

**FROM MODERNITY TO MEMORIAL:
The Changing Meanings of the 1930s Cinema in Nottingham**

By Sarah Stubbings, BA, MA.

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ABSTRACT

This work examines local press reporting of the 1930s cinema from 1930 up to the present day. By focusing on one particular city, Nottingham, I formulate an analysis of the place that cinema has occupied in the city's history. Utilising the local press as the primary source enables me to situate the discourses on the cinema building and the practice of cinema-going within the broader socio-cultural contexts and history of the city. The work incorporates all the different forms of local press coverage of cinema: editorials, advertising, news, features and letters. It argues that the meanings of the 1930s cinema alter significantly over time with regard to changing perceptions of the city and the suburb, of modernity and tradition, of the value ascribed to cinema architecture, and the significance attached to popular memory. It also demonstrates that the meanings of the 1930s cinema are defined by the different agendas of particular groups, and that the local press is significant in determining which of these agendas are prioritised and portrayed as representing the consensus.

Part One of the thesis surveys the contemporaneous reporting of the 1930s cinema and Part Two looks at the retrospective coverage. This method of analysis differentiates my work from most of the existing studies of cinema as a social practice. Studying contemporaneous and retrospective accounts of 1930s cinema enables me to illuminate the shifts in perspective which inform how the 1930s cinema was regarded in that decade and how it has been understood in later periods.

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I would like to dedicate this to my mother who, growing up in the 1930s, was regularly to be found in those picture palaces that so characterise the decade. Her passionate belief that future generations should benefit from the education that was unavailable to her, along with her sustained confidence in my abilities, have given me the commitment and self-belief to undertake my PhD. Thank you.

A version of Part One of this thesis informs Part Three of *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings (London: BFI, 2003). A version of "The Continued Presence of the Past: Popular Memory of Cinema-going in the Golden Age" is published in Paul Grainge (ed.) *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies cinema and cinema-going in the 1930s and takes as its primary reference source the local press coverage of cinema in the city of Nottingham. However, the research takes into account not only the local press reports of 1930s cinema in that decade, but also the subsequent coverage of 1930s cinema. Through an analysis of both contemporaneous and retrospective accounts, the thesis traces the changing meaning of the 1930s cinema within the wider context of the city and its suburbs, taking in account the cinema building as well as the cinema-going experience. It argues that those meanings are constructed according to the different concerns of each period and the agendas of different interest groups, and that the local press itself is instrumental in constructing the changing discourses on cinema and cinema-going.

Although some very well-regarded work has already been undertaken in this area, film studies has traditionally focused on film texts, whether it be in the form of textual analysis or through reception studies, which examines the audience's response to films. This point is made by Annette Kuhn in *An Everyday Magic*. Kuhn states that "films as texts" are the "primary objects of inquiry" for film studies and that when spectatorship is studied the work is "predominantly about a spectator addressed or constructed by the film text – the 'spectator-in-the-text'".¹ Therefore, responses to *films* rather than to *cinemas* is the principal focus of audience studies. The meanings which the

audience makes of films is the object, rather than the meaning of the cinema itself. While work on cinema as an institution rather than on film texts has expanded significantly in recent years and produced some valuable studies, many areas remain largely unexplored. The meanings of cinema-going for actual historical audiences, for example, and the meanings that cinema buildings had, or continue to have, are little studied.

Yet, cinema-going has occupied a very significant place in social history because of its centrality to so many people's lives. As A J P Taylor, writing of the interwar period, suggests: "the cinema was the essential social habit of the age."² Furthermore, the extent of the popularity of films in the first half of the twentieth century meant that a substantial number of cinemas were built to accommodate their audiences and this also had an impact on the architectural forum and on the usage of city space.

The existing studies which take into account the meanings of cinema-going and cinema buildings can be divided into the following three major areas: economic histories; architectural histories; and audience studies.

Douglas Gomery's economic history of cinema, *Shared Pleasures*,³ is one of the most significant histories of cinema exhibition yet written. The scope of *Shared Pleasures* is such that it begins with the earliest days of exhibition in the USA, continues through to the showing of films on video and cable in the early 1990s (when the book was written), and also includes a series of in-depth case studies. For example, Gomery utilises his study of the major cinema chain Balaban and Katz in 1920s and 1930s New York, to support his argument that successful exhibition was more dependent on location, décor and facilities than on the films shown.⁴ This point is highly

significant for the study of audiences and the meanings of cinema-going, working as it does against the 'common-sense' understanding that people have gone to the cinema primarily to see a particular film. Instead, the environment in which the films are seen and the position of the cinema are revealed to be centrally important. Hence, Gomery's work informs us that studying the film text and the audience's response to it is not in itself sufficient to obtain a full understanding of films and their meanings.

Shared Pleasures is an economic history, the primary focus of which is the business side of exhibition. While Gomery does consider the social and technological aspects of exhibition, issues such as the meanings of cinema to the audiences, its impact on leisure and commercial entertainment practices as a whole, and cinema's effects on its locations are not the predominant concerns of his work. However, Gomery argues that economic and business developments, such as the rise of cinema, can have major social implications. Thus, he claims that: "although *Shared Pleasures* does not set out to fashion a social history of moviegoing, it will lay out the social implications of the industrial basis of moviegoing."⁵ The wide range of sources Gomery utilises, which includes the trade and business press and the newspapers of major cities such as New York and Los Angeles, indicates the potential for future research in this field. More specifically, Gomery's work lays down the foundation for utilising press coverage in order to analyse the meaning of cinema-going.

Architectural histories provide a further approach to studying cinema as an institution. While these provide some information on the meanings of cinema buildings and how these buildings have changed over time, their primary focus is the intentions of the architects rather than the ways in which

buildings were actually experienced by the audience.⁶ Britain's cinema architecture has traditionally been held in low regard by the architectural profession. Famously, P Morton Shand's 1930s study was highly dismissive of British cinema architecture, and he advocated the unadorned Modern style of German cinema architecture as the model to which British cinema architects should aspire.⁷ In fact, it is only since around 1970 that British cinema architecture has been re-evaluated to the extent that a number of cinemas are now adjudged by the architectural profession to display architectural merit.

The histories of British cinema architecture are central to this process of re-evaluation. The first of these, published in 1969, was Dennis Sharp's *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*. Both David Atwell's *Cathedrals of the Movies* and Richard Gray's *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* acknowledge their debt to Sharp, who established the critical framework for their studies.⁸ Each of these provide a history of cinema architecture in Britain from its origins to the time they were written, and, as such, focus on the changing architectural styles over the period, rather than on the role of cinema architecture and its contribution to cinema's social and cultural history. For example, Sharp describes the style of the 'super cinemas', the large and luxurious cinemas built to satisfy cinema's growing popularity in the 1930s, but he does not address how seeing films in such an environment would have had a bearing upon the experience of the audience.⁹ In addition to the general histories of British cinema architecture, specific architectural studies of some of the more important cinema chains in Britain have been produced, indicating a growing interest in this aspect of recent history.¹⁰

Maggie Valentine's history of cinema architecture, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, goes some way to addressing the experience of the cinema audience, in the USA.¹¹ This work combines a study of the cinemas of the architect S Charles Lee with a general survey of cinema architecture in the USA which takes into account the impact of the surroundings on the experience of watching films.¹² However, although Valentine acknowledges the place of the audience, this is not the central focus of her study.

In order to study the meanings of cinema-going, some researchers have turned to evidence of the audience's experiences. In the British context, Jeffrey Richards studied the 1930s cinema in *The Age of the Dream Palace*.¹³ Richards examines the social composition of the cinema audience, cinema's associations with luxury and escapism, moralists' campaigns against cinema, and analyses the findings of the Mass-Observation study on cinema-going (as discussed below). Yet despite the wealth of material in Richards' study, this survey of the experience of going to the cinema comprises considerably less than half of the book. The remainder deals with perceptions of British films of the 1930s, and in particular the reception of major stars of British cinema such as Gracie Fields and George Formby. Richards has undertaken a study of Birmingham cinemas in the 1930s and, as a study of cinema in a specific British city, there are necessarily some parallels between Richards' work and my own. However, his work, which is an article rather than a full-length study, is necessarily narrower in focus, looking in detail at the Sabbatarians' campaign against cinemas opening on Sundays rather than at cinema-going as a whole in 1930s Birmingham.¹⁴ John Sedgewick has also produced a full-length study of films and cinema-going in 1930s Britain.¹⁵ While Sedgewick

provides a very thorough analysis of “the activity of cinema-going” his particular focus is on the films the audiences watched: “the choices made by audiences in preferring one film to another”.¹⁶ Through his focus on the audience’s experience of films rather than the cinema experience, Sedgewick formulates a means of assessing the popularity of specific films in Britain in the 1930s, despite the absence of box-office information for the period.¹⁷ Thus despite focusing on cinema-going in Britain in the same period, my thesis has very different aims to those of Sedgewick as its emphasis is on the meaning of the cinemas, both to cinema-goers and to Nottingham and its suburbs, rather than on the audience’s response to the films.

The Mass-Observation work on cinema-going is itself a valuable resource for students of British cinema history. The Mass-Observation project of the 1930s was an attempt to make an “anthropological study of our own civilisation” by enlisting a large team of volunteers to observe and report on people in a wide range of activities. Cinema forms part of the in-depth study of Bolton in 1937, known as the ‘Worktown’ project, and comprises detailed questionnaires to cinema-goers at three cinemas (representing the ‘flea pits’, mid-range and luxury cinemas) about topics such as their film viewing habits, their favourite cinemas, and why they went to the cinema.¹⁸

Audience studies based on surveys such as the Mass-Observation findings are necessarily reliant on the agenda determined by others. However, some researchers have undertaken work based on their own studies of audiences. Jackie Stacey’s questionnaire on women’s memories of cinema-going in the 1940s and 1950s formed the basis of her authoritative account of spectatorship and gender in that period.¹⁹ Notions of escapism, women’s

identification with the stars on screen and commodity consumption are the three major areas Stacey identifies in her respondents' memories. Annette Kuhn's work on cinema-goers' memories of the 1930s, based on the results of a questionnaire and interviews with cinema-goers of the period, studies the place of cinema in courtship and make-believe, and theorises the nature of popular memory.²⁰ While these works take into account the audience's response to the social experience of cinema-going and the cinema building, for example, in terms of the luxury it offered, their central focus is on people's memories of films and film stars.²¹

From a similar standpoint to Richards, John Hill and Christine Geraghty have studied the cinema audience as a means of contextualising the film texts which they then proceed to analyse. Their work on the audience is primarily a means of understanding how the films were received, rather than a study of cinema-going. Each of them discusses the declining cinema audience of the 1950s and the films which were produced in that period as the film industry's attempt to reverse the situation.²² Studies of audiences of the 1970s onwards have predominantly focused on the television rather than the cinema audience and, through that vehicle, have explored significant sociological concerns, such as notions of the family and the power structures affecting family life at home.²³ Through works of this type, the meaning of television has received more attention than that of cinema.

Considerably more work has been undertaken on American than British cinema history.²⁴ This difference in quantity extends to studies of local cinema history. Gregory Waller's *Main Street Amusements*, a study of small-town cinema in Lexington, Kentucky from the birth of cinema to the coming

of sound in 1930, takes the local press as his primary source, as my own study does. Waller charts the changing concerns, reputation and emphases of cinema over the period, and, in the process, situates cinema within the context of the other forms of entertainment available in Lexington. For example, he recounts how the movies triumphed over the ice skating craze that was so popular there at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁵ While Waller provides a valuable study of the changing nature of cinema reception in Lexington, he does not situate cinema within a wider social context than that of the leisure facilities of the town. Thus, for example, his examination of the racial segregation of cinema-goers in Lexington does not encompass any discussion of cinema's role in the racial discourse in the American South.²⁶

Katherine H Fuller in *At the Picture Show* aims, as does Waller, to redress the balance of cinema study towards the often neglected non-metropolitan areas.²⁷ She looks at cinema in a number of small American towns in the first thirty years of its history, and then goes on to study the rise of movie fan culture in the same period. In order to achieve this, Fuller utilises a range of primary sources such as the trade press, exhibitors' papers and film fan magazines.

Robert Allen and Gomery in *Film History: Theory and Practice* emphasise the value of studying cinema in its local context. To demonstrate this they provide three short case studies which indicate the extent of primary material which is available on local cinema.²⁸ Part of Allen and Gomery's rationale for advocating undertaking local study in smaller towns and cities is that focusing exclusively on the major metropolitan areas skews our understanding of cinema history. They support this argument through the

example of a case study of the change from silent films to sound in Milwaukee, demonstrating that this was a very different process to that in New York, which, as subject of the prior research, had become established as the norm.²⁹ As they argue, studies of the local “should also caution us against a sweeping generalisation – however oft-repeated – concerning film exhibition....New York City is *not* the entire country.”³⁰ This is clearly a significant observation in the light of my study of Nottingham cinema-going. Allen and Gomery advocate that further local studies should be undertaken because:

Since so little has been done to document film-going at a local level, it is possible to make a contribution to the state of film historical knowledge. The accumulation of local histories should help reshape our thinking on vital questions of economic and social history.³¹

Allen and Gomery’s pronouncement underpins the content of my thesis. It is from this standpoint that I will provide an analysis of cinema building and cinema-going in Nottingham in the 1930s through the reporting in the local press. Furthermore, I will utilise this material in order to analyse cinema’s place within the city’s social history. As Waller states, “the social and cultural frame within which moviegoing is placed [is] always important in determining what we end up saying about entertainment in general and the movies in particular.”³² In order to address this I have situated cinema-going within multiple contexts, such as the discourse of cinema advertising and the growth of Nottingham and its suburbs. I chose to focus on the 1930s because, for Britain, the 1930s was a very significant decade for cinema and cinema-going. Cinema became a central part of many people’s lives as audiences figures rose substantially throughout that period, and in order to accommodate the ever-growing audience, large numbers of vast and

imposing cinemas were built across the country. This had a major impact on the city and townscapes and is central to the parts of my thesis which study the meaning of the cinema building in the city of Nottingham and its suburbs. This methodology has enabled me to address the very different and changing meanings of cinema, and to formulate new questions about those meanings and about cinema's relationship with wider social contexts.

Both Waller and Fuller provide very valuable contributions to local cinema history through advancing the understanding and knowledge of cinema within the entertainment sphere. However, whilst sharing their concerns, I also examine cinema as a means of formulating questions about social practice and cultural identity. This type of approach is also evident in Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements* which studies the leisure activities of working-class women in turn-of-the-century New York as a means of analysing class and gender issues.³³ Peiss uses her findings to make a series of social arguments. From her analysis, women's leisure practices "offer a window into social practices often obscured in other areas of human experience, opening to view ... the cultural handling of gender among working-class people".³⁴ In line with her approach, I analyse cinema in order to demonstrate its influence on wider social issues in the particular regional context of Nottingham.

Studying 1930s Cinema-going Contemporaneously and Retrospectively

In this thesis I study the cinemas that were built in Nottingham in the 1930s, the decade which marked the cinema-building boom in Britain and which saw the opening of most of the 'super cinemas', through an analysis of cinema

reporting in Nottingham's local press and the meanings which cinema generated through that forum.

However, I study not only the social context and the meanings attributed to 1930s cinema during that decade, but also how those meanings have changed over time. Utilising the local press as my primary source enables me to achieve this because it provides a means of comparing the content and tone of cinema coverage across a seventy-year period. While oral history, for example, offers the opportunity to study people's memories of cinema in the 1930s, experiences can be transmuted over time so that the recollection may be somewhat different to the original experience. The local press, however provides the opportunity to study both how the 1930s cinema in Nottingham was understood at the time, and how it has been interpreted subsequently, and this material also incorporates memories of cinema-going. My study, then, comprises two parts: the first is based on contemporaneous local press coverage of cinema in the 1930s, while the second studies the retrospective local press reports of cinema and cinema-going in the 1930s. This structure has enabled the thesis to analyse the different narratives of the 1930s cinema from that time onwards, and the resultant changes in meaning which it has been accorded. My central point is that the meanings of these buildings change in relation to the different understandings of 1930s cinema and of the 1930s as a whole. This approach means that the perspectives and viewpoints of different periods are crucial to my analysis and understanding of the material. Furthermore, I have begun from the standpoint that the local press sources provide 'a' truth rather than 'the' truth about Nottingham and its cinemas of the 1930s. In this, I draw substantially on John Baxendale and

Chris Pawling's *Narrating the Thirties*.³⁵ This is a cultural history of 1930s Britain, based on a reading of some of the significant narratives constructed about that decade, both contemporaneously and retrospectively. The work argues that "'the Thirties' is a cultural construct....produced not just from the mentality of a particular era, but within certain specific patterns of social and cultural relations."³⁶ To make this point, the book studies a range of narratives including travel accounts, television series, films and novels, which reflect the changing perceptions of the 1930s. In doing so, the authors state that:

Our purpose is not merely to make the somewhat banal point that each age interprets the past in its own way, but to try and show why and how this is so: and in particular, how narratives about or including the Thirties have not only been shaped by subsequent history, but also have been used to shape it, to influence subsequent events and give them particular meanings.³⁷

I have aimed to apply this approach to cinema of the 1930s, specifically to its various readings in the forum of the local press over a seventy-year period, in order to present and analyse how those meanings have changed. As Baxendale and Pawling argue, the themes which occur "have formed part of a cultural object, shifting and changing over time".³⁸ This methodological approach differentiates my work from that of most other cinema historians. So, for example, Waller studies the local press coverage of cinema over thirty-four years, and charts the changes in the cinemas and cinema-going practice in Lexington over that period, yet he does not take into account how subsequent periods have viewed the cinema of that time. Kuhn, by contrast, utilises people's memories of cinema-going in the 1930s to construct a cultural history of that decade which necessarily demonstrates only how those experienced are understood retrospectively. Through studying both contemporaneous and retrospective coverage, I examine the manner in which the meaning of 1930s cinema is not fixed but is always being transmuted; so,

“events may be part of a fixed past, but their meanings are part of the changing present.”³⁹ Utilising the local press as my primary source enables me to achieve this because it offers the opportunity to compare the tone and content of cinema coverage over the period.

I take account of Allen and Gomery’s exhortation that: “in order to answer questions about the cinema’s past, the film historian must not only be a *film* scholar, but a *historical* scholar as well.”⁴⁰ In studying the 1930s through the very different lenses of its own and subsequent decades, I am mindful of the importance of historical method. There is an extensive literature on historical theory and historiography and many of these works detail the vast array of historical approaches available, and discuss issues such as the reliability of sources and the possibility of locating ‘truth’ in history.⁴¹ I have adopted the historical approach of Baxendale and Pawling, who forge a route between a postmodern theory of history, advocated by such as Hayden White⁴², and ‘traditional’ history, practised, for example, by G R Elton.⁴³ For Baxendale and Pawling:

It is narratives and their structures which help to guide us through the morass of facts and help to impose some order on historical events. At the same time, we have to remember that history does not *just* consist of preformed narratives or ‘tropes’, and we should concentrate on the ‘uses’ which are made of these narratives, rather than just fetishising their timelessness or universality.⁴⁴

In this study, I construct a narrative from the changing meanings of 1930s cinema and cinema-going in Nottingham in order to analyse why and how these meanings have continued to change.

Notwithstanding that this is an analysis of 1930s cinema-going in a specific city, it also takes into account the wider national historical implications of the decade, in particular the social history which enables me to contextualise the role of the cinema in society as a whole.⁴⁵ In terms of general

histories of the 1930s, I have found it valuable to bear in mind the different interpretations made by historians in each subsequent period; a consideration which frames my central concern of the changing meanings accorded to cinema.⁴⁶

My thesis includes a study of memory narratives of cinema-going in the local press and the historical method of regarding history as a series of narratives extends to this material. As Andrew Hoskins argues, memories cannot be regarded as simply a recovery of the past, but as a means of utilising the past for present purposes.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Roger Bromley asserts the particular significance of the interwar period for popular memory in Britain, and traces how popular cultural forms have influenced the social production of those memories.⁴⁸ From this perspective, I illustrate that process at work in the local press treatment of cinema memories.

Nottingham: 'Queen of the Midlands'

In order to contextualise this study of Nottingham's cinema history, an historical overview of the city is useful. General histories of Nottingham are, typically, popular celebrations, written by local people for local people. This type of popular account is particularly well-represented by Emrys Bryson, who, at the time of writing Nottingham's history in 1974, was a well-established journalist on the *Nottingham Evening Post*.⁴⁹ A number of other histories of the city have also been produced, of which the most valuable for my purposes has been the edited collection, *A Centenary History of Nottingham*.⁵⁰ The particular merit of this work lies in the fact that, as John

Beckett, the editor, so accurately states in his introduction, this is “a critical discussion, not a gilded celebratory account”.⁵¹

In histories of Britain, Nottingham is rarely accorded more than a footnote or a passing reference. These tend to refer either to the city’s pronounced social problems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the result of rapid population growth, industrialisation, and the lateness of enclosure in the city), or to its radical politics in the form of the Luddite or Chartist movements.⁵² Thus, of Nottingham’s social history as a whole, relatively little is known outside the region. The city’s very own mythical hero, Robin Hood (such is the claim), is the main referent for those who haven’t visited. Others may know of Nottingham lace, and football fans may recall Nottingham Forest FC’s most successful period under the management of Brian Clough in the 1970s.

Nottingham is a medium-sized city with a population today of 300,000 and around 270,000 in the 1930s. Located in the East Midlands, Nottingham became Britain’s most important lace-making centre in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century saw the growth of hosiery and textiles, which were joined in the first quarter of the twentieth century by the pharmaceuticals, tobacco and bicycle industries.

Intertwined with the city’s history is its individual place image and mythology.⁵³ Nottingham’s self-proclaimed title, ‘Queen of the Midlands’, is significant in this respect. The first recorded usage of the term was around 1870, although its origins are obscure.⁵⁴ The term is still frequently used by the local press, popular accounts of the city and local city boosterism in general. Through this title, the city’s image is asserted in opposition to that of

the heavily industrialised northern cities, which typically have pronounced masculine connotations; for example, 'King' Cotton ruled Manchester in its nineteenth-century industrial heyday.⁵⁵

Nottingham City Council has been influential in establishing the city's claim to be 'Queen of the Midlands'. The city handbooks of the 1930s regularly used the term and their visual imagery was primarily feminine. For example, one cover featured a photograph of a statue of a goddess in the newly-built Council House who has her arms out to embrace the major architectural signifiers of the city: that very same Council House and Nottingham Castle.⁵⁶ The text emphasised Nottingham's cleanness and greenness, presented as the result of its feminised industrial base: "Smoke and grime, the attendants of industry in many other centres, could never be tolerated where delicate lace and fine silk stockings are produced".⁵⁷ The establishment of the lace industry imbued Nottingham with its feminine associations, leading to the development of other 'feminine' industries, a large female workforce and a corresponding intensification of the city's 'feminisation'. Although lace making was in decline throughout the twentieth century it remained central to the city's self-image in the 1930s.⁵⁸

Three major companies dominated Nottingham's industry in the inter-war period: Raleigh, Boots and John Player. All three maintain the feminised tradition of light industries requiring a large female workforce. These have also served to differentiate Nottingham from the heavy 'masculinised' industries of the north, such as Sheffield's steel or Newcastle's shipbuilding. Furthermore, Boots were at this time developing products of particular use and importance to women – cosmetics, which eclipsed lace and silk stockings as

the prime signifier of femininity. J B Priestley cites women beautifying themselves and “factory girls looking like actresses” as representative of the mood of the 1930s.⁵⁹

Rob Shields’ *Places on the Margin* explores how some ‘marginal’ places attain their individual associations and place images.⁶⁰ He argues that “the cultural context of images and myths adds a socially constructed level of meaning to the *genus loci*, the classics’ ‘unique sense of place’ said to derive from the forms of the physical environment in a given site.”⁶¹ His study of Brighton traces the town’s development from the royal patronage (by the Prince Regent) of the eighteenth century, through its early twentieth-century manifestation as the prime location for a ‘dirty weekend’ to its more recent renown as a gay centre.⁶² I indicate a parallel pattern of development in Nottingham, based on its feminised image which began with the eighteenth-century establishment of the lace industry.

Furthermore, I apply Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’, developed in *The Long Revolution*, to the significance of Nottingham’s place image.⁶³ This idea was summarised by Ian Taylor *et al* as the belief that: “the definitive cultural character of any social formation could best be grasped in the examination of the routine and taken-for-granted ‘social practices’ that characterised that social formation.”⁶⁴ In that tradition, I aim to reveal some elements of Nottingham’s ‘structure of feeling’ in the 1930s through a study of its cinema. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, Nottingham’s 1930s cinemas had a significant impact on both the cultural and spatial character of the city.

Nottingham in the 1930s, with its wide industrial base and ventures into new industries such as pharmaceuticals, was reasonably well positioned to withstand the Depression. Colin Griffin, however, argues that the public persona of Nottingham in the inter-war years as a pretty, prosperous city masks the high levels of unemployment suffered as a result of its very lack of 'male' industries.⁶⁵ Griffin's claim indicates the mythic nature of Nottingham's femininity, constructed largely by the City Council as a means of asserting the city's superiority to its rivals. Myth is resistant to mere 'facts': as Roland Barthes argues, it "essentially aims at causing an immediate impression – it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its actions are assumed to be stronger than the rational explanation which may later belie it".⁶⁶ Thus Nottingham could maintain its myth of feminine superiority, with its 'clean, green city', even in the 1930s slump when, according to Griffin, it suffered disproportionately to the rest of the region, partly as a result of that very 'fact' of its 'superiority'.

Nottingham's feminine identity is also relevant to its reception of cinema as a component of mass culture. As Andreas Huyssen argues, mass culture is considered by some critics to embody distinctly feminine overtones. Mass culture has been defined as feminine because of its perceived escapist, unchallenging, socially cohesive nature; the nature of "woman", according to such critics.⁶⁷ Huyssen traces this argument from the late nineteenth century, when mass culture first originated in the form of popular novels and magazines. By the 1930s, the cinema had become a crucial element in mass culture as cinema admissions in Britain had reached 1027 million per year by the end of the decade.⁶⁸ I would argue that, closely interwoven with its

feminine image is Nottingham's reputation as a pleasure-loving city. According to Priestley in 1933, "the city has always had a reputation for enjoying itself". From this, Priestley constructs a specifically male model of pleasure that was offered by Nottingham's girls: "It was supposed to be a paradise for commercial travellers of the livelier sort. Rumour had it that the place was rich with pretty girls who were anything but prudes. There were goings-on in Nottingham."⁶⁹ The city did have a higher proportion of women than men in the 1930s and higher than average proportion of single, independent women earning their own living.⁷⁰ As Priestley suggests, this preponderance of women contributed to the air of gaiety which he found in Nottingham.⁷¹ One of the primary associations of femininity is with pleasure, and more particularly with the pleasures afforded by mass culture. And as Richards notes, cinema in the 1930s was particularly popular with women.⁷²

Nottingham in the 1930s underwent a significant amount of change and expansion, to which cinema made an important contribution. In 1929 the city centre gained the new Council House, resulting in a total reconstruction of the adjoining square, with the removal of the market and a greater emphasis on 'genteel' middle-class shops (thus enhancing Nottingham's appeal to women)⁷³ and facilities, including a prestigious new cinema, the Ritz, which opened in 1933.

I have drawn on city studies to devise the theoretical framework which underpins the elements of my thesis that focus on cinema's place in the construction of city space.⁷⁴ Moreover, in keeping with the national trend, suburbanisation was a significant feature of 1930s Nottingham, with the building of large quantities of both council and private housing around the

city. Making reference to studies of suburbia enables me to evaluate cinema's role not only as an urban phenomenon, but also as a significant factor in the growth and identity of the suburbs.⁷⁵ Central to the social facilities of these suburbs was the cinema, which was often the sole entertainment available there.

The Place of the Local Press

As the local press is the main primary source of my research, the workings of the local press and the constraints on it are crucial to my understanding and analysis of the material. The subject of the thesis is the 1930s cinema's changing meanings in the forum of the local press. In order to analyse this effectively it is necessary to take into account the extent to which the press constructs and impacts on the cinema debates which it presents. This approach is in accord with the view of history underlying my study, which asserts that there are a number of differing discourses on particular topics, rather than one all-inclusive, absolute 'truth'. Thus I do not treat the press coverage of cinema solely as a factual resource, but as a text. This approach is outlined in *Paper Voices*, by A C H Smith *et al*, with an introduction by Stuart Hall.⁷⁶ This work studies the changing ways in which the press reported on social change over a thirty-year period. Hall states that:

We approached the newspaper as a structure of meanings, rather than as a channel for the transmission and reception of news. Our study, therefore, treated newspapers as *texts*: literary and visual constructs, employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in its widest sense.⁷⁷

This theory of news-making supports my interpretation of the material in the local press, which I regard as producing both a contemporaneous and retrospective discourse on the 1930s cinema. Hall argues: "that, alongside any

day's 'news' there is a continuous and evolving *definition of what constitutes news* at any significant historical moment.”⁷⁸ This observation is borne out by my findings which denote that the extent, style and content of cinema coverage is subject to substantial variation over the seventy-year period. I aim to demonstrate that the press is sets an agenda and constructs meanings of cinema which change significantly over time. As Hall argues: “the collective identity of a newspaper rests not simply on *what* is said....but on *how* what is said is presented, coded, shaped within a set of signifying meaning-structures.”⁷⁹

The press then, has a crucial role in shaping perceptions of events by the frame, angle and extent of its coverage. As Bob Franklin and David Murphy argue: “News is not the outcome of ‘real’ events. It is the outcome of production processes and work routines of journalists who produce *accounts* of events.”⁸⁰ I am concerned here with how the construction of news has influenced both the extent and forms which cinema reporting has taken.

As my work is based on local press reporting over a seventy-year period, it is necessary to indicate the changes which have taken place in the local press in that time. These changes are significant for two major reasons. Firstly, the local press had a very different relationship to the national press in the 1930s than it does today; so much so that it was only in the inter-war period that sales of the national daily newspapers even overtook those of the local dailies.⁸¹ This meant the local press at that time included a large proportion of national and international news. Today, national papers significantly outsell the locals so only the most significant national stories are reported in the local press.⁸² As Mike Glover points out, the small-scale

national news stories that regularly made headlines in the local press of the 1930s would be unthinkable today.⁸³ To illustrate this, in 1930s Nottingham, representative examples of its national news coverage included a shoplifter in Newcastle claiming he had been influenced by films he had seen,⁸⁴ and a clergyman in Sheffield complaining about film advertisements he deemed to be immoral.⁸⁵ This means that local cinemas news was situated in a far wider context in the 1930s than it is today, when only the most significant news stories taking place outside the local area are reported.

Secondly, the proliferation of new media and changing lifestyles has created a different role for the press. Many people now look to the press not just for news but for additional features, such as comment and analysis on culture or sport. Hence the proportion of hard news has decreased year by year from the 1930s.⁸⁶ At the same time, the size of newspapers has expanded as new technology has made the print and production process both easier and cheaper.⁸⁷

Throughout the 1930s Nottingham sustained four local daily newspapers: two morning titles, the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* (NDG) and the *Nottingham Journal* (NJ), and two evening titles, the *Nottingham Evening Post* (NEP) and *Nottingham Evening News* (NEN). These were aimed at rather different markets, as their cinema coverage, discussed below, illustrates. The *Nottingham Daily Guardian* was a traditional, news-heavy, middle-class paper. In the style of *The Times*, it maintained its small ads on the front page throughout the period; and news coverage began on the inside pages. The *Guardian* had a preponderance of City and financial information, council news and coverage of largely middle-class sports and pursuits, such as

foxhunting. The emphasis was on hard news, rather than features and light-hearted items. I would suggest that, with these priorities, *The Guardian* had a gender bias towards men. Therefore, it did not include a substantial amount of cinema coverage, bearing in mind that cinema in the 1930s was more popular among women. The majority of the cinema news in *The Guardian* related to the city's most prestigious cinemas, which reflected the middle-class focus of its news coverage.

The *Nottingham Evening Post* contained the most cinema coverage of all the local papers. The *Post* had a tabloid style, with a high proportion of sensational news stories, features, a women's page and jokes. It was the youngest in tone, the most up-to-date and the most female-centred in both style and content. *The Nottingham Journal* was a predominantly middle-class, middle-aged paper. This was very home-oriented, with coverage of events such as the Ideal Homes Exhibition; it did not run sensational tabloid style stories and contained little cinema coverage. The *Nottingham Evening News* was the most tabloid and working-class newspaper of the four and had the second highest level of cinema coverage. It also published a separate mid-day sportsman's special which concentrated primarily on racing, and a Saturday football news. The *Evening News* contained the least hard news and the most features. This was aimed particularly at men, with its extensive sports coverage, and also at the older age group; both its layout and style of news presentation were very traditional. These factors indicate why cinema news and advertisements were markedly less prominent than in the *Post*.

So what form did cinema coverage take in the 1930s local press? In keeping with the orientation of the press in the period, it was predominantly

hard news, such as plans to open new cinemas, accounts of cinema openings, questions of morality (such as the physical and psychological dangers of cinemas), plus cinema advertisements. This local cinema information was supplemented by regular film reviews and stories about Hollywood stars.

As a point of comparison, modern day cinema coverage in the local press is both very different in content and very much less than that of the 1930s. As with other national stories, film gossip is largely absent from the local press but people's memories of cinema-going *are* a regular feature, forming part of the rise of the human interest story, the shift, as Rod Pilling describes it, "from public interest to interesting the public". He adds that, alongside this, there is also a strong demand for stories about the community.⁸⁸ Cinema coverage exemplifies this trend by nostalgic accounts emphasising cinema's central role to the local community, albeit a remembered community.

My discussion of the post-war period focuses on how that period viewed the 1930s cinema and imbued it with very different meanings to those which it was accorded contemporaneously. The number of local daily newspapers declined steeply in the post-war period, with the *Nottingham Evening Post* now the sole survivor in Nottingham. In addition, there are a number of weekly free newspapers plus some small-scale community newspapers, of which one, the *Basford Bystander* (BB), contains a particularly significant proportion of cinema coverage.

Although my main primary source is the local press, I draw on other primary material which informs press coverage of cinema: publications produced by Nottingham City Council and the cinema trade press. The main Nottingham City Council sources that I utilise are: some of the materials

produced by the Council for internal use; and its promotional publications, of which the annual official handbook is a particularly important example. The minutes of Council meetings, however, are not consulted because, while these are a source of valuable material, the thesis maintains a focus on how the 1930s cinema is understood in public rather than private forums. Similarly, this applies to oral histories, which have been so well-employed in other research. Hence the unpublished Council papers which I consult are solely those which detail the 1930s slum clearance programme and the new housing estates and I utilise those to enable me to map out the physical changes to Nottingham which were reported in the local press, and which were significant to cinema building there in the 1930s. The annual handbooks are valuable as a means of assessing the similarities between the city images which the Council and the local press aim to project, in relation not only to cinema, but also to the substantial changes wrought in Nottingham city and its suburbs in the 1930s, which had a profound impact on cinema and the patterns of cinema-going.

The cinema's trade press, particularly *Kine Weekly* and *Kine Yearbook*, are utilised to provide a national overview of the main priorities, issues and challenges facing the industry over the period, and this material offers a means of situating Nottingham cinemas in the national context. So, for example, comparing the coverage of the newly-opened cinemas in the trade press with that in the local press enables me to evaluate and contextualise the local press claims that the architecture of Nottingham cinemas was in the vanguard of style and modernity, and was extremely well-regarded nationally.⁸⁹

The Structure and Argument of the Thesis

Through an analysis of its coverage in the local press, my study traces the changing meaning of 1930s cinema in Nottingham. My central argument is that 1930s cinema has been appropriated by many different interest groups, both during the 1930s and retrospectively, and hence its meanings have changed in line with the respective agenda of each. More specifically, I argue that the meanings of 1930s cinema have altered with regard to changing perceptions of the city and the suburbs, of modernity and tradition, of the perceived aesthetic value of cinema architecture, community, and the social value of personal memory. Utilising the local press as my main primary source is what enables me to situate cinema within those very different contexts, because the local press does not report cinema as a separate entity but as an intrinsic part of the city and hence, in the 1930s, as an important source of civic pride. Furthermore, for the local press, cinema forms a part of its owner wider agendas, which change substantially over time. Hence, as regards retrospective meanings, the thesis argues that these meanings have as much to do with contemporary concerns as they do with those of the 1930s. The study traces the shifts in perspective which inform how the 1930s saw itself, how later periods have regarded both that decade and their own present – either in terms of parallels, contrasts, compensations or lessons to be learned, and why these changes in meaning have taken place. The meaning of 1930s cinema, I suggest, is fluid. In its own time that meaning and usage varied according to prevailing discourses, and to which groups were voicing their concerns.

For example, for Nottingham City Council in the 1930s, cinema maintained the status of an important, high-status facility, which enhanced

both the reconstructed square in the city centre and the newly-built suburbs. However, for some clergymen, cinema was an immoral, lowlife amusement which should not be allowed to open on Sundays. Subsequently, that discourse has continued to shift due to the prevailing mores and concerns of succeeding decades. The contemporary meanings were influenced by the social importance of cinema in the 1930s as a mass medium. Retrospective meanings are bound up in the mythology of 1930s cinema as a 'Golden Age', implying a subsequent sense of loss and decline. Despite some ongoing moral concerns, cinema became more socially acceptable in the 1930s, due both to the greater regulation of film content, and to the increasingly high-class cinemas that were built in the decade. This was particularly true of those in the suburbs, and for many suburbanites it can be argued that cinema-going played an important part in their quest for embourgeoisment.

In the 1930s, cinema in the local press was associated with modernity, luxury and social prestige. This was succeeded by a post-war silence on cinema and, from around 1955 to 1965, reports of cinema closures portrayed a sense that cinema was a dying, old-fashioned social practice, occasionally lamented but never perceived as reclaimable. Instead, it was presented as something which had belonged firmly to the older generation. Following that, cinema was again largely absent from the local press until the 1980s, when articles and letters regarding cinema architecture and people's memories of cinema-going began to appear and continue today. The themes which have marked this phase of cinema reporting are those of tradition, community, nostalgia for the 'Golden Age' of the 1930s cinema, and a recognition of the architectural value of cinemas. This is also the case in the video *Nottingham at*

the Cinema which includes stills of a number of former cinemas and recounts people's fond memories of frequenting both the 'fleapits' and the luxurious picture palaces. Although the video recalls one hundred years of Nottingham cinema-going, there is a particular emphasis on memories of cinema-going in the 1930s and during the Second World War. Similarly, in a supplement to the *Nottingham Evening Post*, entitled *Bygones*, the issue in 1995 that focused on cinema is decidedly weighted towards the same period.

In addition to claiming that cinema is appropriated by various interest groups to mean certain things, this thesis also argues that the 1930s are highly significant in terms of British cinema history. This was the decade of the 'cinema boom' in Britain when the most cinemas were built, including many of great architectural merit, and this has had a lasting impact on our cities and towns.⁹⁰ Cinema-going occupied an important place in 1930s social history: cinema admissions rose throughout that decade and going to see a film came to be regarded as an integral part of everyday life for much of the population.⁹¹ There is also a greater proportion of cinema memories of the 1930s in the local press than of any other decade, which is indicative of the ongoing cultural significance of cinema in that decade. This emphasis is arguably related to both the subsequent decline of cinema-going, and to what Roger Bromley claims to be the particular significance of the decade as a whole to the British national psyche.⁹²

My study is in two parts, each of which comprises four chapters. Part One examines 1930s cinema in Nottingham from the perspective of the newspaper coverage accorded to it in that decade. The themes of Part One are: cinema's place in the remodelling of Nottingham's city centre in the 1930s; its

role and significance in the new suburbs; cinema promotion, including advertisements and local press articles on the opening of new cinemas; and concerns over the possible moral and physical dangers of cinema.

Part Two examines retrospective accounts of 1930s cinema. The four chapters form two pairs: the first of which utilises material of the 1950s and 1960s, while the second is drawn from newspaper coverage in the period from the late 1970s to the present. The first pair of chapters survey the postwar downturn in cinema attendance leading to mass closures and cinema's (largely unsuccessful) attempts to modernise itself and appeal to a mass audience again. The second pair investigate how 1930s cinema has been re-evaluated since the late 1970s; both in terms of popular memory of cinema-going and the appreciation of cinema architecture, leading to a renewed interest in the 1930s cinema.

In summary, then, my major findings are as follows. Firstly, that the meanings of the 1930s cinema are not fixed but are constructed according to the different concerns of each period and that, through this process, these readings affect subsequent periods. Secondly, that the local press, in terms of both its tone and content, is crucial in determining that agenda and cannot be regarded as a 'transparent' news vehicle. Through the press, those meanings are constructed in a manner which made cinema a signifier of the city in the 1930s through its associations with modernity and luxury. The retrospective meanings have changed to reflect subsequent concerns of the city. Thirdly, that cinema, when studied in its wider social contexts, can provide valuable information about a specific city's social structure, architecture, structure of feeling, place image and history.

NOTES

¹ Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I B Tauris, 2002) pp. 3-4.

² A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 413.

³ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

⁴ Ibid., pp. 40-56.

⁵ Ibid., p. xviii.

⁶ Nelson Goodman's 'How Buildings Mean', *Critical Inquiry*, June 1985 pp. 642-53, demonstrates the value of studying buildings in terms of their meaning, and suggests that this meaning may transcend the purpose for which it was built.

⁷ P Morton Shand, *Modern Theatres and Cinemas* (London: Batsford, 1930).

⁸ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969); David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (London: Architectural Press, 1980); Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996).

⁹ Sharp, *Picture Palace*, pp. 114-26.

¹⁰ See, for example, Allen Eyles, *ABC: The First Name in Entertainment* (London: BFI, 1993); *Gaumont British Cinemas* (Burgess Hill, West Sussex: Cinema Theatre Association, 1996); *The Granada Theatres* (London: BFI, 1998); *Odeon Cinemas: Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation* (London: BFI, 2002).

¹¹ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater Starring S Charles Lee* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹² Ibid., p. xii.

¹³ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

¹⁴ Jeffrey Richards, 'Cinema and Cinema-going in Birmingham in the 1930s', in J K Walton and J Walvin, eds., *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 31-52.

¹⁵ John Sedgewick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds., *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

¹⁹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁰ Annette Kuhn, 'Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (October 1999) pp. 531-43; *An Everyday Magic*.

²¹ So Stacey's questionnaire focuses primarily on films and film stars; few questions ask about the respondents' memories of the cinema building. *Star Gazing*, pp. 244-51.

²² John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* (London: BFI, 1986); Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³ See, for example, David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: BFI, 1980) and *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Routledge, 1988); John Tulloch, *Watching Television Audiences: Cultural Theories and Methods* (London: Arnold, 2000).

²⁴ Significant American works on cinema history which incorporate film practice and film history include the following: Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scibner's 1990); Charles Musser with Carol Nelson, *High-class Moving Pictures: Lyman S Howe and the Forgotten Era of Travelling Exhibition, 1880-1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (New York: Scribner, 1990); Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For social histories of cinema in the USA see, for example, Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. updated ed. (New York: Vintage, 1994); Gregory A Waller, ed., *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002). For studies of spectatorship, see, for example, Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993); Robert C Allen, 'From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History', in Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey, eds., *Screen Histories: A Screen Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 13-21.

²⁵ Gregory A Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City 1896-1930*. (London: Smithsonian Institution, 1995) pp. 72-4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-79.

²⁷ Kathryn H Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1996).

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- ²⁸ Robert C Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1985) pp. 194-207.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-7.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- ³² Waller, *Main Street Amusements*, p. xvi.
- ³³ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- ³⁵ John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁴⁰ Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, p.5.
- ⁴¹ See, for example, from the more traditional perspective E H Carr, *What Is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); G R Elton, *The Practice of History* (London: Fontana, 1990). For approaches to developments such as oral history and women's history see Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For a thorough survey of historical theory see Michael Stanford, *A Companion to the Study of History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?' From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995); Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999). For studies with an emphasis on structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism in history, see Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- ⁴² Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- ⁴³ Elton, *Practice of History*.
- ⁴⁴ Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁵ For example, A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* which contains some coverage of social history, including cinema; John Stevenson, ed., *Social Conditions in Britain Between the Wars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977); Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); John Stevenson and Chris Cook *The Slump: Society and Politics During the Depression* ((London: Jonathan Cape, 1977).
- ⁴⁶ Baxendale and Pawling summarise some of the changes in interpretation by historians that the 1930s have undergone, *Narrating the Thirties*, pp. 140-67. An examples of this shift is their comparison between Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann's *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* ((London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) which had a left-wing orientation, and

Stevenson and Cook's *The Slump* which formed part of the Thatcherite agenda, whereby the governments of the 1930s were regarded as having taken the right approach by not introducing specific measures designed to reduce unemployment.

⁴⁷ Andrew Hoskins, 'New Memory: Mediating History', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol 21. No. 4 (October 2001) pp. 333-46.

⁴⁸ Roger Bromley, *Lost Narratives: Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁴⁹ Emrys Bryson, *Portrait of Nottingham* (London: Robert Hale, 1974).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Malcolm I Thomis, *Old Nottingham* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1968) and *Politics and Society in Nottingham 1785-1835* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); Geoffrey Trease, *Nottingham: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1970); J D Chambers, *Modern Nottingham in the Making* (Nottingham: Nottingham Journal, 1945) and *A Century of Nottingham History* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1952); Richard Silburn, *One Hundred Years of Nottingham Life* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1984); Duncan Gray, *Nottingham: Settlement to City* (Nottingham: Nottingham Cooperative Society, 1953); K C Edwards. ed. *Nottingham and its Region* (Nottingham: British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1966), John Beckett, ed., *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Beckett, *Centenary History*, p. 1.

⁵² See, for example, Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

Nottingham's political history is discussed on pp. 390-1 and the problems caused by the lateness of enclosure in the city on p. 28, p. 381.

⁵³ For a discussion of the place images and mythology of individual cities, see Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England. A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵⁴ Colin Griffin, 'The Identity of a Twentieth-century City', in *Centenary History*, p. 421.

⁵⁵ The example of both Manchester and Sheffield as 'gendered' cities is discussed in Ian Taylor et al, *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 32, and is referred to throughout the book in relation to the two cities' industrial and economic history.

⁵⁶ *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1934.

⁵⁷ *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1932, p. 21.

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1932, 1933, 1936.

⁵⁹ J B Priestley, *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What one Man Saw and Thought During a Journey Through England During the Autumn of the Year 1933* (London: Heinemann, 1984. First pub. William Heinemann, 1934), pp. 374-80. Priestley was a 'sociologist-journalist' whose views were very well-known through being regularly disseminated on BBC radio.

⁶⁰ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 73-116.

⁶³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961) pp. 47-52. The concept of structure of feeling is further developed in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 128-35.

⁶⁴ Taylor et al, *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Griffin, 'The Identity of a Twentieth Century City', in *Centenary History* p. 425. In 1931 male unemployment in Nottingham was 12,024 out of 75,825, while female unemployment was only 2,997 out of 46,927. This compares to figures for Leicester of 7,816 unemployed men out of 72,701 and 3,876 women out of 49,074 (*National Census*, 1931).

