 1996: 7). A more sober summarizing volume was produced by Charters himself and given the neutral title which provided the rubric for the whole series: *Motion Pictures and Youth* (1933).

As the contrast between those two titles might suggest there is a marked tension apparent in the studies between social scientific rigour and morally concerned commitment. Given Short's motives for initiating the research this is hardly surprising. Jowett et al (1996: 58) in their excellent examination of the history and character of the studies observe that 'Short labored incessantly to shape the researchers' questions and results to forward his imperatives'. Initially, at least, some of the researchers themselves (including, notably, Herbert Blumer) were also inclined to presuppose that the cinema's social and psychological role was deeply problematic, and while for the most part the reported findings did not offer unqualified support to such a view, public perception was significantly formed by Short's beliefs and Forman's volume. This bending of the research findings was a matter of concern for the researchers and for Charters, and throughout the enterprise they were disagreeing among themselves as to what constituted an acceptable social science methodology and, therefore, on what conclusions might validly be drawn from their work.

A detailed account of all this can be found in Jowett et al's (1996) indispensable volume which provides fascinating insights into the history of the studies, thereby correcting many of the mistaken comments made about them by later observers. We have neither need nor space to enter into this detail here so will confine ourselves to some observations about the theoretical and methodological presumptions which informed the Payne Fund research. On the theoretical front it is probably safe to say that coming, as they did, from different disciplines within the broad social science rubric, the researchers did not share a conceptual framework – either in general terms or in specifically focusing on the cinema. These differences crossed various conceptual dimensions, though on the matter of conducting value-neutral research they by and large concurred, if with different emphases. As Jowett et al (1996: 58) note:

> The PFS were undertaken during a period of methodological and ideological conflicts in the social sciences. Debates over whether academic reaction to social problems should favor value-oriented social policy or value-neutral objective study led Charters and most of the sociologists and psychologists involved in the Payne Fund program to stress objectivity over advocacy.

But although they could agree on the broad need for evidence-based conclusions – a position which led to considerable tensions with Short – the concepts to be deployed and the frameworks within which data was to be interpreted were far from settled. Part of that, of course, arose from disciplinary differences; sociology and psychology have often made uneasy bedfellows. In this context it is significant that even five years after the publication of the Studies, Paul G. Cressey, who had himself been one of the researchers,[2] still felt it necessary to propose that '[w]hat is most needed today is an adequate frame of reference for studying the motion picture which is acceptable to all the special disciplines involved in such research.' (Cressey, 1938: 518). By the late thirties, of course, the necessity for such systematic sociological theorising had become more widely accepted. The kind of empirical research harnessed to a pragmatic policy orientation that informed Chicago School

sociology was being supplanted by a growing theoretical emphasis and, in the case of the increasingly significant Harvard department, by a commitment to developing a general theory that would draw together the social sciences as Cressey desired. While he was hardly a follower of Talcott Parsons, the main inspiration for this 'general theory of action', Cressey's analysis of the motion picture experience does emphasise its systemic character, the need to fully comprehend the nature of the social situation in which cinema is viewed, the role of identification in that experience, and the interactive importance of social background and personality. 'The cinema's role in general conduct', he argues 'is found for the most part to be *reflexive*, to take its specific character from the social configuration, the social-psychological "frame" in which the motion picture is experienced and in which responses to it arise.' (*ibid*: 523). Unfortunately, as we shall see, the distinctive approach to 'mass communication' which would subsequently come to dominate research in the forties and fifties resorted to rather cruder models of the communication process than that proposed here by Cressey.

So, what kind of contribution did the Payne Fund Studies make to sociological understanding of the cinema? Clearly they provide an extraordinary range of empirical materials about the consumption of film in the late twenties and early thirties. Where they equally clearly fail is in drawing together that material into a systematic analysis. This is partly because their research methodologies are diverse in nature, ranging from experimental studies to ethnographic portraits. It was always going to be difficult to synthesise such diverse types of evidence, let alone in the absence of an overarching conceptual scheme within which to make them make sense. Indeed, the researchers themselves were increasingly at odds with each other as to what could be inferred from their work: '[t]heir growing antipathies blended personal animosity, departmental and disciplinary rivalries and ideological disagreements over how the Payne Fund research should be interpreted' (Jowett et al, 1996: 89). In the absence of agreement, the field was left clear for the likes of Forman to present an account emphasising the (undesirable) influence of the movies and, in consequence, for a general

