

Mapping urban movie-going, 1970s Los Angeles

Ewa Drygalska

Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland

Ewa.drygalska@gmail.com

As a film historian involved in digital humanities I find particularly interesting rapidly expanding area and potential of spatial historiography. My research is focused on Blaxploitation cinema: its production, distribution, reception, advertisement, criticism, institutional reception, and selected cultural aspects. Blaxploitation is defined here as black-oriented and black-casted movies created between 1970 and 1979, which amounts to approximately 130 films produced by both large as well as independent studios, within exploitation and action cinema, characterized by their small budgets, low production quality, usually R- and X-rated. Blaxploitation films in most, were characterized by black heroes and heroines, urban setting and interracial conflict, which usually positioned whites as villains. During its cultural height (1971-1976) Blaxploitation was largely popular and high grossing, especially among African Americans. In terms of the geographic location, I am particularly interested in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles. In the context of black movies boom I try to understand and analyze Los Angeles movie-going culture and its relations with the city's cultural and racial dynamic, landscape and topography. My examination of archives, oral history, demographics and economics related to 1970s and that urban area shows that highly concentrated black population in Los Angeles was virtually cut off from prime entertainment through various practices. To Edward Soja, L.A. metropolis and its representations of space and historicity are the archetypes of velocity, simultaneity and interconnection. However, from the point of view African Americans experience of urbanity would rather represent disconnection and segregation. Following academic projects like Italian Cinema Audiences and other works of HOMER network, in my poster presentation I'll show the experimentation with visualization of geography of cinema related to concepts of segregation and connection. I will focus on movie theater as alternative public sphere and experiences of moviegoers through sound mapping: cartography (created with ArcGis, Story Maps) and oral history (created with Oral History Metadata Synchronizer), and ways to present demographic data as a context for movie-going.

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