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993) p. 130.

⁶⁷ Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman', in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) pp. 188-207.

⁶⁸ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Priestley, *English Journey*, p. 131.

⁷⁰ *National Census*, 1931.

⁷¹ Priestley, *English Journey*, p. 131.

⁷² Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 15.

⁷³ For a study of women's association with shopping, see, for example, Peter Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption* (London: Sage, 1997).

⁷⁴ For some of the classic studies of the city see, for example, Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations and its Prospects* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), and *The Culture of Cities* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1940); Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), which contains seminal works by Weber, Simmel, Spengler, Park, Wirth, Redfield and Singer. Mike Savage and Alan Warde's *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) offers a valuable survey of, and commentary on, studies of the city. I have found studies of particular cities, such as Asa Briggs' history *Victorian Cities*, especially relevant. Briggs traces the development of Manchester's depiction as a 'shock city' due to its unique status as the world's first industrial city, pp. 83-135. This provided a model for my discussion of Nottingham's place mythology as a feminine city, the 'Queen of the Midlands'.

⁷⁵ See, for example, F M L Thompson, ed., *The Rise of Suburbia* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982); David C Thorns, *Suburbia* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972); the valuable collections, Richard Harris and Peter Larkham, eds., *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form and Function* (London: E & F N Spon, 1999), and Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (London: Pimlico, 1994).

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- ⁷⁶ A C H Smith with Elizabeth Immirzi and Trevor Blackwell, with an introduction by Stuart Hall, *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change 1935-1965* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975).
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 21.
- ⁸⁰ Bob Franklin and David Murphy, *What News? The Market, Politics and the Local Press* (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 60.
- ⁸¹ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 44.
- ⁸² Franklin, Murphy, *What News?* p. 5.
- ⁸³ Mike Glover, 'Looking at the World Through the Eyes of...: Reporting the "Local" in Daily, Weekly and Sunday Local Newspapers', in Bob Franklin and David Murphy, eds., *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 117.
- ⁸⁴ NJ, 4 November 1931.
- ⁸⁵ NEP, 26 February 1932.
- ⁸⁶ Curran, Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 96.
- ⁸⁷ Rod Pilling, 'The Changing Role of the Local Journalist: From Faithful Chronicler of the Parish Pump to Multiskilled Compiler of an Electronic Database', in *Making the Local News*, pp. 190-91.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 187.
- ⁸⁹ For two articles of particular relevance in this respect see 'Architecture of Pleasure' and 'Planning a New Cinema', *Kine Weekly*, 8 January 1931.
- ⁹⁰ Sharp, *Picture Palace*, p. 96.
- ⁹¹ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 1, p. 18.
- ⁹² Bromley claims that the 1930s has a particular resonance in Britain due to the Depression and the Second World War, and the subsequent changes to British society as a result of those two events. Bromley, *Lost Narratives*, pp. 1-23.

PART ONE

CONTEMPORARY REPORTING OF THE 1930S CINEMA

CHAPTER ONE

CONTESTED SPACE, LEISURE AND CONSUMPTION The 1929 Reconstruction of the Market Place and its Impact on Cinema and the City

To our new Exchange men and women will go with a vision which will make Nottingham a pre-eminent city in the country.¹

In the 1930s, cinema attendance in Britain increased significantly: from 903 million admissions in 1933 (the first year for which there are reliable statistics) to 990 million by 1939.² The 1930s also witnessed the boom in cinema-building in Britain.³ Furthermore, cinema-going became more socially acceptable in the course of the 1930s. While cinema retained its popularity with the working-classes, as the decade progressed the middle-classes formed an ever larger proportion of the audience.⁴ The inclusion of facilities such as tea-rooms and the location of many of the new cinemas in the suburbs added to the middle-class acceptance of cinema in the period. This chapter analyses the cinemas built in Nottingham's city centre in the 1930s which had significant appeal to the middle classes, in order to demonstrate and analyse the changing composition of the cinema audience in that decade.

In Nottingham, the cinemas built in both the city centre and the new suburbs in the 1930s (the latter forming the basis of the following chapter) made a significant contribution to enhancing the reputation of cinema as social practice. In the city centre, the building of the Ritz cinema in 1933 was central to this process.

This chapter argues that the Ritz constituted a significant element of the 'gentrification' of Nottingham's Old Market Square, which began in 1929 with the opening of the city's new Council House and Exchange Building. The Council House is Nottingham's seat of government in which all the council meetings are held, and it forms part of the Exchange Building, the remainder of which is devoted to retail outlets. A long-running local battle ensued over the expense and exclusivity of the Council House and the resultant change in usage of the Old Market Square. Cast in white Portland stone, with a vast dome of a classical style dominating the city skyline, its symbolic preserve radiated out around the city, impacting on leisure, shopping, and the usage of city space.

Specifically, the redevelopment of the square involved the removal of the centuries-old market and fair, and the Council's fostering of middle-class retail and leisure outlets in the area. Particularly significant to this process was the opening of the Ritz, which was to become Nottingham's pre-eminent cinema of the period and which was built on land which had been designated a slum area. The Ritz cinema, actively supported by the local council, played a crucial role in the redefinition and remaking of the city. Cinema, which had earlier been the scourge of middle-class respectability⁵, had, by the 1930s, become, in some of its guises, a key signifier of that very respectability. In the process, cinema became central to debates over the meaning of the city itself, over notions of inclusion and exclusion, and was crucial in establishing precisely for whom the city centre was embellished and redefined.

Through a case study of the Ritz, this chapter argues that cinemas are products of particular social forces and movements, and that their meanings can

only be fully understood in that context. In order to understand the cinema's role in the remaking of the Old Market Square it is necessary to situate it within the redevelopment project as a whole. Hence the following section outlines the plans for the new Council House and the ensuing controversy. The chapter goes on to analyse the debates over the use of the square, particularly for leisure and consumption practices. The final section then provides a detailed account of the opening of the Ritz and the manner in which this was presented in the local press, arguing that it was portrayed as a notable asset of the city and, more specifically, as one which was instrumental in establishing the middle-class locus of the Old Market Square.

The Remaking of the City Centre and the Council House Controversy

Louis Wirth defined the city as “the initiating and controlling center of economic, political and cultural life”.⁶ Within the city, the city centre is the apex of that controlling force. Customarily the location of civic power, it has particular significance in terms of public perceptions of the city. Thus in Nottingham, the rebuilding of the Council House and the concomitant restructuring of the market place in 1929 were central to the City Council's attempts to alter the perceptions and uses of the Old Market Square: Nottingham's economic, political and symbolic centre. Prior to the building of the new Council House, Nottingham was perceived as a town rather than a city, as evidenced in the following quote from a participant in the *Nottingham Oral History Project*. Born in 1906, Alice looked back on the city in which she grew up, stating that: “It wasn't a city centre in my day but a market place.”⁷

Nottingham's Old Market Square is one of the largest city squares in Europe. Geographically, politically and psychologically, it forms the very heart of the city. A market had been held on that site for hundreds of years. The Council House and Exchange Building occupies a strategically important central position through its domination of the square. The one built in 1929 replaced a more modest Georgian exchange building which the Council deemed no longer "worthy of a progressive city".⁸ The Council House was a crucial component of the inter-war Council's expansionist policy which aimed to consolidate a city image for Nottingham. According to J D Chambers, this policy was a result of the rejection in 1920 of the Council's plans to extend the city boundary. Chambers claims that the Council subsequently "came to identify civic pride and identity with big, sometimes grandiose municipal gestures".⁹ An imposing new council house fulfilled this ambition in an exemplary manner. (The other, equally 'grandiose gesture' underway in the period, namely the building of the new council estates, is discussed in the following chapter.)¹⁰

The Council House plans, begun in 1921, were highly ambitious. Fronting onto the square, the new building would comprise Ionic columns, extensive council chambers, office accommodation and shopping arcades, all of Portland stone and topped by a huge dome. In a design reminiscent of Trafalgar Square, the building was to be 'guarded' by two stone lions situated at either side and the cobbled market place was to be replaced by formal marble walkways and ornamented with fountains. The project was the responsibility of local resident T Cecil Howitt, the architect of Nottingham's council estates in the same period.¹¹ The estimated cost of

the project, £0.5m, caused a public outcry. Controversy over the plans raged for years in the local press in the form of both letters and articles. Opposition to an early plan to devote the new building solely to shops opened up into a debate about public space and exclusion which continued until the mid-1930s.

Controversy was instigated as early as 1924, when the Estates Committee of the Council proposed that the civic buildings be located elsewhere, and that the new building be given over entirely to shops. This proposal was strongly criticised in both the editorials and the letters pages of the local press. Criticism centred on the over-reaching, over-arching dome: for the protestors, both the cost and the grandeur of the dome were deemed fitting for a civic, but *not*, a commercial building. For example, an editorial in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* argued that: “if the civic connection with the site is severed and the place is given over entirely to trading purposes, it is incongruous to crown a group of shops and offices with a magnificent and costly dome more suited to a cathedral”.¹² Letters claimed that the dome was “utterly useless” and “more suitable for the burial place of a great emperor than for a departmental store”.¹³ Faced with such a groundswell of popular opposition, the Council was forced to reinstate the mayoral rooms and Council Chamber into the plans.

So construction went ahead, criticism abated, and in May 1929 the Prince of Wales opened the Council House at a majestic official ceremony. Large crowds gathered to watch yet, hidden behind the rhetoric of the speeches expounding the greatness of the city is an early hint of the public exclusion that was to cause local uproar.¹⁴ The *Nottingham Daily Guardian* report of the opening informs us that:

A modification of the arrangements affecting the general public had to be made at the last minute. It was originally intended to permit spectators to utilise the Processional Way shortly after the Prince had passed along but the main parade was not in readiness for general use, and the public was not permitted to pass the barricade.¹⁵

According to the report, the concrete beneath the slabs had not properly set: yet it had set firmly enough for the slabs to be laid down and for the ceremonial party to walk along the Processional Way, but not 'the people'. They were kept in their place behind the barricade and were soon forbidden to enter the building.

Initially, viewing permits had been issued to members of the public but these were withdrawn in October 1929 due to claims of vandalism. Of the numerous editorials and letters of complaint to the local press, the following quotes are representative: "Each time I see the building the more I hate it, and those people connected with it",¹⁶ and "Let me remind the ratepayers that this is their Council House, and not the private property of any committee".¹⁷ The writers were incensed that as ratepayers they had financed the building, yet were now denied access to it. This sentiment developed into a generalised anger towards the council for having spent so much money on their own building (which became locally known in those weeks of controversy as 'the house of mystery') while other projects (such as running early morning trams for people to travel to their work or providing housing at affordable rents for workers)¹⁸ were not undertaken. Through this process the needs of the people of Nottingham were cast as secondary to those of the Council members. However, the ban remained in force and the Council attempted to justify its imposition by releasing details to the press of the very minor damage caused to the interior décor; damage which could have been averted had a guide accompanied the visiting groups.¹⁹

Despite only having been open to ratepayers for six months, the Council House was the Corporation's most impressive architectural achievement and, as such, was rigorously promoted. In the *Nottingham Official Handbook* under the heading 'The Principal Public Buildings', the grandeur of the Council House is detailed over four lavishly-illustrated pages, while coverage of the city's remaining 'principal' buildings, for example the Guildhall, (all of which *were* open to the public) is restricted to scarcely more than a page each.²⁰

Dogged by controversy since its inception, the Council House was still attracting censure four years after its opening. Throughout this period, the criticism had one prevailing concern: whose Market Square is it and, by implication, whose city? So, for example, in 1933 there were a series of letters of complaint about the amount of money spent on floodlighting the Council House when public transport remained inadequate.²¹ The loss of the market place as an open venue for public meetings was also keenly felt well into the 1930s, with numerous letters in the local press criticising the dominance of the square by civic buildings, arguing that no one section of society should have priority there and that meetings should still be allowed in the square.²² The history of popular reaction to the Council House in the inter-war period hinges on resistance to exclusivity, exclusion and the loss of public space. Even before the public viewing permits were withdrawn there is no indication that the people saw it as 'their' building; instead, it was always read as an external imposition that had wasted ratepayers' money. Issues of exclusion associated with the Council House are in direct opposition to the identity of the Ritz which opened only a few hundred yards away. Despite its calculated appeal to the

middle class and aspiring middle class, as discussed later in the chapter, the Ritz was open six days a week to any member of the public who could afford to buy a ticket.

The continued debates over the Council House were in part due to the way it functioned as a synecdoche, making it the focal point for either criticism or praise of Nottingham and its council. So, for example, both a newspaper article promoting a week of national radio programmes about the city,²³ and the covers of the city's official handbook in the early 1930s, were illustrated with images of the Council House.²⁴ In 1933 the Council began a libel case against a national magazine, *The Independent*, regarding a highly critical article which it planned to run about Nottingham and its council. The article in question also took the Council House as its starting point, contrasting its luxury and beauty with the city's poor housing and economic decline.²⁵

The contestation over space and sectionalism which is central to the debate over Nottingham's Council House parallels David Harvey's study of the Sacre Coeur in Paris, to which Nottingham's white, domed Council House bears some resemblance.²⁶ Harvey's analysis traces the Sacre Coeur's links with reactionary monarchism and Catholicism, but also notes that the site has other very different connotations, such as that of the death of one of the leading figures in the Paris Commune. Throughout the protracted building process, numerous attempts were made by the left wing to curtail the project, which was seen as a symbol of the domination of the reactionary right in France. At one time it looked as though the basilica would never be built, and even in 1897 when it opened for worship, the

motion to destroy the Sacre Coeur was reintroduced. The history of the building of Nottingham's Council House follows a similar oppositional path, during which the meaning of the square to the public and the council came into regular collision.

Middle-class Consumption, Modernity, Fairs and Markets

The Old Market Square, the hub of the city, functioned in a very different way prior to the building of the new Council House. The Georgian Exchange Building, which was its predecessor, housed a range of shops along with the Council Chamber. These included many small, open food shops such as the butchers' shops in the Shambles. According to the *Guardian* in 1926 these "open shops in the Shambles...have long offended good taste".²⁷ Yet this range of shops meant that the site fulfilled the everyday shopping needs of the general public. Of the shops located there, only the National Provincial Bank, Stapletons the drapers and Burtons, a high-class food store, were to remain in the new Exchange Building.²⁸ While the other stores (with the exception of the 'distasteful' butchers) had been offered accommodation, the new rent was prohibitively high and they were forced to relocate.

The slum clearance programme which also began in the 1920s further affected the composition of the city centre shops. Until the early 1930s, some of the streets radiating off from the market place had contained housing. Those on the site which became that of the Ritz cinema in 1933 were among the last in the area to be demolished and those roads had contained some shops in addition to the houses. Up until then, the shops in and around the square were a local as well as a city-centre

facility, which impacted on their meaning and use. They functioned as part of a neighbourhood, which meant that rather than specialising in luxury goods or out-of-the-ordinary items, many of them sold day-to-day essentials for ordinary working people.

When the housing was demolished and the connotations of the market town dispensed with, basic provisions were no longer available in the square. Yet shops, albeit the right kind of shops, were absolutely central to the new Exchange Building, as demonstrated by the aforementioned proposal that the building should be devoted entirely to shops. The new shops were housed in an arcade designed in the Italian piazza style, with connotations for a provincial English audience of elegance and leisured high fashion: press reporting proudly associated the arcades with a palace in Florence and the arcades in Milan.²⁹ Towards the end of the 1930s a ‘then and now’ newspaper feature on the Old Market Square referred to the “massive Council House on the site of the ramshackle old shops and public houses”.³⁰ The quote indicates the extensive scope of the changes to the site. The department store Griffin & Spalding in the Old Market Square, which predated the reconstruction project, was central to the establishment of a consumption-based, middle-class locus. The store’s position and market is clearly defined in its entry in the 1937 Nottingham handbook which proclaims it as: “the shopping rendezvous of the East Midlands. It is at this store fashionable Nottingham assembles to do its buying.”³¹ Following the opening of the Council House the other stores around the square were aimed at a predominantly middle-class market, with a preponderance of drapers, milliners and high-class grocery shops.³²

In order to implement the embourgeoisement project, appropriate middle-class entertainment was required in addition to the retail outlets. As the public house was not considered respectable in the period, there were no proposals to replace the 'ramshackle' ones which had been housed in the previous Exchange Building. While the dance hall was very popular and did not meet with such opprobrium, Nottingham already had two dance halls and, dancing appealed almost exclusively to young single adults.³³ A new cinema was the most suitable option, on the basis that, while regarded in its early days as lower-class, vulgar and "appealing to the lowest sentiments", by the 1930s cinema had constructed a more respectable image and had a greater appeal to the middle-class. As this trend developed, cinemas were increasingly distinguished along class lines. As Richards claims, although cinema by the 1930s appealed to all classes the "cinema audience was not classless ... for the classes rarely mixed at the cinema".³⁴ In this context the middle class would be expected to venture into the Old Market Square to attend a cinema but would be drawn more particularly to such venues that were designed specifically to appeal to them. Furthermore, cinema had a broad demographic base. While the cinema audience of the 1930s comprised a high proportion of teenagers and those in their early twenties, it also included children, family audiences and some middle-aged and elderly people,³⁵ making it "the essential social habit of the age".³⁶

I would argue that the Ritz was instrumental in both establishing a middle-class locus for the square, and in gaining its acceptance with the populace as a whole. Until the opening of the Ritz, the Council's efforts to make the Old Market Square grander and more imposing did not proceed smoothly. According to a letter

in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* some months after the building was opened, the Council was unable to find tenants for all the shops in the Exchange Building.³⁷ Furthermore, newspaper reports claimed that the area was declining economically, due to the loss of the market.³⁸ Hence the Council made a number of attempts to revitalise the Old Market Square. In 1930 the *Nottingham Evening Post* reported plans for a series of concerts to be held in the square and for more buses to terminate there.³⁹ By 1933, all but three of the fleet of Corporation buses terminated in the Old Market Square.⁴⁰ These measures were early indications that attempts to develop the area into a site of middle-class consumption had achieved only limited success.

The plans for the Council House extended to remodelling the whole of the Old Market Square to create a processional way and formal gardens. This necessitated the removal of the daily open-air market and the annual Goose Fair, both of which had taken place on that site for centuries. The consequences of this move are highly significant. An outdoor market in the centre of a city gives it a parochial 'market town' status that is opposed to grand city ambitions. The language used to describe the site in the 1932 *Nottingham Official Handbook* makes this clear: "the Old Market Square, formerly tenanted by a picturesque medley of canvas stalls, is now laid out in broad marble pavements".⁴¹ While the word picturesque creates an image of a quaint old-fashioned small town, 'broad marble pavements' connote a grand and imposing city. The signification of marble contrasts strongly with that of the cobblestones it replaced.

The restructuring of Nottingham's market place can be productively studied in relation to the City Beautiful movement, of which Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris is a key example.⁴² According to Engels, quoted in Neil Smith, Paris was rebuilt in order to make working-class resistance more difficult. This was achieved through constructing wide boulevards which cut through the narrow courts and alleys, and turned Paris into a luxury city.⁴³ In particular, the remaking of Nottingham's Old Market Square has significant parallels with Daniel Burnham's influential work in early twentieth-century Chicago, albeit on a smaller scale.⁴⁴ The removal of the slums as a means of creating order and an emphasis on beauty and money rather than social concerns are among the key similarities. In Nottingham it is significant that some of the slum clearance areas in the city centre were located just off the market place. While Council statements did not explicitly link the two projects, the slum clearance programme was underway when the Council House opened, and was completed only three years after, making the two projects almost coterminous. Although some of their aims differed, each of them served to enhance the physical structure of the city whilst furthering its appeal to the middle classes.

As Peter Hall argues, the City Beautiful movement represented "a total concentration on the monumental and on the superficial, on architecture as a symbol of power".⁴⁵ This is demonstrably true of Nottingham's Council House, as illustrated by the recurrent use of terms such as 'awe-inspiring' 'magnificent' and 'momentous' in the newspaper account of its opening.⁴⁶ The Council House was certainly an exemplar of "planning for display, architecture as theatre, design intended to impress".⁴⁷ The on-going public opposition indicates that it was

understood in that way, but also that such an attribute invoked widespread hostility. Local evidence here works against Hall's suggestion that such monuments may have served to distract people from their everyday realities.⁴⁸

The architectural merit of the Council House building was forcefully proclaimed by the council and the local press: it was monumental, awe-inspiring, neo-classical and vast; hence, according to the rhetoric, unarguably beneficial. The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, however, offers a valuable corrective to this claim. Far from the voluble raptures of Nottingham's publicity machine, his uncomplimentary account begins by stating that: "not much can be said in defence of this kind of neo-Baroque display" at a date when "the Stockholm Town Hall was complete and a style congenial to the C20 [had already been] established."⁴⁹

As Pevsner claims, the Council House was not an example of modern architecture, in marked contrast with the design of the Ritz, as discussed in the following section. However, the shopping arcade within the Exchange Building did embody some modern characteristics. Light and airy, it replaced the small dark shops and the 'unhygienic' Shambles and open market.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the shops were designed to accommodate fashion and consumer goods, in preference to food and household necessities: thus incorporating the Exchange Arcade into the modern perception of shopping as pleasurable diversion rather than humdrum necessity. As Don Slater argues, the 1920s "promoted a powerful link between everyday consumption and modernization. From the 1920s, the world was to be modernized partly *through* consumption."⁵¹ From this perspective, it can be argued that Nottingham was modernised by the new shops which occupied the new Exchange

Arcade in 1929. Furthermore, the Electricity Board, the purveyor of the new technology to enable people to modernise their homes, was also located there. The cinema was similarly seen as a representative of modernity, both in terms of film technology and cinema design. As Dennis Sharp claims: “The ‘super’ cinema automatically became associated with ‘modernistic’ expression in architecture. [The 1930s cinemas] prepared the ground for the acceptance of modern ideas in this country in the post-war decades.”⁵²

The market and the fair, however, were regarded as symbols of tradition rather than modernity. Hence, the outdoor market in the square was converted to an indoor market and housed in purpose-built new accommodation some distance away, as part of the creation of a functional locus and a separate leisure-based locus in the city. Goose Fair was moved to a site outside the city centre, which inscribed it with very different meanings.⁵³ The removal of the fair and the opening of the new cinema can be studied in terms of the distinctions made between leisure and pleasure and the ways in which these distinctions are socially sanctioned. Rob Shields, in *Places on the Margin*, defines leisure as “not simply the presence of what is pleasurable ... leisure is what is *licensed* as legitimate pleasure within an economy of coded micro-powers”.⁵⁴ In his study of Victorian holidaymakers at Brighton, Shields distinguishes leisure from unlicensed pleasure, of which he regards the mediaeval carnival as a classic example. While Shields sees the scenes at Brighton as “no medieval carnival” he does regard them as “a metaphor of the carnivalesque loss of identity”.⁵⁵ The carnivalesque spirit of unlicensed pleasure had been retained at the resort, albeit in a less extreme form than that exhibited at the

mediaeval carnival. Following Shields, I argue that in 1930s Nottingham, licensed leisure in the form of a 'super' cinema was drawn into the city centre, while unlicensed pleasure in the form of the carnivalesque Goose Fair and the open market, was relegated to the margins outside and well away from the locus of middle-class consumption. By the 1930s, the cinema audience had become more regulated and more middle-class. Film content also began to be perceived as being more respectable due to the increase in censorship in the period. So in terms of both its audience and its product there is considerable evidence that cinema was becoming increasingly regulated and sanctioned, or a form of licensed leisure.⁵⁶ The 1930s fair, meanwhile, like its mediaeval counterpart, remained a symbol of unlicensed pleasure.

Goose Fair had progressively been attacked and its scope decreased in the nineteenth century. The fair was not held during the First World War and the Council attempted to curtail it permanently afterwards, before retaining it due to the strength of popular opinion: hence the 1920s proposal to relocate it outside the city rather than abolish it.⁵⁷ Reformers complained of the fair's unruly nature, of gangs of youths rampaging through the city, and of its particular impropriety for young girls.⁵⁸ So those who would restrict the fair saw it primarily in terms of restraining sexual licence. This is borne out by Shields who, in his study of Victorian holidaymakers, views the carnivalesque as "a mark of *resistant* bodies which at least temporarily escape or exceed moral propriety."⁵⁹

Tony Bennett's theory of the connections between fairs and museums are apposite here, on the basis that the Council House has many similarities with the

museum. Bennett argues that the fairground can be valuably, if not unproblematically, opposed to the museum.⁶⁰ While the City Council stridently asserted that the new Council House was *not* a museum in its attempt to justify its being closed to the public it did have many characteristics of the museum.⁶¹ The stately atmosphere and exhibits on display meant that it functioned as a private museum for the discrete pleasure of the council and visiting dignitaries. If a central aim of the museum is, as Bennett claims, to regulate the conduct of visitors, Nottingham's Council House was a marked failure.⁶² Rather than educating the city's inhabitants into particular forms of behaviour, the Council took the step of excluding them entirely, because a section did not behave in the appropriate way, resulting in damage to the building's interior. While Bennett claims that fairs were perceived as an aid to social order by the end of the nineteenth century,⁶³ this view is not supported by events in Nottingham in the early part of the twentieth century, when the Council attempted to abolish it permanently. Certainly in pre-war Nottingham local government perceived the fair as a threat to order. For Bennett, fairs, with their increasing mechanisation, also represent a modernising of culture.⁶⁴ (Here he has a rather unlikely ally from the 1930s in J B Priestley who, on his visit to Nottingham, bemoaned the mechanisation of Goose Fair.)⁶⁵ In this respect, the cinema is very similar to the fair, with film having long been seen as the first entertainment form to be dependent on technology.⁶⁶

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White draw out the links between fairs and markets, both of which take place in the open space of the market place.⁶⁷ Following on from that, Mike Featherstone discusses them as "sites of pleasure which are

local, festive and communal and unconnected with the real world”. He claims that this aspect has been retained in today’s fun fairs, “albeit in a more controlled, safer way”.⁶⁸ In 1930s Nottingham ‘the site of pleasure’ was excluded from the city to make way for the ‘real life’ of shops, council business and making money. Leisure, on the other hand, was officially sanctioned in the form of the cinema which the Council hoped would foster trade in the Old Market Square.

Following Featherstone, the communal associations of Nottingham’s market place are significant. As discussed earlier, the sectionalism which was believed to characterise the square after the building of the Council House was greatly resented.⁶⁹ The Council House dominated the Old Market Square and, indeed, its dome was visible from many vantage points across the city. Sites of consumption for the middle classes in the form of high quality shops and the city’s most expensive cinema (with parking for 1,000 cars) replaced the general food stores and housing in and around the square. In the square itself, the communal function of markets, fairs and public meetings had been denied when the space was taken over by the marble pavements fronting the Council House.

The Building of the Ritz: Cinema’s Place in the Redefinition of the City Centre

Nottingham’s premier 1930s cinema, the Ritz, was constructed as a result of a proposed slum clearance area in the heart of the city. Located just off the Old Market Square, the site was in a prime location for commercial redevelopment following the remaking of the square. The cinema quickly became recognised as a prime exemplar of luxury and modernity in Nottingham.

The Ritz was marked from the very inception of the project by a high profile marketing strategy. The pre-publicity began in 1931, two years prior to the opening of the cinema. According to a newspaper report, the Ritz would wreak “a transformation ... within a stone’s throw of the heart of the city” and the enterprise would provide Nottingham “with one of the finest cinemas in the country”. This cinema, which “will represent the last word in the provision for ‘talkies’, comfort and lighting effects”, was to offer seating for 3,000 people, car parking for 1,000, and the project was also to include a new road and new business premises.⁷⁰ In 1931 the site contained a factory and a confectionery shop in addition to the houses. The housing was part of a slum clearance plan which had been approved by the Council in March of that year. Under government guidelines, as a slum clearance area the buildings would be demolished, the site compulsorily purchased by the Council and all the tenants would have to be re-housed in council houses. Therefore, if the slum clearance scheme had gone ahead, Mr Gibbons, the owner of the houses who went on to become the owner of the Ritz, would have been in no position to build the cinema. Instead he would have needed to negotiate with the City Council regarding repurchasing the site.

However, the newspaper report of the planned cinema was printed two weeks before Gibbons’ proposal to build the cinema came before the Council. The newspaper article of November 1931 presented it as a firm project, reported thus: “Towards the latter part of 1932, Nottingham is to be provided with one of the finest cinemas in the country”.⁷¹ There was no indication that the proposal was reliant on the actions of the Council. However, the following month the Housing Committee

advised that the area be taken out of the slum clearance scheme due to the cinema proposal. Accordingly, the clearance and compulsory purchase orders relating to St James Street areas numbers 2 and 3, where the Ritz was built, were rescinded, and “the clearance scheme in respect of that part of the city would be re-cast”.⁷² This raises the question of how and why Gibbons had produced such plans, which were uncontested in the local press, for a site that was at that time scheduled to be requisitioned by the Council.

The inference of the proceedings is that Gibbons was able to realise his project due to being a powerful and influential man in the city. He was described in the press as “a well-known Nottingham business man” who owned all the 1.5 acres of land in the cinema and car park scheme.⁷³ Property owners received only minimal compensation from the Corporation when their property was condemned, so if they were able to do so, it made sound sense economically for them to redevelop what they recognised to be a prime city-centre location.

Thus the site which became the Ritz was taken out of the slum clearance plan in order for the cinema to be built. This benefited the Council significantly, as it was no longer obliged to pay compensation to the owners, nor to rehouse the tenants. Instead, “without any cost to the Corporation all the slum houses would be cleared away and premises of a very high rateable value would be erected in their place”.⁷⁴ Gibbons benefited substantially as he retained his land on a prime site on which to build a highly profitable business. The only losers were the tenants of the houses. Once the properties were taken out of the slum clearance scheme the Council was no longer obliged to rehouse them in council houses. Instead, the

tenants were to be rehoused by the owners and, on the basis of the condemned property they had rented out, the prospects for the tenants' future living conditions were not good.⁷⁵

The building of a super cinema on a slum clearance site can be regarded as a precursor of 'gentrification' as defined by Mike Savage and Alan Ward: "a process of the middle class replacing the working class; increasing property values; alteration in the built environment and the emergence of a new urban style of life".⁷⁶ While the remaking of Nottingham's market square as a whole can be understood in those terms, it is particularly significant to the Ritz, as in that instance working-class housing on the site was replaced by the city's most expensive cinema. Smith argues that "although the emergence of gentrification proper can be traced back to the post-war cities ... there are significant precursors."⁷⁷ Gentrification was no more than sporadic in pre-war Nottingham and only became firmly established as late as the 1990s, in the form of large-scale projects such as the redevelopment of the Lace Market, a former industrial area of the city. However, the opening of the Ritz, dependent as it was on the demolition of working-class housing, may be valuably regarded as a significant antecedent of that subsequent development.

The Ritz became Nottingham's leading cinema of the 1930s and the following factors, as discussed below, were highly significant to this development: the cinema's location; its being part of a chain; its décor and facilities; the presence of a well-respected organist; and a high-profile advertising campaign.

The Ritz was prestigiously located in what was in the process of becoming the city's middle-class locus. Furthermore, it was in the centre of the city and was

very convenient for the new transport routes. The significance of location to a cinema's success is detailed in Douglas Gomery's *Shared Pleasures*.⁷⁸ The cinema was part of a local chain, County Cinemas. This gave it a competitive edge over the Elite, the leading Nottingham cinema of the 1920s, which was independently owned. A spokesman for the Elite in 1935 believed this to be a disadvantage, claiming that there was general agreement in the industry that mergers into big syndicates were imminent, and that the individual houses would not survive.⁷⁹ Gomery, discussing the rise of cinema chains in the USA between 1916 and 1924, argues that their great success was, as with the chain stores, due to the resulting economies of scale and reductions in operating costs.⁸⁰ In 1930s Nottingham this theory was decisively borne out by the success of the Ritz and the relative decline of the Elite. Despite the growing popularity of cinema throughout the 1930s, the turnover and gross profit for the Elite was significantly reduced for the financial year ending 31 March 1935, the first full year of competition with the Ritz.⁸¹

Despite being scaled down from the proposed 3,000-seat venue, the 2,500 seats which the Ritz finally incorporated ensured that it was the equal largest cinema in Nottingham. It was equipped with all the status symbols that the 1930s cinema could offer; boasting its own café, restaurant and ballroom, plus crush halls and a rotunda for around 700 people. The architects of the project also added to its stature. Local firms of architects, the principal ones being Alfred Thraves and Reginald Cooper, designed Nottingham's cinemas in the period. However in the larger cities it was customary for the best cinemas to be designed by London firms specialising in cinema architecture. Gibbons demonstrated the superior status of the Ritz to its

competitors in Nottingham by hiring leading London architects, Verity & Beverley, who designed the cinema in association with Thraves. The esteem in which the practice was held is evidenced in architectural historian David Atwell's appraisal. According to Atwell, "Frank Verity can be said without doubt to have been the first British cinema architect of any international importance."⁸² Verity was already a well-established architect when he designed the Ritz, with a number of highly-respected cinema commissions to his credit.

The frontage of the Ritz was extremely narrow at only 30ft, and hence severely limited the ambitions of the external design. However the pretensions of the building are fully revealed in its interior décor and provision of accommodation for theatrical productions and a full orchestra. A heading in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* specified its "luxurious modern equipment",⁸³ while the *Conscher* organ installed in the Ritz was claimed to be the second largest in Europe.⁸⁴ The internal décor was tasteful and artistic: "the dominant tones in the auditorium are green and gold and lend a light, airy aspect to the building".⁸⁵ The ballroom and café attached to the cinema were fitted out in the same classic, sophisticated colour scheme. This provision of what would today be termed a leisure complex meant that such cinemas in the 1930s "were regarded as civic amenities".⁸⁶ Tea dances and evening dances, with music from "the Ritz music masters"⁸⁷ were held each Thursday and Saturday, and Reginald Foort, the organist "known for his broadcast recitals", was hired for both the opening night and a long-term residency.⁸⁸ The name, the Ritz, is also significant to the associations which the cinema had; the Ritz hotel which opened in London in 1906, was renowned for its luxury and grandeur.

By such means the Ritz was firmly aimed at the middle-class and aspiring middle-class market. As the fashionable elite of Nottingham shopped in the new arcade, so they would choose to watch films at the Ritz. Clearly, an elite does not fill a 2,500 seat cinema in an industrial city such as Nottingham but this process worked by association, whereby the lower middle-class and upper working-class cinema-goers are drawn in by its reputation. The prestige of the Ritz is illustrated in the following quote from a Nottingham man who remembered the cinema in the 1930s: “I was very upset to hear about its closure. It was THE cinema in Nottingham.”⁸⁹

On the day of its opening, December 4, 1933, the Ritz took out a full page of editorial and advertising in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian*. This practice further emphasises the audience at which the Ritz was aimed: this was the city’s most consciously up-market newspaper and the Ritz was the only Nottingham cinema in the period to undertake this practice. The tone of the piece is remarkable in its striking emphasis on strength, steel and destruction. The article states unequivocally that:

It is difficult to acquire a site for a theatre capable of holding an audience of 2,500 in a commanding position in the centre of an ancient, commercial and industrial city like Nottingham, and this has only been possible by the ruthless demolition of existing property.⁹⁰

This signals the fact that the company is happy to broadcast its “ruthless demolition”, and goes so far as to indicate that it regards this as an asset. Alongside the editorial are advertisements for the various contractors who worked on the project, including Hawley Brothers demolition contractors who specify that they “removed 150,000 cubic feet of earth”.⁹¹ Throughout the editorial and

advertisements there is an unusual and pronounced sense of pride in destruction. The inference of this is that a superior construction will be created through this process.

In addition to the internal décor of the cinema the article specifically focuses on the structure of the building and the engineering skills required. References to steel abound: we learn that the whole shell of the theatre is made of steel, and both the auditorium and the stage are completely steel-framed, the construction utilising a total of 650 tons of steel. Two days after its opening the *Nottingham Journal* carried a short article exclusively on the steel work of the Ritz, which had been undertaken by the builders of the Sydney Bridge.⁹² This foregrounding of strength and destruction is in vivid contrast to the tenor of the newspaper accounts of the other new cinemas in the period, which are discussed in the following chapter. To assure the readers of the cinema's safety, reference is typically made to its steel-framed structure, but this is strictly as an aside. The décor, comfort, luxury and harmonious colour, which are also highly significant to the material on the Ritz, are the only items of note in the accounts of other cinema openings in the period.

Unlike the other newspaper accounts of cinema openings in the period, the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* account of the opening of the Ritz presents it in the form of a narrative: as a heroic struggle over seemingly unassailable problems. The earlier quote on the difficulty of finding a suitable site sets the scene. The article then expands on how the architects overcame the problems of the site's extremely narrow frontage and of building into the side of a hill, necessitating excavation and the construction of reinforced concrete walls. Again, there is a marked emphasis on

strength and engineering achievements. The fortitude needed to win through in very adverse circumstances is foregrounded in the article prior to detailing the cinema's facilities and internal décor, with an emphasis on its luxury and modernity. One of the articles also argues that the promoters of the Ritz deserve success because of "their great enterprise and amazing hustle".⁹³ Despite the congratulatory tone of the piece as a whole, the use of the word hustle, with its connotations of sharp practice, trickery and extreme forcefulness is an uncomplimentary term which casts a doubt over the business methods used to complete the project.

The building of the Ritz was marked by a number of unexplained delays, in a period when the normal time-scale for cinema building was only six months. This tardiness is particularly intriguing given the aggressiveness that the company demonstrated in its own narratives about the project. While the cinema opening was delayed by a year until the end of 1933, the car park opened even later, in the first part of 1934. The *Nottingham Daily Guardian* article on the opening of the Ritz specifically references it as "only the partial completion of an elaborate scheme".⁹⁴ The other elements, such as the business premises, are not, however, outlined and I do not have any evidence that they ever came to fruition.

The accounts of the opening of the Ritz in the local press establish that this was a highly prestigious occasion for the city and the overall impression of the press coverage is that this was a momentous occasion in which the city should take great pride. For the *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, it was "reminiscent of a first night at the opera",⁹⁵ while according to the *Nottingham Evening News*, the reception "left an indelible impression on the social annals of the city".⁹⁶ The Deputy Lord Mayor was

present at the opening ceremony and his speech develops the theme of triumphant struggle which marked the *Guardian* article: “A few years ago a Nottingham man, Mr S W Gibbons, had a vision – the vision of a super cinema. Everyone thought he would never succeed. The difficulties were too great.”⁹⁷

Following the performance, which included a selection of films, speeches by notaries, a performance by the Band of the Robin Hoods and an organ recital, there was “a reception in the ballroom for the most notable of the visitors”.⁹⁸ The cinema’s high social status is also evident in the calibre of the guests who attended its opening, which included “the most representative company of city and county celebrities which has ever been assembled for such a function”.⁹⁹ The *Nottingham Evening News* refers to the “professional, commercial and artistic classes of the district” who contributed to ensuring that “the function was characterised with rare eclat”.¹⁰⁰ This is the only example of such a fulsome appraisal of the guests at the opening of a Nottingham cinema in the 1930s. Indeed, it is rare to find accounts of a cinema’s opening night in the local press of the 1930s: the regular practice was to merely publish an article announcing that a cinema was to open that same day. The stature of the Ritz is reinforced by the presence of two British film stars, Binnie Barnes and Donald Calthrop, with the latter contributing a “humorous” speech at the gala performance. It was customary at that time for new cinemas to receive congratulatory telegrams from film stars on their opening night and one was sent to the Ritz by Charles Laughton. However, the Ritz was the only 1930s-built Nottingham cinema to attract film stars to its opening.

From the start, the Ritz had a more potent advertising policy than its competitors, habitually taking out larger advertisements than the other cinemas in the classified section of the local press. This promotional prominence was retained when the cinema became established in the city. In the first few months, advertisements regularly included the seat prices, which ranged from 9d to 3s. This compares with the Forum, a luxury suburban cinema which opened in 1937 with prices from 6d to 1s¹⁰¹, and the city centre Regent Hall which reopened in 1937, “fully refurbished and under new management” with the same price structure as the Forum.¹⁰² The Elite was the only cinema in Nottingham with a similar price scale to the Ritz, but whilst prices there started at 9d, the most expensive seats were still only 2/4d, 8d less than the Ritz.¹⁰³

The Ritz advertising presented the cinema-going experience as an event. It typically promoted the cinema’s entire programme (normally a ‘double bill’ of two feature films, plus a cartoon, newsreel and other supporting elements), whilst it was the norm for cinema advertisements to focus exclusively on the main film. It also linked the cinema to special events, so for example, around Christmas time, the Ritz advertised its “enormous holiday programme”, offering “the best Christmas show in town!”¹⁰⁴ Advertisements also regularly referred to the café, a facility which “made a trip to the cinema even more of a special occasion”.¹⁰⁵ The performances of organist Jack Helyer, the long-standing successor to Reginald Foort and another whose work was regularly broadcast on the radio, formed another significant component of the cinema’s advertising. Helyer was instrumental to both the prestige and popularity of the Ritz. His performances were a major draw, with

advertisements regularly including the times at which he played. The significance of this is brought out by the fact that it was customary in the period for cinemas not even to announce the starting times of the films as instead of there being a defined beginning and end to each programme, it was common practice for cinema-goers to come and go throughout.¹⁰⁶ By employing such methods the Ritz differentiated itself from its competitors and effectively promoted itself as an experience and an event.¹⁰⁷ The significance of Jack Helyer is further exemplified by the numerous documents about him in the Nottinghamshire Archives, and by the quantity of affectionate and admiring recollections he still inspires in the local press.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the notaries discussed earlier, the opening ceremony was not only conducted by the Deputy Lord Mayor but was also attended by a group of councillors. It took place at the same time as a major debate at the other side of the square in the Council chambers over the aforementioned libel case, raising questions about the priorities of the respective councillors. Their presence at the opening of the Ritz makes it clear exactly how significant that cinema was to the Council. At the meeting when the Ritz site was taken out of the slum clearance project, the rateable value of the cinema was discussed and one of the councillors claimed that the new properties would be worth £500,000.¹⁰⁹ (In order to put this figure in context, the Council House had cost only a little more than that in 1929). The Deputy Lord Mayor's speech at the opening refers to the cinema's rateable value as one its assets; thus underlining its financial importance to the Council.¹¹⁰ The building of the Ritz then, was very well regarded and, it could be argued, actively fostered by the Council, due to the site having been taken out of the slum clearance

programme in order for it to go ahead. The Ritz was firmly within the category of the licensed leisure that it was aiming to encourage.

However, it is important to be aware that 1930s leisure and its official sanctioning was part of a complex process. The 1930s cinema, in terms of its high rateable value, was important to the Council as well as to the cinema proprietors who benefited from the steady rise in cinema attendance throughout the decade. The cinema was also valuable to the Council as an increasingly respectable leisure activity and in this it can be contrasted with the status of the public house. As the following chapter discusses, licenses for public houses and off-licences were typically refused on the 1930s-built council estates, indicating that alcohol was perceived to be a social threat. Yet throughout the 1930s instances of drunkenness decreased as cinema attendance rose.¹¹¹ Hence it may be argued that cinema was increasingly regarded as a beneficial leisure pursuit that kept people away from the public house, and both the role of the Council in fostering 'acceptable' cinemas and the status of the Ritz need to be viewed in that context.

Certainly by the end of the 1930s the architecture, commerce, retail outlets and leisure facilities of the Old Market Square were substantially different to the situation prior to the building of the Council House in 1929, and the opening of the Ritz was highly significant in informing this process.

This chapter has argued that, under the auspices of the City Council, there was an attempt in the 1930s to embourgeois Nottingham's central arena, the Old Market Square. The opening of the imposing new Council House began the process which proceeded with a continued investment in the square's transport, shops and, most significantly and successfully, cinema. The Ritz, with its well-advertised double-bill programmes, its tea dances, nationally renowned organist and sophisticated décor, was central to fostering the middle-class presence at the cinema in Nottingham. Cinema's central place in the remaking of the Old Market Square into a locus of middle-class consumption provides a good example of the significant role which cinema could play in the 1930s. The process demonstrates that cinema can be instrumental in redefining city space and, through that, impacting on the local economy, the class bias of particular areas of the city and the local perception and awareness of the city. The building of the Ritz was an early example of gentrification due to its appeal to the middle-class and the aspiring middle-class. The cinema's blend of both luxury and modernity were central to that process and the cinema's fortunes in the 1930s may be usefully contrasted with those of the long-established fair and market which were banished to the margins of the city. The role of the 1930s cinema in formulating the usage of city space extends beyond the city centre, as the following chapter demonstrates through a study of cinema's place in the growing suburbs, both in terms of formulating their identity and of providing a community focus.

Nottingham City Council's inter-war attempts to transform the city's main square into a site of middle-class consumption met, then, with partial success.

Cinema, in the form of the Ritz, was a highly successful component of this strategy, and that cinema was joined in 1939 by the Carlton cinema, just a few hundred yards away.¹¹² As for the lasting effects of the process, the shops around the Old Market Square are now a mix of department stores, boutiques and bargain basement outlets. Both cinemas have recently closed although the Ritz (later the Odeon) in particular retained its pre-eminence long after the decline of almost all the other 1930s cinemas of the city. There has been a revival of occasional markets and fairs in the Old Market Square in recent years, although it is debatable whether either have retained a definable populist function.

Resistance to any official attempts to reposition the square for sectional interests has continued on from the 1930s. One of its most popular uses has always been as a meeting place for all kinds of people: “I’ll meet you by the lions” is still a catch-phrase that regularly echoes around the city. Part of the success of the Ritz can be attributed both to its being instrumental in affirming the middle-class locus of the Old Market Square while, at the same time, being a symbol of an inclusiveness which the Council House so signally failed to embody. The Ritz represented a democratic luxury: a visit there often represented a treat and an undoubted element of its appeal was aspirational in nature. However, it was nevertheless open to everyone who could afford 9d for admission to its green and gold exterior.

The following chapter is a parallel study which looks at the place of the 1930s cinema in Nottingham’s newly-built suburbia.

NOTES

¹ Taken from the Chairman of the Estates Committee's speech at the foundation stone laying ceremony of Nottingham's Council House, NJ, 18 March 1927.

² http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk_admissions.html

³ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace Sharp and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 97. In this respect, Britain was a decade behind the USA where the 'Golden Age' was attributed to the 1920s.

⁴ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) pp. 15-18.

⁵ In its earliest years, cinema was regarded as a predominantly working-class leisure activity which could foster impropriety due both to some film content and to the privacy of the cinema space. On this subject see, for example, Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (New York: Scribner, 1990) pp. 37-52, Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 60-89.

⁶ Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', in Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969) p. 143.

⁷ *Nottinghamshire Living History Archive*, A81/a-b/1.

⁸ NDG, 20 March 1926.

⁹ J D Chambers, *Modern Nottingham in the Making* (Nottingham: Nottingham Journal, 1945) p. 44.