perception to develop that the Studies supported some kind of 'strong effects' model. This is not entirely unjustified. The driving force for the whole Payne Fund enterprise was to find evidence for the presumed negative impact of the cinema on young people, even if not all the researchers felt that they had found such evidence. Furthermore – Cressey's significant qualifications notwithstanding – the lack of a theoretical, as opposed to a policy-oriented, focus meant that the central methodological concern to find ways of measuring such presumed effects would be their major legacy to later media research. And, of course, if research always begins by asking about effects then, in the absence of appropriate contextual theorisation, it is unlikely to come up with an account which addresses the interactive complexity of people's responses to a medium as rich as film. So although, as Jowett at al (1996: 11) claim, the Payne Fund researchers 'were not all naïve adherents to what has been caricatured as the "hypodermic" or "magic bullet" theory of mass communications,' the policy driven focus of the studies and their lack of a shared theoretical frame of reference meant that they lent considerable weight to such a perspective. As the first large scale body of empirical work on a mass medium they unwittingly provided the foundations on which that hypodermic model could come to dominate later mass communications research.

Mass Society and Mass Culture

Even though Altenloh's work and the Payne Fund Studies constitute promising beginnings for sociological research into film, theirs is a promise which was not fulfilled. The period from the 1940s to the 1960s saw an enormous expansion in sociology generally and, more specifically, in studies of the various mass media. However, relatively little of this research attended directly to the cinema, surprisingly given that film remained the dominant mass medium in audience terms until the growth of television precipitated the first of several crises for the industry. Two factors are central to this somewhat puzzling neglect. One derives from the widespread influence of 'mass society' ideas in the post-war period with their far-reaching presumptions about the problematic and simplistic nature of the cultural products of

such a society. The second, not unrelated of course, is to be found in the constant focus on measuring the direct effects of mass communications with its attendant paucity of theoretical contextualisation, its mechanistic reliance on reductive forms of 'content analysis', and its consequent failure to grapple with the specifics of cinematic 'language'.

This idea that capitalist modernity was generating a 'mass society' and a concomitant 'mass culture' was not new in the 1940s and 1950s; indeed, its origins can be traced in nineteenth century thought (Swingewood, 1977). But it found its most forceful articulation in the mid twentieth century and in a variety of forms. Conventionally, mass society and mass culture arguments are divided into those of the left and right, with the former often exemplified in the Marxist inflected critical sociology of the Frankfurt School, and the latter associated with conservative cultural criticism of the kind espoused by the likes of Eliot and Leavis. Whatever their differing analyses of the underlying causes, however, their diagnosis of the crassness of popular culture remains broadly the same. As early as 1930 Leavis (1930:11) is bemoaning 'that deliberate exploitation of the cheap response which characterises our civilisation', a phenomenon which he saw as becoming all pervasive in twentieth century popular culture. And in 1940 Horkheimer and Adorno (2004:170), starting from a radically different socio-political analysis, bluntly conclude that '[u]nder monopoly all mass culture is identical'. As that unlikely consensus between left and right suggests, while there are certainly diverse explanations of the alleged emergence of mass society and mass culture, a number of which find expression in the media sociology of the period, they all tend to converge on the view that mass culture is simplistic and all too often meretricious. Aside from their unreflective elitism, such views have the unfortunate consequence of precluding detailed and sensitive analyses of the media since, in this conception, popular cultural forms self-evidently neither merit nor require such attention. Mass media products, then, are *presumed* to be homogenous and straightforward, rather than demonstrated to be thus, and the methodologies developed for their examination under the general rubric of 'content analysis' are insensitive to the distinctive specificities of different forms and to the potential

complexity of meanings to which they may give rise. From this perspective, therefore, it is impossible to grasp the remarkable variation and depth created in the first half-century of film history, and the cinema comes to be seen as just another pernicious purveyor of trivial entertainment. A 'conclusion' which simply echoes the mass culture presumptions from which analysis begins.

Implicit in mass society theories, furthermore, is a belief in the remarkable strength of media effects and their role in creating this undesirable and lowest common denominator mass culture. This is well captured in a famous rhetorical passage from C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*:

> (1)The media tell the man in the mass who he is – they give him identity; (2) they tell him what he wants to be – they give him aspirations; (3) they tell him how to get that way – they give him technique; and (4) they tell him how to feel that way even when he is not – they give him escape. (Mills, 1959: 314).