¹⁰ A total of 17,461 council houses (the vast majority of which were on estates on greenfield sites) were built in the inter-war period, John Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970) p. 440. Other attempted 'grand gestures' of the period were further attempts to extend the city boundary, C J Thomas, *Geographical Aspects of the Growth of the Residential Area of Greater Nottingham in the Twentieth Century* (University of Nottingham, Unpublished PhD thesis, 1968) p. 90, and a substantial increase in Corporation public transport. For details see, for example, NDG, 7 January 1930, NEP, 3 June 1935.

¹¹ Howitt, who later designed a number of well-regarded cinemas (although none in his native city), made a major impact on Nottingham as the architect of its two major building projects in the inter-war period. While both exemplified city council ambitions, the two could not be more dissimilar. One of Portland stone (it was a boast that not a brick was used in the building) that purposefully excluded the local public, and one of the indigenous red brick, designed and built to offer Nottingham's people new and improved living conditions.

¹² NDG, 3 April 1924.

¹³ NDG, 5 April 1924.

¹⁴ Around 50,000 watched the ceremony according to one estimate, NDG, 23 May 1929, or 100,000 according to another, NJ, 23 May 1929.

¹⁵ NDG, 23 May 1929.

¹⁶ NDG, 8 October 1929.

¹⁷ NDG, 17 October 1929.

¹⁸ NDG, 18, 24 October 1929

¹⁹ NDG, 25 October 1929.

²⁰ *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1932.

²¹ NEP, 1 July 1933.

²² NEP, 30 November and 4 December 1933.

²³ NEP, 4 December 1933.

²⁴ See, for example, *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1932.

²⁵ NJ, 5 December 1933.

²⁶ David Harvey, 'Monument and Myth: The Building of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart', in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) pp. 222-49. The problematic nature of domed buildings with their connotations of over-reaching ambition, grandeur and hubris may have a wider significance here. Witness the troubled career of the Millennium Dome, the Sacre Coeur and some of the domed buildings in the City Beautiful movement, Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) pp. 198-9.

²⁷ NDG, 20 March 1926.

²⁸ NDG, 20 March 1926.

²⁹ Nottingham City Library, Local Studies Department newspaper holdings.

³⁰ NEN, 18 April 1938. The loss of the public houses is of further significance to the Exchange Building's embourgeoisment. Public houses were not considered respectable in the 1930s. As discussed in the following chapter, they were frequently not permitted on the new estates and so can be placed in opposition to the cinema, for which building proposals were uncontested throughout the decade.

³¹ *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1937, pp. 154-55.

³² See the Nottingham official handbooks for the 1930s for evidence of the embourgeoisment of the Old Market Square following the opening of the Council House.

³³ For a discussion of the place of the dance hall in the period see Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 394.

³⁴ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p.15-17.

³⁵ B Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress* (London: Longmans, Green, 1941) pp. 412-13, 429-49.

³⁶ A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 413.

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- ³⁷NEP, 17 October 1929.
- ³⁸ NJ, 10 December 1929, NEP, 5 May 1930.
- ³⁹ NEP, 26 April 1930.
- ⁴⁰ NEP, 1 July 1933.
- ⁴¹ *Nottingham Official Handbook*, 1932.
- ⁴² Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp. 174-202.
- ⁴³ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 35.
- ⁴⁴ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp. 175-83.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 202.
- ⁴⁶ NDG, 23 May 1929.
- ⁴⁷ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 202.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, rev. Elizabeth Williamson, *Nottinghamshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, 2nd ed.) p. 225. Pevsner was far more impressed with the architecture of the factories and offices of the Boots Company (pp. 70-71). Indeed, Owen Williams' 1930s-built Boots factories are now listed buildings.
- ⁵⁰ The terms light, spacious and open had particular significance as exemplars of modernity in the period. This is evidenced in the descriptions of its new houses, as discussed in the following chapter, which are also contrasted with the dark, cramped dwellings they replaced. These terms were also valuable in industrial modernity in the period, of which the aforementioned Boots factories are a good example.
- ⁵¹ Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997) p. 12.
- ⁵² Sharp, *Dream Palace*, p. 145.
- ⁵³ J B Priestley writing in 1933 comments that Goose Fair "does not mean as much as it did", citing its removal from the city centre as the main reason for the change in meaning. *English Journey* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1977. First pub. William Heinemann, 1934.) pp. 131-32. Furthermore, the new site for Goose Fair, the Forest Recreation Ground, had historically housed the city's race track, which also has unrespectable associations in some quarters.
- ⁵⁴ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. (London: Routledge, 1991) pp. 96-7.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 97.
- ⁵⁶ As well as the Hays Code tempering Hollywood's output in the 1930s, censorship in Britain increased when the 'talkies' were introduced in 1929. See James C Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) pp. 45-7.
- ⁵⁷ Jeff Hill, 'Leisure', in *Centenary History*, p. 534.
- ⁵⁸ John Beckett, 'Leisure, Recreation and Entertainment', in *Centenary History* pp. 396-8.

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- ⁵⁹ Shields, *Places on the Margin*, p. 95.
- ⁶⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 1.
- ⁶¹ NDG, 16 October 1929.
- ⁶² Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, pp. 6-7.
- ⁶³ Ibid., pp. 73-75.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 4.
- ⁶⁵ Priestley, *English Journey*, pp. 133.
- ⁶⁶ David Parkinson, *History of Film* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995) p. 7.
- ⁶⁷ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986) pp. 27-79.
- ⁶⁸ Mike Featherstone, 'Postmodernism and the Aestheticism of Everyday Life', in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds., *Modernity and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p. 284.
- ⁶⁹ See, for example, NEP, 4 December 1933.
- ⁷⁰ NDG, 26 November 1931.
- ⁷¹ NEP, 26 November 1931.
- ⁷² NJ, 8 December 1931.
- ⁷³ NJ, 26 November 1931.
- ⁷⁴ NJ, 8 December 1931.
- ⁷⁵ NEP, 8 December 1931.
- ⁷⁶ Mike Savage and Alan Ward, *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) p. 80.
- ⁷⁷ Smith, *New Urban Frontier*, p. 34.
- ⁷⁸ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1992) p. 43.
- ⁷⁹ NEP, 3 June 1935.
- ⁸⁰ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, pp. 34-6.
- ⁸¹ NEP, 3 June 1935. Prior to the 1940s, none of Nottingham's cinemas were part of the major national chains such as the Odeon. The advertising policy and press reporting of the Elite are discussed in Chapter Three, 'Selling Cinema', which further develops the pre-eminence of the Ritz in the 1930s.
- ⁸² David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (London: Architectural Press, 1980) p. 57. The significance of the firm is underlined by the fact that a number of Verity and Beverley's cinemas, albeit not the Ritz in Nottingham, are now listed buildings.
- ⁸³ NDG, 4 December 1933.
- ⁸⁴ NJ, 5 December 1933.
- ⁸⁵ NDG, 4 December 1931
- ⁸⁶ Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, p. 116.
- ⁸⁷ NDG, 5 December 1931

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- ⁸⁸ NDG, 4 December 1931
- ⁸⁹ NEP, 14 November 2000.
- ⁹⁰ NDG, 4 December 1933.
- ⁹¹ NDG, 4 December 1933.
- ⁹² NJ, 6 December 1933.
- ⁹³ NEN, 5 December 1933.
- ⁹⁴ NDG, 4 December 1933.
- ⁹⁵ NDG, 5 December 1933.
- ⁹⁶ NEN, 5 December 1933.
- ⁹⁷ NJ, 5 December 1933.
- ⁹⁸ NDG, 5 December 1933.
- ⁹⁹ NJ, 5 December 1933.
- ¹⁰⁰ NEN, 5 December 1933.
- ¹⁰¹ NEP, 15 February 1937.
- ¹⁰² NEN, 7 December 1937.
- ¹⁰³ *Nottingham Civic Society Newsletter*, September 1989.
- ¹⁰⁴ NDG, 29 December 1933.
- ¹⁰⁵ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 22.
- ¹⁰⁶ This is discussed by Thomas Doherty in 'This Is Where We Came In: The Audible Screen and the Voluble Audience of Early Sound Cinema', in Richard Maltby and Melvin Stokes, eds., *American Movie Audiences From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: BFI, 1999) pp. 143-63.
- ¹⁰⁷ The Ritz advertising and the ways in which this differentiated it from its competitors is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, 'Selling Cinema'.
- ¹⁰⁸ Helyer's significance to memories of cinema in Nottingham is discussed in Chapter Seven.
- ¹⁰⁹ NJ, 8 December 1931.
- ¹¹⁰ NJ, 5 December 1933.
- ¹¹¹ Convictions for drunkenness halved in the inter-war period, Taylor, *English History*, p. 385.
- ¹¹² This was a very low-key event due to outbreak of the Second World War only a month before. Hence there is not sufficient material to assess the extent to which the Carlton was conceived to be a cinema in competition with the Ritz. However, in the video *Nottingham at the Cinema*, local cinema historian Rick Wilde states that there had been a definite intention to hold a large opening ceremony.

CHAPTER TWO

LUXURY IN SUBURBIA The Modern, Feminised Cinemas of the 1930s

Few suburbs were too select to manage without a cinema...And they came soon after the houses, often enough before the churches; they were part of the very fabric of the new suburbia.¹

The growth of suburbia was a significant aspect of the social history of 1930s Britain, and cinema was a notable feature of those new suburbs. While the suburbs grew significantly in the 1930s, the principal social focus available to suburbanites in Nottingham was the cinema. This chapter studies the new cinemas in the suburbs in order to demonstrate cinema's significance for suburbia, arguing that the meaning of the suburban cinema was inextricably linked to the meaning of the suburb. Each had powerful connotations of luxury and modernity and this similarity is significant in explaining why cinema was perceived to be an essential amenity for each new estate. In addition, cinema was associated with notions of community and thus was significant to the suburbanites' wish to attain a sense of belonging in their new habitat. The suburb was presented as a form of escape from the noise and bustle of the city, while the cinema has frequently typified an escape from 'real life'.² The chapter also studies cinema in relation to the public house, which, I argue, occupied a very different position as a signifier of the traditional, male world, the centrality of which cinema was active in deposing.

The chapter then argues that there were further thematic links and parallels between cinema and suburb. Moreover, one of these links had particular

resonance in Nottingham: cinema as a prime exemplar of mass culture, aligned with femininity. It can be argued that the 1930s cinema, with its particular emphasis on luxury, glamour and escapism, was especially feminised and, as discussed in the introductory chapter, Nottingham's history and place mythology has highly feminine connotations. By the 1930s, as we have seen, it was already very much a city of pleasure and consumption: indeed, it "has always had a name for enjoying itself".³

The chapter's first section outlines the growth of suburbia which characterised 1930s Britain and analyses the reasons for this; it then examines its particular development in Nottingham and its significance for the city. The chapter proceeds to study in detail Nottingham's suburban cinemas of the period and the ways in which their meanings of luxury, modernity, community and femininity were constructed by the local press.

The Building of 1930s Suburbia

The history of the suburbs goes back as far as eighteenth-century London⁴ and represents what Robert Fishman terms "perhaps the most radical rethinking of the relation between residence and the city in the history of domestic architecture. It was founded on the primacy of the family and domestic life."⁵ Suburbia's function as a retreat from the public, political life of the city is crucial to its meaning and identity, as identified by Fishman and other commentators. For example, Richard Harris and Peter J Larkham argue that, particularly in Britain, suburbia is characterised by "a singular search for ... privacy and control".⁶ The

nature of the suburb means that it creates division between classes, as prior to suburbia the different social classes lived in close proximity to one another in the city, and between work and home life.⁷ Until suburbs were built, people typically worked very near to their home, but the majority of suburbs are purely residential and inhabitants typically travel to work in the city. Thus an opposition developed between the suburb and the city.

Fishman asserts that the suburbs represented “a reversal in the meaning of core and periphery”.⁸ Prior to the development of suburbia, the city centre was the most prestigious location in which to live, with only the very lowest groups living outside the centre; hence the original literal meaning of suburban as below urban.⁹ The emergence of suburbia meant that more prosperous inhabitants left the city centre, making it less prestigious and therefore raising the status of the suburb. This status is, however, ambivalent, as the suburb of the inter-war period has always concomitantly suffered from the ridicule of many cultural and architectural critics. As Paul Oliver *et al* state, “Dunroamin [their affectionate name for the inter-war suburb in Britain, with the implication of stasis after ‘movement’ and all that implies] has had few writers in the architectural, even the sociological field, who have had a good word in its favour.”¹⁰ Peter Hall regards this attack as being inspired by both social class and professional snobbery, arguing that the suburbs were “universally derided and condemned” by upper-middle-class prosecutors who looked down on the ‘social inferiors’ who inhabited them. Designed by unqualified assistants, they were regarded as contemptible to the qualified architects of the period.¹¹ The position taken by the local press of the

1930s was, however, markedly different to that of the upper-middle-class detractors. In that forum, the suburb represents the very epitome of social aspirations due to the light, modern and spacious environment it provided.

Sociologists and cultural critics have frequently associated suburbia with femininity. As Roger Silverstone notes: “The suburbanization of culture has often been equated by its many critics with a feminization of culture.”¹² According to some critics, one of the divides opened up by the growth of suburbia is that between the public, the political and the work place represented by the city (defined as a space of production) and the feminised world of privacy, domesticity and the family.¹³ Specifically, this noting of a feminised retreat from the public realm is associated with a growing emphasis on consumption in the private realm.¹⁴ Thus the increased demand for consumer goods is a feature of the growth of the suburbs: there is “an intimate and indissoluble link between suburbia and buying.”¹⁵ Furthermore, critics have noted a link between women and shopping, and have particularly associated women with consumption practices in general.¹⁶

According to some critics, the feminisation of the 1930s is related to the growth of suburbia but extends beyond it. Alison Light argues that in the inter-war period, Britain as a whole became “more inward looking, more domestic and more private, more feminine”. She regards this development as a component of the “increasing privatisation of national life” which was further reinforced by suburbia.¹⁷

Despite suburbia's three hundred-year history, the inter-war period saw the development of most of suburbanised Britain. The suburban growth in the period was so marked that there is a widespread belief that suburbs developed exclusively in the inter-war period. Hence, "the inter-war suburbs are often viewed as both definitive and formative".¹⁸

There are a number of reasons for that growth. The most important of these in the context of local authority housing – of which an a higher than average number was built in Nottingham – are the social effects of the First World War which created a compelling demand for better housing. According to Gordon Cherry, the housing policies and initiatives of the 1920s and 1930s "provide ample evidence of war as an agent for change".¹⁹ Britain in 1918 was a nation avowedly not 'fit for heroes to live in'. Working-class housing was predominantly unsanitary, in a poor state of repair and overcrowded; in 1921, fourteen per cent of Britain's population lived with more than two people to a room.²⁰ The Tudor Walters Report of 1918 into Britain's housing formed the blueprint for the large-scale inter-war building programme, advocating that local authority houses be built on cheap land on the outskirts of cities at a low density, with a maximum of twelve family houses to the acre.²¹

Hence by the late 1920s, local councils across Britain had instigated a slum clearance initiative and begun a programme of house building around existing towns and cities. In addition to the social aim of improving housing quality, the move from the city was facilitated by the very availability of cheap

land for building and by the improvements in transport which made it feasible for people to live at a distance from their work-place.²²

Nottingham's Interwar Suburbia

Local authority house building was mandatory across Britain following the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919.²³ However, it was especially prevalent in Nottingham in the inter-war period, where “just over a third (34.5 per cent) of new houses were built by private enterprise. By comparison, 80 per cent of all houses built in Britain between 1919 and 1939 were for owner occupation.”²⁴ This factor is crucial to the meaning of Nottingham's interwar estates and to their significance for Nottingham as a whole.

The suburb is typically perceived as a middle-class habitat, to the extent that Fishman's entire book on the subject refers solely to the middle-class suburb, or “bourgeois utopia” as he calls it. He distinguishes this only from urban areas on the fringes of cities or towns being swallowed up by cities; never from working-class suburbs.²⁵ However, as David Thorns illustrates, working-class suburbs certainly do exist, although they are studied less frequently than middle-class suburbs.²⁶ If the suburb represents the apotheosis of the bourgeois lifestyle, in the 1930s at least, the working-class suburb in the form of council housing can usefully be regarded as an attempt to embourgeois the working class.²⁷ In the 1930s, occupants moved from the dark, cramped, unsanitary city centre housing to the light, spacious, hygienic suburb. The idea that one of the aims of inter-war local authority housing provision was to embourgeois the working class is

supported by the absence of public houses on the new estates. As discussed later in the chapter there was widespread opposition to public houses (the traditional working class place of leisure) by both the local council and temperance associations on local authority estates. There was, furthermore, a lack of community facilities which meant there was very little opportunity for the new residents to forge togetherness as a group. Hall argues that this was one of the means by which local authority housing functioned as an insurance policy against Bolshevism.²⁸

The particularly ambitious nature of Nottingham's City Council's interwar house-building programme can be regarded, alongside the opening of the new Council House, as an expansive enterprise undertaken to enhance the city's reputation. The project was in part due to the Council's failed attempt to extend the city boundary in 1919. The Minister of Health had rejected this proposal due to the corporation's poor standard of sanitary and housing provision.²⁹ According to Giggs, this blow to the city's self-image was instrumental in inspiring its building programme, leading the corporation to build some 17,461 new houses in the inter-war period. These "twenty municipal estates were built on green-field sites, ranging in size from 212 dwellings at Gordon Road to 2,838 at Aspley".³⁰ This rebuilding was central to the corporation's slum clearance programmes which removed some of the most over-crowded and insanitary city-centre housing and replaced it with the required low-density housing on the outskirts of the city. For example, in the course of the five-year programme between 1929 and 1934, 3,123 houses were demolished.³¹

The official account of the local government-housing programme in Nottingham, produced by the architect of many of the new estates, T Cecil Howitt, conveys a sense of the different status accorded to housing in the city and the suburb. For example, the Red Lion Street district of the city was designated a slum clearance area and a scheme was devised in 1923 to improve the district. However, for reasons which are undisclosed in the City Council's documentation, "the original idea of providing houses on the area to be demolished was cancelled, and the dispossessed tenants are now being rehoused on various Housing Sites in the city, as near as possible to the condemned area."³² This example is representative of the housing programmes undertaken in Nottingham throughout the period, where there was only one example of residential building in the city's many slum clearance areas.³³ The new estates were not in the city as such, although most fell at least partially within the city's administrative boundary. None, in fact, was actually located near the Red Lion Street area, which was itself left derelict for many years prior to the building of a shopping centre in the post-war period. This indicates that it was preferable for the Corporation to extend the residential area of the city, even where there was a viable opportunity to rebuild on the condemned areas. Such a policy denotes that the suburb was held to be a more prestigious location for residential building than the city centre, and hence that the availability of cheap land on the fringes of the city was not the sole reason for the decisive growth of suburbia in the 1930s.

Richard Turkington outlines the design specification for the inter-war corporation estate in the 1918 Tudor Walters report:

The design characteristics recommended included houses with private gardens, the use of the cul-de-sac, residential roads with hedges and grass verges, the provision of open space and geometric layouts in reaction to the grid pattern of the bye-law terraced street.³⁴

Nottingham's corporation estates of the period fit that brief precisely: the space between the roads, alongside the widespread use of crescents and circular roads, clearly identifies the relevant areas on the Nottingham district street map. This style of housing is now so prevalent that it frequently passes unnoticed. As Turkington comments: the "'council house' and 'housing estate' are taken almost entirely for granted, a reality confirmed by the paucity of scholarly activity on the period".³⁵ However, in the 1930s this type of building and layout represented a major departure from previous patterns of working-class housing which was characterised by high-density, inner-city, cramped and overcrowded accommodation, often back-to-back and opening onto the street with only a small yard at the back. The national initiative of the 1920s and 1930s to revolutionise housing is part of a major cultural shift, and concomitantly, the way of life in the new estates is a crucial element of this process. The move to a domestic and family-centred way of life which it initiated is one of the more significant changes of the period.

The Nottingham Corporation building programme began in the early 1920s and continued throughout the 1930s. The official account of the scheme emphasises the provision of open spaces in the form of playgrounds, allotments, grass verges and shrubberies. The houses were designed to allow the maximum amount of sunshine into the living room (the official report specifically contrasts this with earlier house styles), a bathroom, inside wc and hot water supply.³⁶ All

these facilities and priorities contrast markedly with the working-class housing that the estates replaced.

From the evidence of the local press, Nottingham's building programme was a nationally-acclaimed success. Columnist Dr Betty Morgan, who was not herself a local resident, was hired by the *Nottingham Journal* with much fanfare to write a series of impressionistic articles on the city, the first of which discussed Nottingham's "heroic" building programme. According to her report in 1933, the city had more new houses per head of than in the country, at 49 houses per 1,000 people.³⁷

Turkington argues that the interwar public housing programme was a radical social and political experiment. Yet "the local authorities gave little time or attention to the provision of amenities and to the development of a sense of community on the new estates".³⁸ The evidence of *Nottingham Housing Schemes* bears this out this observation. Howitt's priorities were primarily aesthetic and when assessed in that manner they are highly commendable. The houses were carefully planned to be as spacious as possible, existing mature trees were factored into the schemes, differing land levels were taken into account, and there was an abundance of greenery and open space. However, in line with Turkington's observations, there was no sense that the estates were created to form a community. Initial space was sometimes allocated for a parade of shops – the "special feature" which the surrounding roads led up to – but the plans did not include any other indoor facilities, such as community centres, clubs, swimming pools, public houses or cinemas. At the Sherwood estate in Nottingham, a

shopping centre was introduced part way through the building programme, but some of the plans did not even incorporate the provision of shops. The experience of Nottingham bears out the claim that “in the early stages of municipal housing the general opinion seems to have been that all that was necessary was to transfer people to new estates where they could live in labour saving homes, and spend their time in their gardens”.³⁹

In Nottingham, most of the estates incorporated a planned recreation ground and some of the larger ones incorporated a school. The estates were clearly planned as a reaction against the high-density housing they replaced. Yet despite their cramped and insanitary nature, these inner-city conditions did foster a sense of community. The suburbs were specifically designed to provide self-contained dwellings with space and greenery. Architects and planners regarded gardens and allotments very highly; they represented a means of supplying the fresh air and sunshine that were perceived as essential to both moral and physical health. The planners did not take account of the fact that, removed from the tightly packed courtyards and dwellings of the city, in which all the occupants knew each other, the inhabitants of the new estates were often lonely and isolated.⁴⁰ As Turkington argues, “community development was to remain the poor relation of Corporation suburbia throughout the interwar years”.⁴¹

Despite the evidence of the time, Nottingham City Council has looked back on the 1930s estates as a proud example of community planning. A retrospective Council publication about the Aspley estate, Nottingham’s largest interwar corporation-built estate, claims that: “Great care was taken in planning

the Estate and provision was made not only for houses but for all those other things that are required to make a complete town – such as churches, shops and places of amusement.”⁴² In the centre of the estate was a family of schools built in a twelve-acre circular site, while approximately thirty-four acres were set aside for recreation grounds and two sites were allocated for shops. Yet the original plans did not include churches, cinemas or any other form of entertainment as part of the scheme. This was true of all the Corporation estates built in the 1920s and 1930s. Some included shops in the original plans and, in the case of the larger estates such as Aspley, schools, but no other facilities were named. Public houses were rarely allowed on local authority estates and cinemas were not factored into the original plans. Therefore, while house building on the majority of Nottingham’s Corporation estates began in the 1920s, recreational facilities in the form of cinemas did not appear until the 1930s. The Aspley estate is typical. House building commenced in January 1929 but the Aspley cinema did not open until December 1932. However, in this case the cinema did open before the block of shops which was part of the same development.⁴³ Hence the first people to move to the estate were without even local shops for the first three years.

Transport was also a problem to the inhabitants of the new estates. Only a minority of the population were car owners and the extension of bus routes also lagged behind the house building, creating an impression of a very isolated life for those ‘pioneers’. For example, it was not until May 1930 that the first bus service was scheduled to run to Aspley.⁴⁴

Other important facilities such as libraries, public buildings and doctors' surgeries were also absent from the original specifications. The local press documents some of these gaps in provision. For example, a 1936 article recounts the plans to open a public library in Aspley, *seven years* after people had begun to live on the estate.⁴⁵

The lack of facilities and the inadequate public transport certainly caused some dissatisfaction to the inhabitants of the new estates. Residents of the Lenton Abbey Estate to the west of the city complained about the rerouting of the local bus service through narrow residential streets and were also unhappy about school provision. There was overcrowding which resulted in class sizes of over fifty and some of the teaching had taken place in huts adjacent to the school.⁴⁶ At the Aspley estate it was even difficult to see a doctor locally. A 1930 newspaper article reported that Insurance Panel doctors were unable to obtain surgery accommodation there, despite this being a city council estate.⁴⁷

Entertainment on the new estates was in very short supply. As the following section details, cinemas were built on, or adjacent to, all the new estates, yet their provision frequently lagged some years behind the housing. The very different way in which the cinema and the public house were regarded in the 1930s is evident in the lack of public houses on the estates. The public house is the traditional centre of community life for the working classes, yet in the 1930s provision of licensed premises was very difficult to obtain on the new estates. Turkington states that pubs were banned altogether in the interwar corporation suburbs of Liverpool.⁴⁸ In Nottingham a debate was held throughout the decade

over whether licenses should be granted. An *Evening Post* account of February 1931 makes it clear that the Aspley estate had no facilities for drinking alcohol. An application for an off-licence had been refused, although there were already 1,900 houses on the estate and a further 700 were planned.⁴⁹ A further example is the refusal of an off-licence at the Wollaton Park estate on the grounds that it would “encourage secret drinking”.⁵⁰ In this instance, the Church of England Temperance Society and the British Women’s Temperance Association were united against the provision of a licence. On the evidence of local press reporting their argument was based on social control along class lines. For example, while Wollaton Park (the Corporation estate) was not allowed an off-licence, a license was granted at near-by Trowell Road, Wollaton, a select area of private new housing.⁵¹ The argument that 387 houses had been built within a mile of it and that more were planned contrasts vividly with the situation in Aspley, where considerably greater numbers were denied local access to licensed premises.

One argument used against granting licences was that West Bridgford (one of Nottingham’s most up-market suburbs, dating from the late Victorian era) did not have any slums because it had no licensed premises. Temperance associations fought off licensed premises in many of Nottingham’s suburbs throughout the 1930s. The local press contains numerous accounts of licenses being refused, sometimes despite residents’ petitions supporting the application, indicating that the residents had markedly less influence over their own lives than did the outside temperance groups. In contrast, the building of new cinemas in the suburbs proceeded unopposed and was welcomed by all the elements of the local press.

The Cinema in the Suburb

The 1930s are known as the age of the 'super' cinema.⁵² This was the decade of major cinema-building in Britain, and these cinemas had three defining features. Firstly, the vast majority of them were large, at 1,000 seats plus. According to Dennis Sharp, the demand for large cinemas "seemed almost insatiable."⁵³ Secondly, their architecture and interior design firmly emphasised luxury and fantasy. Fittingly in a period of Depression which resulted in mass unemployment, their aim was to "provide the cinema-goer with greater 'illusion', elegance and comfort".⁵⁴ Thirdly, the location of the 1930s cinema was a crucial factor. The emergence of the suburban cinema was the overwhelming reason for the increase in cinema numbers in the 1930s. As Jeffrey Richards notes, in Britain as a whole, "there was an upsurge in suburban cinema-building that was to continue unabated throughout the Thirties."⁵⁵

The evidence in Nottingham demonstrates exactly how significant the suburban cinema-building boom was. Of the twenty-one cinemas which opened in Nottingham in that decade, nineteen were located in the suburbs.⁵⁶ There were cinemas in or very close to all the city's new suburbs, as well as in some of the older and well-established suburbs. This whole-scale investment in cinema-building outside the city is indicative of a very different relation between city and suburb to that which exists today, when leisure resources are focused either on the city, or on out-of-town complexes which are largely independent of links with a particular locale.⁵⁷

The numbers involved, the luxury fittings and the social importance of these cinemas are crucial to understanding their meanings in the period. Prior to the 1930s 'supers', the cinemas outside of the city centre had typically been small, badly fitted out, old-fashioned and uncomfortable: the 'flea pits' of popular memory.⁵⁸ The expensive high-status cinemas, (examples in Nottingham included the Hippodrome and the Elite) were located in the city centre. The cinemas of the 1930s significantly altered this configuration, and the manner in which this change was effected is discussed below.

In the 1930s suburban cinemas were very much part of the neighbourhood, and consequently they were regularly promoted as the cinema of a particular area, with a concomitant sense of local ownership. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, the cinema and the suburb were mutually dependent. Cinemas provided a much-needed social focus as the inter-war suburb was crucially lacking in social and community facilities; an omission that was particularly significant in the corporation suburbs which made up the bulk of Nottingham's 1930s housing. Very often, cinemas were often the only social facility available on the new estates. Cinemas were built quickly and cheaply and, while early cinema had been opposed by moralists, in the 1930s opposition to cinema on moral grounds was less pronounced. Furthermore, the new cinemas added to the built environment of their neighbourhood due to their modern, streamlined architecture and were beneficial to the local councils as a result of their high rateable value.

Cinema-building in 1930s Nottingham continued throughout the decade, with an average of more than two new cinemas being opened each year. The provision of cinemas in the suburbs did not meet with the opposition provoked by alcohol licences, which demonstrates the different ways in which the two major leisure activities of the period were perceived. I found no evidence in the local press of any opposition to proposals for new cinemas, nor of any cinema applications being refused. Instead, the tone of the articles on proposed cinemas is highly appreciative. The following two examples are representative: a *Nottingham Daily Guardian* article on plans for the Aspley cinema described it as a ‘facility’ for the estate;⁵⁹ and of the proposed Metropole cinema in Sherwood, the press stated approvingly that the “building and equipment will be of the latest type” and that it will “provide patrons with wide and comfortable seats”.⁶⁰ The cinema was presented as an asset to the district, as a symbol of modernity and as a place of luxury.

Newspaper accounts of the openings of suburban cinemas emphasised that they were a vital part of the suburb’s infrastructure and social fabric, as the following extract from an article discussing the opening of the Savoy indicates. “With the exodus of people from the city to housing estates in the suburbs the need is being felt for amusement facilities in those areas.”⁶¹ Similarly, the article on the opening of the Majestic in Mapperley refers to “the need for such a place in the district”.⁶² In such articles, each suburb is established as a separate entity to the city, with its own ‘need’ for entertainment. It is an unspoken assumption that the entertainment in the suburb takes the form of a cinema rather than a public

house, to which, as we have seen, there was considerable opposition in the 1930s.⁶³

One of the reasons that suburbs of the 1930s 'need' a cinema is that they are some distance from the amenities of the city. The newspaper account of the opening of the Aspley cinema states confidently that: "it has been realised that for residents in these areas to spend an evening 'at the pictures' has often meant a lengthy bus journey".⁶⁴ At a distance of two to three miles from the centre of Nottingham and in 1932 before mass car ownership slowed traffic down, the length of the bus journey is highly debatable yet this comment is indicative of the 1930s perception of transport and of leisure activities.⁶⁵ A bus or tram journey to the cinema was then considered unusual and an extravagance so it was typical to attend the local cinema. The inner-city districts had their own local cinemas, which usually dated from an earlier period, while until the 1930s the city-centre cinemas were 'local' for the members of the audience who lived in the city.

The local press reports of the new cinemas promoted them principally as an improvement to the audience's social life, rather than emphasising their entertainment value. For example, in 1937 a second cinema, the Forum, was built on the Aspley estate in response to a further programme of house-building on the south side of the estate and was proclaimed as "the latest addition to the social amenities of Aspley".⁶⁶

The Capitol opened in 1936 near to the Aspley, Stockhill and Nuthall estates but within the heart of the old residential and industrial area of Radford, where the Raleigh cycle factory was situated. The cinema announced its suburban

orientation through the opening sentence of the newspaper article to mark its opening: "One of the essential features of modern housing developments is the provision near new estates of entertainment facilities."⁶⁷ In this way the cinema firmly associated itself with the more high-status new developments in order to position itself above the old, inner-city, industrialised area in which it was actually located. Away from the major new estates, the Ritz-Carlton opened in 1936 in the suburb of Carlton, serving an area of new municipal and private housing. The Roxy in Daybrook which opened in 1937 served both the Corporation estate built in the 1920s and the 1930s private housing development while six other suburban cinemas opened in areas of either mixed or private housing in the 1930s.⁶⁸

The tone of the newspaper reports of suburban cinemas demonstrates that both the cinemas and the suburbs were regarded as highly prestigious. Even allowing for the boosterism of the local press, these were large, expensive, impressive structures.⁶⁹ In the 1930s the suburbs were an asset of which the city was proud, and their local cinema represented a source and expression of this pride, frequently being seen as an indisputable asset and status symbol. So the Curzon "adds to the appearance of the neighbourhood"⁷⁰, while the Majestic "had provided Mapperley with one of its finest buildings".⁷¹ It needs to be noted, however, that while this was the opinion of the local press it was not necessarily shared by other elements of society. Indeed, cultural critics of the 1930s were frequently hostile to the proliferation of row after row of 'identical' housing on previously virgin countryside, regarding both houses and inhabitants with

disdain.⁷² As the suburban cinema was so much a part of the suburb it was not exempt from such criticism and, as discussed in Chapter Eight, British cinema architecture as whole was held in very low regard in the 1930s.

One of the criticisms of 1930s suburbia was that all of its residents were very isolated due to its lack of facilities. As A J P Taylor argues, “these new settlements had no centres, no sense, no communal spirit”.⁷³ This isolation meant that the suburban cinema assumed a strong community function. The preceding section examined Nottingham’s suburbia and found that many of the estates were singularly lacking in other meeting places. Thus, according to a retrospective article in the *Nottingham Evening Post* “local cinemas played such a vital part in bringing communities together” in that period.⁷⁴ One of the means by which cinema fostered this sense of community was in the form of the special children’s performances which were held in many venues on Saturday mornings or afternoons. In Nottingham, one of the first of these was at the Aspley cinema, which was hailed in 1932 as “a novel departure”.⁷⁵ Typically comprising a serial, cartoons, short features and a feature-length film, these showings commanded a regular audience. Later in the decade there were specific children’s Saturday clubs, of which the one at the suburban cinema, the Metropole, was the first in Nottingham. The programme included competitions and singing “community songs”: both of which activities can be seen as a means of fostering a sense of fellowship and belonging.⁷⁶

Cinema’s community function was also important to adults, and its location was central to this role. In the 1930s, the term ‘local’ was applied to

cinemas as well as public houses. Richards notes that in that decade: “The neighbourhood cinema had come to assume a place in the life of the community analogous to those other prime foci of leisure time activities, the church and the pub.”⁷⁷ The perception of a cinema as ‘the local’ is intertwined with cinema-going representing a habit in the inter-war period as a whole. So Taylor described cinema as “the essential social habit of the age, a compensation perhaps for the private boxes: doll’s houses at one end of the scale, cinema palaces at the other”.⁷⁸ In that description, Taylor correlates cinema’s popularity with the social conditions produced by suburbia. Cinema, then, can be understood as representing the ‘compensation’ for the isolation of the new semi-detached houses (“private boxes”) which lacked any other community focus, and also, for the, relative, smallness of the living space (“doll’s house”). As a crucial element of the cinema-going habit, people used to go ‘to the cinema’ instead of going to see a particular film.⁷⁹ That cinema-going was regarded as a habit strengthens the sense of the local cinema as part of the community, and of attendance forming part of the fabric of everyday life. So attending the local cinema could be regarded as a very different experience to going to a city-centre cinema to see a more expensive, first-run film, which was often a treat and a novelty rather than a part of the fabric of everyday life.⁸⁰

Suburban cinema advertisements emphasised their location as being a major attraction and this contributed to the cinemas being regarded as part of the local community. The following examples are typical: “Carlton’s own luxurious cinema”, “luxury in suburbia” and “Radford’s luxury cinema”, while the Adelphi

was “Bulwell’s premier cinema”. The very names of some of the cinemas, such as the Aspley and the Ritz-Carlton, echo the names of the suburbs in which they were located; a practice which strengthened the cinema’s identification with its locale. This sense of identity provided by the cinemas helped create a sense of identity in the new suburbs themselves, by operating as one of their few focal points.

Local newspaper accounts of the openings of suburban cinemas make it clear that they had a different identity to those in the city. The architectural descriptions provide a good example of this differentiation. Cinema architecture in the 1930s was proclaimed as modernist, straight-lined and sleek: indeed, Sharp goes so far as to claim that “the ‘super’ cinema automatically became associated with ‘modernistic’ expression in architecture.”⁸¹ However, the suburban cinemas attempted to combine their streamlined modernity with a sense of the cosiness and intimacy deemed appropriate to a residential area. So the account of the opening of the Dale Cinema reassures readers that: “without embarking on futuristic design, Mr Thraves has designed the Dale on the most modern lines.”⁸² Similarly, the article on the opening of the Savoy emphasises that “the first impression on entering the theatre is one of brightness and spaciousness. Yet there is nothing bizarre.”⁸³ The Plaza boasts an “exceedingly attractive entrance in ... the Continental modernistic style” but inside “panelled walls give an impression of warmth and cosiness”.⁸⁴ Again, the account of the opening of the Dale notes that “in the auditorium cosiness has been achieved without cramping design”.⁸⁵

This careful balance of the modern and the liveable is only evident in the articles on suburban cinemas; neither the reports of the two city-centre cinemas opened in the 1930s nor of those in the late 1920s convey any impression of homeliness or cosiness. This difference may be partly accounted for by the suburban cinema's place in everyday life, where it was suitably perceived as 'cosy', as opposed to the Ritz, which, as an imposing, modernistic edifice, represented an appropriate venue for a special outing. However, it is also significant that the suburban cinema was expected to blend in with the existing architecture of the residential area. This is explicitly stated in the newspaper description of the Roxy, which boasted "plain simple lines which blend harmoniously with its surroundings".⁸⁶ The architects are aiming to yoke together two contrasting and even contradictory elements – an attempt which has arguably had a negative impact on the aesthetic value of the cinemas.⁸⁷ Yet this approach enabled cinema architecture of the period to embrace elements of both the modern and the community.

Notwithstanding its ambiguity, newspaper accounts highlighted modernity as a major asset of the suburban cinema. Accounts of cinema openings stress that they are "up-to-date in every respect",⁸⁸ designed in the "Continental modernistic style",⁸⁹ or "fitted with all the latest improvements in cinema design".⁹⁰ There is an unspoken comparison with the old-fashioned cinemas which comprised the vast majority of those in the centre of Nottingham and in the inner-city residential areas. Yet, in addition to design elements, cinema was also associated with modernity in the period because it figured in terms of particular consumption

practices. As Don Slater claims, “from the 1920s the world was to be modernized partly *through* consumption”.⁹¹ Watching films makes a further contribution to consumption practices in that it can also induce viewers to purchase the new products that they have seen on screen.⁹² Hence cinemas of the 1930s represented modernity not only through the cinema buildings and technology, but also in terms of film viewing and the further consumption practices which this fostered.

The emergence of the suburban cinema created a new breed of cinema-goer. As Richards notes, during the 1930s film was seen to have become more respectable and attracted more of the middle classes as well as the traditional working-class audience. He argues that “one of the reasons for the increase in middle-class patronage was the spread of cinemas to the middle-class suburbs. Respectable houses where middle-class housewives could go in the afternoon appeared.”⁹³ The tone of an article on the opening of the Majestic in Nottingham’s middle-class suburb of Mapperley illustrates this point well. The cinema was opened by a local councillor who claimed that:

Their representatives on the City Council were always pleased to be associated with projects which furthered the religious, social and recreative sides of their activities and he believed the Majestic would supply a need with its programme of educational value and healthy interest.⁹⁴

In this quote, the cinema takes on both a moral and an educational function in order to appeal to the ‘respectable’ middle classes.

Richards stresses that although cinema increasingly appealed to all classes, it was not classless as the different classes rarely mixed at the cinema.⁹⁵ Hence the suburbanites would typically attend their own cinema where they would mix with their own class. This applies to Nottingham’s cinema-goers, as each socially

defined neighbourhood had its own cinema and people rarely went to cinemas in other suburbs, especially not to ones that were perceived to be outside their own social class.⁹⁶ Despite the high quality environment of the suburban cinema, ticket prices were substantially cheaper than the city centre, and travelling to the suburban cinemas was both cheaper and more convenient, as local residents could usually walk or cycle rather than taking a bus. The cheaper seats are promoted in many newspaper accounts of suburban cinema openings, of which the following forthright quote is representative: “The overhead charges are lower and the benefit can be passed on to public in the form of cheaper seats.”⁹⁷ One account of a suburban cinema opening specifically sets up the suburban cinema as a threat to those in the city centre. Hence the Aspley “must be counted a serious rival to the houses in the centre of the city”.⁹⁸

A major attraction of the suburban cinemas was the luxury they offered, which set them above the majority of those located in the city, with the exception of such highly prestigious cinemas as the Ritz. In the 1930s, the cinemas in the suburbs were new and resplendent, benefiting from up-to-date equipment, comfortable seats and attractive décor. Newspaper articles and advertisements for suburban cinemas routinely highlighted that luxury which enabled them to rival the city-centre cinemas. For example, “Luxury in suburbia” was the hallmark of the Astoria.⁹⁹ By the 1930s, the majority of Nottingham’s purpose-built city-centre cinemas were twenty or more years old. They had been built well before the era of the super cinema, at a time when standards of décor and fittings were considerably lower, or were converted music halls built in an even earlier era of

more modest assumptions. The early cinemas “were mostly plain halls with an ornate façade, derived from fairground presentation, simply stuck on the front”.¹⁰⁰ While the quality of cinema architecture had improved in the 1920s, it was considerably less acclaimed than the achievements of the 1930s. The account of the opening of the Curzon specifically compares the basic accoutrements of the older cinemas with what the modern new cinema has to offer: “Time was when comfort, to say nothing of luxury, was not a conspicuous feature of the average cinema ... All that is now changed.”¹⁰¹ The Capitol, opening in 1936, could claim that “the patron will be sensitive to a feeling of modern liner-luxury”,¹⁰² while at the Savoy “nothing has been spared to ensure complete comfort”.¹⁰³ The suburban cinema then, was represented as a luxury yet, at the same time, a habit because it was convenient, local and substantially cheaper than the city-centre cinemas.

This emphasis on luxury was particularly relevant in the 1930s when the average cinema-goer’s home was anything but luxurious. This is a recurrent theme in Jackie Stacey’s work on women cinema-goers of the following two decades. Stacey argues that in their accounts, “attention is drawn to the physical luxuries of the cinema in contrast to the very specific hardships of the domestic environment”.¹⁰⁴ Thus the response to the luxury of the 1930s cinema was very different to today, when the standards and facilities of the average home are comparable with, or superior to, those at the cinema. The luxury of the suburban cinema used to be a vital part of the cinema-going experience, and contributed to the sense of ‘being taken into another world’ which 1930s films typically offered.

As Stacey argues, “thus the architecture, design and interior décor can be seen as an integral and important part of the escapist pleasures of cinema-going.”¹⁰⁵ An important element of the luxury of the cinema in that period was its feminine associations. This was dependent on cinema architecture and interior décor, and on the very experience of watching films. Speaking of the 1940s and 1950s Stacey goes so far as to say that “the cinematic space in which Hollywood films were consumed was a feminised one”.¹⁰⁶ In her study, the colours, textures, smells and overall richness of sensual experience of the cinema pervade the women’s memories.¹⁰⁷

The emphasis on luxury offers one way of understanding the associations between femininity, cinema and suburbia in the period. These associations are particularly significant in the context of Nottingham. As argued previously, Nottingham, as the ‘Queen of the Midlands’, had a well-established reputation as a feminine and feminised city. Boasting a disproportionately high number of women, drawn into the city by the offer of ‘women’s’ jobs, the lack of heavy industry and the large numbers of shops, the Nottingham of the 1930s was in sharp contrast to its surrounding coal fields, a primary ‘male’ signifier (as shown, for example, in D H Lawrence’s novels of the period). As we have seen, mass culture in general and cinema in particular have been closely associated with the feminine: due to the imputed emphasis of both women and mass culture on that which is escapist, unchallenging and socially cohesive.¹⁰⁸ The luxury of cinema in the 1930s further intensified the association between the two. Again, women have

been traditionally associated with luxury, colour, warmth and softness, the very qualities on which cinemas of the 1930s promoted themselves.

The findings of the Mass-Observation study of cinema in 1938 support the arguments made about the coverage of cinema in Nottingham's local press. Of the three cinemas which Mass-Observation studied in Bolton, the female response to their questionnaire outnumbered the male only at the most up-market cinema, the Odeon. Patrons of the Odeon singled out its interior as significant to their pleasure in cinema-going. Examples of their comments include the following: "luxurious interiors certainly increase one's enjoyment of a show", "the organ is very beautiful" and "the picture palaces are so comfortable, lovely seats etc".¹⁰⁹ All these adjectives may be typically defined as feminine and many are commonly used to describe attractive women and their accoutrements. (The memories of cinema-going published in Nottingham in the local press demonstrate the same emphasis.)¹¹⁰ The theme of the luxurious and sensuous interiors of the 1930s cinema is discussed in detail in the following chapter which studies how cinemas were advertised.

This chapter has argued that the 1930s cinema boom needs to be understood in relation to the growing suburbanisation that characterised the period. This resulted in changing perceptions of city and periphery, locality and the place of entertainment. In the absence of other facilities cinema was instrumental in creating a sense of community and neighbourhood among newcomers to the newly-built estates. In the next phase of suburbia in the 1950s and 1960s, public houses resumed their traditional role in this process and were joined by community centres and bingo halls. That period was also marked by mass cinema closures, as discussed in Chapter Five.

The strong associations which both cinema and suburbia have with femininity are revealed to be particularly pronounced both in the 1930s and, specifically, in Nottingham. It could furthermore be argued that these are manifestations of a more widespread impulse towards feminisation in society as a whole in the 1930s. John Baxendale and Chris Pawling's analysis of Priestley's *English Journey* suggests that his journey in 1933 reveals "the collapse of an old masculine world".¹¹¹ The suburban cinema achieves increasing resonance and significance when situated within this social and historical context.

NOTES

¹ Alan A Jackson on Britain's inter-war suburbs, quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p. 16.

² See, for example, Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 95, which discusses escapism at the 1940s and 1950s cinema, while the very title chosen by Richards for his study of 1930s cinema, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, clearly indicates cinema's role in that decade.

³ J B Priestley, *English Journey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977. First pub. William Heinemann, 1934.) p. 131.

⁴ Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ Richard Harris and Peter J Larkham, 'Suburban Foundation, Form and Function', in *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form and Function* (London: E & F N Spon, 1999) p. 10.

⁷ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, pp. 7-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ So in nineteenth-century Nottingham, working-class villages such as Radford and Sneinton were built outside the city boundary, whilst the exclusive housing estate, the Park, grew up within the city.

¹⁰ Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley, *Dunraomin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (London: Pimlico, 1994) p. 23.

¹¹ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) p. 79. Hall goes on to summarise the attacks waged on suburbia by architects and cultural critics in the inter-war period, pp. 80-5.

¹² Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 7.

¹³ This belief underlies accounts of suburbia even where gender issues are not foregrounded or are not discussed directly. For example, see Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*; Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*; Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia*; Harris and Larkham, ed., *Suburban Form and Function*.