In this account the 'man in the mass' is a victim, always on the receiving end of all-powerful media messages. Here, of course, we encounter the discourse of the so-called 'hypodermic model' of mass communication wherein the media metaphorically inject a powerful drug into the receptive vein of the body politic. Quite how pervasive was this model has been a matter for some debate (Bineham, 1988; Lubken, 2008), but here it suffices only to recognise that part and parcel of the mass society perspective was the assumption that the media were powerful sources of largely one-way influence, and that the primary task of research was to measure those effects. Any suggestion, therefore, that film was a rich, meaning-making artefact that would only properly be intelligible as a complex interaction between medium and spectator proved to be anathema to the prevailing modes of mass communications research.[3] The methodologies of content analysis – themselves a product of an overly scientistic epistemology – were simply inadequate to the task of capturing the modes of meaning construction that the cinema and its audiences had created (Tudor, 1995; 1999: 22-33).

In consequence of the ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded in the mass society perspective, and its offshoot in effects research, film, as a by then highly developed 'language' and an extensive cultural resource, was largely ignored in the sociology of mass communications. There is a scattering of interesting work, particularly from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, some of it developing a kind of mass social psychology of film in which the cinema is seen as a domain in which particular kinds of collective fantasies are played out. In their different ways, Kracauer (1947) and Wolfenstein & Leites (1950) exemplify this approach. A more socially oriented perspective informs Margaret Farrand Thorp's 1939 *America at the Movies*, though the book itself, for all its perceptive concern with the significance of the movies for American culture, shows little sign of a specifically sociological sensibility.[4] In that same year, however, Rosten (1939) published the first report from his more than two years of systematic empirical research into Hollywood, funded by both Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations, and employing several research staff. Like so many of the earlier Payne Fund Researchers, Rosten was a graduate of the Chicago School and had been a PhD student under Harold Lasswell, though he also worked as a journalist and briefly as a screenwriter. The research was heavily influenced by the Lynd's famous 'Middletown' studies (Lynd & Lynd, 1929, 1937) with Rosten aiming to examine Hollywood in detail from a similar objective, social science viewpoint. Only one volume was published (Rosten, 1941), though a second was projected but became a casualty of the onset of war and Rosten's consequent deployment elsewhere.

Like so many of his contemporaries, Rosten was convinced both of the general cultural inferiority of the products of the movie industry and of their far reaching influence on individuals and society at large. He also stressed the centrality of the tension between creativity and commercialism in Hollywood, as would Powdermaker (1947, 1950) in her later anthropological study, and he proposes a model of Hollywood society as a hierarchical social system comprised of three concentric circles differentiated from each other by status

and financial reward. In support of his analysis Rosten provides a good deal of factual and statistical information derived from extensive survey and interview work, government and industry statistics, and an array of less formal sources consequent upon his having, to some degree, an insider perspective. There is therefore also much anecdotal material in his study, and the style is journalistic rather than academic. More significantly, and hardly surprising at that time, the research lacks the kind of integrating perspective that, as we have seen, Cressey (1938) thought necessary if social science studies of the cinema were to progress. Nevertheless, as Sullivan (2009) suggests, Rosten's work merits more attention than it has received.

Powdermaker (1950) is also concerned to provide a portrait of Hollywood society, in her case based on a year of interviewing and participant observation in 1946/7. It is her background in social anthropology that principally distinguishes her approach – she did graduate work at the LSE with Malinowski. Her aim in the Hollywood study was to 'to explain in nontechnical language how the social system underlying the production of movies influences them' (Powdermaker, 1950: 9) and in this she partially succeeds. She offers some vivid accounts of the mores of Hollywood society, and is at her most interesting in documenting what might be described as the crisis culture which pervades Hollywood life – a feature to which Rosten also draws attention. At the time her study received a mixed reception. Predictably it drew negative comments from industry sources like *Variety*, and, more surprisingly, an extraordinarily aggressive review from Robert Bierstedt (1951) in the *American Sociological Review*. Although she did respond with some justice to Bierstedt's attack, looking back on the study in the 1960s Powdermaker (1967:11) professed herself unhappy with various aspects of it. Nevertheless, it remains a significant and rare attempt to apply the concepts and methods of anthropology to the workings of film production.

Perhaps the oddest of these sporadic 1940s attempts to foster a sociology of film are the two related volumes produced by J.P. Mayer (1946b, 1948). This research was initially