¹⁴ Silverstone, *Visions of Suburbia*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ See, for example, Peter Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption* (London: Sage, 1997); Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940* (London: University of California Press, 1985); Richard Ohman, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

¹⁷ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ Harris and Larkham, 'Suburban Foundation', in *Changing Suburbs*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Gordon E Cherry, *Urban Change and Planning* (Henley-on-Thames, Oxon: G T Foulis, 1972) p. 128.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 134.

²¹ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp. 68-9.

²² In London the growth and centralised ownership of the Underground system facilitated the rapid growth of suburbia; in Nottingham it was aided by a new road system and by local transport increasingly coming under the aegis of the city council. The increase in car ownership was instrumental to the growth of the suburbs across the country.

²³ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 71.

²⁴ John Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, ed., John Beckett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 440.

²⁵ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, p. 5.

²⁶ David C Thorns, *Suburbia* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972) p. 78.

²⁷ For a discussion of theories of embourgeoisement through council estates, see Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-class Housing in England Between the Wars: the Becontree Estate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 231-7.

²⁸ Hall includes a quote from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board to support his argument, see p. 71. Amongst the establishment there was a fear of the perceived threat constituted by the extreme left throughout the 1930s.

²⁹ Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in *Centenary History*, p. 437.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ NEP, 1 October 1934.

³² T Cecil Howitt, *Nottingham Housing Schemes 1919-1928*, p. 104.

³³ A small housing development was built on the eastern fringes of the city, Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in *Centenary History*, p. 441.

³⁴ Richard Turkington, 'British "Corporation Suburbia": The Changing Fortunes of Norris Green, Liverpool', in *Changing Suburbs*, p. 57.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

³⁶ *Nottingham Housing Schemes*, pp. 5-18.

³⁷ NJ, 8 May 1933.

³⁸ Turkington, 'British Corporation Suburbia', in *Changing Suburbs*, p. 59.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴⁰ The influence of isolation and lack of community facilities in 1930s corporation suburbia is recollected by some of the residents who were interviewed for the *Nottinghamshire Living History Archive* and is detailed by Turkington's 'British "Corporation Suburbia"', in *Changing Suburbs*, pp. 56-75.

⁴¹ Turkington, 'British Corporation Suburbia', in *Changing Suburbs*, p. 59.

⁴² City of Nottingham Education Committee, *The William Crane Schools 1931-1952* (1952).

⁴³ NDG, 1 December 1932.

⁴⁴ NEP, 2 May, 1930.

⁴⁵ NEP, 2 June 1936.

⁴⁶ NEP, 16 October 1929. This was a common problem in new estates throughout the country as planners had neglected to take into account the unusually high demand for school places due to the demographic mix of the new residents resulting in a high proportion of young families.

⁴⁷ NEP, 26 April 1930.

⁴⁸ Turkington, 'British Corporation Suburbia', in *Changing Suburbs*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ NEP, 13 February 1931.

⁵⁰ NEP, 13 February 1931.

⁵¹ NEN, April 5 1934.

⁵² For a discussion of what constituted a 'super' cinema, see Sharp, *Picture Palace*, pp. 104-48.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 114.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁵ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*.

⁵⁷ The vast increase in car ownership is also central to this change. Hence Nottingham's 1980s-built out-of-town multiplex, the Showcase, is located just off a main road and possesses a large car park, making it highly convenient for car owners. Indeed, it is conceptualised as an American model and virtually presupposes a high percentage of car users.

⁵⁸ These cinemas are recalled as flea-pits, albeit fondly, by many of the contributors to the video *Nottingham at the Cinema*.

⁵⁹ NDG, 8 July 1932.

⁶⁰ NJ, 28 September 1936.

⁶¹ NDG, 8 November 1935.

⁶² NJ, 12 June 1929.

⁶³ Nottingham's 1930s local press contains numerous proud references to the decreasing amount of drunkenness in the city, which was represented with a great sense of pride. For commentary on

the decline in drunkenness in Britain as a whole in the inter-war period see A J P Taylor, *English History*, pp. 385.

⁶⁴ NDG, 1 December 1932.

⁶⁵ Car ownership went up in the 1930s from just over one million to nearly two million (A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 302), but in Nottingham this was matched by major road-laying projects throughout the decade, including the construction of the city's ring road.

⁶⁶ NEP, 16 February 1937.

⁶⁷ NDJ, 17 October 1936.

⁶⁸ *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*.

⁶⁹ It is difficult to envisage buildings of a similar scale and importance being built in the middle of a suburb today, when any out-of-town building work forms a self-contained complex accessible by car for the region as a whole.

⁷⁰ NDG, 1 August 1935.

⁷¹ NDJ, 12 June 1929.

⁷² A valuable overview of opposition to 1930s suburbia is provided in *Dunraomin*, pp. 27-66. This includes the disdain of the architectural profession as a whole, which was in favour of unadorned Modern architecture, and of writers such as John Betjeman and W H Auden.

⁷³ A J P Taylor, *English History*, p. 304.

⁷⁴ NEP, 6 March 1996.

⁷⁵ NDG, 1 December 1932.

⁷⁶ GJ, 22 August 1969.

⁷⁷ Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *English History*, p. 313.

⁷⁹ For commentary on cinema-going as a habit in the period, see Philip Corrigan, 'Film Entertainment as Ideology and Pleasure: A Preliminary Approach to a History of Audiences', in James Curran and Vincent Porter, eds., *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson) 1983 p. 32.

⁸⁰ This difference in the perception of city-centre and suburban cinemas is evidenced in readers' memories of cinema-going in the period. For example, Bill Cross recalls that you would take a girl out to the local cinema, "but if your date developed and you saw her again you would take her into the city". NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998. For another suburban 1930s cinema-goer a "special outing was a trip into Nottingham to the huge new Ritz cinema", *Nottingham Observer*, March 1984.

⁸¹ Sharp, *Picture Palace*, p. 145.

⁸² NDG, 27 December 1932.

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- ⁸³ NDG, 8 November 1935.
- ⁸⁴ NEN, 13 May 1932.
- ⁸⁵ NDG, 27 December 1932.
- ⁸⁶ NDG, 16 February 1937.
- ⁸⁷ In *Dunroamin*, p. 79 Oliver et al discuss this same ambiguity in relation to 1930s-built suburban houses which, they claim, expressed, for example, nostalgia *and* modernity, individuality *and* community. The dual attitude towards tradition and modernity is particularly relevant to suburban cinemas of the period. According to Pevsner [quoted in Oliver et al p. 73] ambiguity is typical of British architecture in general; accordingly we can expect this ambiguity to find its apotheosis in the suburb caught between town and country, upper and lower class.
- ⁸⁸ The opening of the Savoy, NDG, 11 November 1935.
- ⁸⁹ The opening of the Plaza, NEN, 13 May 1932.
- ⁹⁰ The opening of the Dale, NDG, 27 December 1932.
- ⁹¹ Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997) p. 12.
- ⁹² Buying clothes and makeup to imitate the stars is one of the significant ways in which watching films induces people to buy new products. See Stacey, *Star Gazing*, pp. 167-70 and, for recollections of the same process in Nottingham see, for example, Bill Cross's memories in NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- ⁹³ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 16. Celia Johnson's character in *Brief Encounter* represents a classic example of this type. A cinema visit is regularly combined with this respectable housewife's afternoon shopping trip, for whom the cinema is presented as a safe, unthreatening venue for a woman alone.
- ⁹⁴ NDJ, 12 June 1929.
- ⁹⁵ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 17.
- ⁹⁶ This observation is based on evidence from Nottingham cinema-goers in retrospective newspaper accounts, on research for a Nottingham cinema oral history project, and on the video *Nottingham at the Cinema*.
- ⁹⁷ NDG, 1 December 1932.
- ⁹⁸ NDG, 1 December 1932.
- ⁹⁹ NEP, 17 June 1936.
- ¹⁰⁰ David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies* (London: Architectural Press, 1980) p. 14.
- ¹⁰¹ NDG, 1 August 1935.
- ¹⁰² NDJ, 17 October 1936.
- ¹⁰³ NDG, 8 November 1935.
- ¹⁰⁴ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 95.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. See, for example, pp. 95-7.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman', in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.) pp. 188-207.

¹⁰⁹ Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds., *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

¹¹⁰ This theme is looked at in detail in Chapter Seven which studies memories of cinema-going.

¹¹¹ John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p. 67.

CHAPTER THREE

SELLING CINEMA

How Advertisements and Promotional Features Helped to Formulate the 1930s Cinema Discourse

Advertising men were modernity's 'town criers'. They brought good news about progress.¹

This chapter studies the ways in which 1930s cinema was promoted in the local press through both the advertisements and feature articles on the opening of new cinemas. Through these means, cinema maintained a high profile throughout the decade due to the fact that many cinemas advertised almost every day, plus there were feature articles to mark the opening of the twenty-two cinemas built in Nottingham in the 1930s. Based on the information contained in the articles about new cinemas, the chapter also discusses the cinema building which, with its streamlined modern design and neon-lights to attract customers, can itself be read as a form of advertising.

The chapter argues that cinema advertising was instrumental in constructing the discourses of luxury and modernity discussed in the previous two chapters. The notion of escapism associated with that luxury and modernity was also significant to the advertisements. Furthermore, advertising contributed to the notion of cinema-going as a habit, particularly in the context of the new suburban cinemas. The advertising appealed to the aspirations of the audience, and particularly to the aspiring working-classes. Thus advertisements would, for

example, highlight a cinema's up-to-the-minute technology, assure readers that it was of the latest design, and that their comfort would be assured. In an era when cinema-going was customary for a large proportion of the population, the notion that it was a habit was already established for many people. Thus the role of advertising in that context was, first and foremost, to inculcate the habit of going to *their* cinema rather than to one of the many alternative venues in Nottingham.

In order to understand how these two discourses functioned, it is important to note that 1930s advertising focused far more on cinemas than on films, as the audience would often go to the cinema irrespective of the film showing.² Details of the films were most likely to be included in advertisements for the 'escapist' genres of the period, such as musicals and comedies, those genres of film seemingly most in accordance with the atmosphere of the cinema. Advertisements were, however, primarily for cinemas and the advertisements were selling a brand, of which the Odeon is a prime example in Britain. So the 'Odeon style' became synonymous with the 1930s cinema building and, as Richard Gray argues, is now "almost a generic term" for cinema.³ The cinema's luxury and, for suburban cinemas, its location, were central to the advertisements in most cases, while the film showing was of secondary importance.

Whether, despite or because of the very popularity of cinema in the 1930s, competition was intense. In Nottingham there were over fifty cinemas by the end of the decade, while there are only four today.⁴ In the 1930s, however, there was a range of cinemas in both the city centre and the suburbs, each of which had to vie with one another to secure high attendance figures. This was the decade when

most of the 1,000-seat plus 'super' cinemas were built.⁵ However, throughout the building boom some representatives of the industry were deeply concerned about the problem of overbuilding.⁶ There were no restrictions on the number of cinemas built in the 1930s; in fact, as the first chapter argued, local councils could actively encourage new cinemas as they provided extra facilities and had a high rateable value. Even though national cinema attendance rose from 903 million in 1933 to 1,027 million in 1940⁷, the older cinemas, which may have been more uncomfortable and with poor-quality equipment, increasingly lost business to the luxury new constructions.⁸

The majority of Nottingham's cinemas advertised regularly in the local press. The advertisements were almost exclusively in the form of small ads: cinema listings with varying amounts of detail about the individual cinema and the films showing. (However, the advertisements for the Ritz were customarily larger than those for the city's other cinemas.) Some cinemas occasionally took out larger box advertisements, usually to announce their opening or refurbishment. There were no visuals included of either the cinemas or the films. Although the individual advertisements were small, they had a cumulative impact, particularly in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, which numbered around thirty cinema advertisements each night towards the end of the decade.⁹ This meant that cinema coverage would typically occupy around two-thirds of a broadsheet page in each edition, before taking into account any cinema-related news items. The regular cinema news stories comprised previews of the new films each week and short feature articles about Hollywood or British stars. Occasionally, this was

supplemented by less favourable coverage of the possible dangers of cinema (as discussed in the following chapter). In this manner, cinema maintained a regular presence in the local press throughout the decade. Nottingham also had one theatre at the time, the Theatre Royal, and a music hall, the Empire. While each of these regularly advertised in the same format as the cinemas, and their advertisements were the first in the listings, theatre was considerably less prominent than cinema due to there being so few examples.

As the city's four daily newspapers of the 1930s were aimed at somewhat different markets, this was reflected in the amount of cinema advertising they carried. As Stuart Hall claims, "newspapers do not come absolutely fresh and open to news. They are already in a complex relationship with a body of readers."¹⁰ As a result, each newspaper included the appropriate cinema advertisements to satisfy the priorities of their readership. The *Nottingham Evening Post* contained the most cinema advertisements and, as we have seen, was the youngest in tone, the most up-to-date and the most female-centred; for example, with regular features on fashion, cosmetics and music. This is in keeping with Richards' profile of the typical 1930s cinema-goer: "While a large proportion of the population at large went to the cinema occasionally, the enthusiasts were young, working-class, urban and more often female than male."¹¹ The *Post* was abreast of national newspaper trends in this respect: James Curran and Jean Seaton state that the *Daily Mirror* changed the agenda for newspapers in the 1930s by appealing more to women and younger readers, and paving the way for the incorporation of newspapers into the entertainment

industry.¹² The *Post* also ran adverts for the Palais, Nottingham's largest dance hall, which further indicates that it particularly targeted the young, female readership. As Ross McKibbin argues, there is a connection between the clientele of the dance hall and the cinema in the 1930s, in that they both were luxuries which appealed to the aspiring working class.¹³

The *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, the city's most middle-class newspaper, included a high proportion of business news and avoided sensational news stories. Accordingly, the most prestigious cinemas, at the beginning of the decade the Hippodrome and the Elite, joined in 1933 by the Ritz, were the most likely to advertise there.

The *Nottingham Evening News* was second to the *Evening Post* in its quantity of cinema advertising. This was the most tabloid-style newspaper of the four but was targeted more specifically at male readers and thus contained less cinema news and advertisements than the *Post*.

The *Nottingham Journal* was a traditional publication which appealed to the middle-class, middle-aged audience and accordingly carried little cinema advertising. While cinema-going became more popular with the middle-classes in the 1930s,¹⁴ the majority of the audience were young people who were unlikely to either be home owners or to have the resources for foreign holidays. Indeed, the number of cinema advertisements in the *Journal* declined in the course of the decade, so by 1938 only the Ritz regularly advertised there.

Cinema promotion in the advertisements and articles on the opening of new cinemas comprises four main areas: location; the cinema building;

technology; and films. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into corresponding sections in order to analyse the discourses of luxury and modernity in each context.

Cinema's Location and its Association with Habit and Luxury

A cinema's location was an important element of 1930s cinema advertising, and the location of suburban cinemas was especially significant in this context as it represented both luxury and modernity.

Nottingham's cinemas of the 1930s may be divided into three geographical groups: the city centre, the inner-city and suburbia. The most prestigious cinemas, the Elite and the Ritz, were located in the city centre, yet there were also many converted theatres or music halls in the city, such as the Goldsmith Street Picture House and the Victoria Electric, which lacked the luxury of the newer purpose-built cinemas. Some were refurbished in the 1930s in an attempt to compete with the newer cinemas. For example, the city-centre Regent Hall which had opened in 1913 advertised itself in 1937 as "redecorated, refurbished, reseated with latest type luxury cinema seats ... The public of Nottingham may now confidently regard the Regent as a first-class, up-to-date cinema".¹⁵

The cinemas located in the city centre had the benefit of attracting first-run films which could be presented in the suburbs anything up to a year later. For example, *Gold Diggers of Broadway* (1929) was shown in the city centre in April 1930 but only reached the suburbs in February of the following year.¹⁶ As

discussed later in the chapter, advertising customarily utilises newness as a major selling point and this was particularly true of the 1930s. Yet there is little reference to the presentation of first-run films in the cinema advertising of the period. This supports the idea that the cinema building rather than the films was central to 1930s cinema advertising.

The next group comprises the cinemas in what we would now call the inner city: working-class districts comprising old housing stock, often with industries, such as the Raleigh cycle works in the Radford area, mixed in amongst the houses. These areas housed the lowest status cinemas: the old, dirty and uncomfortable ones. These so-called flea-pits advertised far less than the other categories of cinema and some placed no advertisements whatsoever. For example, I found no adverts at all in the local press for either the Electra, Leno's, the Olympia or Sneinton Palace, all of which are remembered in the local press as flea-pits, and which local histories of cinema attest to being in operation throughout the 1930s.¹⁷ When cinemas in this group did advertise, the information would typically comprise only the film's title and, occasionally, the performance times.¹⁸ This minimal advertising presence suggests that the audiences of the inner-city cinemas were fixed, solely comprising people who went to their 'local' and simply wanted to know at what time the film was showing.

The third grouping is the 1930s-built suburban cinemas. The suburban cinemas were consistently cheaper than the city centre cinemas and offered other distinct advantages: namely, their convenient location and, very importantly, a modern, luxurious building. There was at least one cinema in each of the new

suburbs, and the newspaper accounts of cinema openings all stress the importance of the cinema to the district: it typically “adds to the appearance of the neighbourhood, quite apart from the fact that it will be welcomed from an entertainment point of view”.¹⁹

Following each cinema’s opening, regular advertisements maintained a focus on its luxury, which was firmly associated with its location: the cinemas offered “luxury in suburbia”.²⁰ In this manner, each suburb was accorded its own luxury. For example we hear of “Radford’s luxury cinema”²¹ and “Carlton’s own luxurious cinema”.²² The advertisements for suburban cinemas presented their location as advantageous. By this means, cinema advertising was instrumental in establishing the local press discourse on the superiority of the suburban lifestyle as a whole to that of the inner-city dwellings it replaced. Through cinema advertisements, the advantages of the suburban lifestyle were frequently extolled through the suburban cinema as a signifier of luxury and modernity. Furthermore, the emphasis on location in these advertisements functioned to instil a sense of community, fellowship and belonging: so the Ritz-Carlton is not only luxurious but is also Carlton’s *own* cinema.²³ This was crucial to the strategy of presenting cinema-going as a habit, as demonstrated by the Savoy cinema’s mid-1930s strapline: “Get the Savoy habit!”²⁴

The suburban cinemas also promoted themselves on the basis of status. As part of their attempt to appeal to the middle-class and aspiring middle-class audience, there was a strong emphasis on the provision of car parks. This trend became marked in the second half of the 1930s. The first suburban cinema in

Nottingham to advertise car parking, as early as 1932, was the Tudor in West Bridgford, one of Nottingham's most prosperous middle-class suburbs.²⁵ (The parking facilities were minimal by present day standards; parking for 200 cars was standard in a cinema seating between 1,000 and 1,500.²⁶) Even in terms of parking facilities, cinema advertising was competitive. So the Astoria went one better by specifying that theirs was a "large, free floodlit car park".²⁷ Car owners were a small minority in 1930s-Britain, yet all the suburban cinemas advertised their parking facilities which is indicative of the aspirational nature of the advertising.

Hence, as Roland Marchand has identified, advertisers presumed "that the public preferred an image of 'life as it ought to be, life in the millennium' to an image of literal reality".²⁸ To satisfy this demand, the features with which the suburban cinemas associated themselves were signifiers of social standing as much as facilities of actual value to the majority of cinema-goers. By these means the glamour and prestige which the cinema is perceived to represent also came to be identified with the more ordinary patrons who formed the vast majority of cinema-goers. Marchand discusses how the advertisers of the period emphasised a "class" audience partly because of the influence this group held over the lower classes. The wealthy "popularized new forms and places of amusement, and pioneered new styles of living. The rest of the country soon followed."²⁹ Marchand's work analysed advertising in the USA, but I would argue that his findings are also applicable to the British context. Cinema advertising frequently

worked by a process of association whereby the aspiring working-class readers could feel included in references to such facilities as car parks.

The frequency of references to cars in cinema advertising was part of a major trend in the latter part of the 1930s when motoring became a high profile activity and coverage of speed, accidents, parking and congestion all featured increasingly in the local press. Through advertising car parks, cinemas not only promoted a facility but also became associated with new technology. Furthermore, this technology was representative of the concept of the 1930s as the streamlined decade, as discussed below, and hence with the progress it represented and the social changes it brought.

Advertisements for cinemas in the city-centre were less likely to refer to issues of location and transport. All these cinemas were conveniently located near the Old Market Square (which in the 1930s became the terminus for local buses, trams and trolley buses), the new bus station or one of the two rail stations. Car parking, with the notable exception of the newly-built Ritz, was not available in the city-centre cinemas. The New Empress did take out a large box advert in 1930, an unusual practice in the period, to announce that it was “near new market and central bus station”.³⁰ The advert is selling convenience: the customer can combine a shopping trip with a matinee and be able to travel home again easily. This aimed at a defined market sector in the 1930s: “Women on their own tended to go [to the cinema] in the afternoon, particularly housewives after they had finished shopping.”³¹

The Cinema Building as Sales Tools

The seductive allure of escape and luxury was promised by the cinema building as well as by print advertising. The bright lights and the display of the names of the films outside beckoned the viewer in, while the canopy that was a typical design feature of the inter-war cinema formed a bridge between the interior and exterior. As Maggie Valentine claims in her architectural history of cinema in the USA, its title, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* is “a literal description of the building”.³²

The new cinemas were rigorously promoted in the press as aesthetically pleasing assets to their respective areas. For example it was claimed that the Majestic cinema “provided Mapperley with one of its finest buildings”;³³ an article on the opening of the Curzon notes its “interesting façade” which “adds to the appearance of the neighbourhood”³⁴; while the Aspley is praised for being “one of the most imposing [cinemas] both to the eye of the passer-by and to the patron”.³⁵ Many of the 1930s-built suburban cinemas, such as the Aspley, the Roxy and the Dale, benefited from an eye-catching corner location, often at the junction of two major roads, and this represented a further selling point through making the cinemas prominently noticeable to passers by. This effect was consolidated by the “imposing” appearance of cinemas such as the Aspley. Richard Gray, describing the Odeon style which was the prime exemplar of 1930s cinema architecture, states that: “the Odeon was highly visible on the High Street; it advertised itself in a flamboyant manner.”³⁶ The tall towers and fins which were so typical of the 1930s cinema per se were highly significant to the definition of the cinema

building as a sales tool and all the Nottingham cinemas of the period were built in this style.³⁷

Ambitious assertions of ultra-modern design were crucial to 1930s cinema promotion; of which the *Nottingham Evening Post*'s claim, that the Astoria cinema is "the most up-to-date in the country",³⁸ is representative. Further examples include the Savoy which is "the most up-to-date in every respect"³⁹ while the Curzon represented "an outstanding demonstration of the progress which has been made in recent years" in cinema architecture and design.⁴⁰ In order to put these claims in context, Nottingham's cinemas receive only passing mention in architectural histories of Britain's cinemas, and are nowhere commended for their groundbreaking innovation. Yet the discourse of modernity was maintained throughout the local press accounts. This discrepancy demonstrates that the local press discourse on modernity and design can differ considerably from the national discourse. In this instance, it functions as a means of city boosterism whereby the newly-built cinemas were portrayed as a significant source of local pride.

The new cinemas opened with a flourish of pre-publicity and grandiose claims, particularly regarding their modernity. A component of cinemas' modernity in the 1930s is that they were streamlined. Indeed the 1930s as a whole has become known as the "streamlined decade". The majority of newspaper accounts of cinema openings in the period refer to the building being streamlined, while one went so far as to specifically reference it as "modern streamlined".⁴¹ In the 1930s the two terms, modern and streamlined, were often used together

because streamlined design was itself a new development. Valentine's discussion of streamlined architecture claims that "its swooping lines, horizontal emphasis, and smooth veneer projected an image of modernism, the promise of the twentieth century".⁴² From this definition, the cinema was an exemplary proponent of streamlined architecture.⁴³ More specifically, to be streamlined is to be designed to go faster, further, more smoothly; it is about transport and the modern potential: Donald J Bush's study of 1930s design, *The Streamlined Decade*, devotes a chapter each to the cruise liner, aeroplane and motor car. Bush equates streamlined design with optimism as an antidote to the despair wrought by the Depression. So for him "the streamlined form came to symbolize progress and the promise of a better future."⁴⁴ Cinema, as the 'dream palace', was, in this context, ideally placed to embody that sense of hope for the future.

The very names of some 1930s cinemas were significant to their associations of escapism and grandeur. So the Forum and the Capitol conjure images of ancient Rome, the Majestic and the Windsor evoke royalty, Rio evokes the idea of Rio de Janeiro and the Ritz literally means opulent and glamorous, in addition to the connotations of the Ritz hotel. As Richards states, the "imperial splendour and unimaginable luxury" suggested by such names is in stark contrast with "the anodyne ABC or Studio One" that is representative of the later period.⁴⁵ In the 1930s, the cinema's connotations of luxury and escapism, then, began even before the patron came within sight of the cinema building.⁴⁶

The neon sign, which brought the building to life after dark, was integral to 1930s cinema design and, therefore, it was significant to the function of the

cinema building as an advertisement. Commercial neon signs in the 1930s were a recent invention, having first been introduced in the USA in 1923.⁴⁷ Thus they were emblematic of modernity and, furthermore, were specifically significant to cinema as principally an after-dark entertainment. Gray, writing of the German influence on British cinema architecture, discusses the Titania-Palast and the Lichtburg (both Berlin, 1929) which “were built to demonstrate ‘night architecture’”, meaning that the type of lighting used was a particular feature of the design.⁴⁸ The neon light’s significance is indicated by the extent to which it was both noted and promoted in accounts of cinema openings. So the Savoy “with its neon lighting cannot fail to have a big impact”,⁴⁹ while neon lights “spring into life” after dark at the Curzon⁵⁰ and give “a most brilliant and attractive first impression of the Plaza”.⁵¹ Architectural historian Reyner Banham, writing of the impact of electric lighting as a whole, claims that “the sheer abundance of light effectively reversed all established visual habits by which buildings were seen.”⁵² Hence it could be argued that the new style of the late 1920s and 1930s cinemas was influenced by the availability of electric lights. Certainly the horizontal and vertical contrast of the cinemas of that period in Britain, which Gray identifies with the 1930s-Odeon style, have considerably more impact after dark.⁵³ The significance of neon lighting is also detailed in the cinema trade press which asserts that it is “admirably suited to emphasise the architectural characters of the façade”.⁵⁴

William Leach’s work on display in department stores is applicable to the argument that the cinema building functioned as a component of its advertising in

the 1930s. Leach argues that the department stores were associated with “glamour, stardom, luxury, sensuality and leisure activities” as a means of selling the goods on display. The department stores, according to Leach, in addition to selling goods were selling dreams and hopes, as were the cinemas. The 1930s shop windows told stories and “they may tell a story that is the exact opposite to the one that people live”.⁵⁵ Similarly, the cinema was clearly visible at night with its neon lights which drew its audience into the on-screen fantasies that inspired the hopes and dreams of the Depression era. As Valentine argues, the environment in which a film is shown strongly affects the viewer’s response, and that effect begins with the exterior of the building.⁵⁶

The sheer size of some of the 1930s cinemas is significant to understanding how the building functioned as a form of advertisement. This was specifically referred to in a number of the articles to mark the opening of new cinemas, in which terms such as monumental, imposing, awe-inspiring were frequently employed.⁵⁷ Peter Corrigan’s study of department stores states that their size has always been a means of inspiring awe in shoppers, and suggests that they have had a religious association which “attracted people to worship at the temple of consumerism”.⁵⁸ The ‘super’ cinemas of the 1930s functioned in the same way; so much so that they were frequently likened to churches in well-used phrases such as “cathedrals of the movies”.⁵⁹

Jackson Lears discusses advertisements for consumer goods as providing the opportunity to “luxuriate in the sensuous experience of material abundance”. If the less affluent were unable to purchase, then “the pleasures of sensuous

contact were at least fleetingly available”.⁶⁰ Cinema advertising worked in a similar way to increase awareness of the abundance within the auditorium that most could afford each week, even if they could not afford that material abundance in other areas of life.

The importance of the connotations of luxury to the experience of cinema-going in the period has been well-documented. Jackie Stacey emphasises the importance of luxury and décor to the pleasures of cinema-going for women in the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that “cinema designs at this time encouraged the feelings of entering another world.”⁶¹ According to Stacey, memories of the cinema building, including its sensuous pleasures such as touch and smell as well as sight, were central to the memories of the cinema-goers she studied.⁶² Connotations of luxury were central to cinema promotion in the 1930s, particularly in the reports of newly-built suburban cinemas. The following extracts from newspaper reports of suburban cinema openings in the 1930s are representative: “Nothing has been spared to ensure complete comfort”⁶³, “a luxury cinema with ... artistic green and gold interior decorations and furnishings”⁶⁴ and “there is little doubt that the patron will be sensitive to a feeling of modern liner luxury”.⁶⁵ Yet the articles also stressed that this was a democratic luxury, equally available to all, so for example one account specified that “the whole of the seating is the same quality.”⁶⁶

The facilities available within a cinema represented an ideal means for advertisers to differentiate it from their competitors and worked as a means of promoting the luxurious nature of the cinema-going experience. The *Elite*, dating

from 1921, was the first cinema in Nottingham to promote itself on the basis of amenities. As such, the Elite's restaurants and cafes regularly featured in its early 1930s advertising. In addition, this would sometimes accentuate the advantages of the restaurant and cafe by referring to particular menus, such as businessmen's lunches.⁶⁷ This practice is indicative of the clientele which the Elite aimed to attract and the aspirational nature of its advertising. Businessmen would not be able to stay on for the matinee, yet the Elite's association with them lent it added kudos. A shopper's lunch would be a more realistic proposition but I found no advertisements referring to such a menu. Instead, throughout its advertising up to the mid-1930s, the Elite presented itself as a high-status cinema which would attract Nottingham's most successful, middle-class patrons. This is amply demonstrated in the extracts from the following advertising copy proclaiming it to be "the most elegant public building of its type in town", offering "a French menu in true French style" and assuring readers that "nothing differs between our presentation and that of the London theatres".⁶⁸

By such means the Elite associated itself with the nationality renowned for its gastronomic excellence, and with Britain's capital city, with all its connotations of cultural prestige and superiority to the provinces. Marchand argues that in the USA in this period "ad creators tried to reflect public aspirations rather than contemporary circumstances, to mirror popular fantasies rather than social realities".⁶⁹ The Elite's advertisement indicates that this observation is also applicable to the British context.

As discussed in Chapter One, the status of the Elite declined in the 1930s. This decline may be traced back to the opening of the Ritz in December 1933. In 1935, a news item recorded the fall in profits of the Elite at the end of the first full financial year of competition from the Ritz. According to an Elite spokesman, the fall in profits was due to “excessive” competition.⁷⁰ As the decade advanced there were fewer and fewer advertisements for the Elite, and the remaining advertisements were smaller and less informative than their predecessors, frequently comprising only the name of the main film and the times of the performances.

The Ritz, then, took over the role of Nottingham’s leading cinema.⁷¹ The cinema advertised regularly throughout the 1930s, and its advertisements were frequently in a larger format than those of the other cinemas. In common with the Elite’s earlier advertising, these frequently included references to its being lavishly appointed, with its own restaurant and tea-rooms. The Ritz had a further attraction which set it above the rest of Nottingham’s cinemas: an organ played by the well-respected and nationally broadcast organist Jack Helyer. Helyer was referred to in the majority of the Ritz advertisements throughout the 1930s and the following example is typical: “Jack Helyer at the console of the Ritz wonder organ. Hear the latest and most marvellous addition to the Ritz organ. Daily at 3.25, 6.20, 9.10.”⁷² This advert underlines Helyer’s significance by listing the times he plays as well as the times of the films, thus marking out his *performance* as an attraction in itself irrespective of the film programme.⁷³ The coverage

accorded Helyer, who also wrote and arranged music, in the Nottinghamshire Archives provides further evidence of his local significance.

Helyer's significance to the Ritz advertising is also aspirational in nature. He achieved a level of national fame as his performances were regularly broadcast on BBC radio, so those who went to the Ritz were in close contact with a celebrity whom others admired but could only listen to. Thus he was also regularly presented in the Ritz advertising as "radio organist",⁷⁴ as a further enhancement of both his and the cinema's standing. The significance of being broadcast on the radio in the 1930s is substantial as this was the time when radio became a mass medium. Radio ownership rose from only 1% in 1922 to 71% of English households in 1939, with the largest increase taking place in the Depression years of 1932-33.⁷⁵

Technology as a Signifier of Modernity

Technology played a significant role in cinema advertising of the 1930s as, indeed, it has in that of cinema itself. As Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery note, "the study of technology [has] a prominent place in film history."⁷⁶ In the 1930s the major technological advances of the period, namely the development of sound and colour film, created new advertising opportunities. As a result, technology was closely associated with the modernity that cinema was then perceived to represent. While advertising regularly utilises the terms new or improved as a means of enticing the consumer, Marchand has argued that this was especially true of advertising as a whole in the 1920s and 30s. According to Marchand: "The ad creators of that era proudly proclaimed themselves

missionaries of modernity. Constantly and unabashedly they championed the new against the old, the modern against the old-fashioned.”⁷⁷ Although Marchand was studying the priorities of advertisers in the USA, again, this principle can be applied to cinema advertising in 1930s Britain.

The closing years of the 1920s witnessed one of the most important technological advances in film history: the development of synchronised sound. Although the first feature-length talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, was made in 1927, sound films did not arrive in Nottingham until 1929. Even after the first sound film had been shown, the process of converting cinemas to show talkies was slow. Some in the industry believed sound was merely a passing fad and thus would not warrant the expense of equipping cinemas with the new technology. According to Kristin Bordwell and David Thompson, in Britain “there was no rush to convert to sound” and it was not until 1933 that “all but the smallest British cinemas could reproduce sound”.⁷⁸ Even after they had all been converted to sound, cinemas differentiated themselves on the basis of the quality of their sound equipment and as late as December 1932, the account of the opening of the Dale specifically refers to its being a talkie cinema.⁷⁹

As befitting its superior status at the time, the Elite was the first cinema in Nottingham to show a sound film, *Lucky Boy* (1929), in June 1929.⁸⁰ However, this was part of a touring exhibition and the Elite did not actually install sound equipment at that time. The Hippodrome, another leading city-centre cinema of the period with seating for around 2,000, was the first Nottingham cinema to be wired for sound, later in 1929. The Elite was an independently owned cinema

whilst the Hippodrome was owned by the Provincial Cinematograph Company. The order in which they installed sound equipment is, then, in accordance with Allen and Gomery's argument that large cinemas which were part of a chain were the first to convert.⁸¹ The remainder of Nottingham's cinemas proceeded to install sound equipment in the early 1930s. For the earlier of these, such as the Elite and the Scala in January 1930, the new technology was promoted in the form of news items in the local press.⁸²

As sound film represented both the latest technology and a new means of presenting a narrative it was a major selling point. Indeed, sound remained important to cinema advertising throughout the first half of the 1930s. The first group of cinemas to convert to sound regularly asserted their superiority over their competitors. For example, an advertisement in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* for the Hippodrome promoted a film as "all talking, all singing, all dancing", while the Elite advertised *Careers and Love's Test* as "all talking, all drama".⁸³ In the first years of talkies, cinemas focused on new variants on the theme, hence advertisements for double feature talkies⁸⁴ and "the first talkie pantomime", which was *Alice in Wonderland* (1933) at the Ritz.⁸⁵ The 'expert', in this case Al Jolson, as the star of the first full-length sound film, was used to promote *Holiday* (1930) at the Elite: apparently, Jolson professed it to be "the finest talkie yet made".⁸⁶

The reference to the "all singing, all dancing" film is very common in the early 1930s, as the introduction of sound to the movies enabled the development of a new film genre, the musical. Musicals were highly popular throughout the

1930s: they represented the ultimate escape from the Depression as well as symbolising technological progress in their dependence on synchronised sound.⁸⁷ Cinemas that were not yet wired for sound in the early 1930s found alternative methods to attract customers. So, for example, the Victoria Picture House in 1930 advertised a “brilliant musical interlude by the Victorians”.⁸⁸ Prior to the introduction of sound film it was customary for cinemas to employ resident musicians and there is some evidence that these formed a significant part of the appeal of films in that period.⁸⁹

As talkies became firmly established, so sound films themselves were no longer a selling point. The advertising imperative was then to persuade the viewer to watch a talkie at their particular cinema. Here, refinements of quality were called into play. For example the Tudor promoted itself as “the house with sound system supreme”,⁹⁰ while the New Empress was “the house with perfect sound”.⁹¹ Despite the technological breakthrough which the sound film represented, there is evidence that film quality at the beginning of the sound era was very rudimentary as, according to David Parkinson, sound “posed a profusion of artistic and technical problems which engendered the most static films ever made”.⁹² In order to resolve this problem, the Scala differentiated itself on the basis of the quality of its sound films, so, if “it’s a good talkie, it’s at the Scala”; thus situating the cinema above the others which had installed sound equipment in 1932.⁹³ At the beginning of the sound era, cinema advertisements also promoted the novelty value of hearing an established star speak. So for example, “Our own Gracie Fields in her first talking picture” was significant enough to warrant a warning to

patrons: "Do not miss this special attraction".⁹⁴ Greta Garbo's first talking role, in *Anna Christie* (1930) at the Scala, a good example of the 'quality films' that the cinema promoted itself on the basis of showing, warranted a short news item.⁹⁵

A further technological advance was significant to the 1930s cinema: namely the commercial availability of colour film. *Gold Diggers of Broadway* was a major draw because it made full use of both sound and colour: thus it was advertised as "all singing, dancing, colour".⁹⁶ Yet while talkies were all-conquering within a few years, colour films remained the exception to black and white throughout the period. Arthur Knight argues that this was due to technical problems in producing acceptable colour quality and to public resistance to further innovation after the change to sound.⁹⁷

Thompson and Bordwell offer a further explanation of why colour film took so long to be regarded as standard. Their view is based on the different perceptions of the use of colour and black and white film in the period. So "today we regard color as a realistic element in films, but in the 1930s and 1940s, it was often associated with fantasy and spectacle".⁹⁸ Hence, in the first years, colour film was only considered appropriate for specific genres. This approach to colour in film can be found in some of the advertisements in the local press. For example, *Vagabond King* (1930) boasted "the screen's most glamorous and enthralling entertainment in full techni-colour"⁹⁹ and *Ebb Tide* (1937) was advertised as "adventure in the south seas in gorgeous colour".¹⁰⁰ Both the film titles and the adjectives used in the advertisements convey the idea that these were ideal colour vehicles for the 1930s: escapist, romantic dramas in exotic locations

which fulfilled a fantasy, at a time when the majority of the audience would not expect to visit such places. Colour film, then, offered advertisers an opportunity to combine the discourses of both modernity and escapism.

A further example of technology being used to sell cinemas is the telephone. From the mid-1930s cinema adverts began to include a phone number and an invitation to book seats by phone. As with the car, the majority of 1930s cinema-goers did not have a phone but the implication is that those who did patronise the appropriate cinema. Hence the advertising is aspirational in nature: through associating cinema-going associated with the telephone – in the 1930s a symbol of wealth that was unavailable to most of the working class. The cinema, however, was financially within reach of almost everyone – providing a taste of an otherwise unattainable luxury.

The Place of Films in 1930s Cinema Advertising

As the previous sections demonstrate, the cinema was more important to advertising than were the films on offer. However, all the cinema advertisements did include the name of at least the 'A' film that was showing. Promotion of individual films by cinemas in the 1930s falls into the following major areas: genre, stars and the full programme on offer. The text often makes it clear that the audience will be transported into another world. This aspect of film promotion links in with the luxury of the cinemas. The audience would be 'in another world' due to both the surroundings and the film. Richards begins his 1930s cinema history, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, with an analogy of cinema and dream: "people went regularly in order to be taken out of themselves and their lives ... a

few coppers purchase[d] ready-made dreams.”¹⁰¹ Cinema advertising, both of the cinema buildings and the films, supports this idea: it is selling dreams and escape. Therefore, musicals and romantic comedies were the best publicised genres, as a means of fostering the escapism that characterised cinema of the period. For example, the Ritz advertised *Advice To The Lovelorn* (1933) with the slogan “biggest laugh of the year”,¹⁰² while the Elite advertised *Hook, Line and Sinker* (1930) as “Gangs! Guns! Gags! Guffaws! Burlesque gangland! A barrage of laughter!”¹⁰³ and *Too Busy To Work* (1932) was promoted as “a cure for depression”.¹⁰⁴ The “romantic fantasy” *Love Me Tonight* (1932) was advertised both on the basis of its stars, Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette Macdonald, and with a taster of the film to whet the audience’s appetite: “He was naughty, she was naughty, but they fell in love”.¹⁰⁵ All the songs in the “musical comedy romance” *Sitting Pretty* (1933), starring Ginger Rodgers, were listed in order to bring out their centrality to the film.¹⁰⁶

As the decade progressed cinemas began to promote special Bank Holiday screenings which typically starred well-established comedy acts such as Laurel and Hardy.¹⁰⁷ Thus “Spectacle! Thrills! Laughs” were on offer in the Easter holiday programme of 1938 at the Ritz-Carlton, while the city-centre Ritz offered the “ideal holiday programme”.¹⁰⁸ The Scala advertised its “big holiday programme” and the Dale, a suburban cinema which normally only opened three afternoons per week, offered special “Whit week matinees”¹⁰⁹.

Stars were important to a film’s success and hence regularly featured in cinema advertising. For example, Garbo in *Anna Karenina* (1935) was promoted

as “the star of stars in her greatest triumph”¹¹⁰ and films which starred Gracie Fields were always billed as Gracie Fields films, often specifically referring to ‘our Gracie’, as in “tonight our own Gracie Fields in her first talking picture *Sally In Our Alley* (1931), do not miss this special attraction”.¹¹¹ This indicates that “our own” British celebrity was being positioned against the big American stars. Fields was one of the greatest film stars in Britain in the 1930s (she also regularly featured in news items in the local press) and the advertisements indicate that her name alone could sell a film. Her film *Sally In Our Alley* was showing at three of Nottingham’s suburban cinemas together in 1932. Richards states that “she was a phenomenon ... a national symbol. To the British as a whole in the 1930s she was simply “Our Gracie.”¹¹² In contrast with current cinema advertising there were very few examples of directors’ or producers’ names being used for promotional purposes. A rare example is for *Sky Devils* (1932): “Spectacle! Thrills! Laughs! In Howard Hughes’ *Sky Devils*.”¹¹³ Even *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) is promoted as a Leslie Banks and Edna Best film, not as a Hitchcock film, which is how it would subsequently be billed.¹¹⁴

The full programme was a crucial aspect of cinema promotion. Most cinemas offered a double bill of two full-length feature films (one of which would normally be a B movie). The programme also typically included short films such as travelogues or cartoons, a newsreel, trailers and sometimes a serial. At the beginning of the 1930s, when talkies were new, it was customary to pair a silent with a talkie film. At the end of the decade, cinemas often ran one colour and one black and white film, or two black and white films supported by a colour cartoon.

The Disney cartoons were particularly well regarded and were regularly mentioned by name in the cinema listings. So from the range of items in the programme, cinemas could highlight their strongest elements and, by emphasising the choice, could appeal to many different market sectors together.¹¹⁵

The Ritz was most successful in this by producing adverts which regularly included details of its entire programme. This made it look far more substantial than the competition, even though the other cinemas did typically offer a programme of similar length. The following example is representative: “The all comedy hit with the all comedy cast, *Havana Widows*. Also Carole Lombard in *Brief Moment*. Jack Helyer at the console of the Ritz wonder organ. *Havana Widows* at 1.00, 3.45, 6.40, 9.30. Ritz café restaurant open daily 11-10.30. Special three course luncheon at 2s.”¹¹⁶ Many of its advertisements also referred to the cartoons, particularly the very popular early Walt Disney films, the Silly Symphonies.

As an element of the full programme on offer towards the end of the decade, an increasing number of cinema adverts referred to their newsreels. The New Empress advertisements regularly referred to offering Pathe Gazette newsreels in general, but for the majority of cinemas newsreel advertising focused on the specific momentous events they recorded. For example, the funeral of King George V was extensively covered. The Hippodrome offered “special pictures of the Royal Funeral”¹¹⁷ while the following day the New Empress went one better by announcing “Royal Funeral Official Film”.¹¹⁸ The Queens cinema presented its

special pictures of the funeral the following week, indicating its lower place in Nottingham's cinema hierarchy.¹¹⁹

Cinema coverage of sporting events also represented a major attraction. The Ritz advertised special pictures of an important boxing match with "the whole fight round by round showing knock downs in slow motion".¹²⁰ Newsreel footage of the 1938 Test Match against Australia at Trent Bridge (Nottingham's cricket ground) was particularly well-promoted in the local press: combining as it did the major selling factors of a local setting and national sporting interest, which even culminated in a thrilling England victory. The Tudor Cinema did not have coverage of the Test Match, but associated itself with the glory of the events unfolding there by virtue of its location "near Test Match ground".¹²¹

In 1935, Nottingham acquired a dedicated news cinema, the News House, which presented itself as an exemplar of the modern with its strap line "to be up-to-date you must see the news you have read about".¹²² The News House advertising emphasised the range of subjects covered in order to appeal to the widest possible section of the public. So its "ninety minutes of exclusive news, interest, travel and variety programme" could include "the wonderful day's play at the Test Match, also the glorious spectacle of the Trooping of the Colour. Everyone will find something to please."¹²³ Clearly, newsreels did not keep the viewer quite up-to-date about news: the pictures were shown days after the news appeared in the newspapers and on the radio. Watching news at the cinema did not keep you abreast of current affairs, but it did provide a new medium for news dissemination and hence a means of being part of the modern world.

The newsreels and the varied programme as whole are important to the place and meaning of cinema in the 1930s: they are central to explaining why cinema-going was a habit and a part of everyday life in the period. A visit to a luxury, up-to-date cinema could typically offer the audience a range of escapism, entertainment and information unavailable anywhere else at the time.

Cinema advertising of the 1930s constructed discourses of luxury and modernity through the cinema building and facilities it could offer. It also worked to instil a habit; particularly in the case of the newly-built suburban cinemas which had to develop their audience base. They also exploited the aspirations of their audience by addressing them as both car and telephone owners, when most patrons possessed neither. Cinemas represented luxury and escapism – both in terms of the film texts and the cinema building. For the majority of cinema-goers in the 1930s, plush seating, carpets and electric lighting were luxuries unavailable in the home, and so were crucial parts of the ‘other world’ that the cinema-going experience represented. Cinema advertising of the period both reflected that meaning of cinema-going and helped to create it by emphasising those elements.

Cinema advertisements, as discussed above, focussed attention on escapism in the way they promoted both the cinema buildings and the films. Yet as Allen and Gomery point out:

Even if we assume that films have functioned as vehicles of escape from everyday woes, we must also assume that they have represented an escape *into something*. Audiences

have made active choices to ‘escape’ into the movies rather than into some other form of entertainment or recreation.¹²⁴

In the 1930s the audiences escaped not only into the film but also into the cinema, which itself represented another world of luxury and modernity. The discourses of cinema advertising, alongside the physical properties of the cinemas, offer a means of understanding what cinema audiences of the 1930s escaped into.

The possible dangers inherent in undertaking that form of ‘escape’ form the subject of the following chapter.

NOTES

¹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) p. 1.

² The importance of going to the cinema rather than to see a film in this period is demonstrated by Douglas Gomery's study of the success of US cinema chain Balaban and Katz in *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1992) pp. 40-56.

³ Richard Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996) p. 90.

⁴ The number of cinema admissions each year has declined accordingly, from 990.00 million in 1939 to only 142.50 in 2000, http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk_admissions.html

⁵ This point is made by, among others, Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 97.

⁶ See *Kinematograph Year Book* in the 1930s. For example, "alarm has been aroused among exhibitors at the possibility of the new picture theatres causing a redundancy". *Kinematograph Year Book, 1932*, p. 210.

⁷ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p. 11.

⁸ According to Allen Eyles, 'Reginald W Cooper of Nottingham', in *Picture House* No. 6 (Spring 1986) p. 19, cinema overbuilding was a particularly pronounced problem for Nottingham in the 1930s due to the rivalry between the city's two principal cinema architects, Cooper and Thraves, which prompted each to respond with 'spoilers' whenever the other embarked on a cinema commission.

⁹ See, for example, NEP, 13 June 1938.

¹⁰ A C H Smith with Elizabeth Immirzi and Trevor Blackwell, with an introduction by Stuart Hall, *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change 1935-1965* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) p. 11.

¹¹ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 15.

¹² James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 67.

¹³ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 394. (There is a further link, namely that both dance halls and cinemas were particularly

popular with young women. These 1930s leisure pursuits represented women's escape from family and church-based leisure activities as well as the demise of homo-social leisure patterns; men, while not such avid fans of dancing and films as women, did forsake the specifically male territory of the public house for them.)

¹⁴ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 17.

¹⁵ NEN, 7 December 1937.

¹⁶ NEP, 26 April 1930, 10 February 1931.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*, 1995.

¹⁸ The performance times were not crucial to cinema advertising at that time as most cinema had a continuous showing and it was customary for the audience to arrive and leave at any time, irrespective of the film times. Hence the expression 'This is where I came in'.

¹⁹ The opening of the Curzon, NDG, 1 August 1935.

²⁰ NEP, 17 June, 1936 of the Astoria Cinema in the suburb of Lenton Abbey.

²¹ NEN, of the Capitol, 28 November 1936.

²² NEN, 18 June, 1936 of the Ritz-Carlton Cinema in the Carlton suburb.

²³ The success of this approach can be inferred by studying memories of cinema-going in the period. As Chapter Seven demonstrates, memories of community and belonging are highly significant.

²⁴ NEN, 20 January 1936.

²⁵ NEP, 25 February 1932.

²⁶ Advertisement for the Futurist Cinema, NEN, 18 April 1938.

²⁷ NEN, 28 November 1936.

²⁸ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, p. xvii.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

³⁰ NEN, 1 July 1930.

³¹ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 15.

³² Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (London: Yale University Press, 1994) p. xiii.

³³ NJ, 12 June 1929.

³⁴ NDG, 1 August 1935.

³⁵ NJ, 1 December 1932.

³⁶ Gray, *One Hundred Years*, p. 91.

³⁷ For example, the 67ft tower of Nottingham's Windsor cinema had been "a feature of the Radford landscape for almost a quarter of a century", NEP, 9 March 1963.

³⁸ NEP, 8 June 1936.

³⁹ NDG, 8 November 1935.

⁴⁰ NDG, 1 August 1935.

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- ⁴¹ The opening of the Curzon cinema, NDG, 1 August 1935.
- ⁴² Valentine, *Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, p. 114.
- ⁴³ For an account of 1930s British cinema architecture, see Gray, *One Hundred Years*, pp. 91-116.
- ⁴⁴ Donald J Bush, *The Streamlined Decade* (New York: George Braziller, 1975) p. 3.
- ⁴⁵ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 18.
- ⁴⁶ However, the names of some cinemas underlined that they were a part of their local community, for example, the Aspley cinema was located on the Aspley Estate. The names of all Nottingham's 1930s cinemas connoted either their luxury and escapism or their place in the community, reflecting the signification of the cinema in that decade.
- ⁴⁷ <http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa980107.htm?once=true&>
- ⁴⁸ Gray, *One Hundred Years*, p. 82.
- ⁴⁹ NDG, 8 November 1935.
- ⁵⁰ NDG, 1 August 1935.
- ⁵¹ NEN, 13 May 1932.
- ⁵² Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* quoted in William Leach's 'Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire', in Simon J Bonner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America 1880-1920* (New York: Norton, 1989) pp. 103-04.
- ⁵³ Gray, *One Hundred Years*, p. 92.
- ⁵⁴ *Kinematograph Year Book*, 1938, p. 261.
- ⁵⁵ Leach, 'Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire', in *Consuming Visions* pp. 116-18.
- ⁵⁶ Valentine, *Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, p. xii.
- ⁵⁷ See, for example, NDG 1 December 1932 on the opening of the Aspley, NJ, 17 October 1936 on the opening of the Capitol.
- ⁵⁸ Peter Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption* (London: Sage, 1997) p. 55-56.
- ⁵⁹ The phrase 'cathedrals of the movies' is often used in cinema histories, with Atwell's architectural history of that name as a particularly prominent example. The use of the term is discussed briefly by Richards, who goes on to say that "regular cinema-goers talked of their seats as 'pews'; stars were worshipped and regularly described as 'gods and goddesses'". *Dream Palace*, p. 1.
- ⁶⁰ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) p. 127.
- ⁶¹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994). p. 95.
- ⁶² Memories of such pleasures for Nottingham cinema-goers are discussed in Chapter Seven.
- ⁶³ The opening of the Savoy, NDG, 8 November 1935.
- ⁶⁴ The opening of the Aspley, NDG 1 December, 1932.

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- ⁶⁵ The opening of the Capitol, NJ, 17 October, 1936. The ship as a symbol of streamlined modernity is indicated by its warranting a chapter of Bush's *Streamlined Decade*, pp. 43-53.
- ⁶⁶ The opening of the Astoria, NEP, 8 June 1936.
- ⁶⁷ NDG, 2 March 1931.
- ⁶⁸ NJ, 2 December 1926.
- ⁶⁹ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, p. xvii.
- ⁷⁰ NEP, 3 June 1935.
- ⁷¹ This assessment of the Ritz is based on a number of factors in addition to its advertising prominence: namely its high-profile opening night attended by film stars and councillors; the amount of coverage accorded to its opening in the local press; its pricing policy; and the memories of cinema-goers of the 1930s, for whom it was the cinema to go for a glamorous and impressive outing. There are far fewer reference to the Elite's splendour in the memories of 1930s cinema-goers although the cinema building has remained newsworthy due to the local import of its architecture.
- ⁷² NEN, 2 April 1934.
- ⁷³ Helyer's status is illustrated by his having subsequently been referred to as "the Brian Clough of his day", which means he was regarded as a local celebrity who enhanced the national reputation of the city. (Oral history project, Nottingham cinemas.)
- ⁷⁴ See, for example, NDG 1 April, 1937.
- ⁷⁵ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 457.
- ⁷⁶ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985) p. 110.
- ⁷⁷ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, p. xxi.
- ⁷⁸ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History an Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) p. 226.
- ⁷⁹ NDG, 27 December 1932.
- ⁸⁰ The first sound film to be shown in Nottingham was *Lucky Boy*, NEN, 25 June 1929.
- ⁸¹ Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, p. 196-97.
- ⁸² On the Elite's changeover to sound see, for example, NEN, NG, 7 January 1930 and on the Scala, NEP, 3 January 1930, NG, 3 January 1930.
- ⁸³ NDG, 7 January and 1 March 1930.
- ⁸⁴ NEP, 10 February 1931 at the New Empress.
- ⁸⁵ NDG, 1 January 1935 at the Ritz.
- ⁸⁶ NDG, 7 March 1931.
- ⁸⁷ The films of the 1930s could be used as an example of the point made by Richard Dyer, who argues that entertainment is a response to real needs created by society. *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 24.

⁸⁸ NEP, 1 July 1930.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience, Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003) pp. 96-8. According to the NG 5 March 1931, however, cinema proprietors claimed that the orchestra had never been a major attraction in cinemas and that the audience figures had risen since the introduction of sound.

⁹⁰ NEP, 25 February 1932.

⁹¹ NEN, 5 July 1930.

⁹² David Parkinson, *History of Film* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995) p. 85. Films would frequently be 'static' because, in the first years of sound, it wasn't possible to move the microphones easily, with the result that the actors also were unable to move around the set.

⁹³ NEP, 25 February 1932.

⁹⁴ NEP, 25 February 1932.

⁹⁵ NEP, 30 April 1930.

⁹⁶ NEP, 26 April, 1930.

⁹⁷ Knight, *The Liveliest Art*. rev. ed. (New York : Macmillan, 1978) p. 148-50.

⁹⁸ Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History*, p. 243.

⁹⁹ NEP, 14 February 1931.

¹⁰⁰ NEP, 13 June 1938.

¹⁰¹ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 1.

¹⁰² NEN, 30 May 1934.

¹⁰³ NEN, 1 July 1931.

¹⁰⁴ NEN, 1 April 1933.

¹⁰⁵ NJ, 2 May 1933.

¹⁰⁶ NEN, 2 April 1934.

¹⁰⁷ NEN, 18 April 1938.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the Easter programmes advertised in the NEN, 18 April 1938.

¹⁰⁹ NEP, 10 June 1935.

¹¹⁰ NEN, 20 January 1936.

¹¹¹ NEP, 25 February 1932.

¹¹² Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 169.

¹¹³ NEN, 18 April 1938, advertisement for the Ritz-Carlton Cinema.

¹¹⁴ NDJ, 1 March 1935.

¹¹⁵ This practice is discussed by Thomas Doherty who terms it a balanced programme in the same way as a meal, with the main course supplemented by side dishes and drinks. 'This is Where We Came In: The Audible Screen and the Voluble Audience of Early Sound Cinema', in Richard Maltby and Melvin Stokes, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: BFI, 1999) pp. 149-58.

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- ¹¹⁶ NEN, 2 April 1934.
- ¹¹⁷ NEN, 31 January 1936.
- ¹¹⁸ NEN, 1 February 1936.
- ¹¹⁹ NEN, 4 February 1936.
- ¹²⁰ NEN, 1 October 1935.
- ¹²¹ NEP, 13 June 1938.
- ¹²² NEP, 19 July 1937.
- ¹²³ NEP, 13 June 1938.
- ¹²⁴ Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, p. 158.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCERNS OVER CINEMA Perceptions of the Moral and Physical Danger of Going to the Pictures

Cinema in its earliest years was frequently regarded as a debased form of mass entertainment and was deemed to be a moral and social threat. Annette Kuhn's study of the period from 1909 to 1925 claims that at that time "cinema was widely looked upon as at best a vulgar sideshow, at worst a serious social problem".¹ While I have argued that cinema became increasingly respectable in the course of the 1930s, a series of debates at both the national and local level continued into that decade and were reflected in the local press coverage. There were three major areas of concern which thus form the basis of the chapter: the physical danger of the cinema; the possible moral and psychological danger of watching films; and whether cinemas should open on Sundays.

In the 1910s and 1920s, cinemas had been widely perceived as representing a physical danger due to their darkness and privacy which made young girls in particular at risk of unwanted sexual advances.² While this fear continued into the 1930s, the risk of fire was regarded as the most significant physical threat following the well-publicised fatalities of some cinema fires, particularly the one in Paisley 1929 (discussed below). Film content was considered to be a threat by those who believed it would encourage moral depravity of either a sexual or criminal nature. However, concern over film content declined in the latter part of the decade, due to the regulation in 1933 of

Hollywood films by the implementation of the Hays Code. In addition, cinema developed an increasingly respectable and middle-class image in the 1930s due to the opening of the large numbers of the well-appointed, imposing and luxurious cinemas, as discussed in the previous chapters. There was debate over Sunday cinema opening throughout the 1930s in Nottingham, yet the evidence of the local press indicates that this was informed more by sabbatarians who were against *any* amusements being open on Sundays and who were in favour of Sunday remaining a day of rest for everyone, rather than by a conviction that cinema represented a specific threat.

This chapter argues that while there were areas of concern about film consumption in the 1930s, the concerns expressed in the local press about Nottingham's cinemas were presented as the agenda of specific groups, for example, that of the clergymen who campaigned against Sunday opening, rather than representing any consensus. As the chapter goes on to demonstrate, the reports of 'bad news' about cinema was largely consigned to events taking place in other parts of the country. Thus the chapter also argues that the local press could report bad news about cinema elsewhere in the country in such a way as to give a favourable account of the cinema industry in Nottingham. As the previous chapters have delineated, throughout the 1930s cinema maintained a high profile in the local press through its affirmative coverage. This practice is highly significant given the accepted truism that 'no news is good news'. The chapter argues that reports of cinema as representing a problem need to be understood in

that context. The affirmative stories rather than the issues of concern over cinema, were foregrounded as representative of the dominant discourse.

There were principally two groups which perceived cinema as an immoral influence: namely, teachers and clergymen. Representatives of each of these groups believed that the danger was most apparent for young people. There is little evidence in the local press that cinema of the 1930s was seen to represent a significant threat to the authorities in general. Indeed, some regarded cinema as contributing to a decline in drunkenness and the police were in favour of cinemas opening on Sundays as a means of keeping children and young people off the streets and, consequently, reducing the crime rate. The growing respectability of cinema is evidenced by the findings of a number of sociological investigations of the period. While some detailed cinema's deleterious effects, others were ambivalent while some examples regarded cinema as a positive influence.³

As the chapter goes on to discuss, the three major issues of physical safety, film content and Sunday cinema opening were significant at both national and local levels. The national concerns were filtered through and applied to the local context by the press and the manner in which this was achieved enabled the press to establish an agenda which, overall, reflected positively on Nottingham. This process occurred because the local press functioned in a very different manner than it does today. As we have seen, in the 1930s many people bought only a local paper and sales of national daily papers only overtook the locals in the inter-war period,⁴ hence it was standard practice for the local press to report national and international as well as local news. Typically, then, the press would

cover a national story and, where appropriate, relate it to the specific local situation.

While cinema continued to receive some negative newspaper coverage, I would argue that the importance and urgency of these debates had declined from the earlier part of the century and continued to decline in the 1930s as cinema became an accepted part of life and the film industry became more regulated through the introduction of the Hays Code. There is a further reason for this shift in emphasis. As my earlier chapters have demonstrated, cinema had come to be perceived as a means of benefiting the city and its growing suburbs, through the building of so many lavishly appointed new cinemas. Thus, criticism of it in the press could possibly be detrimental to the city's self-image, a practice which the local press avoids wherever possible. Furthermore, the decrease in negative cinema coverage indicating that the perceived threat of cinema, or the real instances of its corruption, were less evident by the end of the 1930s, was paralleled by an increase in cinema advertising and film previews due to the increasing number of cinemas in the city. Therefore, the proportion of positive cinema news increased substantially in the course of the decade. In addition, cinema openings constituted a regular news item, along with reports of new Hollywood films and its stars. Thus both the range and the extent of positive stories far outweighed the negative ones. This may be ascribed to both the increasing acceptance of cinema and also, according to Seaton and Curran, to a general trend in newspaper reporting of the 1930s away from political content and hard news items towards human interest stories.⁵

Towards the end of the decade, local newspapers' coverage of the concerns over cinema was superseded by reporting on the new 'problem' of mass car ownership, suggesting that each new mass activity is inevitably perceived as a problem by those in authority. John Springhall situates the concerns over in its early period in their historical context, stating that: "These concerns stretch in an almost unbroken line through successive 'moral panics' in both Britain and America, once popular culture was transformed into urbanized commercial entertainment from the early Victorian years onwards."⁶

Springhall argues that these struggles over taste represented both a class and generational contestation, and from the evidence of both Nottingham's local press and national cinema history, children were central to the debates surrounding cinema. Children were presented as being particularly vulnerable to its dangers, both physical and psychological. Kuhn states that "during the 1910s, the danger of sexual assaults on children in or near cinemas was frequently discussed".⁷ They were placed in a synecdochal relationship to the public as a whole, as Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio claim about children at the cinema in the 1910s in the USA.⁸ In both countries these concerns were manifested in a series of sociological investigations into cinema's effects on the young, of which the American *Our Movie-Made Children* is a widely-known example. Concerns of a similar nature are evident in British studies such as the Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry, School Children and the Cinema in London and the Birmingham Cinema Enquiry.⁹ In both the national and local press, the physical

danger of the cinema to children made headline news right at the beginning of the 1930s.

The Physical Dangers of Cinema-Going

On New Year's Eve 1929 there was a serious cinema disaster in Paisley, Scotland when fire broke out in the operating room of the Glen Cinema during a children's matinee and 70 children were killed in the resulting stampede. The majority of the deaths in Paisley were due to that stampede rather than to asphyxiation or burns. The fire was contained in the operating box but when the 2,000 children saw smoke fill the auditorium they all rushed towards the exit and those on the balcony jumped on top of those below. The hazardousness of the situation was exacerbated by one of the exits being locked, which meant that as they tried to escape, children were piled ten or twelve deep at the remaining exit. In addition, the children had not heeded the manager's exhortations to make their way through the smoke to reach the other exits. The cinema manager was arrested on a manslaughter charge but was cleared in the subsequent enquiry, which hinged on whether he was guilty of having padlocked the exit.¹⁰

The scale of the tragedy, the worst in British cinema history, meant that it was headline news in Nottingham's local press for some days. The press coverage switched between events in Paisley and their implications for Nottingham. This method of reporting gave the local press the opportunity to proclaim local superiority with regard to cinema safety, although an examination of those claims indicates that they may have been somewhat spurious. So the *Nottingham Daily*

Guardian not only reassured its readers with the general statement that Nottingham's cinemas were very safe, but also added the specific detail that they were regularly inspected by the fire brigade, so there was no chance of a similar accident happening there.¹¹ Yet the *Nottingham Evening Post* stated that the fire brigade had approved the safety precautions at the Glen Cinema on the very morning of the fire, which contradicts the notion that regular fire checks would be sufficient to preclude tragic events ensuing at one of Nottingham's cinemas.¹² The press stated that under the regulations in force in Paisley, the fire brigade inspected all the cinemas daily, while in Nottingham an inspection was conducted only once a week. The local cinema industry itself was quick to reassure the Nottingham public of their safety through the press. Two newspapers quoted Mr F A Prior, Secretary of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Cinematograph Exhibitors Association, who claimed that regulations were enforced so strictly in the area that a similar disaster could not happen there. According to his testimony, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council imposed regulations on the cinemas in addition to those of the Home Office.¹³ Another local cinema proprietor claimed that there was no city in the country where regulations were more strictly carried out by the police and fire brigade than they were in Nottingham.¹⁴

Reporters from the *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* checked the safety of children's matinees at Nottingham cinemas on the first Saturday after the Paisley disaster and reassured readers with their findings. One cinema manager informed them that there was one exit for every seventy-two

people in Nottingham's cinemas. (Bearing in mind that the largest of the city's cinemas held up to 2,500 people, that would necessitate an unlikely 34 exits, but neither reporter questioned the reliability of the claim.) The same manager argued that the chance of fire breaking out in the operating chamber of a Nottingham cinema was "almost negligible" as they all utilised the latest machinery.¹⁵ (This perceived link between safety and modernity is carried through in reports of new cinemas, discussed later in this chapter.)

Through regularly interspersing news of Paisley with commentary on and investigation of Nottingham cinemas, then, a tragedy in another part of the country was reported in a manner which would reassure readers that while going to the cinema could constitute a danger in some places, it was safe to do so in their city. In this manner, the local press could proclaim Nottingham's superiority.

Public concern over the fire in Paisley was illustrated by a letter to the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* recommending that in the interests of safety, children should only be allowed to go to the cinema with an adult.¹⁶ The reports of the Paisley disaster make it clear that the consequences were perceived to be worsened because the fire broke out during a children's matinee. All the press reports referred to the children panicking, with a strong inference that this response is far more probable from children, and more particularly children who are unsupervised, rather than from adults. One report explicitly stated that this was the children's response at Paisley because there were no adults present.¹⁷ Children were seen as a particularly likely to panic: so much so that according to one report, the tragedy was caused by "unjustified panic".¹⁸ Similarly, Pearson

and Uricchio argue, in their study of the nickelodeon era in New York, that children, along with women and immigrants, were adjudged to be very liable to panic.¹⁹ Children were believed to be vulnerable because of their “physical frailty” and to be more susceptible to the effects of films because they had more impressionable minds than adults.²⁰

Despite the sense of local superiority fostered by the press, Nottingham strengthened its cinema safety regulations in the wake of the Paisley disaster. In February 1930 it was decreed that an adult must accompany all children under seven years of age in the cinema, and that no children would be allowed to stand in the gangways unless they were there with an adult. It appears that Nottingham was particularly quick to respond to the tragedy at Paisley as, the *Nottingham Evening Post* reported, London did not institute these same regulations for a further year.²¹

Public concern over cinema safety is evident in many accounts of cinema openings in the 1930s, which emphasise that their particular cinema can be visited in safety. For example, from an account of the opening of the Aspley cinema: “safety for the public is assured, as steel and concrete form the entire skeleton of the building”, and the Roxy is “fireproof throughout”.²² While the articles never specifically mention danger, this is the subtext of the recurring reassurances about the cinema’s safety. This very safety is ensured by their modernity which is typically manifest in the provision of a steel-framed building, an up-to-date projection room and the use of fireproof building materials. The report on the opening of the Dale for example claims not only that “elaborate precautions have

been taken to ensure safety”, but also that “the projection room is carried out on the most modern lines”.²³ Before the introduction of safety film three years after the Dale opened in 1932, the projection room was the greatest source of danger in a cinema.²⁴

The question of physical safety at the cinema arose again at the end of the decade, albeit in a very different form, due to the outbreak of the Second World War. Cinemas were closed from 4 September 1939 due to the fear of air raids. The cinemas in the ‘safe zone’ in Nottingham, those outside the city boundary which formed the evacuation area, reopened on 9 September and the city-centre ones followed suit a week later.²⁵

When the cinemas did reopen some emphasised in their advertisements that they were safe to visit. Explicitly, patrons were invited to attend “the Metropole for safe entertainment”²⁶ while the News House emphasised its own war-time safety provisions: adequate warnings in case of air raids, four wide exits and ARP trained staff.²⁷ This type of announcement performed the same function as did the references to safety in the accounts of cinema openings: they obliquely referred to the possibility of panic in the crowd and assured readers that they did not need to be afraid of visiting their cinema.

From being perceived as a potential source of physical danger at the outbreak of war, cinema came to be regarded as a morale booster as the war progressed. In addition, the perceived crowd mentality of the cinema audience also changed. The cinema crowd then represented the national community united in a common patriotic cause, as cinema became important in building morale.²⁸

As discussed later in this chapter, the outbreak of war also had a further effect on the cinema-going experience in Nottingham, as Sunday cinema opening was only introduced in the city because of the war.

The Danger of Films

Film content was perceived by some groups to pose more of a threat than the cinema buildings. These two very different ‘dangers’ of cinema were linked in British legislation in the form of censorship and fire safety. The 1909 Cinematograph Act put physical safety in the cinema, particularly fire safety, under local authority control. Due to the inflammable nature of film at that time, which meant it could be claimed that “the general public feared for their lives every time they entered a picture house”²⁹, the projection booth then had to be fire resistant and safety measures were introduced into the auditorium. Kuhn, however, questions the passing of the bill, asking whether the danger of cinema fire had been overstated as no statistics, or even instances of it, were cited.³⁰ However, due to the ambivalent wording of the bill, the Act also gave the local authority the opportunity to impose censorship at a local level, a practice which remained in force following the formation of the British Board of Film Censors in 1913.

The possible moral and psychological danger of films had been a matter of concern since cinema began. According to Julian Petley, “local authority concern about film content was an expression of the moral panic that accompanied cinema’s early years in many countries”.³¹ These concerns continued into the

1930s with some social surveys, newspaper articles and pressure groups warning of the potential ill-effects of film viewing. This formed part of a broader social trend. As Andrew Higson argues, “social documentation as a mode of cultural-political intervention” in the 1930s was not restricted to cinema but was a widespread practice.³² Some works, notably *The Devil’s Camera* by journalists R G Burnett and E D Martell, were specifically concerned that watching sex and violence would influence behaviour, particularly among women and children. The Birmingham Cinema Enquiry, which was particularly concerned about the effects of film on children, alleged there was a link between “films and deviant behaviour” and went so far as to present a deputation to the prime minister in 1935. Others, such as the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, were more concerned about the perceived insidious effects of films as a whole due to their sentimentality and lack of intellectual rigour.³³

Of the three main cinema concerns of the 1930s, the moral and psychological threat of films stimulated the least local reaction in Nottingham. While some cities, notably Birmingham, spawned pressure groups, this was not the case in Nottingham.³⁴ The local press did report young people who claimed to have been drawn to crime by films, but there were far more accounts of crimes committed under the influence of alcohol.³⁵ (The perceived danger of alcohol even extended to sport; Lady Astor was reported as saying that England had lost the 1931 Ashes cricket series because the Australian team was teetotal.)³⁶ The press also reported clergymen’s and headmasters’ speeches about the corrupting nature of films, but these were not local events and the local angle was noticeable

by its absence. So, in contrast with the reporting of the Paisley cinema fire, I found no examples of local teachers or clergymen being asked for their opinion on whether film was a force of corruption.³⁷

During the Depression years, social surveys studied cinema's effects on the unemployed. According to Peter Stead, anti-cinema campaigners were worried because "cinemas were seen as helping to confirm that new apathy which was thought so typical of those years of mass unemployment".³⁸ This view was expounded by a number of social surveys, such as Seebohm Rowntree's study of York. Rowntree claims that the escapism of cinema can serve to arrest the development of some film fans. Yet he also states that cinemas "play a great part in relieving the monotony of countless lives", where the viewers "can be transplanted, as if on a magic carpet, into a completely new world: a world of romance or high adventure". Furthermore, he observes that cinema has played a significant part in the reduction in drunkenness that had taken place since the previous social survey of York in 1899.³⁹ The Carnegie Trust's study of unemployed youth concluded that cinema-going bred passivity and acceptance rather than action.⁴⁰ For other researchers, this apathy was believed to extend to women and juveniles, both of whom were judged to be more impressionable than adult men in employment were.⁴¹

A similar claim is made by Pearson and Uricchio, who found that social commentators in the Nickelodeon era claimed children, women⁴² and the urban poor⁴³ were particularly impressionable and vulnerable to films. There is some evidence that women were perceived to be particularly impressionable to films in

1930s Nottingham. For example, one article reported disapprovingly on the ‘cocktailisation’ of society: an increasing emphasis on frivolity, superficiality and appearances, which was led by women, and in which cinemas and dance halls played a significant part.⁴⁴ In line with Pearson and Uricchio’s claim for the earlier period in the USA, reports on cinema in 1930s Britain deemed that the perceived frivolousness of films had a far more potent effect on women and children than on men. Often the ‘dangers’ of cinema, alongside other examples of modern life, were deemed to be physical as well as mental. So a leading article of 1939 claimed that modern girls are risking their health by spending their money on cosmetics, dancing and the pictures instead of food.⁴⁵ A medical column entitled ‘A Doctor Writes’ stated that too much speedy movement and the young’s “feverish hunt for ill-ventilated amusement at nightfall” results in nervous breakdowns and illness.⁴⁶

From the evidence of Nottingham’s local press, the cinema occupied a middle position in entertainment between theatre and public houses in the 1930s. Theatre, often referred to as “the legitimate theatre” (in contradistinction to music hall), had high prestige as the city’s major cultural institution. Theatre advertisements, reviews and previews always preceded those of cinema, although Nottingham possessed far fewer theatres than cinemas. Alcohol was opposed not only by temperance associations but also in the wider arena of cultural consciousness. In crime reports, many of the defendants were said to have been drunk and there was frequently an underlying assumption that their drunkenness and resultant criminality were outside their control. This was voiced in a report of

a drunken man's attack on his wife which stated that such an attack could only have been made by a drunken man.⁴⁷ While press coverage of public houses and licensing was frequently hostile, in the 1930s cinema received a more varied and more affirmative press. Some news stories situated films as an inducement to crime and immorality⁴⁸ but there were few examples of this type of reporting. Cinemas were considered to be a more civilised place of leisure than public houses, an appraisal due in part to their popularity with women.⁴⁹ Public houses were more of a male preserve in that period and, combined with the influence of alcohol consumption, they were perceived to foster disorderly behaviour and crime. A trade expert at the British Association argued that habitually watching films must "create a certain restlessness of mind and mood. Yet on the other hand there must be a gain in sobriety as much of the money spent on pictures might otherwise be spent on pints."⁵⁰

In parallel with the concern over the physical danger of cinemas, the debate about film influence was most evident at the beginning of the 1930s. A spate of violent gangster films, very famously *Public Enemy* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932), convinced moralists that the cinema was spawning a crime epidemic. The sex films in the same period, such as *Redheaded Woman* (1932) and *Baby Face* (1933) made them fear that cinema was fostering immorality. According to Thompson and Bordwell, the film companies expressly used sex and violence in the early 1930s to boost cinema attendances, which, in the USA, had fallen as a result of the Depression. However, the censors and pressure groups were firmly opposed to them.⁵¹ So to pre-empt national censorship in the USA, the film

industry accepted self-censorship in 1933 with the adoption of the Hays Code. This meant that film content was no longer held to be 'immoral' and hence moralist campaigns diminished. According to Annette Kuhn, concern about the immorality of films became considerably less important in the second half of the decade. She associates this change with cinema becoming "more widely acceptable and a certain embourgeoisment of filmgoing".⁵²

While concern about the immorality of film diminished, in Britain there was a further campaign against the 'Americanisation' wrought by cinema that some felt was destructive to the British character. This threat was in the form of a change in both accent and behaviour. British and American films competed at the British box office in the 1930s and the majority of the audience preferred Hollywood films.⁵³ Teachers may have been in the vanguard of the anti-Americanisation campaign, with one delegate at a teachers' conference claiming that teachers can no longer understand their pupils due to the American accents they have learned from Hollywood films.⁵⁴ In general, some elements of the teaching profession voiced concerns about cinema's impact on children. At a meeting of the Incorporated Association of Headmasters, the sex and violence shown in films was believed to be a bad influence on children. Some delegates appreciated the educational potential of film but remained concerned that seeing images of violence was becoming a habit for some children and had a more pervasive influence than reading about it.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Catholic Teachers Federation in Nottingham called for more stringent film censorship and decried the influence of gangster and "sex appeal" films on young people.⁵⁶

Concerns over the effects of films on children were heightened by there being no films made specifically for children until the 1940s. In Britain, some towns and cities, including Nottingham, followed the BBFC certification, which divided films into 'U' (suitable for all), and 'A' (suitable for adults only), but this was not a national legislative requirement. However, regulation of children's viewing did develop in the 1930s. From 1937 the BFI produced lists of films suitable for children and the Saturday morning children's clubs adhered to this list. These Saturday morning children's clubs had membership cards, identification badges and rules and had a social as well as entertainment function: part of their remit was to instil values into the children.⁵⁷

The children's clubs provided a valuable function for the cinema industry – they avoided censorship by labelling some films as suitable for children while instilling the cinema-going habit and adding to the respectability of cinema-going: if children's cinema clubs are the norm, then cinema must be considered a basically safe pursuit.

Keep Sunday Special? The Debate About Cinema Opening on Sundays

The debate over Sunday cinema opening lasted throughout the 1930s in Nottingham. Those in favour argued that amusements should be available on Sundays, while those against claimed that the immorality of films should not be allowed to desecrate the Sabbath. This contention, does, however, extend beyond the reputations of films and thus needs to be situated in the context of debates over other forms of entertainment on Sunday. So, for example, there was a dispute over a Sunday circus performance,⁵⁸ and the North Nottinghamshire Symphony

Orchestra was not allowed to hold its annual concert on a Sunday.⁵⁹ In the early 1930s, Sunday cinema opening in Britain was prohibited but a number of cinemas had started to open illegally, leading to some prosecutions. These prosecutions, indicating that the law was unenforceable, combined with public opinion in favour of Sunday cinema opening and led to the passing of the Sunday Entertainments Act in 1932. This gave local authorities the power to sanction cinema opening on Sundays, with the proviso that a proportion of the takings went to charity, that the first showing was at 7pm, and that no employee should have to work more than three Sundays in four.⁶⁰

However, the opportunity for cinemas to open on Sundays was rejected in Nottingham. In January 1932 the local branch of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association attempted to pre-empt the local council's decision at a meeting attended by a number of councillors, the Lord Mayor and the Sheriff. They blamed 'killjoys' for falling cinema patronage along with advocating Sunday opening and highlighting the 'educational' nature of films.⁶¹ In July 1932 the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* entered into the debate with an editorial on "the leisure problem" which, while urging people to develop healthy hobbies to enrich their lives, advocated that Sunday should be a day of rest.⁶²

From 1932 onwards, following the passing of the Sunday Entertainments Act, the local press covered numerous accounts of towns and cities around the country which were debating Sunday opening, which meant that the issue retained its newsworthiness throughout the decade.⁶³

In Nottingham itself the debate came to a head in 1939 when the Watch Committee, which regulated the city's cinemas in that period, recommended that cinemas open on Sunday evenings from 7.45pm.⁶⁴ Their report was provoked by an alleged 400% rise in juvenile crime over the decade. According to the Watch Committee a very high proportion of this crime was committed on Sundays and it was in response to the boredom young people experienced due to all the entertainments being closed on that day. It was claimed that towns where cinemas were open on Sundays had a less pronounced Sunday crime problem. In Nottingham, the police were concerned about the groups of young people who loitered around the city on Sundays, 'looking for trouble'. Instigating Sunday opening for cinemas was, then perceived as a means to alleviate a social problem. Thus, from the perspective of the police, cinema exerted a positive influence on young people. The response of the police in Nottingham was typical of that across the country as a whole. Richards claims that throughout the 1930s the police were generally pro-cinema; as far as they were concerned, cinema was also significant in accounting for the pronounced reduction in drunkenness in the period.⁶⁵

Local opinion on the Sunday opening issue was published in the same issue of the *Nottingham Evening Post* as the recommendation of the Watch Committee, albeit only clergymen's and cinema proprietors' views were canvassed. Those against Sunday opening, namely the clergy, argued that a day without the "machinery of life" and its resulting stress and strain would be widely beneficial. The perils of commercialisation and Sunday working as an infringement of ancient liberties were also invoked. The cinema proprietors,

however, argued that the streets on Sundays were thronged with people who had nowhere to go, and that Sunday opening had proved successful in Birmingham and Coventry.

The ensuing debate over Sunday opening for cinemas in the local press was low-profile outside of the letters pages. There were no leader columns on the topic and little follow-up reporting in the week between the reports of the Watch Committee's recommendation and the relevant council meeting. From the evidence of the letters pages of the local press, the debate did not engage the passions of the local community, with the exception of a few anti-Sunday opening campaigners. The editorial policy of the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* was demonstrated obliquely through the composition of its pages: a large headline "Sunday cinemas not favoured" is misleading in that it refers only to a short item about the opinion of the Forest Ward Women's Conservative Association.⁶⁶

The letters from sabbatarians argued against the commercialisation of Sunday and claimed to be speaking on behalf of the cinema workers who would be condemned to work a seven-day week. The CEA, however, responded with the assertion that cinemas are good employers and that no-one would be forced to work a seven-day week. Those in favour of Sunday opening argued that it would stop "the moral dangers inseparable from the street parades", while those against stated that children and young people were out on the streets on the other six days, so it would have little effect⁶⁷

In general, the anti-Sunday opening lobby campaigned on the basis of respecting the Sabbath and anti-commercialism. The proponents also argued that

family life, and particularly children, would suffer as cinema workers would be unable to be with their families on Sundays. This claim linked cinema with the potential breakdown of family life and family values, in a manner that was a precursor of the 1990s debates over shops opening on Sundays. The clergy presented the issue as one of national importance – indeed, to the Reverend Gregory, the idea of Sunday opening for cinemas was an attack on the national character and security.⁶⁸ While the clergy was predominantly against Sunday cinema opening, at least one parish priest in Nottingham presented Sunday evening cinema shows, which were held immediately after the evening service. It was stipulated that only British films be shown, with the possible inference that these were morally superior to Hollywood films.⁶⁹ Letters in favour of Sunday cinema opening argued for a ‘live and let live’ approach – those who wanted to go to the cinema on Sundays should be able to, while the churchgoers could continue as before.⁷⁰ For the pro-Sunday campaigners, cinema in the form of Sunday opening was presented as a civilising influence, at the very least a means of keeping young people off the streets. Therefore both sides of the Sunday opening debate campaigned on the basis of morality – either to retain the Christian Sunday and its concomitant family values or to locate a means of halting the juvenile crime epidemic.

At the City Council meeting to decide the issue, held on 3 April 1939, Alderman Bowles argued that Sunday cinema opening would not necessitate a seven-day working week, instead it would be the decision of the individual, and all profits would go to charity.⁷¹ His speech referred to the leaflets and letters

from interested parties whose arguments he meant to refute. This indicates that the sabbatarians campaigned most vigorously, as there are no references to any leaflets having been printed in support of the pro-Sunday opening group. The local media remained neutral and even the local cinema proprietors did not campaign vigorously for Sunday opening.

Some of the anti-Sunday opening campaigners at the council meeting said it could be argued that cinema causes crime but this line of argument was not followed through with the presentation of any evidence. Alderman Bowles' speech in favour of Sunday opening, however, claimed that it would reduce crime figures. According to the Watch Committee's analysis of the rise of juvenile crime: "out of the increase here practically the whole took place on Sunday evenings".⁷² Yet the facts, according to the information presented by Alderman Bowles did not quite support this claim. In 1928, 74 juvenile crimes were committed in Nottingham, compared with 489 in 1938 – an increase of less than 300% as opposed to the alleged 400% plus increase. The breakdown of those figures is particularly interesting. According to Bowles: "no fewer than 111 of the 489 offences were reported to the police during weekends".⁷³ Although he argued that this figure represented the majority, the proportion represents less than a quarter of the increase and, crucially, relates to the whole weekend rather than just Sunday evenings.

However the Sunday Opening Bill, supported by Alderman Bowles, was defeated by 34 to 20 votes. Alderman Green claimed this decision meant that "England did not want a continental Sunday."⁷⁴ (This positing of Nottingham in a

synecdochal relationship to the country is, however, somewhat spurious as national legalisation permitting cinemas to open on Sundays at local authority discretion had taken place seven years earlier, and many towns and cities had taken up the opportunity.)

The outcome of the Sunday opening debate in Nottingham was, as Gregory Waller states about that in Lexington,⁷⁵ specifically local: other industrial midlands cities, such as Birmingham and Coventry had introduced Sunday opening some years before.⁷⁶ The views of those against Sunday opening in Nottingham did not reveal that they regarded cinema as a pernicious influence, rather that they were in favour of 'keeping Sunday special' in general and maintaining it as a day of rest.

Sunday cinema opening in Nottingham only became a reality due to the Second World War. Although it had been denied to local people, in 1940 the army requested Sunday opening to entertain the troops stationed in the area and their request was duly granted. Post-war Sunday opening was only retained following a referendum in the city.⁷⁷

This chapter has argued that cinema was perceived as a moral and physical threat in the 1930s but that such a view was held by only a small minority and was not presented in the local press as representative of society as a whole. The chapter has also demonstrated that such concerns over cinema declined over the period. By the end of the decade two of the major concerns over cinema in the 1930s were resolved, leaving cinema more regulated in terms of film content and Sunday opening. In terms of the physical danger that cinema could represent, the Paisley disaster was the only example which retained its newsworthiness over a number of days. Furthermore, I have argued that articles which are concerned with the safety of cinemas need to be viewed in the context of cinema reporting as a whole, which predominantly comprised highly affirmative content. The context of cinema reporting also applied to the national forum and here, it is significant that, in the case of the Paisley cinema disaster, Nottingham's superiority was asserted by the local press.

Throughout the decade, positive cinema coverage always far outweighed the negative coverage. Cinema advertising appeared in the press each day and articles about new or forthcoming cinemas were regular additions. In contrast, articles on the physical or moral dangers posed by cinema were much rarer and were always initiated by major or local news stories.

By such means, the fifty-two cinemas in operation in the city at the end of the decade could largely be perceived by its local press as representing a contribution to the worth of the city, rather than a moral or physical problem which needed to be regulated. The meaning of the 1930s cinema in that decade,

through its coverage in the local press, was a signifier of modernity and luxury, through which it was a source of local pride to both the city and its suburbs. It was also an important means of fostering a sense of community and fellowship. Cinema was a success story with a yearly increase in audience figures matched by the construction of more lavishly appointed new cinemas. However, that meaning was to change significantly over time, as Part Two analyses. Following the wartime and immediate postwar silence, retrospective coverage of the 1930s cinema has been a recurrent theme of the local press. In each subsequent period, the 1930s cinema has taken on different meanings according to social and spatial changes.

Part Two of this thesis analyses these changes, beginning by studying the reports of the cinema closures and modernisation projects which marked the 1950s and 1960s.

NOTES

¹ Annette, Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 14.

² Ibid., pp.120-21.

³ Their findings are summarised and discussed in Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) pp. 67-85. John Baxendale and Chris Pawling situate the “surveys of public opinion which were increasingly common in the Thirties” as part of the expansion of the culture industries and increasing application of social sciences which marked the period as a whole. *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p. 21.

⁴ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 51.

⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

⁶ John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics* (London: Macmillan, 1998) p. 2.

⁷ Kuhn, *Cinema*, pp. 120-21.

⁸ Roberta E Pearson and William Uricchio, “‘The Formative and Impressionable Stage’: Discursive Constructions of the Nickelodeon’s Child Audience’, in Richard Maltby and Melvin Stoked, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: BFI, 1999) p. 64.

⁹ See Richards, *Dream Palace* pp. 67-85.

¹⁰ NEP, 2 May 1930.

¹¹ NDG, 2 January 1930.

¹² NEP, 1 January 1930

¹³ NEN, 1 January 1930 and NJ, 2 January 1930

¹⁴ NEP, 1 January 1930.

¹⁵ NEN, 4 January 1930 and NDG, 6 January 1930.

¹⁶ NDG, 7 January 1930.

¹⁷ NEN, 1 January 1930.

¹⁸ NEN, 1 January 1930.

¹⁹ Pearson and Uricchio, “‘The Formative and Impressionable Stage’”, in *American Movie Audiences*, p. 68.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

²¹ NEP, 14 February 1931.

²² NDG, 1 December 1932 account of the opening of the Aspley; NJ, 17 October 1936 account of the opening of the Capitol; NDG, 1 August 1935 account of the opening of the Curzon; Ibid, 27 December 1932 account of the opening of the Dale; Ibid, 4 December 1933 account of the opening of the Ritz; Ibid, 16 February 1937, account of the opening of the Roxy.

²³ NDG, 27 December 1932.

²⁴ In addition to the extensive coverage of the Paisley disaster Nottingham's local press also provided coverage of fires breaking out in the operating box of cinemas in other parts of the country, for example, in Belfast, NEP, 19 October 1929 and London, NEN, 3 April 1934.

²⁵ NEN, 4, 9, 13 September 1939.

²⁶ NEN, 13 September 1939.

²⁷ NEN, 13 September 1939.

²⁸ For discussions of British cinema in wartime see, for example, Andy Medhurst, 'Music Hall and British Cinema', in Charles Barr, ed., *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986) pp. 177-182, Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 101-105, Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 54.

³⁰ Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship*, p. 16.

³¹ Julian Petley, 'Cinema and State', in *All Our Yesterdays*, p. 41.

³² Andrew Higson, '"Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film": The Documentary-Realist Tradition' in *All Our Yesterdays*, pp. 73-74.

³³ Jeffrey Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp. 54-55.

³⁴ Jeffrey Richards, 'The Cinema in Birmingham of the 1930s', in J K Walton and J Walvin, eds., *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) pp. 31-52.

³⁵ Examples of these types of stories are scattered throughout Nottingham's local press of this decade. See, for example, NDG, 9 March 1931, NJ, 1 January 1938.

³⁶ NDG, 7 March 1931.

³⁷ NDJ, 4 January 1930 includes coverage of the Incorporation of Headmasters' comments on cinema; NEP 25 April 1930 reports on the effects of salacious films on children according to a clergyman.

³⁸ Peter Stead, 'The People and the Pictures. The British Working Class and Film in the 1930s', in Nicholas Pronay and D W Spring eds., *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45* (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 78.

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- ³⁹ B Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Social Survey of York* (London: Longmans, Green, 1941) p. 470.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 54.
- ⁴¹ Fenner Brockway, *Hungry England* and A J Lush, *The Young Adult*, quoted in Stead, 'The People and the Pictures', p. 78.
- ⁴² Roberta E Pearson and William Uricchio, "'The Formative and Impressionable Stage'" in *American Movie Audiences*, p. 68.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ⁴⁴ NDG, 4 March 1931.
- ⁴⁵ NEP, 15 April 1939.
- ⁴⁶ NEP, 13 July 1937.
- ⁴⁷ NEN, 15 July 1931.
- ⁴⁸ For example a thirteen-year-old shoplifter up in court said he had been trying to behave as people did in the screen stories, NJ, 5 November 1931.
- ⁴⁹ Jeffrey Richards, 'Cinema in Birmingham of the 1930s', in *Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939*, p. 34.
- ⁵⁰ NJ, 12 September 1934.
- ⁵¹ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994) p. 239.
- ⁵² Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I B Tauris, 2002) p. 83.
- ⁵³ This issue is covered in detail in Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds., *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).
- ⁵⁴ Teachers Conference, NDG, 14 April 1932.
- ⁵⁵ NJ, 4 January 1930.
- ⁵⁶ NDG, 6 January 1933.
- ⁵⁷ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 82-84.
- ⁵⁸ NEP, 7 May 1930.
- ⁵⁹ NEP, 10 February 1931.
- ⁶⁰ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 53.
- ⁶¹ NDG, 14 January 1932.
- ⁶² NDG, 5 July 1932.
- ⁶³ See, for example, articles on Leeds' rejection of Sunday opening, NEP, 1 October 1932 and the application from Birmingham proprietors to continue Sunday licences, NDG, 7 January 1933.
- ⁶⁴ NEP, 28 March 1939.
- ⁶⁵ Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 60-61.
- ⁶⁶ NDG, 30 March 1939.
- ⁶⁷ NDG, NEP, 31 March 1939.

⁶⁸ NEP, 28 March 1939.

⁶⁹ NJ, 1 January 1938. According to Richards, this became such common practice towards the end of the 1930s that the cinema trade began to regard screenings in churches as “potential rivals for customers”. *Dream Palace*, p. 50.

⁷⁰ NEP, 30, 31 March 1939.

⁷¹ NDG, 4 April 1939.

⁷² NDG, 4 April 1939.

⁷³ NDG, 4 April 1939.

⁷⁴ NEP, 4 April 1939.