supported by British studio and cinema owner J. Arthur Rank, an arrangement which came to an end after a year, and although Mayer observes that they did not 'quarrel', he does stress the importance of his developing an *independent* piece of research (1946b: 11); his subsequent negative evaluations of the growing commercial monopoly in production and distribution would certainly not have enamoured him to Rank. Much of both volumes consists of essay-like responses to Mayer's questionnaires from Rank cinema audience members (including children) and, later, readers of the popular film magazine *Picturegoer*. This material does cast interesting light on the views of keen cinemagoers of the period, but very little is added to it in the way of significant sociological analysis. Even allowing for the disciplinary heterogeneity of British sociology at the time, Mayer's sociological observations are limited and somewhat eccentric. Drawing on Lévy-Bruhl and Malinowski he suggests that 'myth' is key to a sociological approach to film. Cinema audiences are seeking a '*participation mystique* in the events on the screen' (*ibid*: 19) through which they achieve a form of self-identification. This, in his view, is not a positive development. Though many of his respondents claim that films had helped them to discover their 'real' personalities, Mayer refuses to take that at face value, arguing instead that what they have established is themselves as 'types' derived from films. Accordingly, '…the majority of films we see are pernicious to our nervous system. They are a mere drug which undermines our health, physical and spiritual' (*ibid*: 278-9). Lurking behind this observation, of course, are the familiar mass culture/strong effects assumptions which in Mayer's case lead him to argue for state intervention, not simply to prevent economic monopoly, but also to exert 'spiritual' control over the 'value patterns' of films. In a revealing exception to this requirement, he adds: '…the artistic and cultural standard of a cinema like *The Academy* in London must under all circumstance be maintained. Here "control" would appear to be quite unnecessary or purely formal.' (*ibid*: 324). As always in negative evaluations of mass culture, the educated elite (Academy audiences in this case) remains immune. Indeed, in his second volume he expands on this theme in terms of the need for 'cultural leadership' from 'a

leading and responsible *elite* not only in the sphere of politics but also in the realm of culture' (Mayer, 1948: 244). Clearly the ordinary cinema audience could not be trusted.

The cinema audience was also the focus of Leo A. Handel's *Hollywood Looks at its Audience* (1950), but from a rather different point of view. Another writer sometimes (mis)described as a sociologist, Handel had a background in economics and for most of the 1940s ran the Motion Picture Research Bureau at MGM which, along with Gallup's Audience Research Inc., was responsible for modernizing the somewhat crude methodologies of market research which had hitherto prevailed in the movie business (Handel, 1953). While providing a profusion of data derived from studio sponsored research into audience preferences, some of which is of considerable interest for historians of 1940s Hollywood, the research on which his book reports is inevitably driven by the commercial imperatives of the film producers rather than by any more analytical social science concerns. As Paul F. Lazarsfeld observes in the book's foreword: 'The reader will not find in this text any attempt to connect film research with the broader social and political problems of our time' (Handel, 1950: xiii), adding, with some regret, 'but he would probably find it nowhere'.

It is significant that the handful of aspiring contributions to a sociology of film examined above have so little to say about film content. Powdermaker and Rosten offer illuminating accounts of the social structures of production, Handel and Mayer quantitatively and qualitatively explore audience responses, Thorp provides general cultural reflections, but no-one asks *systematically* about the distinctive language of film and the associated construction of meaning on the part of film spectators. In part that is a consequence of the blinkers imposed by mass culture presuppositions about the simplicity, even crudity, of media messages. In part also it derives from the dominance of particular kinds of content analysis techniques which were not well suited to dealing with relatively complex narratives as opposed to, for example, news reports or propaganda pieces. This failure to address how

film language worked was shortly to change, but in the newly emergent field of film studies rather than in sociology.

The Rise (and Rise) of Film Studies

The 1960s and 1970s saw a remarkable growth in scholarly work on the cinema and a concomitant expansion of film studies departments in institutions of higher education, a development which proved to be a mixed blessing for the (still) nascent sociology of film. The growth of interest was welcome enough and for a while it appeared as if a useful alliance might be forged between sociology and the newly emergent discipline (Wollen, 1969). However, in the event film studies moved in a different direction, developing a body of theory which effectively precluded such an alliance. This is not the place to examine the considerable intricacies of post-1970 film theory; its relation to sociology has been explored elsewhere (Tudor, 1998: 192-3). Other than tensions arising from the long-standing mistrust of sociology by those in traditional literary studies (from which film studies significantly emerged) the fundamental assumptions of the new film theory were at odds with more sociological approaches. Not, it should be noted, because sociology of film was trapped in the unacceptable empiricism of earlier mass communications research, although that claim was frequently made. It was, rather, a consequence of the conceptual emphases that entered film studies from structuralism and semiotics. These newly arrived perspectives generated a timely concern with the systematic analysis of film language and one which, furthermore, logically necessitated examination of the social construction of these language-like processes in filmic communication. Here was an opportunity for an appropriately formulated sociology. But, as a result of the particular structuralist ideas that emerged after the first wave of Saussurian influence, the dominant tradition in film theory came to depend on concepts derived from Althusser's theories of ideology and Lacan's distinctive psychoanalytic approach to subject formation, rather than on a more thoroughgoing social (or even sociological) perspective. This remarkable combination of structuralist *enfants terribles* gave rise to a theory of filmic communication which was as deterministic in its way

as was the earlier mass society/hypodermic model. The very structure of film language was conceived as imbued with ideology and, in what came to be known as subject-positioning theory, the film spectator was conceived as constructed by the film text primarily through that ideological positioning. The most influential variation of these ideas was found in '*Screen* theory', so called because its main locus was in the journal *Screen* (Jancovich, 1995; Tudor, 1999: 81-108), and they and their conceptual offshoots were to occupy a dominant position in film theorising for the next two decades.