⁷⁵ Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City 1896-1930* (London: Smithsonian Institution, 1995) p 133.

⁷⁶ For coverage of the debate on Sunday cinema in Birmingham, see Jeffrey Richards, ‘Cinema and Cinema-going in Birmingham in the 1930s’, in *Leisure in Britain*, pp. 31-52.

⁷⁷ Jeff Hill, ‘Leisure’, in John Beckett, ed., *Nottingham A Centenary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 538.

PART TWO

RETROSPECTIVE COVERAGE OF THE 1930S CINEMA

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POST-WAR FATE OF THE 1930S CINEMAS Cinema Closures - the 1950s and 1960s

This chapter, along with the following one, studies the press reporting of the 1930s cinema in the 1950s and 1960s in order to explain and analyse the changing meanings of cinema in those decades and account for the reasons which underlie that change.

In the immediate post-war period, news about cinema was largely absent from the local press. It became newsworthy again in the mid-1950s due to the decline in cinema admissions. Cinema's popularity had continued to increase throughout the Second World War and the number of national cinema admissions peaked in 1946 at 1,635 million per year. Following that, admissions declined steadily each year until they were less than 1,200 million for 1955.¹ The decline then became much more pronounced, so that in 1959 there were only 581 million visits to the cinema per year and 215 million in 1969.

This trend established the two themes that were to dominate cinema news for the next decade and a half: cinema closures, and the modernisation projects undertaken in an attempt to reverse the decline in cinema admissions, which form the basis of the following chapter. Thus there were two contradictory cinema discourses at work in the period: cinema-going as a

social practice in decline, as signified by the mass cinema closures, and as a leisure activity which was trying to reinvent itself to appeal to the new generation.

Between 1955 and 1968, a total of thirty-five Nottingham cinemas closed, leaving just eleven in operation. (A further six closed in the 1970s.)² This chapter studies how those closures which so characterised the 1950s and 1960s were reported in the local press. The severity of the situation resulted in cinema receiving a significant amount of negative press coverage over the period. While this did not take the form of press condemnation of cinema, the frequency of cinemas closures did have a substantial cumulative effect as it projected a recurrent image of cinema as an industry in decline. The chapter argues that these press accounts represent cinema as a moribund social form. Cinema was no longer perceived to be a symbol of the modernity which the press had so vigorously proclaimed it to be in the 1930s. Instead it had come to be regarded as representative of tradition. While the previous section has demonstrated that the modernity of the 1930s cinema was always reported in an affirmative manner, the press response to cinema as a dying tradition in the 1950s and 1960s was ambivalent. Some articles lamented what was perceived to be the end of cinema's era, while others evinced a purely factual and objective tone. Significantly, none of the local press coverage campaigned for measures to revive the cinema industry, and the impression given was that this decline was inevitably terminal. Whilst maintaining a focus on the cinemas that were built in the 1930s, the chapter also takes into account those built in

the earlier period in order to assess the position and status of the 1930s-cinema. At the beginning of the 1950s just under half of Nottingham's cinemas, twenty out of forty-six, dated from the 1930s³, but the pattern of closures indicates that these had a higher status than the older cinemas.

In tandem with the discourse on cinema closure, which presented cinema as a dying art form, there was the very different discourse on cinema modernisation projects. The cinema industry made a largely unsuccessful attempt to reinvent itself as a symbol of modernity in this same period in response to its decline in popularity. While both processes received some local press coverage, cinema closure was by far the most prominent news story, conveying the primary meaning of cinema in that period as a declining tradition. The closure of a cinema is more inherently newsworthy than a modernisation project as it signifies both the end of the cinema and, in many cases, the beginning of a new project, be that the building's demolition or its conversion to another use.

Despite these two discourses in the 1950s and 1960s, there remained significantly less cinema coverage in the local press than there had been in the 1930s. Many cinemas were modernised and some were closed down without mention in the press.⁴ This contrasts with the significance accorded to the fate of the theatre in the period. An account of the "possible reprieve" for Nottingham's Theatre Royal, which had been threatened with closure, made front-page news in 1960.⁵ In addition, the demolition of the Empire Palace, which had been a variety hall, also warranted considerably more extensive

coverage than any of the cinemas.⁶ Of the cinema closures that were reported, the articles were typically brief, providing little more than a summary of the reasons given for the closure and any proposals either to reuse or demolish the building.

Despite the prevalence of youth films that marked the period, that loss of modernity, as discussed in the following chapter, lessened cinema's appeal to the young, who have always been its main market. The huge increase in television ownership and, to a lesser extent, the growing popularity of bingo, competed with cinema for the middle-aged and elderly audience. Cinema's place as the pivotal mass entertainment was threatened by the increasing ownership of televisions and, to some extent, by the growing importance of pop music to youth culture. As Margaret Dickinson states:

Between the 1940s and the 1960s the role of the cinema in British society changed radically. From being a very influential mass medium and an important industry in its own right it became a minority entertainment and a sideline of the leisure industry.⁷

The ever-decreasing audience resulted in widespread cinema closures. The following section looks at the national context of cinema closure and the reasons given for this both contemporaneously and in later studies of cinema history. The chapter goes on to look in detail at how this national debate was filtered through to the local context by the press to inform the specific experience of widespread cinema closures in Nottingham. It studies the different ways in which the press presented cinema as representing a declining social form. Crucially, this imbued cinema with very different meanings to those it had enjoyed in the 1930s.

The National Context of Cinema Closures

While the 1930s was the boom period for cinema building, both in terms of the numbers of cinemas built and their architectural quality, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the demise of the cinema building. As audience figures plummeted, so vast numbers of cinemas were forced to close down across Britain. A total of 2,512 closed between 1955 and 1965 alone, which equates to 54% of the 1955 total.⁸ While the national figures are not in dispute, explanations of them are more debatable. A number of reasons were put forward at the time to explain this pronounced decline: the most significant of which were Entertainment Tax and television.

As far as the cinema trade was concerned, Entertainment Tax, which by 1954 amounted to 34.4% of gross box office takings,⁹ was designated a major culprit, and, as such, the cinema trade press, *Kinematograph Weekly* vigorously campaigned against it in the late 1950s. The cinema industry had previously lobbied against Entertainment Tax, which was first introduced in 1916, but the decline in cinema admissions from the mid-1950s onwards motivated the industry to redouble its efforts. As the tax was passed onto the audience in the form of increased ticket prices, the industry argued that it resulted in declining box office receipts. This was allied in the trade press with a shortage of product as the other factor which was instrumental in the decline in cinema admissions.¹⁰ In response to insistent lobbying, the government reduced the tax in 1958 and 1959 before abolishing it altogether in 1960. The Chancellor's statement in 1959 reveals that the government believed the

decline in cinema-going was inevitable, as it was primarily the result of “changes in social habits” with “television the biggest single factor”, and thus it would be maintained irrespective of the price of admission.¹¹

The trade press inevitably lamented the decrease in cinema admissions and the resultant cinema closures, which led it to lobby the government about Entertainment Tax. However, it did not present any plans of action for cinema owners to remedy the situation, such as modernisation projects or new ways of promoting cinema to improve its image. The CEA itself did, however, indicate a more proactive approach in that its 1959 conference advocated the need for cinema modernisation, and for the trade to adjust to the competition from television.¹²

Increased ownership of television was certainly an important factor in explaining the decline in cinema attendance. It was also highly significant to establishing the changing meaning of cinema in this period. John Spraos, whose *The Decline of the Cinema* is subtitled “An Economist’s Report”, produces a vast array of statistics to prove his theory that television was the key factor. The other reasons advanced are a shortage of films and the cinema closures themselves.¹³ Spraos’ study breaks the country down into regions, claiming that in each region television ownership goes up in proportion to cinema admissions going down. (Scotland is the one exception to this rule and Spraos notes but does not explain this major aberration.) Yet even in the rest of the country, the significance he attaches to television ownership could have been exaggerated. The number of television licenses only varied by around 2

per cent between different regions, while the decline in cinema admissions varied by up to 20 per cent.¹⁴ This makes the link between the two trends somewhat problematic. Spraos' contributory factors, the shortage of film and cinema closures themselves, while less easily quantifiable than ownership of television licences, are both important considerations to take into account. Fewer films equates to less choice for the cinema-goer because numerous cinemas in one city are obliged to show the same film. A cinema's closure impacts particularly on the number of admissions in rural areas as they may lose their only local cinema, with the result that going to see a film would necessitate a long journey. It would also adversely affect the confirmed cinema fan for whom there would then be less choice of films on offer and who would thus be expected to attend less often. Hence cinema-going as a habit is threatened and in this process, its meaning is crucially altered.

In line with Spraos' economic account, many cinema historians and commentators argue that television is primarily responsible for the decline in cinema admissions. Thus, Atwell cites television as having had the most influence, along with the large cinema chains' policy of block booking, which reduced the choice of films on offer.¹⁵

A crucial question about cinema closures in the period is why certain cinemas closed down in the 1950s and 1960s whilst others survived, if not quite prospered. John Hill's analysis takes this issue into account. He demonstrates that the large cinema companies, particularly the two majors, ABC and Rank, fared substantially better than the independents and the small

cinema chains. So between 1956 and 1960 the total number of cinemas fell by 30.9 per cent, but “the rates for Rank and ABC respectively were 19.7 per cent and 14.8 per cent”, which meant that their position in the industry was actually strengthened in the 1950s.¹⁶

It could be argued that a further factor which contributed to the post-war cinema closures was the overbuilding of cinemas in the pre-war period. *Kinematograph Weekly*, had berated this trend in the 1930s, arguing that the new super cinemas were built in areas where there were already a number of small older cinemas, which meant that the profit margin of the latter was drastically reduced because the market could barely sustain this level of supply.¹⁷ Again, the two major cinema chains were best equipped to deal with the situation as “what cinemas Rank and ABC did close were usually the oldest and most ill-placed while they still maintained their dominance in the most attractive areas”.¹⁸

Hill situates cinema’s loss of popularity in the wider social context of the affluence of the 1950s, arguing that “rising incomes, increasing home-ownership and home-oriented consumption, the diversification of leisure facilities and increasing popularity of motoring all seemed to conspire to diminish the cinema’s importance”.¹⁹

Although the increase in television ownership had a decisive impact on the decrease in the size of the cinema audience, I would argue that television ownership did not simply stop people going to the cinema so often, it also contributed to the changing meanings associated with cinema-going.

Essentially, television competed with cinema in the 1950s and 1960s for the family audience. Cinemas presented “the balanced programme” as discussed by Thomas Doherty. This was typically the A and B feature films plus a selection from cartoons, newsreels, a documentary and a serial.²⁰ Most of these ‘balanced programmes’ were suitable for all the family. This mixed format, arising out of cinema’s variety tradition, was also adopted by television, which meant it usurped cinema’s undifferentiated market. The feature film, which had long been of central importance to the cinema schedule, became the one element that cinema could offer over and above the television programming and, as such, the cinema industry campaigned vigorously against films being shown on television.²¹

In response to television’s popularity with the family market, cinema increasingly aimed to develop niche markets in an attempt to differentiate itself from television. The trend here was “towards the spectacular – the emphasis on colour and the large screen through the deployment of CinemaScope, 3-D and the like”.²² The X-certificate film, the first of which was shown in 1950, also established itself as an important niche market. This development indicates a clear distinction between the family viewing offered by television and the adult-only films showing at some cinemas. Atwell argues that the industry lost viewers through taking this direction instead of continuing to provide the family entertainment which typified the pre-war era.²³ This is, however, a debatable point as it could be claimed that, rather than hastening its demise, X-rated films, while they tarnished its image in the eyes of some, were also an

asset to cinema. As Hill claims, they were “a key weapon in differentiating cinema from TV, allowing representations unlikely to be seen in the home”.²⁴ This was also the case with the art house film which became “far more important commercially” in the 1950s.²⁵ As with the X-certificate films, art house films were a type of entertainment that was unavailable on television. This loss of the family market and the resultant search for niche markets meant that the associations of cinema were significantly altered in the 1950s. Instead of going to see a film in the knowledge that it would be acceptable to all it became imperative to ensure that the film was suitable for all the family, or would not shock any adult companions.

While there is unarguably some truth in the connection between the rise of television and the concomitant fall of cinema, the link is far more complex than a simple cause and effect process whereby ‘television killed the movie star’. As frequently noted, the ownership of television licences soared following the Queen’s coronation in 1953.²⁶ The number of television licences continued to rise steadily throughout the remainder of the 1950s and the 1960s. By 1980 virtually all households in Britain owned a television. So according to the theory that holds television largely responsible for the demise of cinema, if that argument were followed through, the cinema would no longer be viable today. Yet cinema admissions started to rise again in the late 1980s, and that rise was sustained throughout the 1990s. What contemporary commentators on cinema in the 1950s and 1960s tended to overlook was that people *did* continue to go out, despite the omnipresence of television. Young people go out the

most and have always been the mainstay of the cinema audience.²⁷ I would argue that a further factor in cinema's loss of popularity in the 1950s and 1960s was its failure to appeal sufficiently to the youth market as a whole. The post-war baby boom meant that teenagers were a powerful influence demographically, and they were also powerful economically, being more affluent than at any previous time.²⁸

As such, teenagers were targeted by the film industry as a further niche market. According to Thomas Doherty, by the mid-1950s the film industry was forced by social and economic conditions "to turn increasingly to teenagers for financial sustenance".²⁹ This was the first time that 'youth' was regarded as representing a distinct market, both for films and for other forms of leisure and consumerism, such as clothes and pop music. Highly successful youth films were made in the period, of which *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), which incited riots in its young audience in some cinemas, is a particularly well-known example. The production of films specifically for the youth market from 1956 onwards did not, however, prevent the steep decline in cinema audiences: from 1,100.80m in that year to only 288.80m just ten years after.

As the following chapter argues, cinema's perceived modernity had been a major factor in its pre-1950s popularity. In the following two decades, cinema attempted to recreate itself as modern but was largely unsuccessful. It was no longer the natural province of its principal target market – the youth audience. While studies agree that the majority of cinema admissions have always been to young people there has been little recognition of the impact of

the 1950s 'generation gap' or of cinema's signal failure to challenge it. Again, I would argue that recent cinema history bears this out. The success of the multiplex is in large part due to its successful targeting of the youth market.³⁰

There are indications that teenagers attached greater importance to their social life in the 1950s than previous generations had done.³¹ Yet as far as the cinema was concerned, this was the 'lost generation'. As the following chapter argues, teenagers were not sufficiently targeted by the industry in this period in terms of modernisation programmes, which were targeted more towards those in their twenties and thirties. In the 1930s, cinema was central in the cultural consciousness, but by the 1950s this pre-eminence had largely been usurped by music. While the 1930s generation of cinema-goers were expected to have been at home watching television, or frequenting the cinemas which had been converted to bingo halls, their children were going out – but were not going to the cinema as frequently as their parents generation had done.

The Meaning of Cinema Closures in the Local Context

In comparison with national statistics, the number of cinemas which closed in Nottingham between 1955 and 1965 was particularly high: 67 per cent of the total, compared with 54 per cent in that period nationally.³² Due to a lack of statistics available on the subject, the reasons underlying this are almost impossible to state categorically but I have identified the following possible explanations. Firstly, the cinema overbuilding that the trade press had warned about in the 1930s may have been particularly pronounced in Nottingham, as an article on Nottingham cinemas in *Picture House* claims, as a result of the

rivalry between the city's two principal cinema architects.³³ Secondly, the city sustained a very severe reduction of its local rail links in the period, which could have served to adversely affect the extent of cinema-going. The Beeching rail cuts denuded Nottingham of its major train station and a substantial part of its rail links, yet all the local suburban rail services had closed prior to the 1960s.³⁴ Thirdly, there is evidence from the local press that the substantial slum clearance programme the city undertook in that period, as discussed below, contributed to the decline in cinema attendance in those areas affected.

The contemporary local press was clear about what it regarded as the causes of the decline in cinema admissions, which, in their estimation, were threefold: television, increased running costs and Entertainment Tax.³⁵ These views were frequently filtered through quotes from cinema managers or representatives, and hence represented reactions 'on the ground'. This means there is a degree of correspondence with the views expressed by the cinema trade press as referred to in the previous section of this chapter.

Despite the protestations of the press, the pattern of cinema closures in Nottingham bore out the government's view that Entertainment Tax was not actually a significant factor, as it continued unabated following the lifting of the tax in April 1960. However, this did not prevent the manager of the Apollo in October 1960 still blaming the tax for the closure of his cinema. According to him "the lifting of the entertainment tax came too late for the small cinemas".³⁶

A number of the articles feature comments from representatives of cinemas that also address other reasons for that cinema's closure. These include in 1963 "the threat of colour television" coupled with the lease expiring in twenty years³⁷; an avowal in 1962 that "business has not been bad – we are not closing for anything like that", but the cinema had been made a good offer by the Co-operative stores.³⁸ Whilst the reasons put forward are always significant, I would argue that other factors have not been taken into account by the cinema owners and managers. While they show an awareness that the cinema audience is diminishing, they also demonstrate a refusal to address their own role in the process. So, for example, the need to modernise individual cinemas and to recreate the image of cinema as a whole into a symbol of modernity is noticeable by its absence.

The example of Nottingham supports Hill's claim that in the period the national cinema chains strengthened their power base at the expense of the independents and the small cinema chains. Hence the ABC took over the Elite and the Carlton, which remained in business up until 1977 and 1999 respectively, while the Odeon, part of the Rank group, bought the Ritz which only closed in 2000 due to the building of a new multiplex in the city centre. A smaller, local chain, Levins, also maintained its interests until the late 1960s, which was some years after most of the independent cinemas in Nottingham had closed.

The location of the cinemas that closed in the 1950s and 1960s is crucial to an understanding of the process. As Hill argues, the large combines,

Rank and ABC, maintained their dominance in the most attractive areas, which tells us that a cinema's location remained central to its success, as was so evident in the 1930s. However, the definition of a good location for a cinema had, by the 1950s, become very different to that of the 1930s. It was the suburban cinemas, the main product of the 1930s cinema-building programme, which, along with the older inner-city cinemas, were most vulnerable in the 1950s and 1960s. Those in the city centre fared much better. Therefore, the large chains worked to rationalise cinemas in specific locations, by closing suburban cinemas while their city-centre operations remained in business. This pronounced trend tells us not only that cinema audiences declined. As importantly, they declined in specific areas, implying a different relation between the suburb and city centre, and a different perception of going out to that of the inter-war period. I am arguing that at that time the suburban cinema was at least as popular as the city-centre cinema. This claim is based predominantly on the fact that all but two of the twenty-one cinemas built in Nottingham in the 1930s were in the suburbs, strongly indicating that this was the most profitable location for a cinema at that time. Sites were available in the city centre due to the slum clearance programme that moved large numbers of the population out to the suburbs, but only two cinemas availed themselves of that opportunity.

As box office receipts for Nottingham cinemas in the 1930s are not available, it is difficult to compare the popularity of the city-centre, inner-city and suburban cinema. However, as the previous section demonstrates, the

council did not contest the building of new cinemas and the extent of new building strongly indicates that these were highly profitable for the proprietors. In this climate, it is probable that there was some overbuilding, and thus a proportion of the small, older, less well-equipped cinemas were in difficulty even in the 1930s and 1940s boom time. This could account for their demise, but does not explain why the supers suffered such a very similar fate.

Only two of the thirty-five cinemas which closed in the 1950s and 1960s, the Mechanics Hall and the Odd Hour, were in the city centre. In addition to their location, both were exceptional in other ways. The Mechanics, which closed in 1964, was not solely a cinema: it was also a venue for talks and lectures which had a broadly educational remit, and this side of the operation continued. The Odd Hour, formerly the News House, was the city's news and cartoon cinema and as such it had a different function to that of the other cinemas and was especially vulnerable to the competition of television, which offered viewers cartoons and the latest news at home. In addition, personal rather than economic reasons were responsible for its demise, as the cinema closed in 1957 due to the death of its owner.³⁹

In the city centre, market segmentation of the cinema audience manifested itself towards the end of the 1950s. A new cinema opened in 1957, the Nottingham Co-op Film Club which was the city's art house venue. In 1960 the New Victoria changed its name to the Moulin Rouge and started showing continental films. According to a spokesman these were very popular "mainly because the audiences are true connoisseurs and not the type who

think foreign films are more ‘juicy’”.⁴⁰ (Although according to a later analysis these films did not attract sufficient numbers so “the manager tried to liven up Sunday screenings by combining them with a strip show.”⁴¹) In 1964 the Classic became a news and cartoon cinema but changed direction again in 1972 when it began to specialise in sex and horror films.⁴² In addition, the Elite also became a venue for X-certificate films in its last two years.⁴³ The opening of the Co-op Film Club and the new direction of the Moulin Rouge, the Classic and the Elite, are indicative not only of cinema’s increasing reliance on attracting niche markets, but also of the changing relationship between the cinemas of the city centre and the suburb. While so many of the mainstream cinemas in the suburbs did not survive, specialist venues arose in the city centre.

So Nottingham city centre ended the 1960s with its stock of cinemas largely unaltered since the end of the Second World War: there were seven cinemas then (one of which was a twin-screen venue, as discussed in the following chapter), compared to eight in 1945. In contrast, the suburban cinema was approaching extinction. Thirty-three suburban cinemas had closed, significantly changing the landscape, facilities and hence the meanings of the suburbs. Between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s, cinema-going had been an overwhelmingly suburban experience in Nottingham, due to such a high proportion of 1930s-cinemas being built in the suburbs. Yet these cinemas were disproportionately affected by cinema’s decline in popularity. The

process entailed a wholesale public rejection not just of the 'flea-pits' but also of those 1930s-built 'supers' that had brought "luxury to suburbia".

Most of the pre-1930s cinemas, 'flea-pits', which were a mix of converted music halls and purpose-built early period cinemas, were located in the inner city areas characterised by poor-quality Victorian terraced housing. It was these areas which were affected by the rebuilding programme begun in the 1950s. After the Second World War, the government initiated a national scheme to replace sub-standard housing. In Nottingham, the scheme aimed to replace the estimated 8,605 dwellings in the Nottingham City Council area which were deemed unfit for habitation by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.⁴⁴ As in the 1930s, a large number of condemned houses within the city were replaced by estates, primarily council-owned, and some of which were located further outside the city centre than the dwellings they replaced. This scheme began in 1955 and continued until the 1970s. As was the case in the 1930s, Nottingham was particularly vigilant in carrying out the programme, with the rebuilt St Ann's and Meadows estates being among the largest such projects in Europe.⁴⁵

There was no future for the cinemas located in the slum clearance areas, as a newspaper report on the closure of the Orion makes clear. "The cinema was in a slum area with houses coming down and the regular patrons leaving for other districts."⁴⁶ From the three categories of city-centre, inner-city and suburban cinemas, those in the inner city were mostly defined as neighbourhood cinemas. While the suburban cinemas would be expected to

attract most of their audience from the local area, their comfort, luxury and new technology meant that some patrons would have an incentive to travel to them. The 'flea-pits' had no such incentives to attract an audience from outside their immediate locale. Largely privately-owned, or owned by a local syndicate in the 1950s, they lacked the financial backing that enabled the modernisation programmes undertaken by cinemas which were part of the large chains. Neither did they have access to the newly released films – that again was the preserve of cinemas owned by major companies such as Rank and the ABC. According to the pre-war trade press, these were also the cinemas that had suffered due to the over-building of the 1930s.⁴⁷ According to that argument, the suburban 'supers' took a large proportion of the older cinemas' audience share, so that even at the height of cinema-going those cinemas only just made a profit. As soon as audience figures declined, their small profit was translated into a loss.

The demise of cinemas in the inner city could then be adequately explained by the combined housing and business pressures exerted on them. Yet why were the 'supers' in the suburbs so badly decimated? These were newer and more luxurious than almost all the city-centre cinemas, never mind those of the inner city. Some, such as the Metropole, were owned by the large chains which, as a whole, were least affected in the period. As such, they had access to the latest releases and the financial backing to undergo extensive modernisation programmes. The vast majority were situated in 1930s-built

residential districts, not the older areas which were under the threat of demolition and rebuilding.

There is some evidence that the 'supers' had a greater market hold than the inner-city cinemas. This is demonstrated by the timing of cinema closures across the city. While all the older out-of-town cinemas had closed down by the end of the 1960s, three of the 1930s-built 'supers' – the Metropole, the Futurist and the Astoria – survived until the 1970s, while the Savoy remains in operation today. The suburban cinemas that stayed in business throughout the 1960s had a different meaning by that time than they had in the 1930s. These were isolated survivors which, due to the steep decline in admissions, must have served a much wider area than they had done thirty years previously. As such, their local function became lost in the process. While in the 1930s the term 'local' referred to cinemas as well as public houses, by the 1960s this term had no validity for cinemas. To some extent it can be argued that leisure centres took the place of cinemas in the 1960s-built estates. For example, a 1968 newspaper article reports plans for new leisure centres on the Clifton and Strelley council estates. The article states that the new estates 'need' leisure facilities⁴⁸ and it was taken as read that these facilities should take the form of a leisure centre, much as the 1930s newspapers had proclaimed that each new estate 'needed' a cinema.⁴⁹ Hence the swimming pools found in many of the country's 1950s and 1960s-built leisure centres were regarded as "a symbol of civic endeavour", according to English Heritage.⁵⁰ The same could be argued of cinemas in the 1930s. However, by the 1950s, cinema was no longer

considered an important part of the social fabric of each district, and so lost its place as a signifier of the local community.

While the opening of new cinemas in the 1930s had been represented as highly prestigious for each suburb, the closure of a suburban cinema was not reported in terms of the decline of an area. (However, as discussed below, some reports did portray cinema closure as being symptomatic of a more widespread cultural decline.) This indicates a changing understanding of cinema's position in the local landscape: the identity and status of a residential area by the 1950s was no longer associated with the presence of a cinema.

Thus, in the 1950s the perception of the local cinema was very different to what it had been in the 1930s. Going 'to the local' is a casual activity: often on a weekday, without ceremony, as a habit. It had different associations to 'going into town', which implies a sense of occasion, of dressing up and often of a weekend activity.⁵¹ In this way the meaning of cinema-going had changed; crucially, by the 1960s, as Philip Corrigan states, "the *habit* had died".⁵² Instead of being at one and the same time a regular activity undertaken at the local cinema, and a treat in the city centre where the films were newer and the admission prices higher, it came to represent, with few exceptions, the latter only.

Hence it is possible to distinguish between the practice of cinema-going irrespective of the film showing, and going to see a specific film on a specific occasion. A change in the social fabric resulted in people ceasing to 'go to the cinema'; instead they went to 'see a film'. Robert Allen differentiates between

when “movie-going in the local picture palace was habitual” and the contemporary period when “films have to constitute themselves as events on an *ad hoc* basis”.⁵³ This shift is far more than semantic nit-picking; it is significant to understanding both why cinema-going declined so much in the 1950s, and to understanding the shifting meanings of cinema-going.

The tone of cinema reporting in the 1950s and 60s provides one means of understanding this process. It is very different to that of the 1930s, reflecting both cinema’s altered fortunes in that twenty-year period and the altered perceptions of it. In the space of one generation cinema moved from being an overwhelming success to a period of sustained decline. Hence the 1930s witnessed very positive cinema reporting, fuelled by the press releases of cinema openings and the public’s appetite for Hollywood gossip. Press coverage in the post-war period could not have been more different.

Certainly, anyone looking back at cinema reporting in the 1950s and 1960s without subsequent knowledge could reasonably expect cinema to have died out altogether in the following two decades. As a reflection of the cultural consciousness, there was markedly less cinema coverage. Local cinema coverage spiralled downwards and, as fewer films were made, so there were fewer film reviews and previews.⁵⁴ As cinemas closed there was necessarily less space allocated to cinema listings. Furthermore, the surviving cinemas advertised far less than they had done in the 1930s; so much so that by the early 1960s even the Friday edition of the *Guardian Journal* included theatre but not cinema listings.⁵⁵

Cinema reporting in the 1950s and 1960s was predominantly negative. While newspapers featured some modernisation projects, these were reported considerably less often than were the cinema closures.⁵⁶ The cinema industry's attempt to inject some optimism through new technology and modernisation was clearly undertaken in response to cinema's decline in popularity. To some extent, the industry was carrying out a rearguard action and its efforts were viewed in the context of cinemas closing and lying derelict across the city. As a result, cinema reporting was underpinned by an acceptance that cinema was in decline. Furthermore, the press did not campaign for measures to support cinemas because of their community function, their importance to the city's image and architectural merit, or their place as a repository for important values from the past. This is in contrast to the position since the 1980s, when both cinema's place in the physical structure of the city and in personal memory have become highly valued (as discussed in chapters seven and eight). In the 1950s and 1960s the press made no attempt to alter the cultural consciousness that rejected cinema. From this acceptance two divergent trends arose: a matter-of-fact disregard for cinema's decline (occasionally coupled with approving reference to the new usage of the cinema buildings) and a sense of nostalgia for the end of an era, sometimes with the implication that the bingo hall, supermarket or warehouse that typically replaced the cinema was symptomatic of a wider cultural decline.

Thus a number of reports offer a factual and objective summary of the closure of a cinema – stating the official reasons for the closure and sometimes

including a brief history and an outline of any plans for its future use. For example, the reports on the closing of the Queen's Cinema,⁵⁷ the Orion,⁵⁸ and the Highbury all follow this format. The down-to-earth, objective tone of the opening of this article is typical: "The Highbury Cinema, Bulwell, which was opened in 1921, is to close in the first week in April and a supermarket is to take its place."⁵⁹

The reports that demonstrate affection for cinema and nostalgia over its demise convey no sense that this process can be averted. The most emotive tone is found in an article on the 1960 closure of the Apollo. Interestingly, this cinema would be characterised as a 'flea-pit', built in 1920 in an inner-city area of Victorian terraces. Its fortunes had been in decline since the opening in the 1930s of more luxurious cinemas nearby; particularly the Capitol in 1936. The article, entitled "The End", sees the Apollo's closure in terms of the cumulative effect of cinema closures throughout the city, as the following quote illustrates. "The Apollo adds its name to the gloomy list of cinemas being made into furniture stores, frozen food depots and warehouses, or waiting, gaunt and derelict, to be pulled down and cleared for car parks or petrol stations."⁶⁰ The impact of the piece depends on the anthropomorphism it so effectively employs: the cinemas are "waiting" as the condemned man awaits his fate, "gaunt" with its connotations of the haggard and hungry. The article subsequently refers to the "Death Roll" and the "grim roll of victims" (the other cinemas that had recently closed) – again conjuring up images of humans on death row rather than the demolition of buildings that housed a

leisure activity which was becoming less popular and fashionable. This emotionally charged language relates to the meanings inscribed in the building, rather as a church can be regarded as a spiritual place in itself, by virtue of what has been invested in it. Significantly, the article does not draw on the cinema's architectural value, unlike press appeals for cinemas in later decades. Instead, the sense is rather of a meaning inherent in the buildings which is divorced from their aesthetic value. Similarly the article on the closure of the Windsor highlights that its "67ft high tower has been a feature of the Radford landscape for almost a quarter of a century",⁶¹ conveying the sense of a loss of tradition rather than an architectural depletion. A further article is headlined "Death of another cinema",⁶² while the report on the Aspley's closure quotes the cinema manager as saying "it was my baby. And it is heartbreaking to see it go under".⁶³

I found no examples of the press campaigning for a cinema building to be saved from demolition in this period. This reflects the fact that as a whole, architectural preservation was low on the city council's agenda in the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, the city's housing plans replaced Nottingham's substandard houses with new ones: the red brick Victorian terraces were not seen as a suitable vehicle for improvement and modernisation. This policy extended to the demolition of the Georgian area of Nottingham's city centre to make way for new roads and shops, which resulted in the formation of the Civic Society to fight for the conservation of the remaining historic areas of the city.⁶⁴ However, despite the evidence that there was some local opposition to

other demolition projects, in this period there is no indication that cinemas were deemed worthy of conservation: it was to be another generation before the value of any cinema architecture in the city was effectively recognised. Indeed, as late as 1981 a *Nottingham Evening Post* article speculating on the possible future of the Astoria cinema claimed that obviously “locals don’t want to preserve the bizarre 1930s building”.⁶⁵

As argued by Atwell, the bingo craze, while much derided, was responsible for preserving many cinema buildings.⁶⁶ In common with a cinema, the bingo hall does not need windows and the cinema locations, principally in residential areas, were highly suitable. The conversion of so many cinemas to bingo halls indicates that the middle-aged and the elderly, who were the main market for bingo, still went out locally, but for the younger people going out increasingly meant going into the city centre. The popularity of bingo is demonstrated by an article in 1969, by which time many bingo halls were already in operation in the city, which states that a further four former cinemas were to be converted to bingo by an entertainment group.⁶⁷

Whilst the 1950s and 1960s are typically viewed as forward-looking and embracing the modern, there are few indications in the local press that the businesses taking over the cinema buildings were regarded as an improvement on what had gone before. The change of use is but rarely perceived as progress, whilst conversions of music halls to cinemas and the building of new cinemas in the 1930s had always been presented in a very positive light.

In the 1950s and 1960s the general trend was for cinemas, as a declining socio-cultural force, to be replaced by bingo halls and supermarkets, both of which were in the ascendancy. The suburban cinemas were typically built on prime sites close to a main transport route and adjoining a parade of shops. Yet despite their economically viable locations, there were major architectural problems associated with cinema conversions. Due to their distinctive shape and lack of windows, there are few other uses for cinema buildings. Hence those that closed down in the 1950s and 60s were most frequently converted to bingo halls or supermarkets, while some were used as warehouses or carpet showrooms. These businesses took over disused cinemas because they were able to work around the limitations of cinema design but, equally importantly, they represented the dominant cultural axes of the time. Bingo, although very little researched, was a mass entertainment in the 1960s, while supermarkets, in addition to contributing to the growth of the consumer society, have had a major impact on the demise of the typical parade of shops and a cinema that characterised the suburbs in the inter-war period.

This chapter has argued that in the 1950s and 1960s the meaning of cinema changed from being a regular activity that was part of the social fabric to being an occasion. Taking into account not only the number of cinemas that closed but also their location is central to this understanding. Thus by the end of the 1960s, there was only one less cinema in Nottingham city centre than there had been in 1950 and, furthermore, the Odeon was a two-screen cinema by 1965. However, in the suburbs, only four cinemas remained out of a total forty in 1950, which indicates that the idea of the local cinema had become obsolete. For most of the population in the 1950s and 1960s a cinema trip entailed travelling to another suburb or into the city centre. The chapter has argued that cinema-going had a very different meaning to that which it embodied in the 1930s. The advent of television was highly significant in effecting this change, yet spatial change, more specifically the city centre's growing predominance over the suburbs in terms of leisure activities, particularly for younger people, was also an important factor.

Going to see a film was, by that time, a 'night out' rather than a habit. The cinemas that survived the even greater decline in audience figures of the 1970s had undergone a substantial modernisation which was aimed at changing people's perceptions of cinema-going. The Odeon, twinned in 1965, is a prime example of this tendency and, as such, forms the basis of the following chapter.

NOTES

¹ http://bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk_admissionshtml

² *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Knowledge of cinema closures and modernisation projects which went unreported in the local press comes from retrospective reports and from unpublished pamphlets.

⁵ NEP, 11 November 1960.

⁶ NDG, 19 June 1969.

⁷ Margaret Dickinson, 'The State and the Consolidation of Monopoly', in James Curran and Vincent Porter, eds., *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983) p. 74.

⁸ David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies* (London: Architectural Press, 1980) p. 167.

⁹ John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* (London: BFI, 1986) p. 36.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 29 January, 9 April, 18 June 1959. The latter article is in response to a 25% reduction in Entertainment Tax which the industry claimed was insufficient and that they would have to fight on for its abolition.

¹¹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 18 June 1959.

¹² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 February 1959.

¹³ John Spraos, *The Decline of the Cinema: An Economist's Report* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962).

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵ See, for example, Charles Barr, 'Broadcasting and Cinema 2: Screens Within Screens', in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986) pp. 207-09; Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies* p. 165; Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996) p. 124.

¹⁶ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, pp. 38. Gray also refers to the dominance of the two major chains in *Cinemas in Britain*, p. 126.

¹⁷ These concerns are discussed in the *Kinematograph Yearbook* as early as 1932, p. 210.

¹⁸ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 38.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁰ Thomas Doherty, 'This is Where We Came In: The Audible Screen and the Voluble Audience of Early Sound Cinema', in Richard Maltby and Melvin Stokes, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: BFI, 1999) pp. 149-58.

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- ²¹ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 35-36.
- ²² Ibid., p. 48.
- ²³ Atwell, *Cathedrals*, p. 166.
- ²⁴ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 50.
- ²⁵ Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 185.
- ²⁶ See for example Spraos, *Decline of the Cinema*.
- ²⁷ See, for example, Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p. 12-15 and Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 5, Spraos, *Decline of the Cinema* and Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* for comments on the centrality of the youth audience throughout cinema's history.
- ²⁸ Discussed in Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, pp. 10-16.
- ²⁹ Thomas Doherty, 'Teenagers and Teenpics, 1955-1957: A Study of Exploitation Film Making', in Janet Staiger, ed., *The Studio System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) p. 298.
- ³⁰ See Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003) p. 204, p. 245.
- ³¹ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 10.
- ³² *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*.
- ³³ *Picture House*, No. 8 (Spring 1986) pp. 18-25.
- ³⁴ John Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in John Beckett, ed., *Nottingham A Centenary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 460.
- ³⁵ See, for example, NEN, 11 July 1958 on the closure of the Commodore (formerly the Aspley), NEN, 10 April 1959 on the closure of the Orion, NEP, 9 March 1963 on the closure of the Windsor.
- ³⁶ NEP, 26 October 1960.
- ³⁷ NEP, 9 March 1963, the closure of the Windsor cinema.
- ³⁸ GJ, 2 March 1962, the closure of the Highbury cinema.
- ³⁹ NEP, 22 February 1962, which reports the demolition of the building.
- ⁴⁰ GJ, 19 October 1961.
- ⁴¹ NEP, 14 November 1985.
- ⁴² NEP, 18 September 1984.
- ⁴³ NEP, 2 March 1977.
- ⁴⁴ C J Thomas, *Geographical Aspects of the Growth of the Residential Area of Nottingham in the Twentieth Century* (University of Nottingham, Unpublished PhD thesis, 1968) p. 123.
- ⁴⁵ John Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport', in *Nottingham A Centenary History* p. 447.
- ⁴⁶ NEN, 10 April 1959, on the closure of the Orion.

⁴⁷ *Kinematograph Year Book 1932*, pp. 207-8.

⁴⁸ NEP, 14 September 1968.

⁴⁹ For claims of the 1930s 'need' for cinemas see, for example, NDG, 1 December 1932 on the opening of the Aspley, NJ, 17 October 1936 on the opening of the Capitol, NDG, 8 November 1935 on the opening of the Savoy.

⁵⁰ English Heritage, *Something Worth Keeping? Post-war Architecture in England*, p. 23.

⁵¹ This idea is discussed in Chapter Seven through popular memory of cinema-going.

⁵² Philip Corrigan, 'Film Entertainment as Ideology and Pleasure: A Preliminary Approach to a History of Audiences', in *British Cinema History*, p. 32.

⁵³ Robert Allen, 'Home Alone Together: Hollywood and the "Family Film"', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI, 1999) p. 123.

⁵⁴ The number of films produced in both the UK and the US fell from 334 in 1950 to 188 in 1962. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1964) p. 348.

⁵⁵ GJ, 1 September 1961.

⁵⁶ The 1965 'twinning' of the Odeon, discussed in the following chapter, was an exception which received extensive national as well as local press coverage.

⁵⁷ NEP, 4 January 1955.

⁵⁸ NEN, 10 April 1959.

⁵⁹ GJ, 2 March 1962.

⁶⁰ NEP, 26 October 1960.

⁶¹ NEP, 9 March 1963

⁶² NEP, 9 March 1963, referring to the closure of the Windsor cinema.

⁶³ NEN, 11 July 1958.

⁶⁴ Giggs, 'Housing, Population and Transport' in *Centenary*, p. 459.

⁶⁵ NEP, 5 May 1981.

⁶⁶ Atwell, *Cathedrals*, p. 165.

⁶⁷ GJ, 11 January 1969.

CHAPTER SIX

MODERNITY AND MODERNISATION: Cinema's Attempted Transformation in the 1950s and 1960s

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by mass cinema closures due to the dramatic decline in attendance figures. In this bleak context, the cinema industry attempted to fight back through undertaking a number of modernisation projects. However, this rearguard action was largely unsuccessful as the vast majority of the modernised cinemas subsequently closed down, some within only a year of their refurbishment. This chapter argues that while cinema was regarded as representative of the modern in the 1930s and 1940s, it lost that quality in subsequent decades. Furthermore, in the 1950s and 1960s, the meaning of cinema-going was reconstructed to represent an occasion rather than a habit.

The cinema closures of the period received significantly greater press coverage than did the modernisation programmes. The cinema modernisation in Nottingham that attained by far the most publicity was that of the Odeon. This was the subject of a reconstruction in 1965 which was on such a large scale that it garnered substantial national as well as local news coverage. The only other modernisation project for which I found contemporary news coverage was that of the Elite, undertaken in 1958. For information on other cinemas that were modernised in the period, I have consulted retrospective local press coverage in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the

process. However, it remains significant that the majority of cinema modernisations went unreported as this denotes that, unlike in the 1930s, cinema in the 1950s and 1960s was regarded as being newsworthy primarily in the context of bad news rather than good news. As cinema was no longer widely perceived as modern, it became more appropriate to report news of its demise rather than attempt to counteract this trend. I would suggest that in the cultural consciousness of the late 1950s and 1960s, cinema was widely regarded as a relic of the past, viewed either with nostalgia or matter-of-fact disregard. Both these perspectives give no indication that cinema was still regarded as a viable proposition. Cinema modernisation did not generally capture the mood of the time and, as such, it was but rarely considered newsworthy.

Cinema's attempts to reposition itself during the period demonstrate an implicit awareness of its own decline. Some modernisation attempts, most notably that of the Odeon, aimed to free cinemas of their associations with the past. This betrayed a sense not just that cinemas needed to be refurbished and sometimes re-equipped, but that they needed to embody a whole new set of assumptions about leisure. The remodelling of the Odeon did not start from the assumption that cinemas could or should maintain the best features from their past and develop those in line with new trends. Instead, the solution was to attempt to recreate cinema anew. Statistics show that an overwhelming proportion of the attempts failed, but I would suggest that this does not necessarily imply that the cinema owners and managers concerned were

wrong in trying to change cinema's image. Arguably, the success story of the cinema could never have continued unabated into the post-war period due to the myriad factors which worked against it, including higher overheads, the much reduced number of films being made, the increase in television ownership, the changes in leisure patterns, and the effects of the cinema overbuilding in the 1930s.

It is in this context that the chapter studies the cinema modernisation projects undertaken in Nottingham in the 1950s and 1960s. Cinema's failure to reposition itself adequately as a signifier of the modern is the central argument here. In addition, the chapter also relates these schemes and the rationale behind them to ideas of what constituted a modern cinema in the 1930s. For example, a close scrutiny of the 'new' facilities with which the Odeon was equipped reveals that these were actually little different from its original specification in 1933. Finally, the chapter surveys cinema's relationship with the new socio-cultural formation, the teenager, in order to assess the extent to which it succeeded in attracting the all-important youth market.

The great age of cinema building in the 1930s was promoted as a symbol of modernity, as Part One demonstrates. The cinema-building boom was associated with expansion, modern design and imposing buildings. It was claimed at the time that cinema gave rise to a new style of architecture. But some retrospective judgements have questioned the modernity and innovation of cinema architecture of that period. For example, Dennis Sharp claims that

"the movie demanded a new type of building; it can hardly be claimed that it got it".¹ Yet whether or not the claim can subsequently be defended, in the 1930s cinema architecture was widely perceived to be innovative. The pronounced horizontal and vertical lines and bright neon lights which typified 1930s cinema architecture ensured that cinemas were differentiated from the surrounding buildings. Without question, films employed some genuinely new forms of technology in the period, most notably the introduction of sound and colour, while projection and film quality also improved markedly. These innovations were assiduously promoted alongside other claims to be modern: for example, the 1936 account of the opening of the Nottingham Astoria claimed, with very little evidence, that the cinema was "the most up-to-date in the country".² Cinema in the 1930s was able to present itself as a technologically advanced, growing, luxurious mass medium: the very epitome of the modern. This was a major selling point as cinema has always been heavily reliant on the youth market, which, in turn, is always seen as predisposed to embrace the new.³

By the 1950s, however, cinema had been overtaken by new cultural forms. It was no longer seen as the most culturally significant mass medium; a position that cinema had enjoyed in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ Alan O'Shea argues that since that time, cinema "has been superseded by television as the dominant media form".⁵ Thomas Doherty's claim that, for Americans in the 1940s "motion pictures were the mass medium of choice"⁶ is equally applicable to the British context in that decade. By the 1950s, cinema was

crucially losing its associations with the modern, and hence some of its appeal to youth. Peter Laurie enumerates the main items which young people spent money on at that time: "clothes, records, concerts, music, magazines".⁷ The cinema is notable by its absence from that list. Cinema was no longer the cultural concern that defined a generation: the teenagers of the 1950s and 1960s were more likely to be defined by their musical tastes. Discussing the increased affluence of youth dating from the 1950s, Bill Osgerby states that "this expansion of the youth market had its greatest impact, of course, in the field of popular music".⁸ So Nottingham's local press in that period introduced columns which were aimed specifically at teenagers, and music was their focal point. At the same time, there was a reduction in the column inches devoted to cinema. Throughout the 1930s there was a regular supply of cinema news but by the early 1950s, quite simply, cinema was no longer very newsworthy.

That cinema had, in some respects, been usurped by pop music does not, mean, however, that it became insignificant to that new demographic group, the teenager. (The musicals featuring major popular music stars, such as Elvis Presley, were central to the degree of popularity which cinema maintained with young people in the period.) As Christine Geraghty claims, the family audience declined greatly in the 1950s (with television ownership an important factor in that decline) leaving the cinema audience comprised primarily of the young, particularly young working-class males, and with a preponderance of teddy boys who were customarily associated with violence.

As a result, “the social space of the cinema became marked by a sense of threat and heightened sexuality.”⁹ However, that factor also made it unattractive to some of the youth audience. In addition, it clearly reduced cinema’s appeal to the family audience, as did the introduction of the X-rated film in 1950. David Atwell suggests that this development “helped to dictate the character of cinemas of the fifties and sixties: seedy, deteriorating palaces followed by small, plain, anonymous studios of cut-price construction.”¹⁰ So cinema began to develop a somewhat sleazy reputation: as well as attracting the potentially violent teddy boys, it was also frequented by the potentially threatening fans of the adult-only films.