Meanwhile there remained sporadic attempts at developing a more thoroughgoing sociology of film. In the early years some were entirely independent of the burgeoning field of film studies where popular cinema had increasingly become the focus. Huaco (1965), for example, offers a study of 'film art' as found in three 'film movements': German expressionism; Soviet expressive realism; and Italian neorealism. He proposes a macroscopic model which utilises a somewhat uneasy combination of Marxian base/superstructure imagery with 'categories borrowed from the work of Neil J. Smelser' (*ibid*: 18). He assumes that some films can validly be seen as 'art' and, in marked contrast with popular cinema, therefore merit close attention in a mode similar to the then approaches of the sociologies of art and literature. Quite what distinguished this 'film art' is not made clear. He utilises what he describes as 'content analysis of film plots' (*ibid*: 20) to establish the 'ideology' of the film movement, though the details of this methodology are also unclear. In assuming a traditional view of the aesthetic distinctiveness of 'art cinema' his is the last ostensibly sociological study conducted without reference to popular cinema, which was rapidly becoming a key focus in modern film theorising.

But before the divergent paths of film theory and film sociology became fully apparent there remained sufficient, perhaps naïve, optimism about future possibilities to encourage sociologists in programmatic explorations of the field. Both Jarvie (1970) and Tudor (1974) offer field mapping enterprises, if from somewhat different theoretical starting points. But as

film studies colonized the field through into the 1980s and 1990s, specifically sociological contributions became increasingly rare. To be sure, writers with sociological backgrounds continued to contribute significant work but not with the objective of constituting a distinctive sociology *of* the cinema. They might in part utilise perspectives drawn from sociology, and they certainly attended to social dimensions of the cinematic institutions and products which concerned them, but in a piecemeal way. The diversity of such material can be seen in, for example, Denzin (1991, 1995) and Orr (1993, 1998, 2000) who, in their different ways, address general issues of the social theorisation of modernism and postmodernism by reference to the cinema, or in more specific studies such as those by Wright (1975) on the Western, Hill on British cinema (1986, 1999), or Tudor on horror movies (1989), which are sociologically inflected but without in any way constituting a sociology of film as such. During this period there also developed a substantial literature, particularly in the journal *Teaching Sociology*, focusing upon the use of film as a teaching resource for sociology but sometimes also exploring more general issues (e.g. among many others, Demerath, 1981; Prendergast, 1986; Burton, 1988; Pescosolido, 1990; Leblanc, 1998; Dowd, 1999). In addition there were always organizational studies of the film industry, some of which, such as Baker & Faulkner (1991), have a strong sociological component.

This somewhat erratic pattern continued even as the centre of gravity of film studies and film theory once more began to shift. By the 1990s the deterministic certainties of *Screen* Theory were in some retreat, faced by an increasingly influential counter-view utilising cognitive psychology and developed primarily by Bordwell (1985, 1989), which in turn precipitated much rethinking of the field (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). These years also saw a growing emphasis on cultural studies and, in particular, the increasing prominence of so-called ‘ethnographic’ work on media audiences (especially television) and the turn toward ‘reception studies’. Some sense of the stimulating range of this work can be found by consulting the material collected in Brooker & Jermyn (2003), Jancovich, Faire & Stubbings (2003) and Christie (2012) among others. In film studies, film history and in cultural studies,

then, aspects of the 'social' became of greater significance in consequence of these changes and the research areas that they opened up. But substantive sociological contributions were rare and remain so still.

Let us briefly take some examples which illustrate this continuing pattern. Dudrah (2006), for instance, draws on a variety of perspectives to explore aspects of Bollywood cinema. He is clear on the conceptual and methodological pluralism of his preferred approach:

> The sociology that has been advocated and demonstrated throughout this book has been one that has little to do with following the canonical figures and classical theories of the discipline in a systemic and exhaustive manner, and more to do with demonstrating a practicing of the sociological imagination as it is brought into dialogue with studies of the cinema, namely from the related disciplines of film, media and cultural studies. (Dudrah, 2006: 167)

In adopting this position, of course, he continues the long-standing tradition of combinatorial strategies for the study of film. In that sense, his book is not so much a case of, as his subtitle suggests, 'sociology goes to the movies'. Rather, aspects of sociology meet up with aspects of a number of other disciplines to collectively seek fresh understanding of cinema. To misappropriate some terminology that originated in the sociology of science[5], this might be described as the 'weak programme' for a sociology of film wherein the sociology is one tool among many with no special demands on explanatory priority. To describe such an approach as 'weak' is not a judgement of worth. Indeed, the present authors in their own work have often adopted such a pluralist approach (Heise, 2012; Heise & Tudor, 2013, 2014) and continue to do so.

Heise, for example, is developing research in the context of recent scholarly attention paid to the construction of social memory in 'post-dictatorship' Latin American films, films addressing the rise and consequences of the military dictatorships that swept the continent from the 1960s to the 1980s. Research in this area, such as some of that reported in the

'Political Documentary Film and Video in the Southern Cone' issue of *Latin American Perspectives* (2013), adopts tools drawn from a range of disciplines to understand the strategies that these films employ to rewrite and recuperate a past that has been obliterated in hegemonic historical discourse. In her current work Heise (forthcoming) examines Brazilian post-dictatorship films in the light of recent social-historical shifts in the ways in which Brazilians deal with the memory of their dictatorial past. Her pluralistic approach incorporates elements from memory studies and trauma theory to examine the uses of personal testimony and re-enactments as means of bearing witness to history. In this approach, psychoanalytical concepts borrowed from trauma theory add a further dimension to more familiar social and political analyses, the latter including elements of gender theory employed to examine the representation on screen of women's role in historic political resistance. This is then conjoined with the methods of film studies to closely analyse specific films and to explore what some have understood as a tendency in trauma texts to favour a modernist aesthetic over 'realism' (Craps, 2014).

In contrast to that pluralist strategy, a 'strong programme' for the sociology of film would aim to prioritise sociological theories and methodologies in comprehending the workings of the system of cinema, including those aspects of the cinematic institution which are part of its own self-understanding. The latter, of course, would include film criticism and, indeed, products of the discipline of film studies. A recent example of this stronger use of sociology, though not one that reflexively examines film studies itself, is Hughey (2014) which marshals an array of carefully elucidated methods in examining white saviour films and their contribution to a 'post-racial racial ideology' in American society. As well as content analysis of 50 films and detailed examination of 2799 critics' reviews of those films, he also researched 83 screening audience members using ten carefully constructed focus groups plus pre- and post-group interviews (Hughey, 2014: 175-92). His research is systematically analytic and empirical, and it places those methodological commitments in the service of a distinctively sociological approach. While it may not provide the overarching frame of

reference that Cressey was seeking back in 1938, Hughey's study does underline its strongly sociological character in terms of scale and methodological rigour, features which serve to distinguish it both from many examples of the 'weak programme' and from film studies traditions more generally.

Toward a Bourdieusian Strong Programme

What is to be done, then, to further the historically neglected sociology of cinema? There is no simple answer, but, in seeking a framework in modern sociology within which to develop a strong programme, Bourdieu's work is of immediate relevance. Of course, his ideas have already had some isolated influence in film studies and, more often, cultural studies. At one point his expression 'cultural capital' gained a good deal of general currency, particularly in the later 1980s when *La Distinction* was first translated (Bourdieu, 1986). Many would argue however – not least Bourdieu himself – that in being torn from its context in the rest of his theory that concept (along with others, such as habitus, field and strategy) was systematically misread (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 79). But taken as a whole, rather than in this piecemeal fashion, Bourdieu's is the most extensive and stimulating examination of cultural reproduction to be found in modern sociology. In particular, it is in his focus on the relation between structure and agency that his work can be used as a foundation here. Now some might argue against that claim that the resolution that Bourdieu offers to the traditional sociological 'problem' of structure and agency – if resolution it is – is too much inclined to focus upon the constraining features of structure at the expense of the creative activities of agents. His appears to be a strong socialisation model in which internalised dispositions play a key role in forming the terms within which agents constitute their practices. What we want to suggest here, however, is that the basic thrust of Bourdieu's thinking still retains considerable potential for a sociology of cinema – especially in suggesting lines of inquiry which might rectify the recent drift towards over-voluntarism in audience 'ethnography' and reception studies. The interaction between the structuring capacities of cultural forms and social worlds, on the one hand, and the meaning-making practices of audiences, on the

other, requires examination as a process, not by emphasising one or another side of the duality. It is this complex feedback system that is central to any understanding of the workings of cinema in society.