Cinema reporting in the 1930s had told a success story: it projected an air of confidence, a sense of civic pride in the local press accounts of cinema openings all around the city which were a feature of local ‘boosterism’ in the period. The press releases presented the new cinemas as beautifully designed, up-to-the-minute buildings that enhanced Nottingham’s status and prestige. In the immediate post-war, however, period cinemas were shabby and in need of a major overhaul after the privations of wartime. They were no longer the sumptuous picture palaces redolent of luxury and modernity which had been so celebrated in the 1930s. Instead, they were all twenty or more years old, and thus, representative of the tastes of an older generation. In the 1930s, cinema had renewed itself as a modern medium both through technological advances and cinema buildings which gave cinema the opportunity to invent itself anew for a new generation. The late 1920s and 1930s ‘super’ cinemas

presented themselves as different in kind as well as in size to the smaller and less luxurious houses they replaced.

After the war, cinema had great difficulty in repositioning itself as a symbol of the modern. In the 1950s and 1960s, very few new cinemas were built in Britain; and of those that were, the vast majority in the 1950s were completions or reconstruction of buildings which had either been begun before the war or damaged during the war. Cinema-building in the 1960s was characterised by redevelopment projects, although these were predominantly undertaken in London.¹¹ Thus cinema building did very little to counteract the mass cinema closures that marked the period. In Nottingham, a city largely undamaged by the Second World War and with no cinema construction works in abeyance during it, there was no new cinema building during this period. The audience decline of the 1950s and 1960s meant that cinema no longer had the opportunity to renew itself and instead was fighting a rear-guard action against perceptions of it as old-fashioned and representative of those who grew up in the pre-war period.

The Twin-screen Odeon as a Symbol of 1960s Modernity

There is a clear hierarchy at work within the cinema modernisation process. As the previous section demonstrated, the Ritz, which became the Odeon in 1944, was Nottingham's most prestigious cinema in the 1930s and the object of a groundbreaking modernisation project in the 1960s. The Ritz took over the role of the 1920s-built Elite which, though eclipsed, nonetheless remained a prestigious venue throughout that decade. As befits their high

status, these two cinemas were extensively renovated and modernised in this period. It is significant that both cinemas were located in the city centre, which had become commercially by far the most attractive cinema location. In addition to having more money lavished on them than did the suburban cinemas, these were the only two projects which attained any significance for the local press of the time.

The Odeon modernisation was easily the most ambitious cinema project embarked on in Nottingham during these years, and its newness merited substantial national newspaper and trade press coverage in addition to the local press reports. There were two elements, press reports claimed, that were different about the Odeon project: the single screen cinema was converted to a twin screen, and it was the first automated cinema. The magnitude of the scheme can be gleaned from its cost, £250,000 compared with the £53,000 spent on the renovation of the Elite; and the time it took to complete. At nearly eight months the refit had taken longer than it had taken to build many cinemas in the 1930s.

The Odeon twinning took place in 1965, in the national context of a series of ambitious projects by the large cinema chains to halt the decline in cinema attendance. For example a cinema, bingo and casino complex in Salford, and a cinema bowling complex in Stoke-on-Trent had opened two years previously.¹² At the same time there was a trend to include licensed bars within a cinema building and catering was seen as important in “giving cinema-going a sense of occasion and creating atmosphere”.¹³ I would argue

that this trend represented cinema's attempt to regain an aura of glamour and modernity by association. Cinema was seen as old-fashioned and tawdry, hence the industry tried to update its image by associating it with a newer leisure pursuit, bowling, and with other popular leisure activities. Furthermore, the Rank organisation which owned the Odeon was implementing a series of other modernisation schemes in cinemas across the country at the same time as that of the Nottingham Odeon.¹⁴ This was an important part of the industry's attempt to reposition cinema at this time. The British Federation of Film Makers conducted a survey of cinema-goers in 1963 and on the basis of the replies concluded that it was important to "alter the 'image' of the cinema more towards 'a special night out'".¹⁵ The licensed restaurant at the Odeon and the licensed bars in some of the other modernised cinemas played a significant role in making a visit to the cinema an event rather than a habit.

Press reports presented the Odeon as a totally different phenomenon to the existing cinemas – it was "a new concept in cinema-going",¹⁶ specifically promoted on the basis of its not being "recognisable as a cinema until one sees the actual screen".¹⁷ As when it opened in 1933, its modernity was a key selling point: the reconstruction made the Odeon "an entertainment centre of the future"¹⁸ and "Britain's most up-to-date cinema".¹⁹ Yet when studied closely, the proclaimed innovation of the scheme is questionable. Rather, the Odeon successfully promoted an *image* of newness and modernity while offering very little that was substantially new. New technology is a key area in

which cinema promotes itself as modern, and as such the Odeon renovation was quick to capitalise on this tactic. The new Odeon was applauded as being the first automated cinema in the world.²⁰ However, *Kinematograph Weekly*, whilst also hailing the Odeon as “the world’s first automated cinema” also provided factual detail about the particulars of the new equipment which tells a slightly different story.²¹ Cinematic, the much-hyped automation system used by the Odeon, was regarded as representing the start of cinema’s journey into the computer age, yet it was in fact, a development of the existing Projectomatic system, and so not strictly new at all. The Cinematic system controlled “48 operations, from lighting, heating and ventilation to switching over projectors, opening up the screen”.²² This system was fitted only in Odeon 2, the larger of the ‘twins’, while Odeon 1 used the standard Projectomatic equipment.

Also questionable is the implication that the twin-screen concept was unique. This was proclaimed in quotes such as following: “the new double-decker Odeon is heralded as a new concept in cinema-going”,²³ while other articles reported the twin-screen as being the first to be installed outside London, not as an entirely new innovation.²⁴ Overall, an unconfirmed impression of the modern is created by the newspaper reports of the scheme which aimed to redefine the cinema’s image. Close examination of the press coverage reveals that many aspects of the proclaimed revolutionary newness of the Odeon’s décor and restaurant, discussed below, are as spurious as those referring to the technology employed.

The modernisation of the Odeon is framed and discussed in terms which reject all associations with the cinema's previous success and popularity. There is no sense of continuing an existing success story by updating and reworking the Odeon's design to incorporate the two screens. Instead its past is obliterated in order to present it as modern, whether despite or because of its status as Nottingham's premier pre-war cinema. The pronounced break with tradition is illustrated by the cinema manager's assertion that people would not know they were in a cinema until they saw the screen, "because it is so ultra-modern."²⁵ A *Nottingham Evening Post* story emphasises the fact that the Odeon's: "design, décor and furnishings ... represent a complete break with tradition and nothing has been borrowed from the past".²⁶ These quotes are very informative about pre-war cinema's image in the period: the past is used here pejoratively, and is to be escaped from as quickly as possible. (The contemporary view of cinema's past is significantly different: both a recent cinema modernisation and the opening of a new cinema in the Nottingham area stress a continuum with the pre-war 'golden age' of cinema as essential to their appeal.) Indeed, so successfully did the Odeon efface its pre-twinning history that a 1990 newspaper feature marked its "25 historic years" (since the twinning), which made no mention of its previous incarnation in the preceding thirty-two years.²⁷

This determined break with tradition may have contributed substantially to the Odeon's long-term success: in 2001 this was the only pre-war built cinema to survive in Nottingham's city centre. The Odeon closed in

that year in response to the construction of the Warner Village fifteen-screen cinema which, only five minutes walk away, was believed to pose too great a threat.

Yet the extent of the innovation of the Odeon project is highly debatable with regard to the facilities which were included as well as the technology utilised. According to the *Sunday Telegraph*, the refurbished Odeon provided what the new breed of cinema-goer wants, namely “added incentives such as restaurants, ballrooms and even shops”,²⁸ all of which were the very same facilities that the most prestigious pre-war cinemas offered. The 1920s-built Elite cinema was the hub of what we would now term an ‘entertainment complex’: the building incorporated restaurants, cafes, a ballroom, function room and shops, while the original Ritz was equipped with a restaurant, cafes and a ballroom. Yet the Odeon’s survival for longer than any of its competitors in the city centre may be partially reliant on the manner in which the reconstruction project was presented as modern and different, despite the fact that the reality did not fully support the promotional claims.

Moreover, as the following quote demonstrates, there was a strongly defined class bias in the publicity for the twin-screen Odeon.

The mobile cinema-goer will therefore be able to book his seats [another facility offered by the 1930s cinemas] and then dine in the restaurant with a bottle of Beaujolais, rather than having to shuffle out into the rain afterwards to a local café.²⁹

The typical cinema-goer is presented here as both old-fashioned and working-class, frequenting these grubby, shabby and outdated fleapits either on foot or on public transport. The Odeon, by contrast, is aiming at a very different

demographic group exemplified by the cinema-goer who would travel in from neighbouring towns. For the 1960s, 'Beaujolais' is a symbol of a young middle-class life-style, while the "shuffling" pedestrian paints a picture of the elderly, the down-trodden and the dejected working-classes. With the exception of the wine, the 1930s cinemas promoted themselves on the very same basis to the very same middle-class cinema-goer in their emphasis on facilities such as restaurants, car parking and pre-booking. The emphasis in 1965 on technical modernity and state-of-the-art equipment also mirrors 1930s reporting, even down to vague references to "the complex mechanism of the robot brain".³⁰ All these were recycled in the 1960s as representatives of a "new concept in cinema-going".³¹

While none of the articles specifies the age group which the new Odeon was targeting, the dining, wine-drinking car owner is unlikely to have been a teenager. The jukebox and coffee bar, both symbols of teenagers' leisure in that period, were not among the facilities offered by the new Odeon. The significance of the coffee bar was such that Osgerby argues that it was "the pre-eminent focal point to British teenage life" and "one of the most enduring images" of the period.³² Yet instead of incorporating a coffee bar, the refurbished Odeon of 1965 offered the Carola, a licensed restaurant, at a time when both alcohol and going out for meals were not central to teenage social life. Furthermore, this restaurant was opened by television chef and personality Fanny Craddock, who may have been an icon for the teenagers' mothers then, but not for the teenagers.³³

The rescue of the Odeon from the perceived low status of cinema in the 1960s is further demonstrated by a change in job title: usherettes became receptionists. While the job appears to be the same, receptionists are “specially trained in deportment and beauty care”,³⁴ receive better pay and training, and the name change aimed to “eliminate the somewhat tarnished image of the usherette”.³⁵ Both the renaming of the role and the assertion that “they will be more like air hostesses” is further evidence of the Odeon’s attempt to appeal to the middle-class audience, as it had originally set out to do in 1933.³⁶

The Odeon twin project was on a much grander scale than anything else attempted in Nottingham, as exemplified by its cost. Through projects such as the Odeon twinning, Rank was aiming to reposition cinema as upmarket and fashionable – courting the cosmopolitan, well-travelled customer who would travel to the cinema by car and stay on for dinner with wine. In order for this image to be fashionable it had to be new, so the Odeon’s history of the self-same provision was of necessity either ignored or discredited. Today’s leisure facilities had to be presented as an advance previous examples, not as a repetition with a few additional flourishes. In order to be a major and news-worthy achievement, the meaning of cinema had to be recreated anew, not merely restored to a pre-existing splendour. The generation it was targeting could not remember the Odeon as the Ritz, when its comfort, facilities and celebrated organist made it Nottingham’s premier

entertainment venue. In the mid-1960s, as the Odeon, it was designed to appeal to the affluent, young cosmopolitans.³⁷

This approach to cinema's past is very different to the almost reverential way that the 'Golden Age' of cinema is now regarded. The 1930s cinemas in particular are seen as architectural triumphs with a grandeur, ambition and opulence that can no longer be attained. Although some of the 1930s cinemas are now acknowledged as flea-pits, they tend to be looked back on with affection for that very reason, rather than with disparagement. Yet in the 1960s it needed no explanation for a newspaper article to refer to "the public's rejection of the 1930s fleapits".³⁸ The implication of the quote is that all the 1930s cinemas are flea-pits so they are uniformly condemned on the basis of their age. The subtext of the modernisation projects undertaken in that period is that cinema's decline is due to the decaying fabric of the buildings and can therefore be rectified by an architectural transformation. According to the rhetoric, the pre-war cinemas are flea-pits by their very nature; the modern is always better, so once cinemas are brought up-to-date, according to that reasoning, cinema-going will regain its popularity.

Other Modernisation Projects in the 1950s and 1960s

If the high-profile Odeon twinning was formulated on a break with the past, the more modest renovations at the Elite were positioned somewhat differently. The Elite underwent three separate refurbishments in the 1950s, which were sufficient to ensure its survival until 1977. Unlike the Odeon

modernisation, these were carried out in line with the cinema's previous success story.

As befits a prestigious city-centre cinema the Elite's renovations were more expensive and substantial than the superficial make-overs that were all the most imperilled cinemas could afford. Yet at £53,000 for its most substantial refurbishment,³⁹ the expenditure was still significantly below the figure invested in the Odeon. While the renovation in 1952 and the installation of CinemaScope in 1955 were not newsworthy, the last of the three, undertaken in 1958, was reported in some detail by the *Guardian Journal*.

The article's title, "New chapter in Elite story", and the sub-heading "Social centre of the gay 1920s", situate the refurbishment firmly within a continuum of success. In the 1950s the Elite was owned by the ABC group but retained its original name. The Elite's post-war trajectory contrasts sharply with that of the Odeon, which was renamed and then reinvented through its modernisation programme. In the long-term, the Odeon's method was the more successful as the Elite closed in 1977 after a period of decline and the assertion by the regional manager of the cinema chain that it was "no longer viable as a cinema".⁴⁰

According to the *Guardian Journal* in 1958, "the continued popularity of the Elite led the directors to the latest expenditure of £53,000, making the cinema the last word in luxury." The article emphasises the comfort and quality which the refurbishment will bring; for example the highly polished

doors are “a work of art” while the redecoration is “attractive” and the seating offers greater leg room. Despite the renovations, around a third of the article is devoted to an account of the Elite’s history, which extends right back to its opening in 1921. The article projects the Elite as a cinema which owes its success and high reputation to its continued modernity, so “the Elite pursued its policy of always being in the foreground with improvements”. As an example of that modernity, the electric sign showing which seats were vacant was “the first of this type to be installed in this country”.⁴¹

In addition to the city centre cinemas, some of the higher status 1930s-built suburban cinemas were also extensively modernised in the 1950s and 1960s. In common with the Elite, the Aspley underwent a number of modernisation schemes in the 1950s. Built at the hub of three 1930s housing estates, the Aspley was ideally positioned at that time. In 1953 it was the first Nottingham cinema to install a panoramic screen. This was followed by improvements to the auditorium and the installation of CinemaScope in 1955. In 1956 the Aspley was “renovated and fitted with the biggest screen outside London as part of a £30,000 luxury plan”.⁴² The 1956 refurbishment was the last and most ambitious of the Aspley’s modernisation schemes. The work on the cinema formed part of a larger project, namely the creation of a cinema and ballroom complex, both elements of which were named the Commodore. The substantial nature of the changes is evidenced by the cinema’s closure for six months while the work was carried out. The number of seats was reduced

to 750 “super seats” from over 1,300 in 1932, but it proved impossible to fill even this number.

When the cinema reopened following the modernisation project, the advertising claimed that the Commodore was “Nottingham’s most modern cinema” and would “bring luxury to suburbia”.⁴³ The latter statement was an echo, whether conscious or unconscious, of the very same strapline the Aspley used in its advertising immediately after its opening in 1932. According to a retrospective feature, the cinema manager had changed its name to the Commodore in 1956 as part of its “determination to discard the former image of the Aspley, in an effort to win back audiences”.⁴⁴ The sense is not of restoration to its former glory (in contrast with the Elite project which was promoted as a means of maintaining that cinema’s high status position) but of upgrading a ‘flea pit’ into a quality cinema – it will “*bring* luxury to suburbia” not restore it, clearly implying that suburban cinemas had previously been hitherto devoid of luxury. This cinema’s modernisation, although one of the more ambitious schemes of the period, received no contemporary press coverage other than the Aspley’s own advertisements. The event was ignored in the local press and the only mention of it was in the cinema listings. This disregard is evidenced in all but the most elaborate of cinema improvements and modernisation schemes in the period. For most, the press reports are retrospective accounts which either mark the closure or demolition of the cinema or, from around 1980, take the form of articles recounting a cinema’s entire story. Often, cinemas were quietly left to their fate whilst the press

focused on the new symbols of modernity. Post-war press disregard for cinema extended across all aspects of the film industry. Film news and Hollywood gossip was far more prevalent in the 1930s local press than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. (However, this observation needs to be understood in the context of the decrease in local press coverage overall of national events as a whole in the period.)

If the Commodore was accurate in its claim to be “Nottingham’s most modern cinema”, this was still not sufficient to attract large enough audiences to ensure the cinema’s long-term survival as it closed only two years after. The Commodore ballroom (now more usually known as a function room and banqueting suite) remains a going concern, yet the cinema’s fortunes never improved under the new scheme. Hence the attempt to link the cinema with other forms of entertainment proved unsuccessful.

For the less highly regarded cinemas, the modernisation attempts could be perfunctory due to limitations of finance. In some cases these attempts to maintain cinemas’ modernity actually exacerbated their problems. For example, cinema responded to the competition of television with new technology designed to lure viewers away from the home. The attempts were based on expanding the size of the standard film picture to maximise cinema’s advantage over television of the large screen. The most successful of these was CinemaScope, first introduced in London in 1953, which became the industry standard across the country.⁴⁵ The Astoria in Nottingham installed Cinemascope in 1955 and the Vernon a year later; yet the projects failed

because the cinema had not installed a wide screen, so “the wider than wide image which should have been given the full width of the auditorium to be appreciated, was shrunk down to a little letter-box slit on the existing screen”.⁴⁶ Both attempts had tried to re-equip the cinemas without undertaking the prohibitive expense of fitting the wide screen, so the limited nature of their ‘improvements’ meant that the picture quality actually deteriorated. Thus the attempt to keep abreast of modern technology only led to a more rapid decline in the status and commercial viability of the cinemas.

In general, the modernisation attempts of some of the more run-down cinemas, such as the Vernon, were unable to substantially improve the cinema’s prospects. These tended to be the early purpose-built cinemas and the converted music halls. Some of these had already undergone one modernisation project in the 1930s to compete with the new supers. These low status cinemas were typically in the old and run-down areas of the city, making it more difficult for them to redefine themselves as modern. The Boulevard in Hyson Green was one of these; closed for refurbishment for just a month, it reopened without any publicity and three years later, in 1956, the cinema closed down. Many other cinema modernisations throughout the 1950s and 1960s were equally unsuccessful and typically, they resulted in only a temporary reprieve from demolition. For example Leno’s was modernised in 1962, only to close six years later and, as discussed, the Commodore (formerly the Aspley) was renovated in 1956 but closed down in 1958.

Cinema was frequently associated in the 1950s and 1960s with a leisure pursuit that did little to improve its image and modernity: namely bingo. In 1961 the Adelphi cinema experimented with offering bingo on Monday and Tuesday nights and showing films for the rest of the week. Once again, the cinema arm of the alliance faltered and the scheme only lasted for two years. In 1963, the Adelphi converted fully to bingo, remaining in operation as a bingo hall until 1997.⁴⁷ Numerous cinemas were converted into bingo halls while one, the Globe, became a bingo hall in July 1961, only to reopen as a cinema three months later.⁴⁸ The Globe's victory over bingo was, however, short-lived as the cinema closed again and for the last time in 1962.⁴⁹ Although now often seen as a 'tacky', 'kitsch', or debased form of mass culture, in the late 1950s and 1960s bingo represented a major enthusiasm for many. However, it did not have the associations with youth and modernity – bingo was a development of an older game, housey-housey and was not reliant on technology. It never did attain the middle-class and youthful image that cinema aspired to. One article on the bingo craze states that its fans are "mostly the ordinary mums and housewives and dads ... Young people have not fallen for the game at all".⁵⁰

The Odeon twinning led the way for a national trend in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many other Nottingham cinemas followed suit, for example the Savoy, the Classic and the ABC all became multi-screen cinemas and this ensured that they outlived the single-screen cinemas. Accordingly, this was the most successful modernisation idea in the period. Refurbishment and new

technology alone did not ensure cinemas' survival, but offering a choice of films sometimes did. In general, modernisation did not bring audiences back to the cinema, as the previous chapter on cinema closure demonstrates. The cultural consciousness of the 1950s and 1960s was scarcely predisposed towards the cinema. Instead it favoured television and the associated social revolution in home-based entertainment. For young people music was the pre-eminent cultural form of the period, and the one that youth instinctively gravitated to. To the newly-emergent youth culture industry, "one particular sector of this industry was pivotal to the process of the definition of youth, as it has been in one way or another ever since: that of rock and pop music".⁵¹ Youth remained cinema's target market as it always had been, but television was also contributing to cinema's declining popularity among the older age groups. Cinema-going was increasingly regarded, by all age groups, as an occasion, rather than a regular, customary activity.

In this climate, cinema lost a considerable amount of its popularity. The family audience dwindled due to the competition of television, the introduction of X-rated films and the association of cinema, for some people, with violence and anti-social behaviour. Cinema had always courted the young and was still able to attract some of them through the provision of films made specifically for the teenage market, for example, rock 'n' roll films and

surfing films.⁵² But specific youth markets, linked around fashion and music, were rapidly developing and cinema was often regarded as a relic of the older generation's youth. The modernisation of cinemas, with very rare exceptions, did not constitute news and did not succeed in halting the overall decline in cinema audiences. Yet demographics were in favour of cinema, given the post-war baby boom. The modernisation programmes, however, appeared to target young people in their twenties and thirties rather than the teenagers. Hence the refits incorporated restaurants rather than the coffee bars, milk bars or jukeboxes that were so popular with the teenagers of the period. In contrast, the opening in the Nottingham Warner Village in 2001, and of its numerous bars and restaurants such as TGI Fridays and Pizza Hut, demonstrate an appeal to both the youth and family market.

Teenagers were defined as a group in the 1950s when youth culture began to be seen as a separate socio-cultural development. However, cinema was unable to capitalise thoroughly on the youth market as it failed to reposition itself effectively as a modern leisure form. Even though some cinemas that were modernised survived, they did so in a climate of closures and decline, making it difficult to recreate the associations of cinema in a modern, youthful style that had mass appeal. This decline continued throughout the 1970s. It began to be reversed through the late 1980s and 1990s with the rise of the multiplex, which has promoted itself far more effectively to the younger generation. This change in fortune was helped by its young audience being able to 'reinvent' the cinema-going experience anew as

they are two generations away from cinema's last period of major popularity, and also by the influx of American capital and expertise into Britain's cinema business.⁵³

In the 1950s and 1960s, cinema was unable to reinvent itself successfully as modern. Geraghty quotes Tony Bennett's claim that the late 1950s saw "a new type of popular culture which, owing to its specific association with youth, marked the development of pronounced generation division." Geraghty goes on to state that: "it was clear that cinema was not that new type of culture and could no longer claim to be the most significant and modern of the mass media."⁵⁴ No amount of refurbishment and installation of new equipment in cinemas could be sufficient to alleviate that situation.

The following two chapters study press reports of the 1930s cinema from the 1980s onwards: in that period, the 1930s cinema was certainly not construed as modern, but began to be valorised because of its perceived role as a receptacle of values of the past.

NOTES

- ¹ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 8.
- ² NEP, 8 June 1936.
- ³ For a summary of the age ratio of the British cinema audience up to the 1940s see Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) pp. 12-14, for the 1940s onwards see Philip Corrigan, 'Film Entertainment as Ideology and Pleasure', in James Curran and Vincent Porter, eds., *British Cinema History* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983) p. 33.
- ⁴ Peter Stead states that the 1930s was the most crucial period for cinema because, in both Britain and America, "what was quite decisively determined in those years was the place of film within the respective national cultures". *Film and the Working Class* (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 46.
- ⁵ Alan O'Shea, 'What A Day For A Daydream: Modernity, Cinema and the Popular Imagination in the Late Twentieth Century', in O'Shea and Mica Nava, eds., *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 249.
- ⁶ Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) p. 9.
- ⁷ Peter Laurie, *The Teenage Revolution* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965) p. 9.
- ⁸ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p. 38.
- ⁹ Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 7.
- ¹⁰ David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies* (London: Architectural Press, 1980) p. 166.
- ¹¹ Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996) p. 126.
- ¹² *Kinematograph Weekly* 22 and 29 August 1963.
- ¹³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 17 October 1963.
- ¹⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 8 and 15 July 1965.
- ¹⁵ Philip Corrigan, 'Film Entertainment as Ideology and Pleasure', in *British Cinema History*, p. 32.
- ¹⁶ GJ, 12 July 1965.
- ¹⁷ WBCS, 10 July 1965.

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- ¹⁸ NEP, 12 July 1965.
- ¹⁹ WBCS, 10 July 1965.
- ²⁰ See, for example, GJ, 12 July 1965.
- ²¹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 8 July 1965.
- ²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 July 1965.
- ²³ GJ, 12 July 1965.
- ²⁴ WBCS, 10 July 1965.
- ²⁵ WBCS, 10 July 1965.
- ²⁶ NEP, 12 July 1965.
- ²⁷ NEP, 11 July 1990.
- ²⁸ NEP, 11 July 1990.
- ²⁸ NEP, 11 July 1990.
- ²⁹ NEP, 11 July 1990.
- ³⁰ GJ, 12 July 1965.
- ³¹ GJ, 12 July 1965.
- ³² Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain*, p. 41.
- ³³ NEP, January 27 2001.
- ³⁴ WBCS, 10 July 1965.
- ³⁵ KW, 8 July 1965.
- ³⁶ *The Times*, 30 June 1965. (The air hostess was an iconic figure of the period, *the* dream and aspirational figure of the 1960s ethos of modernity through travel, who, of course, despite the glamorous image, was actually a glorified waitress.)
- ³⁷ The Odeon's appeal to the youth market is also linked in with music. In the late 1950s and early 1960s it hosted some live music events of great significance – most notably appearances by Buddy Holly and the Crickets, the Rolling Stones, and three concerts by the Beatles. The chapter is arguing, not that cinemas of the period had no appeal to the youth audience, but that sufficient notice was not taken of that audience, that their requirements could have been taken into account far more, for example in the modernisation of the Odeon, and that this would have been to the advantage of the cinema trade.
- ³⁸ *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 June 1965.
- ³⁹ GJ, 25 June 1958.
- ⁴⁰ NEP, 2 March 1977.
- ⁴¹ GJ, 26 June 1958.
- ⁴² NEN, 11 July 1958.
- ⁴³ NEP, 21 September 1956.
- ⁴⁴ BB, April/May 1996, issue 60.
- ⁴⁵ Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, p. 125.

⁴⁶ BB, September/October 1989.

⁴⁷ NEP, 17 June 1997.

⁴⁸ NEN 12 October 1961.

⁴⁹ *Nottingham and District Cinema Dates*.

⁵⁰ NEN, May 29 1961.

⁵¹ John Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent Conflict* (London: Athlone Press, 1990) p. 160.

⁵² See Thomas Doherty, 'Teenagers and Teen Pics 1955-1957: A Study of Exploitation Film Making', in Janet Staiger, ed., *The Studio System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) for a discussion of films made specifically for a teenage market.

⁵³ For a study of the demographic market of Nottingham's multiplex, Warner Village, see Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience; Cultural Geographies of Cinema-going* (London: BFI, 2003) pp. 244-6.

⁵⁴ Geraghty, *British Cinema*, p. 11.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE PAST Popular Memory of Cinema-going in the 'Golden Age'

Following the mass cinema closures and the widespread perception of cinema's decline which marked the 1950s and 1960s, it may have been expected that the 1930s cinema would subsequently disappear from the local press as so many of its buildings were doing from the cityscape. However, from the 1980s onwards, the 1930s cinema has in fact received a significant amount of press coverage. This coverage divides into two main areas: memories of cinema-going and cinema architecture, the latter of which forms the basis of the following chapter.

This retrospective coverage signifies a change in the meaning of the 1930s cinema as it became increasingly valued for *what it had been* rather than for what it is. The pre-war cinema and its films are now typically regarded as representing a 'Golden Age'. The closure of such a large quantity of the earlier cinemas, and the growing importance accorded to memory and nostalgia in society as a whole, are significant in informing this process. This trend began in the 1980s when the memory or heritage imperative in British cultural life, described by critics such as Raphael Samuel and Robert Hewison, became acute.¹ This chapter argues that personal memory of cinema-going, through being reproduced in the public forum of the press, became a significant social construct. As Roger Bromley, in his study

of British memory in the inter-war period, claims: 'Memory is not simply the property of individuals, nor just a matter of psychological processes, but a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and "forgetting".'² While personality and personal history affect the content, intensity and emotional tone of a memory, the social and cultural context of memory also exerts a substantial influence on its form and content, with the effect that "popular memory is never untouched by the context of its production or the surrounding political and ideological discourses".³ Therefore, this chapter argues that memory is shaped and formulated by external agencies or processes, in this case the local press: and more specifically by the way it requests and then structures particular types of material.

The examples of memory narratives in the local press concentrate on generational memories of cinema-going in what has been discursively construed as the 'Golden Age' of cinema. These memory narratives take the form of articles and letters based upon personal cinema reminiscence. While they range from memories of the 1920s up to the 1960s, a disproportionately high number recall the cinema of the 1930s. Overwhelmingly, the period is remembered fondly, as a 'Golden Age' when popular cinema and cinema-going were seen to be at their pinnacle. The particular significance of memories of a 'Golden Age' is theorised by Stuart Tannock who, in his critique of nostalgia, argues that "the notion of a Golden Age and a subsequent Fall" is one of the "key tropes central to nostalgic rhetoric".⁴ Furthermore, the major changes wrought in British society by the Second World War are significant in explaining the preponderance of memories

of the 1930s cinema, as Bromley asserts about the particular quality of personal memory of the 1930s as a whole.⁵ Moreover, as Fred Davis claims, “nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for community”.⁶

The memories that emerge in the letters and articles that I examine cover four main themes: identity, community, morality and decline. While there is necessarily some overlap between them, this chapter will examine these four areas in order to draw out their significance in terms of the process of framing memory in cultural terms. These themes all have a powerful social resonance, which partly explains their prominence and serviceability within the press. Not only do they provide the kind of human interest stories that James Curran and Jean Seaton⁷ suggest has become instrumental to British local press since the early 1930s, but memory narratives are also strategic in commercial terms. Significantly, they have the function of appealing to an important sub-section of media readership in that of the elderly, the demographic audience towards which the memory narratives are substantially geared. Additionally, however, memory narratives are cost-effective in terms of news production. According to Rod Pilling, the local press is “largely staffed at reporter level by trainees” who “typically undertake the greater part of that work in the office”⁸ due to low staffing levels. Articles comprising memories sent in by readers are ideal in this context for they are less labour-intensive than stories and features requiring active or investigative research. The important role of memory narratives to the local press is illustrated by the *Nottingham Evening Post* supplement, *Bygones*, which comprises historical

accounts of the city, the majority of which recount personal memories. In February 1998, a whole issue was devoted to the history and popular memory of Nottingham cinema.⁹

In the last decade, significant academic work has been produced on memories of cinema. Annette Kuhn has studied memory of 1930s cinema-going through contemporary records, in-depth interviews with cinema-goers, and her readings of certain films of the period. Kuhn attaches particular importance to the interviews, stating that “for an ethnographic inquiry the experience of cinemagoing must be the core and the *raison-d’être*.¹⁰ The personal experience of cinema-going similarly formed the basis of Jackie Stacey’s study of women’s memories of the 1940s and 1950s cinema, for which the methodology was a detailed questionnaire about their memories of films, cinemas and stars.¹¹

In contrast to the questionnaire-based methodologies of Stacey and Kuhn, utilising newspapers as source material directs research towards patterns of memory within media discourse, rather than towards the solicitation and interpretation of memories from sample participants. This more closely examines how private memories are figured within recurrent themes and images of a sub-genre of memory narrative that has become increasingly significant within local newspapers. In broad terms, this methodology facilitates analysis of the content and focus of particular (generational) memories but also, significantly, the role of the press in fostering, formulating and structuring these memories within the context of local discourse and debate and in terms of particular commercial imperatives.

Stacey's study of female fans in the 1940s and 1950s makes reference to "the negotiation of 'public' discourses and 'private' narratives".¹² This sense of negotiation between the public and the private has a direct bearing on memory narratives as they are used, framed, taken up and published in local newspapers. Not least, individualised memories form, as they themselves are informed by, a sense of iconic recall. Visual and written memories of Nottingham cinema-going frequently coalesce into a hardened set of impressions: of cinema queues snaking down the street, of the respective merits of the flea pit and the picture palace, of the connotations of the back row. What might be called a 'genre of memory' is developed in the local press, whereby a structured set of themes work to include certain issues and frequently marginalise others. Aspects of cinema-going that are rarely discussed in Nottingham press narratives include, to name just a few, cinema smells, smoking, the unwanted advances from strangers (that fuelled some moralists' opposition to cinema in the early period), and the possibilities of sex and coupling enabled by the dark 'privacy' of the cinema.¹³ Films and film stars are generally, although not exclusively, presented as a secondary part of the experience. While all of this may not constitute a deliberate foreclosure of memory, a form of sanctioned reminiscence does emerge, based upon organising themes, images and memory topics.

In his book, *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton offers a persuasive account of the ways in which societal frameworks mould not only the form but also the content of social memory.¹⁴ He claims that: "even so fundamental a question as what the shape of the twentieth century looks like will depend

crucially upon what social group we happen to belong to.”¹⁵ So certain experiences, seen as defining in either the personal or social sphere, are regularly remembered, while others are classed as insignificant. The case of personal cinema memory, situated in the public realm of the local press, foregrounds a number of issues about the constitution of memory and identity for particular social groups. At one level, it can provide insights into the operations of memory and nostalgia as they are figured around the lived experience of cinema and the city. At the same time, memory narratives in the local press raise issues about the ways in which these forms of reminiscence are figured discursively. That is to say, by the way they join, or are seen to inflect, contemporary debates in the present about issues such as criminality or the perception of declining moral standards.

In order to analyse the manner in which personal memories are made public in the local press and are thus shaped by that process, the chapter draws on the work of Maurice Halbwachs. For Halbwachs, personal memory is inextricable from social memory and, consequently, being a member of a social group is bound up with the content of that person’s memories. Through this process “a community of interests and thoughts” is constructed and “our memories are located within the mental and material spaces of the group”.¹⁶ In this manner, the social group of which an individual is a member serves to shape that person’s memories.

Cinema memories in the local press comprise both letters and articles. While some of these are occasioned by news stories, such as the demolition of a

cinema, as many are stand-alone items. The place of cinema within the social life and customs of the 1930s is brought out by the content of some cinema memories. These memories demonstrate that cinema-goers had different relationships and patterns of use with different cinemas. In the early 1930s, prior to the completion of the slum clearance programme, some people had lived in the city centre and, thus, for them, there was no distinction between the local and the city-centre cinema. For example, as a child, Lotty Greaves lived around the corner from the city-centre cinema, the Classic, and each Saturday afternoon her treat had been a trip to that cinema, followed by cream cakes.¹⁷ But the premier position of Nottingham's city centre cinemas was unassailed for those who lived out of town: for many of them the trip into the city was an event in itself, and a cinema such as the Ritz was often the venue for a birthday treat.¹⁸ As teenagers, the city-centre cinemas were the place to take a special date: "if your date developed and you saw her again you would take her into the city."¹⁹ The local cinema, however, is remembered with great affection because it was an intrinsic part of many people's everyday lives.²⁰

Newspaper accounts of cinema memories typically concern suburban cinemas, which are frequently used as a signifier of a larger sense of community and fellowship. Press coverage of the city centre cinemas tends to focus on their architectural importance (particularly that of the Elite, as the following chapter demonstrates) and hence their contribution to Nottingham's sense of itself as a historic, heritage city. As discussed below, the Odeon is the exception to this trend, yet for many respondents the Odeon's significance in their memories

derived from its status as Nottingham's most prestigious cinema. In contrast, the memories of cinema-goes at the local cinemas emphasise their value in bringing people together. Memories of a favourite cinema often ignore the plush 'supers' in favour of the small, homely 'flea-pit'. These tend to be the local cinemas with connotations of home, comfort, familiarity and community.

This chapter will now consider the interweaving of personal and public memory as it relates to the four key themes in the sub-genre of memory narrative as defined.

Identity and Community

The psychologist, Joseph Fitzgerald, has argued that "personal identity is a culturally and historically specific notion", which he locates within modern Western society. He relates the development of personal identity to the narrative mode used in literature, which, he argues, is also "used extensively in the socialization process by which new members are taught the underlying themes and values of the group through 'true' stories, fables and allegories".²¹ I would suggest that film, as the dominant mass medium of the 1930s, offers a valuable means of studying identity formation or, in this case, memories of its processes. The role of memory in identity formation is asserted by Halbwachs who claims that: "We preserve memories of each epoch of our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated."²² Fitzgerald's study in 1988 of a sample of both younger and older adults found that, for both age groups, their greatest number of vivid memories

(which he terms flash-bulb memories) were of events between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, the period regarded as crucially important in identity formation.²³ This is also the age when cinema attendance is generally at its highest and the age that recurs most frequently in newspaper accounts dealing with Nottingham cinema memory. This section examines the causal connection between memory, cinema and identity formation, measured through the lens of nostalgia that, as sociologist Fred Davis comments, is ‘one of the means...we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities.’²⁴

An important element of cinema nostalgia, foregrounded in newspaper accounts, is the fondly remembered imitation of film stars. This is specifically measured in terms of clothing, manner and hairstyles. For example, Margaret Corkill relates how she and her friends followed film stars closely and “tried to imitate their hairstyles and make-up”.²⁵ Stacey provides a detailed study of the significance of female identification with the 1940s and 1950s film stars.²⁶ She claims that, through this process, “the difference, then, between the star and the spectator is transformable into similarity through the typical work of femininity: the production of oneself simultaneously as subject and object in accordance with cultural ideals of femininity.”²⁷ However, while Stacey’s work focuses exclusively on female spectators, the genre of cinema memories in the local press indicates that this process is significant to the development of masculine as well as feminine identity. This theme is central to the fascinating and highly detailed reminiscences of Bill Cross. He recollects he and his friends “worshipping” and copying the style of film stars as teenagers in the 1930s, particularly stars of

gangster films such as James Cagney. For Bill, this even led to being able to recreate film star lifestyle at the cinema with a girl: “You in your James Cagney outfit, she in her Joan Blondell dress, you were the stars of the screen for the night.”²⁸ The surroundings were crucial to his depiction of reliving film star lifestyle at the cinema; he recounts dating as a young man at two of the plush, luxurious cinemas in Nottingham, the Adelphi and the Ritz, in contrast to his childhood haunt, the Palace, that “had another name, the Flea Pit”.²⁹ He clearly presents this development in terms of the lifecycle, whereby dating at a luxury cinema symbolises both adulthood and a rise in social status as a whole. Inside the Ritz, “after the hard-up times as a boy you were a young man, nice clothes, money in your pocket and a lovely girl on your arm”.³⁰

Many memories of cinema-going in local press accounts focus on cinema’s role in key aspects of the lifecycle and key moments of identity formation, particularly in terms of courtship. The cinema’s significance in the courting ritual is one of the explanations of the great emotional resonance of cinema memories. For many, a trip to the cinema was their first date. This was of particular significance for those who went on to marry that first date,³¹ and one couple even recalled getting engaged in the cinema.³² For many of the older generation, cinema played an important part in their courtship because it was the only place where they could have any privacy. Hence the connotations of the back row and its double seats (“we envied those who got the double seats in the back row of the stalls”³³) that have now become a part of national mythology.

For girls, a date at the cinema also indicated the level of a boy's regard: if he really liked her he would arrange to meet outside and pay, otherwise the arrangement would be to meet inside so the girl paid her own way.³⁴ Audrey Booth's first date was at the cinema and the boy met her outside and asked her to give him the money as he didn't like girls to pay for themselves! This recollection is also significant with regard to the effect of nostalgia on the emotional tone of her memory, resulting in a rather humiliating experience being transmuted over time into something that she "has had many a laugh about since".³⁵

The same process is evident in Mrs. Whittaker's defining memory of the Futurist. A film had been made at the factory where she worked, which included some footage of herself and a friend. On its release they excitedly went to see it, their anticipation aroused by the prospect of seeing themselves on screen. However, they found that they had been edited out. Mrs. Whittaker recounts, "we were so disappointed, but I often think back".³⁶ The implication of the 'but' is that her perspective has since altered, and this inference is borne out by the title of the piece, "Happy memories of the Futurist". Her original disappointment has subsequently become wrought into nostalgia for the time as a whole, a sentimental memory of youth. As she describes, "we were just 14 years of age!"³⁷ Mrs. Whittaker's remembered eagerness, hope and enthusiasm as a fourteen year-old emerge as the key memory, the event at the Futurist a tangible means of accessing that former self and locating it within a specific time and milieu. The telling exclamation mark suggests an incredulity that she could ever have been so young and naïve. This indicates both a perception of her former identity and a

nostalgic sense of how that identity has changed over time. As Davis claims, an important element of nostalgia is that it fosters the belief that “we have in the interim ‘grown’ and ‘matured’ and are now better equipped to confront the considerably more challenging demands of the present”.³⁸

The further significance of this item is Mrs. Whittaker’s call to her friend and co-worker, and to other readers, “do you remember?”.³⁹ This indicates that personal memories are linked to ideas of collective experience and to the notion of community. Indeed, the invocation of community is central to many memory narratives in the local press and this functions on two levels. Firstly, there is an attempt to recreate a (lost) community of those who remember, as Mrs Whittaker aims to achieve. Secondly, there is an infusion of historical nostalgia in the recall of community life: memories of a shared leisure practice are often contrasted implicitly or explicitly with the individualistic tendencies of contemporary culture. Andrew Hoskins states that societies “turn to the past, in an attempt to find some kind of anchor in the characteristically fragmented experience of modern life”.⁴⁰ Cinema memory invests in, and enables, a sense of community that frequently plays against the perception of social diffusion in the present. The nostalgia evoked by a lost community is utilised by the local press as a means of retaining that community through shared memories.

This sense of community is expedient to the local press. Indeed, one of the key functions of the local press is in fostering communal identities. For Rod Pilling, local newspapers are successful when they make their readers feel part of a community.⁴¹ As such, they will frequently instigate campaigns about issues

such as transport systems, shopping facilities or social problems as a means of furthering the perception of the city as 'our' city. More importantly in terms of the commercial imperatives of the press, developing an imagined community at the local level provides a means of securing readership loyalty to 'our' local paper. In this way, city identity and press identity are inter-linked.

As a means of achieving this highly productive mutual dependence between city and press identity, many retrospective accounts of cinema-going in the local press close with an invitation for readers to write in and share their memories. In *Bygones* there is a special text box inviting readers to send "any memories or photographs you want to share".⁴² By such means, a community of those who remember is created, offering a way of compensating for the loss of community that members of the older generation often face. As Halbwachs argues: "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present."⁴³ This approach, then, fulfils the needs of the elderly, yet it also addresses a commercial imperative in strengthening readers' loyalty to the newspaper by asking them to participate in the process and formation of city memory. On a wider level, the technique helps to foster a sense of ownership among the readers, a feeling that this is 'their' newspaper appealing to 'their' generation and interest group. The following quote from the *Nottingham Herald* is typical in this respect. "Do you remember the old Nottingham picture houses or have fond memories or experiences of a night at the flicks? If so, write to us."⁴⁴ Such a question conveys the idea that a memory has more value if it is shared with others who remember similar events, rather than with those for whom it is

new material. Furthermore, in this example, the newspaper clearly signals the type of anecdote it will print. Rather than memories of moral scandal or economic want, cinema-going is associated with all things fond, nostalgic and quintessentially communitarian.

Cinema-going of the period is regularly remembered as a collective experience. An important means of affirming this sense of community was cinema organ music. For the 1930s audience in Nottingham, this was a major attraction of the Ritz. While only the higher class of cinemas contained organs, the Ritz was positioned above that select few due, as we have seen, to the presence of its highly respected organist Jack Helyer. For many, his performances were as much of an attraction as the films and feature prominently in many people's memories. For example, Kath Price recalls "memories of Jack Helyer and our sing-songs during the interval when he came up through the floor of the stage on that wonderful Wurlitzer organ and we sang from the song sheet hanging down from the ceiling".⁴⁵ As such memories demonstrate, Helyer offered a means of bringing the audience together. Indeed, a letter in the Nottinghamshire Archives states that Helyer's "forte was singalong medleys [which] created the special atmosphere that is unique to community singing."⁴⁶

The place of community within the activity and process of cultural recall has been taken up by theorists of memory and nostalgia. Davis suggests a generational sense of community in his discussion of "the powerful generation-delineating properties to which nostalgia lends itself so easily". For Davis, "images from our past ... seem to iconically bestow an age-graded

distinctiveness”.⁴⁷ And for Fivush, Haden and Reese, “joint remembering, or reminiscing, serves a very special purpose, that of creating interpersonal bonds based on a sense of shared history.”⁴⁸ Raymond Williams refers to generational identity in his theory about structures of feeling. In writing of the social links that produce emotions, Williams suggests that “what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period.”⁴⁹ Cinema in its Golden Age, the time of its largest audience base, provides a valuable means of illustrating such structures of feeling at work. For those who remember cinema through the local press, reminiscence is a discursive means of community-building. While any city newspaper will have different readership constituencies with potentially competing investments in the idea of community, memory narratives are a means of courting and displaying a generational sense of community that, in a wider capacity, can enrich a broad-based notion of the city’s lived experience.

Some articles and letters about cinema’s past denote a strong sense that going to the cinema was instrumental in forging, and not simply hosting, community sensibilities. An article in the *Nottingham Evening Post* comprising a selection of readers’ memories about cinema-going in their youth states that “local cinemas played such a vital part in bringing communities together”.⁵⁰ A factor in this is that in the 1930s the vast majority of cinemas were located in residential areas around the city. These, rather than cinemas located in the city centre, feature most in readers’ memories in the local press, unless the coverage

relates to a specific city centre event. As Chapter Two noted, for the large number of suburbs built in the 1930s, the cinema was often the only leisure or community facility. There is some evidence, then, that for those who moved to a new estate in the period, going to the local cinema was the only way of mixing socially with others of that new community. This included children, enticed by the popular children's clubs that began in the 1930s, where "millions of youngsters spent their Saturday mornings marvelling at the wonders on screen in their local picture palace".⁵¹

The fact that cinema was a dominant mass medium in the 1930s also bears upon the centrality of community in many memory narratives. As the *Nottingham Evening Post* makes clear, "going to the pictures was very much a shared experience" which offered "the sheer pleasure of roaring with laughter amidst a thousand others".⁵² In all of these ways, cinema is often remembered as the place where the cinema-goer met others from his or her neighbourhood, where s/he belonged in a club as a child, where s/he sang along with the accompaniments, shouted advice to the stars, and shared all the powerful emotions that films of the 'Golden Age' could invoke. Cinema-going is invariably linked with powerful impressions of community in the memory narratives of the local press, a sense of remembrance that not only helps foster and secure a particular readership but that also plays off and within contemporary figurations of city identity and cultural value. In the following section, I will examine questions of value as they relate specifically to narratives of morality and decline.