Let us examine this aspect of Bourdieu's work a little more closely. It is clear that his central *habitus* concept does envision agents as powerfully constrained. Consider just one of his typically roundabout attempts at definition:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)

The language is tangled but illuminating. 'Conditionings', 'durable', 'structured', 'structuring', all reflect the power of these acquired, non-conscious dispositions to mould our social practice. Nevertheless, active agency survives: 'There is action, and history, and conservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents, but agents who are acting and efficacious only because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily put under the notion of individual and who, as socialised organisms, are endowed with an ensemble of dispositions…' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 19). Bourdieu's agent, then, is not mechanistically controlled by internalised norms and values – rules to *govern* social activity. Habitus, rather, *disposes* us to act in certain ways, to prefer this way of being to that, to comprehend the world after a particular fashion. Only to that degree does Bourdieu present us as creatures of our socialisation; of the dispositions, those 'structuring structures' given to us through the medium of habitus. The latter, he writes (1990: 56), is 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history'. But, as he also observes (2000:

180), ‘habitus is not destiny’. We are practical *users* of the principles our habitus provides, not marionettes whose strings are pulled by some dispositional puppet master.

It is here that the key concept of ‘fields’, as well as Bourdieu’s account of positions and position-taking within fields, takes on a central role. As bearers of the dispositions of our habitus, themselves significantly derived from our consumption of cultural forms, we take up specific locations within the relational structure of social positions offered by the field. In so doing we are indeed agents making choices, but agents who are constrained by the habitus that we bring to bear and by the positions pre-given in the logic of the field. Bourdieu is always careful to deny inevitability or finality in this habitus/field/positions/position-taking nexus. ‘There is nothing mechanical about the relationship between the field and the habitus,’ he insists (Bourdieu, 1993: 65), and ‘the correspondence that is observed between positions and position-taking never has a mechanical or inevitable character’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 151). Nevertheless, this formulation does suggest a social ontology in which agents are caught up in a network of (almost) self-fulfilling constraints. This is at its clearest in his later formulations of the general theory, in the essay on ‘Bodily Knowledge’, for example, in *Pascalian Meditations*. Here he writes of social space in terms of a juxtaposition of positions, the social topology of which can be mapped, and of agents acquiring habitus from past experience: ‘systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action [which] enable them to perform acts of practical knowledge’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 138). Although particular dispositions do not determine our actions, habitus does lead us to have ‘a feel for the game’ in specific fields. The positions we adopt, then, are the positions to which we are fitted by virtue of our habitus and the capital at our disposal. Thus is social order reproduced. The agent ‘feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus’ (ibid: 143). How is this so? Because ‘the instruments of construction that he uses to know the world are constructed by the world’ (ibid: 136). The circle completes itself.

Elsewhere we have sought to utilise elements of this field model in application to the historical construction of film 'art' (Tudor, 2005; Heise & Tudor, 2007). Key to the approach is the distinction that Bourdieu makes between two 'principles of hierarchization' at work in the field of art. One – the 'heteronomous principle' – is 'favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. bourgeois art)', while the 'autonomous principle' (often exemplified by Bourdieu in 'art for art's sake') is identified by its advocates 'with degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise' (Bourdieu, 1993: 40). The world of art, then, is an 'economic world reversed' (Bourdieu, 1983) in two senses: its proponents negatively evaluate economic success, rejecting it in favour of what they see as the necessary autonomy of art; and, more profoundly, the very possibility of this 'anti-"economic" economy of pure art' (Bourdieu, 1996: 142) is predicated upon the existence of a social and political system dominated by the rational calculation of the market and the interests of those thus engaged. For Bourdieu, then, the opposition between art and commerce is fundamentally constitutive of the fields of artistic production and consumption within capitalist modernity.

It is important to note that this model is historically specific (it depends on the widespread diffusion of the market orientation of capitalism) and that, strictly speaking, it applies only to those sub-fields of cultural production in the modern era which aspire to, or are widely consecrated as, art. Thus, while it may be illuminating when applied to Flaubert and to 19th century French literature and painting more generally (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996), at first sight it appears to be of less obvious value in application to what we now tend to think of as the 'popular arts' of film, television, and the like, except in those periods when their artistic status is particularly at issue. Indeed, it is striking how silent is the later Bourdieu on processes of cultural production in 'popular culture', other than in advancing a broad socio-political critique such as the one he makes of journalism and television (Bourdieu, 1998a). Does this seriously limit the applicability of Bourdieu's field model only to those areas where the concept of 'art' is central, and therefore confound its use as the basis for a more general

sociology of cinema? We think not. Although his analysis has been developed in the classic art/commerce context, the tension caught in the heteronomy/autonomy distinction is one that finds expression in all areas of culture, albeit without necessarily invoking 'art' by name. As the early studies of Hollywood by Rosten (1941) and Powdermaker (1950) made clear, commerce versus creativity was a significant structuring feature of the Hollywood system even though few, if any, of the participants would have been remotely concerned about 'art'. And as we have argued elsewhere (Heise & Tudor, 2007), heteronomy/autonomy anyway takes on a rather different character when its primary reference point is to the political field rather than the economic, as was the case in the era of dictatorship in Brazil.

We would propose, then, that Bourdieu's analysis of the field of art can be extended and elaborated in relation to other notionally non-art fields of cultural production and consumption. The two dimensions that Bourdieu uses to map the positions offered by the logic of the field, and which are variously occupied by agents who bring to the process the dispositions of their habitus, are more general than his particular application to art might suggest. Thus, the first dimension, Bourdieu's 'degree of consecration', is a specific case of a more general parameter along which is distributed differing evaluations made of agents, cultural artefacts and processes, evaluations which are the subject of struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Such processes have been the focus of some recent cultural sociology: Cattani et al (2014) have empirically explored the struggle for consecration in the context of differing evaluations expressed in awards by 'peers' and 'critics' in the Hollywood context, Allen & Lincoln (2004) consider processes of 'retrospective consecration' of Hollywood films, while Kersten & Bielby (2012) examine the function of film reviewing. Bourdieu's second dimension, heteronomy/autonomy, refers to degrees of dependence or independence in relation to prior existing structures of social division. In his analysis of art that is construed in relation to the economic field, but it could of course relate to other fields such as the political, military, religious, or ethnic. In addition, these various fields may overlap or, indeed, be nested one within another. Drawing on this kind of multi-

field perspective it becomes possible, for example, to examine a particular film genre, or a national cinema, or a distinctive thematic pattern in relation to a range of constraining structures, thus mapping the field as it changes over time and examining the ways in which other fields impinge upon it. The resulting sequence of 'maps' provides a systematization of the positions made available in the logic of the field which, in conjunction with an account of the habituses and cultural capital of the agents who choose to occupy those positions, allows examination of the various conjunctions of agency and structure in cinematic fields. This is not an analysis to which we can give empirical substance here; that remains a task for the future. But we nevertheless contend that such a framework offers considerable promise for the development of a strong programme in the sociology of the cinema.

[1] The *Screen* editorial in the issue in which this material is published suggests that it 'offers a methodological template for the sort of ethnographic study of media audiences which is being reinvented today' (*Screen* Editors, 2001: 248). It should be noted, however, that Altenloh's study is not an ethnography in any sense that would be recognised by an anthropologist or sociologist. The use of the term 'ethnographic' here is a product of its systematic misappropriation by modern film studies and cultural studies to describe almost any audience focused methodology (c.f. Tudor, 1999: 165-94). Altenloh's work is in fact a piece of early survey research, and all the more useful for that. However, given advances in survey research technique over the past 100 years, it could hardly serve as a 'methodological template'.

[2] Jowett et al (1996) make a good case for Cressey as a particularly interesting and neglected contributor to the Payne Fund research. They have recovered various unpublished drafts of his work which they include as Chapters 4 and 5 of their volume. As his 1938 *American Sociological Review* article cited here makes clear, he had a subtle appreciation of the theoretical issues involved in understanding the social significance of cinema. That article is also included in their volume as an appendix.

[3] An honourable exception to this was the sociologist Herbert J. Gans who sought to develop more sensitive ways of addressing the 'creator-audience relationship' (Gans, 1957) and who refused to accept the standard opposition between 'high' and 'mass' culture (Gans, 1974).

[4] This book is sometimes described as 'sociological' and as written by a sociologist. Neither is the case; Thorp's academic field was English. Describing it in this way seems to originate from J.P. Mayer's (1946a) insistence on its sociological credentials in the Editors' Preface and Introduction to the UK edition, perhaps reflecting his own determination to develop sociological study of film at that time.

[5] The key element in the weak/strong programme distinction in the sociology of scientific knowledge was that the strong programme treated 'true' scientific knowledge to be as much socially determined as 'false' knowledge, including the claims of SSK itself. In the sociology of film (and culture more generally) we are clearly not dealing with truth claims but rather with the degree to which sociological factors are seen as powerful determinants. But in both cases, of course, sociology is treated as the primary theoretical and methodological resource for providing explanations. It is in that sense that we employ the distinction here.

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