Morality and Decline

In the memory narratives contained in the local press, films of the 'Golden Age' are remembered as being fervently moral in nature. Memories of cinema are associated for many with a widespread sense of morality and respectability. This morality is recalled fondly as a secure touchstone. As a respondent to an oral history interview in Nottingham so effectively phrased it, "in those days films were black and white both in terms of colour and their morality".⁵³ This recurrent perception extends outwards from the content of the films to the appearance of cinemas, the behaviour of audiences, and then to a wider sense of this morality operating in society as a whole.

As with particular memories of community, the overriding sense of the 'Golden Age' generation is that morality has declined since their youth. For many respondents, the morality on screen in the 'Golden Age' was evidence of the values which operated in society as a whole, values which, they believe, have also subsequently declined.

The morality evinced by the period's films is taken by many readers to explain the widespread level of audience participation. So, according to an article of cinema reminiscence in one paper: to the hero "we shouted in unison 'Look behind yer!' or if he hesitated to shoot, 'Shoot! Shoot!' we chanted".⁵⁴ This type of reminiscence evokes the sense that good and evil were clearly differentiated on film as in life; no memories recall any grey, ambivalent, uncertain characters or plots onscreen. The audience as a whole, we are told retrospectively, felt the same, so "good always triumphed over evil and there is no doubt whose side we

were on”.⁵⁵ In the memory of audience response, there is an insistence that everyone felt the same and responded in the same way, thus reflecting a broader set of shared values as well as cinematic expectations. This implied sense of a strong moral compass amongst Nottingham cinema-goers of the 1930s is particularly significant in the context of the 1990s, where issues of morality were frequently discussed in relation to urban criminality. In a time where crime waves were being seized upon in local news coverage – largely provoked by Nottingham’s higher-than-average crime rate, made conspicuous by national surveys rating crime such as burglary, car theft and mugging⁵⁶ – the inclusion of personal memories helped generate perspectives about city identity in the past and for the future. More specifically, memory became a news strategy for maintaining the stake and readership of the elderly as it responded to community dramas of the present day.

Memory of cinema’s inherent morality in the Golden Age extends from the films to the experience of cinema-going itself. The role of authority in the Golden Age and the attitude of cinema-going children and young people are central to this form of recall. The commissioner and doorman are remembered as the representatives of cinema’s vociferous policing of behaviour: they were the officials who disciplined any rowdy children in the Saturday children’s clubs. Their smart uniforms are especially remembered as central to their unarguable authority. Hence the following quotes are representative: “the commissioner was in control in his peaked hat, his smart uniform in gold braid, military style” and “the commissioner or doorman would keep us all in order...very smart in

his uniform adorned with gold braid”.⁵⁷ Another respondent remembers “commissionaires in military-style uniforms ... controlling the queues” and adds the interesting personal reflection that “I was always rather disappointed when I saw these power wielding people out in their ordinary clothes – they didn’t look at all important then”.⁵⁸ If the increasingly militarised 1930s was a period where uniforms became a powerful signature of authority, a sense of regimental discipline carried over into the cinema clubs frequented by Nottingham’s children.

While the behaviour of children at the cinema is often remembered to be rowdy and noisy – some letters even refer to children as hooligans – there is an overwhelming sense that behaviour was never a serious threat or danger. One respondent recalls that after eating bananas, pranks would begin. He writes: “you see we were hooligans in those days as we slung the skins over the balcony!”⁵⁹ And another that “when one of us had no money to get in we all kept guard while he or she sneaked in, but we always got caught. Oh such criminals!”⁶⁰ Both the exclamation marks that end these reminiscences and their overall tone are typical of this group of memories. The elderly generation’s own retrospectively small acts of rebellion are now looked on nostalgically because to the proponents they had seemed so big and daring at the time. Reg Billiald remembers throwing ice cream cartons from the circle at the Cavendish⁶¹, while in the children’s matinees everyone fought to get in, shouted all the way through and then “stampeded out like the hordes of Genghis Khan”.⁶² These youthful exploits are explicitly contrasted with the present in the following quote which also refers to the

Cavendish cinema which was situated in the inner-city area, St Ann's. "If the film broke down, everyone would scream and throw sweet papers' recalls Jean, now living in the sedate suburbs of Mapperley."⁶³ Her nostalgia is dependent on a changed perspective; the boisterous child of the inner-city is now presented as a suburban pillar of the community. The recollected 'hooliganism' and 'criminality' are seen more as high spirits or as minor misdemeanours. Either way, such infringements were always dealt with effectively by the uniformed cinema staff or by parents, and those reminiscing seem pleased that order was maintained. The memories are comic rather than threatening or frightening: none of the memories tell of any violence, vandalism or danger inflicted by Golden Age audiences. Who would dare? As local cinema historian, Rick Wilde, recalls, boisterous children were dealt with firmly, "law and order was enforced with a rod of iron".⁶⁴

For the press, this type of memory is often utilised to fuel debate about youth and criminality in the present day, inflecting a discourse of social change, especially as it bears upon manners of behaviour and levels of youth discipline. For those who proffer memories of cinema-going in the local press, a picture of decline frequently emerges, set in relation to relaxed expectations of personal probity and against a more aggressive and materialistic contemporary milieu. These rather clichéd notions of social decline are not uncommon within structures of personal and cultural nostalgia. As Davis claims about nostalgic reminiscence, "present circumstances and condition ... compared to the past are invariably felt to be ... more bleak, grim, wretched."⁶⁵ However, certain incidents and events can mobilise a focused sense of decline, related to particular news issues that may

invoke youth (mis)behaviour, or that may relate more broadly to manifestations of disorder in the city sphere.

The announcement that the city centre Odeon was to close in January 2001 is a marked example of the latter, inspiring letters to the *Nottingham Evening Post* mourning what one writer saw as a general decline in the city's sense of heritage and identity. She wrote: "We know changes to our city centre are inevitable through the years but are they really for the better?"⁶⁶ Another letter by a man who used to work at the Odeon commented that 'I was very upset to hear about its closure. It was *the* cinema in Nottingham.'⁶⁷ These comments are part of a broader perception among older generations that the city centre is being devalued. Significantly, this can be set in relation to new forms of city investment, most notably the fifteen-screen Warner Village.⁶⁸ While the opening of the complex was met with considerable news fanfare, especially honed for the young professional and middle-aged target users, elderly respondents often saw it as a white elephant. As one letter stated: "who is going to fill the many bars and cinemas during the week?"⁶⁹ To many elderly respondents, the mall-like complex was further evidence of Nottingham's perceived decline, and was contrasted with the individual splendour of the Ritz in the 1930s.

For many, the Odeon functioned as a signifier of certain standards and values, and has been mourned in the same way as the demise of Nottingham's high-class shops, such as Pearson's department store and Burton's food shop. In addition, the closure of the Odeon, along with that of the original *Evening Post* Building and the long-standing Co-operative store, is seen by some to mark a

deterioration of the city's architectural heritage. A further letter on the subject of the Odeon's closure wrote: "It has tried to compete with the noisy monsters that now go under the name of cinemas where there is no personal service any more."⁷⁰ The closure and the re-use or demolition of a cinema can also serve to make people protective of their memories. So local press narratives are infused with characteristic phrases such as "they can't take my memories away", with the implication that 'they' are trying to do so by the restructuring of the city. (This is also a complaint amongst some of the elderly generation when streets are re-named, which is interpreted as meaning that 'they' are trying to obliterate the past.⁷¹) In these examples external forces are perceived to threaten the continued presence of the past. While Davis claims that for the elderly there is "the apparent *unquestioned* belief that the past was better, that one's belief to that effect is a true reflection of *real* change in the world",⁷² memories can often function discursively in response to tangible change, in certain cases bearing upon the restructuring of the city's public space and leisure culture.

Whether stated or implied, the past is regularly referred to as superior to the present. So Margaret Corkill remembers people eating fish suppers, pork pies and oranges in the cinema although: "curiously enough I don't remember these old cinemas being grubby or littered."⁷³ Interestingly, for some, in tandem with recollections of the palatial grandeur of the old cinemas, go recollections of them being flea-ridden and of the usherettes going down the aisle spraying air freshener. Any sense of tension between these two perceptions is invariably absent. For the elderly, today's cinemas have far less atmosphere than the ones

that live on in memory. For one man, “one can only look back and marvel at the wonderful entertainment these movie palaces gave us”.⁷⁴ For most, the films, too, have declined since their heyday: “The films are not as good now . . . we never come away saying we’d enjoyed them because we’d had a good cry!”⁷⁵ Equally, the expense of recent trips to the cinema is often resented, especially as the price is for just one film, whereas in the Golden Age there would be two full-length films, plus a supporting short film and a newsreel.

These memories serve to comment as much on present as on past experience, and can create a world view which is typically antagonistic to the present and mistrustful of the future. For Christopher Lasch, this type of memory would be termed nostalgia. According to him:

The emotional appeal of happy memories does not depend on disparagement of the present, the hallmark of the nostalgic attitude. Nostalgia appeals to the feeling that the past offered delights no longer obtainable. Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost and for that reason timeless and unchanging.⁷⁶

From this perspective, memory of cinema-going in the local press could usefully be regarded as nostalgic, with the ‘Golden Age’ of both the cinema and those reminiscing consigned firmly to the past.

This notion of decline is further represented by a recurrent sense that the past had a vigour and vividness, in contrast with the present’s bureaucratic and staid character. This observation is closely related to the age of those reminiscing as, for the elderly, health problems and a general ‘slowing down’ often restrict activity and liveliness and, therefore, the relative perception of vigour. Yet, as Halbwachs argues, there is a general tendency not restricted to the elderly, to perceive that “the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was

in the past”.⁷⁷ In general terms, many reminiscences state that past times were ‘good old days’. This not only forms a sense of the superiority of the past over the present, but also helps cement generational commonalities in belief, experience and attitude. Such discussion of the past is beneficial to the local press for it encourages readers to write in with their views, and can lead to in-depth features on the state of the city. While notions of decline may be endemic to the experience of nostalgia, and to memories of cinema-going in particular, these can be used to enrich and democratise news discourse as it negotiates issues of city life for, and in response to, its various demographic constituencies.

The cinema-going past lives on in the local press. Economically, this fulfils a valuable function by ensuring that the readership of the elderly is maintained without the necessity of undertaking substantial cost and labour-intensive investigative journalism. Furthermore, incorporating cinema memories as a regular feature is in keeping with the overall press trend of increasing the proportion of human interest stories, with the result that the emphasis has moved “from public interest to interesting the public”.⁷⁸

As a means of placing personal recollections in the public forum, the press plays a significant role in formulating both the structure and content of cinema memories. These serve to address both the nostalgic tendency of the elderly to look back fondly on their Golden Age, equated with that of the cinema, and to

comment on the contemporary concerns of the city. As Halbwachs argues, “our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present”.⁷⁹

NOTES

¹ See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994) and Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen, 1987). Samuel offers a detailed and wide-ranging study of some of the ways in which memory is preserved in British society, arguing that “the last thirty years have witnessed an extraordinary and, it seems, ever growing enthusiasm for the recovery of the national past”. (Samuel, p. 139.) Hewison argues that the heritage industry has developed in the United Kingdom in response to the widespread perception that the nation is in decline. That perceived decline is evidenced in both the economy (with the heritage industry functioning as a substitute for the manufacturing industry) and across society as a whole. (Hewison, p. 9.) He believes that when studying the past we should ask “what kind of past we have chosen to preserve, and what that has done to our present”. (Hewison, p. 47.)

² Roger Bromley, *Lost Narratives, Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 1.

³ John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p. 118.

⁴ Stuart Tannock, ‘Nostalgia Critique’, *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9. No. 3. (October 1995) p. 454.

⁵ Bromley, *Lost Narratives*, p. 5.

⁶ Fred Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday, A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 49.

⁷ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 49.

⁸ Rod Pilling, ‘The Changing Role of the Local Journalist: From Faithful Chronicler of the Parish Pump to Multiskilled Compiler of an Electronic Database’, in Bob Franklin and David Murphy, eds., *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 184-5.

⁹ NEP, *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.

¹⁰ Annette Kuhn, ‘Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 19. No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 531-543, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I B Tauris, 2002).

¹¹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing, Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994.)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹³ Alan Bennett's article on his memories of cinema, 'Seeing Stars', (*London Review of Books*, 3 January 2002, pp. 12-14) offers an interesting variation on the fare provided by the local press. He recounts a man groping his leg in the cinema when he was a child and his realisation that "this must be what Mam's mysterious warnings had been about". (Indicating this may have been a widespread problem of which others have memories.) The tone of the memory is typical of Alan Bennett's deadpan humour but I would also suggest that this theme may be acceptable for a well-known and well-respected figure in a literary journal, but not for 'the man in the street' in his local newspaper because it is the 'wrong' kind of memory.

¹⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Nottingham City Library, Local Studies Department newspaper holdings. In this type of memory, cinema is bound up with important associations of childhood and rites of passage which means that the memories attain a symbolic and representational value to the individual concerned which is out of all proportion to the practice of 'going to see a film'.

¹⁸ See, for example, NO, March 1984.

¹⁹ NEP, *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.

²⁰ See, for example, NEP, 6 March 1996, BB, November 1989.

²¹ Joseph Fitzgerald, 'Intersecting Meanings of Reminiscence in Adult Development and Aging', in David C. Rubin, ed., *Remembering Our Past, Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 370.

²² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. trans., Lewis A Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) p. 47.

²³ Fitzgerald, 'Reminiscence in Adult Development', in *Remembering Our Past*, pp. 367-9. For work on the significance of this phase of the lifecycle in terms of memories, see also Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, pp. 28-30.

²⁴ Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 31.

²⁵ 'Double Seats and Savoury Snacks', NO, March 1984.

²⁶ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, pp. 126-75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁸ 'Guys and Molls in Back Row', in NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998. Bill also recalls a Proustian revisitation of cinemas of the past. He recounts how shopping in Woolworth's (formerly the Olympia cinema, and prior to that a music hall of the same name) led to a surreal visitation from the past: "Then in my memory I rose above up to the balcony of this one time music hall looking down at the stage where players were performing by the light of flickering oil lamps." In the middle of a bustling Woolworth's he was transported back sixty years, in an image reminiscent of Marcel's encounter with the past through the smell of madeleines and tea in *Remembrance of*

Things Past. He goes on to have a similar experience in Wilkinson's store when he describes:

"The dust covered balcony looking down at the silver screen in my memory." Walking round the contemporary streets produces for him what seem to be spontaneous reconstructions of his youth in which the landscape of past is superimposed over that of the present.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ NR, 28 October 1982.

³² Nottingham City Library, Local Studies Department newspaper holdings.

³³ NO, March 1984.

³⁴ Evidence from oral history research project. However, this behaviour was interpreted differently by Margaret Corkill, who "learned to be wary of the tightfisted ones who said they would meet you inside". *Nottingham Observer*, March 1984.

³⁵ NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998

³⁶ 'Happy Memories of the Futurist', BB, 34 (November-December 1991).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 45.

³⁹ Happy Memories of the Futurist', BB.

⁴⁰ Andrew Hoskins, 'New Memory: Mediating History', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 21. No. 4 (October 2001) p. 1.

⁴¹ Pilling, 'The Changing Role of the Local Journalist, in *Making the Local News*, pp. 187-8.

⁴² NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.

⁴³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ NH, 18 July 1996.

⁴⁵ NEP, 17 October 1982.

⁴⁶ Nottinghamshire Archives.

⁴⁷ Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p.102.

⁴⁸ Robyn Fivush, Catherine Haden and Elaine Reese, 'Remembering, Recounting, and Reminiscing: the Development of Autobiographical Memory in Social Context', in *Remembering Our Past*, p. 341.

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 131.

⁵⁰ NEP, 6 March 1996.

⁵¹ NEP, 10 April 1993.

⁵² NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.

⁵³ Interview for a Nottingham oral history project, February 2000.

⁵⁴ BB, November 1989.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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- ⁵⁶ For the most recent figures see, for example,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/graphic/0,5812,344426,00.html>
- ⁵⁷ NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- ⁵⁸ NO, March 1984.
- ⁵⁹ NEP, 6 August 1996.
- ⁶⁰ NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- ⁶¹ NEP, March 6 1996.
- ⁶² NEP, April 10 1993.
- ⁶³ NEP, March 6 1996.
- ⁶⁴ NEP, 10 April 1993.
- ⁶⁵ Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 15.
- ⁶⁶ NEP, 14 November 2000.
- ⁶⁷ NEP, 14 November 2000.
- ⁶⁸ For a discussion of the possible impact of the Warner Village on Nottingham's city centre, see Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003).
- ⁶⁹ Nottingham City Library Local Studies Department newspaper holdings.
- ⁷⁰ NEP, 27 October 2000.
- ⁷¹ *Nottinghamshire Living History Archive*, A57/a-c/1
- ⁷² Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 64.
- ⁷³ NO, March 1984.
- ⁷⁴ NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- ⁷⁵ NEP *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (London: W W Norton, 1991) pp. 82-83.
- ⁷⁷ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 48.
- ⁷⁸ Pilling, 'The Changing Role of the Local Journalist', in *Making the Local News*, p. 187.
- ⁷⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 34.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PRESERVING THE PAST, CHANGING THE PRESENT? Cinema Conservation: Its Context and Meanings

This chapter studies the movement to conserve cinemas which began in the 1970s. Until that time, it was customary for cinemas that had closed either to be demolished or be converted to another use without any attempt to preserve their architectural features. The chapter develops two principal arguments. Firstly, that through being preserved, the meaning of a cinema is inevitably changed, whether it remains in operation as a cinema or is adapted for other purposes. Instead of being an accepted part of everyday life, the cinema begins to embody some of the associations of an object in a museum. In the process of preservation, cinemas may be instrumental to the changing usage of the city space, with the Elite representing a very well-defined example of this trend in Nottingham. Secondly, the chapter argues that preservation attempts are motivated by two very different concerns: either the architectural merit of a cinema, or its remembered personal and community function, and that the location of a cinema is instrumental in determining which of these concerns is prioritised. The city-centre cinemas tend to be more highly regarded for their architecture while those in the suburbs are valued more for the place they have occupied in the community.

In order to understand and analyse the trend towards cinema preservation, the chapter outlines the changing reputation of cinema architecture in Britain from its origins up to the present day, and situates that process within the context of architectural preservation as a whole. The chapter then examines the changing perceptions of the cinema building in Nottingham and the local press response to its destruction or preservation. The chapter focuses in particular on one city-centre cinema, the Elite, and three suburban cinemas, the Savoy, the Adelphi and the Capitol, in order to illustrate the significance of a cinema's location with regard to the architectural value ascribed to it. Theoretically, it draws upon Tamara K Hareven and Randolph Langenbach's study of the re-evaluation of vernacular architecture, applying to cinemas their work on industrial buildings and ordinary houses. Hareven and Langenbach claim that: "the demolition of dwellings and factory buildings wipes out a significant chapter of the history of a place".¹ Their work demonstrates the emotional impact of some buildings on people whose memories are invested in them.

As the previous chapter discussed, cinemas have the ability to evoke very powerful associations for people whose cinema memories are bound up with either the rituals or special occasions of their youth. M Christine Boyer's analysis in *The City of Collective Memory* is also utilised in terms of establishing a critical framework for the study.² For Boyer, preservation can only be partial because the life of a city depends on vibrancy and growth. Consequently certain zones are singled out for preservation and these become

“visual spectacles”, like objects in a museum.³ In Boyer’s argument, this is not necessarily a democratising, egalitarian shift: instead it can function as a means of showcasing and fragmenting city space into gentrified and neglected zones.⁴ Situated within this context, cinema preservation is recognisable as one component of a much wider discourse over the structure and meaning of the city space.

Cinema architecture in Britain has typically been either vilified or disregarded throughout its long history. Since the 1970s, however, it has undergone such substantial re-evaluation that currently over seventy cinemas in Britain are statutorily protected by listed status. Why has this reappraisal taken place after the derisory reputation that had previously dogged cinema architecture? In order to understand the process, these changing perceptions need to be located within the wider context of national initiatives over architectural preservation as a whole. While historic preservation in Britain can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century,⁵ the Second World War was extremely influential in accelerating and informing this process. As an English Heritage publication states: “it took the bombing of our major cities in 1940-1 to bring home the urgent need for a means of identifying historic buildings worth saving”.⁶ Thus, after the war came the first proposals to provide statutory protection for particular buildings. At first, very few twentieth-century buildings were listed as they were not old enough to be considered architecturally valuable.⁷

Despite its nineteenth-century roots and the activity of the immediate post-war period when the first buildings attained listed status, the conservation movement only became firmly established in the latter part of the twentieth century. David Pearce locates concerted attempts to protect and conserve Britain's heritage as originating in the mid-1970s, "a time of fundamental change in attitudes about the treatment of what was just then coming to be called 'the heritage'".⁸ This development coincided with the beginning of the revolt against Modernist architecture. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the doctrines of modernism had been in ascendancy, but the results of this building style – particularly in terms of the negative social effects of some of the modernist housing programmes – began to be questioned in this period.⁹ Pearce cites both the mid-1970s change in government policy on the inner urban motorways which had decimated so many city centres in the 1960s, and the move to foster home improvements rather than high-rise new builds, as indicative of the change in mood.¹⁰ This gave rise to government-sponsored initiatives such as redevelopment zones and designated conservation areas, which have made a significant impact on the structure of our cities.

Conservation of industrial architecture has had the foremost impact on Britain's cityscapes since the 1970s. In Nottingham this has taken the form of gentrification of the Lace Market area: the industrial heartland of the city up to the mid-twentieth century. The Victorian factories and warehouses of the lace industry, once languishing disused as derelict reminders of a lost

industrial heritage, are now redeveloped for the newly urbanised young middle-classes as bars, restaurants, hotels and loft living residences.¹¹

The conservation movement was in turn born out of the development of new attitudes towards history, nostalgia and the relationship between the ordinary person and popular memory. Pearce claims that “the nearly ordinary ... has become the focus of much conservation effort in recent years.”¹² Buildings such as cinemas have now attained importance as representing a means of preserving the social records of ‘ordinary people’.¹³ Until the 1970s, preservation was considered to be appropriate principally for edifices such as cathedrals, royal palaces, government buildings and stately homes. However, since then “attention has now shifted from things and places of high architectural merit or unique historical consequence to those that have played a part in the lives of ordinary people.”¹⁴ This concern is inter-linked with the concurrent revaluation of the ‘ordinary’ person’s life and memories, as witnessed by the growth of oral history projects, and a greater historical concern with personal accounts and social history, in addition to political, military and economic histories.¹⁵ Therefore the time period covered in this chapter corresponds with that of the preceding chapter on cinema memory.

The Changing Reputation of Cinema Architecture Nationally

While leisure architecture as a whole has often been disregarded, this is particularly true of cinema architecture in Britain. (Theatres have attracted greater interest than most other leisure forms, in consequence of their

perceived higher cultural legitimacy and their more venerable age: many have achieved cultural respectability due to their Victorian or Edwardian origins.¹⁶) Despite being lauded by the inter-war press as representing an important asset to the cityscape, the inter-war cinemas were little valued by the architectural profession of the time. The well-known architectural critic, P. Morton Shand, claimed that “no class of edifice represents quite such a degraded level of design” as British cinemas.¹⁷ Until around 1970 his evaluation was typical of that of the architectural profession as a whole. As Dennis Sharp comments, cinemas “were considered to be not quite architecture”.¹⁸

For the architectural profession, cinemas of the 1920s and 1930s in Britain were failed attempts at a modernism which had been successfully articulated by some continental cinema architects. Thus Shand applauded the more rigorously modern style of the German cinemas, which utilised clear stark lines and a minimum of ornamentation, urging British cinema architects to adopt that style and adjudging their achievements by the extent to which they did so. He claimed that: “With such a depressingly low level of design among British cinema, it is heartening to turn to what is being done in the same field in...Germany.”¹⁹ However, despite his coercion, as Bevis Hillier points out, British architects refused to copy slavishly the German example, and were influenced by native theatre and fairground architecture, as well as by the atmospherics which had originated in the USA.²⁰ According to John Gold in *The Experience of Modernism*, British architecture as a whole was much slower than continental Europe to embrace modernism. However, he

does claim that in the course of the 1930s “cinema facades sometimes edged away from Art Deco to more consciously modern styling”.²¹

The disregard for cinema architecture exhibited by Shand continued throughout the post-war era of mass cinema closures which marked the 1950s and 1960s. As we have seen, of the cinemas that closed down in Nottingham in that period, some became bingo halls, others were converted into supermarkets or warehouses, which frequently necessitated undertaking major structural changes, while others were demolished. The local press coverage of these developments evinced no sense that this constituted an architectural loss to the city. Furthermore, many of the cinemas that remained open in that period were shabby and run-down, and could thus be seen to symbolise the demise of the cinema industry as a whole.

The re-evaluation of cinema architecture began when the vast majority of cinemas had closed down and been converted to other uses. After decades of neglect and dismissal by the architectural establishment, British cinema architecture began to be considered reputable and worthwhile around the time of the publication of the first book-length study of Britain’s cinema architecture, Dennis Sharp’s *The Picture Palace*, in 1969. In 1972 cinema’s architectural significance was further recognised by the establishment when the first group of cinemas attained listed status.²² Since then, the cinema conservation movement has grown apace, with campaigns to save cinemas from demolition and internal reconstruction in evidence in towns and cities across the country. As Alan O’Shea argues, since the 1960s cinema can no

longer be regarded as the dominant cultural form.²³ I would argue that it is significant that the greater cultural value accorded to both films and cinemas can be dated from the period when they were in decline. Similarly, Ian Taylor et al, in their study of Sheffield and Manchester, suggest that male working-class culture began to be celebrated in Sheffield at the precise moment of its demise.²⁴

As the 1930s was the decade of major cinema-building in Britain, a further factor in the changing reputation of cinema architecture is the perception of 1930s architecture and design as a whole. This has been re-evaluated since the 1970s and the art deco movement has become particularly well regarded. This is of particular significance to cinemas dating from the 1930s as the art deco style is a feature of so many of them. The Thirties Society was formed in 1979 by a group of architects and conservationists who were concerned that the buildings of the inter-war period “were not generally appreciated, and were often threatened, sometimes by simple neglect, sometimes with demolition or radical redesign in the name of redevelopment”.²⁵ Although the society has been renamed the Twentieth Century Society, its initial remit signifies the particular importance which it accorded to 1930s architecture.

The 1930s cinemas are the main focus of Sharp’s *The Picture Palace* and of the two subsequent histories of British cinema architecture: Atwell’s *Cathedrals of the Movies* and Gray’s *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*.²⁶ The latter two writers have also been directly involved in

cinema preservation: Atwell claims that the statutory listing of the first nine cinemas in London was due to his input,²⁷ while Gray was the archivist of the Cinema Theatre Association (CTA), an organisation formed in 1967 which campaigns for cinema preservation.²⁸ A nostalgic, elegiac tone is discernible in the studies of cinema architecture. For example, Gray's introduction recounts how he fell in love with cinemas at an early age and the many happy visits he made to them as a child.²⁹ Atwell, who also traces his concern for cinema architecture back to his childhood, comments that surviving cinemas should be conserved as "permanent memorials to a vanished era".³⁰ The very fact that the heyday of cinema has 'vanished', he implies, means that it accrues greater value.

These architectural histories recount that the quality of cinema architecture, while very low at the beginning, improved in the 1910s and 1920s to peak in the decade before the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, the greatest achievements were concentrated in the large metropolitan centres, particularly London, and were built for the national cinema chains that developed in the 1930s, of which the Odeon is the best-known example. Renowned architects such as George Coles, Julian Leathart and Robert Cromie all established their reputations through their work on top London cinemas.

Yet it was a considerable period of time before any cinema architect's work was recognised to the extent of achieving listed status. The first listing of historic buildings in Britain took place in 1946 but it was a further twenty-

six years before the first group of cinemas was listed.³¹ Since 1992, the Department of National Heritage have been responsible for the listing of buildings, under the advice of the government-sponsored English Heritage. Obtaining listed status for a building is the only reliable means of ensuring its survival. There are three tiers of listing, of which the highest, Grade I, accounts for only 1.4% of listed buildings, the next, Grade II*, for just 4.1%, while the remainder are listed Grade II. The most important criteria used to ascertain which buildings should be listed is their perceived architectural merit. While a building's historical interest is also taken into account, its age and rarity value are very important factors in assessing this. Hence cinemas are infrequently listed on that basis, due to their relative newness and the fact that there are many examples of the type. Listing normally results from surveying whole areas, but there is also a facility for 'spot listing' to protect a building at risk outside of the inspection period for that area.³²

In 1980 there were only twenty-two listed cinemas in England³³; by 1996 this number had risen to seventy-five.³⁴ Currently only one cinema, the Granada at Tooting, has been accorded Grade I status.³⁵ In Nottingham there are currently three listed cinemas: the Elite at Grade II* and the Capitol and the Long Row Picture Palace at Grade II.

The Changing Reputation of Cinema Architecture in Nottingham

As the first section of my thesis demonstrated, the new cinemas in 1930s Nottingham were very well received by the local press and their

architecture was crucial to the high regard in which they were held. New cinemas were believed to improve significantly the status of the city and its suburbs, in addition to offering a new amenity to its residents. In the pre-war period, none of Nottingham's cinemas were part of the major national chains. Instead, many were owned by locally based circuits while the Ritz, which was incorporated into the Odeon circuit in 1944, was owned by County Cinemas, one of the smaller national chains. Most of the cinemas built for the national chains in the 1930s were the work of London architectural firms or, in the case of some of the Odeons, by Birmingham-based firms. In Nottingham, as the cinemas were owned by local circuits they were also designed by local firms, which in itself represented a source of pride to the local press. The Ritz, owned by one of the smaller nations chains, County Cinemas, was the only exception to this trend, being designed by the local firm Thraves, in association with Verity and Beverley of London, a notable and highly successful firm specialising in cinema design. T Cecil Howitt, the architect of Nottingham's Council House, went on to design a number of well-regarded cinemas around the country, including some for the Odeon circuit, yet none was in his native Nottingham.

Taking these factors into account, the architectural merit of Nottingham's cinemas is unlikely to be outstanding when viewed in the national context. This deduction is borne out by the aforementioned cinema histories in which Nottingham cinemas warrant little more than a footnote. Indeed, Sharp makes no mention of Nottingham at all, while the Elite is

swiftly dismissed by Atwell as: “an especially ostentatious white faience-faced block of buildings”.³⁶ Gray also references the Elite yet for him the building, although by then Grade II* listed, is of interest purely as an early example of a cinema forming part of a “comprehensive redevelopment”.³⁷ He is slightly more engaged with Nottingham’s 1930s cinemas, making mention of the Ritz’s “highly successful art deco auditorium” (which had been lost in the 1965 ‘twinning’), and devoting a few lines to Reginald Cooper’s oeuvre as a whole, which, he argues, followed the precepts of the Odeon style.³⁸

When viewed from the local angle, perceptions of cinema architecture do not always coincide with those of the architectural profession, either historically or in the contemporary period. In the 1930s the publicity for each successive new cinema in Nottingham was embellished with examples of what made this the best, most up-to-date, most technically superior cinema of any in the country.³⁹ For example, the “many novel features” incorporated into the Astoria cinema justify “the claim that this is the most up-to-date in the country”, while the Savoy “demonstrated how really beautiful modern architecture can be.”⁴⁰ These articles did not respond to the architectural profession’s own dismissal of cinemas at that time. Instead, local press coverage of cinemas in the 1930s was always highly congratulatory and evinced no criticism of a cinema’s architecture. Instead, each new cinema represented an asset to the city or its suburb, so, for example, the suburban cinema, the Curzon, “adds to the appearance of the neighbourhood”.⁴¹

The local press was very much in tune with the public perception of cinema in the 1930s, reflecting cinema's huge popularity at the time with its fulsome reporting of both cinema buildings and the film industry. The post-war decline of cinema was reported in either an unemotional, factual manner, or, more rarely, with nostalgia over the loss of a local amenity. Absent from the press accounts was the perception that this resulted in any architectural loss, due either to a cinema's closure, which frequently necessitated major structural alterations to convert it to another use, or even its demolition. In fact, in the 1950s and 1960s press accounts of closures and demolition, the cinema building was only referred to twice.⁴² In keeping with the national re-evaluation of cinema architecture, it was not until the 1970s that, for the local press, cinema buildings began to regain some of the architectural value which it had so vociferously proclaimed for all the new cinemas in the 1930s. The beginning of the press re-evaluation of cinema architecture can be seen in its detailed and sustained coverage of the city-centre cinema, the Elite.

Within the confines of Nottingham's city centre the pre-war operational cinema is now obsolete, the last two to close down being the Canon in 1999 and the Odeon (the 1933-built former Ritz) in 2001. Even the physical structures of almost all the city centre cinemas have now disappeared: for example, at the time of writing, the whole block of which the Canon formed a part was being demolished. In terms of the survival of the buildings, the suburban cinemas have fared considerably better. In keeping with the general trend across the country, the survival of so many is due to

their conversion into bingo halls or supermarkets. As a result, despite the shell of the buildings having survived, the external design features and internal fittings of many cinemas have disappeared. In Nottingham only one of these, the 1930s-built Savoy, remains open as a cinema.

The focus of architectural debate over cinemas in Nottingham has always been the Elite. Opened in 1921, the Elite incorporated a restaurant, cafes, a ballroom, function room and two shops⁴³, and billed itself as “the most elegant public building of its type in town”.⁴⁴ As one of the early examples of what we would now call a leisure complex, the Elite building also incorporated a restaurant, cafes, a ballroom, function room and two shops. Constructed of white stone, it occupies a prominent and imposing three-corner position on one of the city’s main thoroughfares. The city’s entertainment leader throughout the 1920s, the Elite’s position was somewhat usurped by the opening of the Ritz in 1933, as discussed in previous chapters. Formerly an independent cinema, by the 1950s the Elite had been taken over by the national ABC chain, and was the city’s second cinema within that chain. Accordingly, its position in that time of mass cinema closure was under threat. In 1972, the first attempt to demolish the cinema met with opposition and the plan was shelved.⁴⁵ A 1975 newspaper article reported that its then owners, EMI, were applying to the council for permission to change its use to a class of entertainment incorporating a sports complex, dance hall or concert hall.⁴⁶ However, this development did not take place and instead the Elite declined into a venue which specialised in showing X-rated films.⁴⁷ In 1977, the

cinema closed down, was converted to a bingo hall,⁴⁸ and remained as such until 1989.

The changing uses and debates over the Elite form a microcosm of the city's leisure preoccupations and priorities since the 1970s. All the planned uses of the site have incorporated substantial leisure components. In 1991 the Elite's then owners, Rushcliffe Development, intended to convert the building into "the first all-day entertainments centre in the Midlands", with a restaurant, cabaret and dancing from 10.30 am until midnight.⁴⁹ However, these plans were rejected and the building then lay empty for some years. Another twist in its history came in 1996 when plans to convert the former cinema into a nightclub finally came to fruition in 1999. At the time of writing, the Elite building houses a selection of shops, an estate agents, a travel agents and an Internet café, as well as the nationally known and very fashionable nightclub, Media, which is located in the part of the building that housed the original cinema. The internal renovations of the building are such that the remaining cinema fittings are visible from the club, thus offering today's youth a glimpse into the vanished leisure world of their grandparents and great-grandparents. A leading dance music and club culture Internet site, burnitblue.com, offers an interesting appraisal of the building.

Undoubtedly one of the most visually stunning club venues in the country, if Media were any more glam, it would be hanging out with Liz Taylor. Carved out of the ludicrously listed former 'Elite' cinema, (one grade higher and it would be equivalent to Nelson's Column) Media is both grand opulence and cutting edge design simultaneously."⁵⁰

Taking into account the changes in vocabulary over the past eighty years, this assessment is strikingly similar to that originally made of the Elite cinema all

those years ago. The press report of its opening proclaims that “as far as furnishing, decoration and technical equipment are concerned, the Elite is probably far ahead of any other ‘movie’ theatre in the country. One could travel to the Continent and never see anything more magnificent.”⁵¹ Boyer’s analysis of the uses to which historic preservation may be put are applicable here. She argues that in the postmodern period, many cities have become a “city of spectacle” which is created according to the dictates of major corporations. Boyer claims that: “Commercial real estate firms have obviously taken notice that traditional architectural forms, materials, and ornamentation sell because they answer sensuous and emotional needs that modern styles never could fill.”⁵²

That the Elite is seen in nostalgic terms, is evidenced by the coverage accorded it by both the club culture web site and the local press. According to Boyer, this type of nostalgia, which perceives the past as a time when life was believed to have been simple and genuine, enables us to “invent, puff up, or imagine all sorts of tall tales, anecdotes, traditions, and places.”⁵³ Cinemas en masse represent a valuable resource for developers because they were designed in a manner which would heighten those very sensory and emotional experiences of the audience. Thus Maggie Valentine argues that cinemas “are remembered decades later for the purely sensory pleasure they provided” and that their design reinforced “the glamour, escape, adventure or romance of the film by extending those qualities to the building, thereby involving the patrons in the experience”.⁵⁴ These same experiences are sought in the contemporary

nightclub, indicating that some of the success of Media is due to its location in a building which already embodied those qualities to such a lofty degree.

The changing fortunes of the Elite demonstrate that pre-war cinemas have myriad leisure uses, with the only proviso being that they are not generally commercially viable as cinemas. Instead they are valued through their associations with the Hollywood 'Golden Age', the period when cinema-going is retrospectively construed as having been a considerably more glamorous activity than it is today. Economically, these cinemas are not a going concern for their original function in Nottingham. In order to provide the acoustics, level of comfort and multi-screen space demanded of today's cinemas, a new building is often a necessity. More recently, with the government's discouragement of out-of-town developments, suitable sites must be found in the city centre, hence the building of Nottingham's Warner Village, replacing the former offices of the *Nottingham Evening Post* and within five minutes walk from where the city's pre-war cinemas were located.⁵⁵

The overwhelming emphasis of cinema preservation in the city has been on retaining original features while adapting the building for a very different use. (This practice goes against the spirit of the statutory listing process, which recommends retaining the building's original usage where possible.)⁵⁶ A good example of this process is the 1989 restoration of the Majestic Cinema in Mapperley. This modest 1929 construction ceased trading as a cinema in 1957 in the early stages of the series of cinema closures which

marked the period. The cinema was subsequently the subject of a major restoration project which, “handled with the utmost delicacy to bring old and new together,” secured a Nottingham Civic Society award. The building currently houses a golf store.⁵⁷

The Long Row Picture House in Nottingham city centre has undergone a high-profile restoration scheme. Opened in 1912, this was one of the first purpose-built cinemas in the city, but closed down as early as 1930. The building attained Grade II listed status in 1990. In 1993 restoration work was completed on the structure and it opened as an amusement arcade, providing another example of the changes in usage of the city’s former cinemas. This restoration was granted a Civic Society conservation award⁵⁸ and, according to the local press, “restoration work has returned the façade of one of Nottingham’s old cinemas to its former glory.”⁵⁹

Yet while the coverage of the Elite concentrates on the aesthetic value of its architecture, the personal and community functions of the cinema building are to the fore in the press accounts of other cinemas, more particularly of those located in the suburbs. Maggie Valentine’s history of American cinema architecture identifies the significance of the building in determining the audience’s response to films. According to Valentine, “the real lesson of the movie theatre is that space matters. *Where* something happens affects how it happens. Architecture and design shape our experience and memories, our values and attitudes.”⁶⁰ This analysis helps to explain the mourning of some former cinema-goers when ‘their’ cinema is demolished.

An article marking the demolition of the Astoria opens by stating that: “Nostalgic film fans have been remembering the age of the silver screen as one of their favourite haunts comes tumbling down.” For people of the older generation who remember cinema-going in the 1930s when it was the most significant form of mass entertainment, the experience is closely associated with their everyday lives at that time. So for example, Les Harrison recalls queuing up outside the Astoria as a child on Saturdays for the “tuppenny rush” and also has “fond memories” of doing his courting there.⁶¹ Memories of cinema-going reinforce Halbwachs’ theory that “every collective memory always is embedded in a spatial framework”.⁶² For Halbwachs, “we can understand how we can recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings.”⁶³ The destruction of those physical surroundings then, may be felt to equate to the eradication of people’s memories of the time they spent there.

As the previous chapter discussed, it is primarily the demise of the local cinema that the general public has mourned, with the exception of the Odeon which was particularly significant due its status in the 1930s and to its being the last operational pre-war cinema in the city centre. While there have been considerably more column inches devoted to the changes in use of the Elite than to any of the local cinemas, I found no evidence in the local press of the general public’s involvement in the Elite. However, the closure and demolition of suburban cinemas has garnered considerable attention from those who were avid cinema-goers. I would argue that an important reason for

this is the community function which those cinemas used to embody. These cinemas were a part of people's routine: it was a regular occurrence in the 1930s for people to attend their local cinema as often as twice a week. As Hareven and Langenbach assert, emotion is invested in buildings which are or have been a significant part of people's everyday lives. "People become attached to certain buildings because of the association with past or present experience, which the buildings symbolize." They also denote "the significant role which buildings play in the formation of identity".⁶⁴ Again, as the previous chapter argued, the cinema played a role in people's identity formation, hence with those associations, the loss of the building may be keenly felt by cinema fans many years after the event.

Writing of the demolition of homes in Boston's West End, Hareven and Langenbach claim that the former residents' "attachment to the physical structures drew its strength from their identification with the texture of the entire neighbourhood, an identification inseparable from the physical setting".⁶⁵ The buildings that are worthy of preservation for ordinary people then, may not correspond with those lauded by the establishment for their architectural worth.

The demolition of the Adelphi cinema offers a good example of this process. Reginald Cooper, who designed the Ritz in association with the London firm Verity and Beverley, was also the architect of a significant number of Nottingham's 1930s-built suburban cinemas, including the Adelphi. The cinema opened in 1938 and, forced to adapt to changing leisure

patterns, was converted into a bingo hall in 1968 and then demolished in 1997 to make way for a family pub. (This is yet another example of the transformation in uses of premises over time, with a family pub, from a 1930s perspective, representing a contradiction in terms.) This was the only cinema located outside the city centre to incite letters of complaint to the local newspaper about the demolition order. One writer blamed the demolition on both “the greed and insensitivity of developers” and on English Heritage who, apparently, refused to visit the cinema with a view to spot listing it when it was threatened with demolition. The letter draws an illuminating contrast between the negatively perceived outsiders who made the decision and the response of the local community. The developers “do not have to live within the vicinity of the unsympathetic toytown architecture they create”, while English Heritage made their decision “from an office in London without the building even being looked at”.⁶⁶ In contrast, both the locally based writer of the letter and Nottingham City Council attempted to attain listed status for the Adelphi. The letter does not delineate any architectural features that made the Adelphi worthy of preservation, but instead argues that it formed part of the local landscape and is worthy of preservation on that basis alone. However, the criteria used by English Heritage are somewhat different, with historical interest, age and rarity as the principal concerns.

Thus the notion of a cinema’s place in the local community is central to many local rather than national preservation attempts, which shifts the frame of reference from the national historic significance of a building to a

value resulting from its local significance. Also mourning the demolition of the Adelphi, local cinema historian Rick Wilde argues that “it had become something of a landmark for Bulwell and a lot of people will miss it”.⁶⁷ For Hareven and Langenbach, this shift is a part of the process whereby personal experience is increasingly being legitimised into history, so buildings attain a historical importance not just from their aesthetic value but also from their social context. As they argue, history, architecture and personal associations all converge to create a new attitude to the past. From their analysis, residents of demolition areas often feel that *their* past is demolished along with the physical structures.⁶⁸ This perception is most intensely felt by older people who tend to have a greater investment in the past than the future. Hareven and Langenbach argue that this is a democratisation of history⁶⁹ and that “the survival of buildings and landmarks associated with a familiar way of life provides a continuity of social as well as physical fibre”.⁷⁰ As a large proportion of 1930s cinemas incorporated tall towers, they had a further social function as they were a local landmark. The significance of this factor is demonstrated by an article on the closure of the Windsor Cinema, “whose 67ft high tower has been a feature of the Radford landscape for almost a quarter of a century.”⁷¹

A further Cooper cinema, the Capitol, has fared considerably better than the Adelphi. When it opened in October 1936, the cinema’s publicity praised its “bold, streamlined design” with “graceful lines” and pastel colours that harmonise with its curves.⁷² The cinema was excellently situated on a

corner plot which was on the edge of a new housing estate and also adjacent to a large stock of Victorian housing. The building closed as a cinema in 1968 and was converted into a bingo hall. Its graceful lines and curvature are now preserved for future generations with the imposition of a preservation order in 1995. Arguably, the fact that the “auditorium retains most of its original features” was a significant factor in the cinema attaining listed status.⁷³

Yet the beautifully proportioned Capitol has received surprisingly little local attention in terms of its architectural merit, in contrast to that lavished on the Elite, to the extent that I have found no newspaper coverage of the Capitol since the reports of its opening. The very different locations of the two cinemas are significant in accounting for this dissimilarity. Due to its prime city centre location, the many changes in usage of the Elite are significant to the construction of Nottingham’s city image. The Capitol, however, is located in a run-down area of the inner city, which indicates that its architectural value is of considerably less significance to the city. As the building has remained in operation as a bingo hall, there have been no plans to demolish it and thus the local community have had no cause to mourn the proposed loss of a local landmark.

This argument is borne out by a 1981 newspaper article on the possible new usage of the Astoria cinema (from 1952, the Essoldo) which claims: “Not that the people living there are worried much about preserving the bizarre, 1930s looks of the former Essoldo Cinema”.⁷⁴ The article situates the cinema between two worlds but fitting neither in its claim that it was: “always

something of an incongruity whether viewed from the council houses of Boundary Road or the private houses flanking Derby Road”.⁷⁵ Yet a year previously, an article which included a reference to the writer’s memories of attending the Astoria described its “imposing and very attractive exterior”.⁷⁶ This suggests that the personal memory of a cinema has the capacity to produce a very different appraisal of its architecture relative to that made by a newspaper reporter.

The 1935-built Savoy (also the work of Cooper) is now the only pre-war cinema in Nottingham that remains in operation as a cinema. Situated a mile or so outside of the city centre, its continued success is due to an unusual combination of factors. In order to keep pace with the audience’s changing expectations of cinema, the original auditorium was tripled in 1972, then a fourth screen was added in 1997. The further addition of a bar gave the Savoy an advantage over the majority of its competitors. Yet despite keeping abreast of current developments, the Savoy has maintained the ‘charms’ of an earlier age through retaining its original name, an intermission during which usherettes purvey ice creams, and traditional cinema décor, including red plush velvet seats and double ‘love seats’ at the back. Furthermore, the cinema has promoted itself as being family-run and offering personal service, managed by the Silvers family for thirty-seven years.⁷⁷

In addition to its emphasis on providing a well thought-out combination of the old and the new, the Savoy’s location is also significant in explaining its survival. The cinema is situated on a main bus route in the

student heartland of Lenton, between the University of Nottingham and the city centre. For the student generation it represents a self-consciously different cinema-going experience to that offered by the multiplex or the arts cinema found in almost all cities. The Savoy is also on the fringes of The Park, one of Nottingham's most exclusive residential areas. One edition of the district's newsletter included a feature article on the Savoy, strongly urging fellow residents to utilise this local amenity, and conveying the sense that "the delights of their local cinema" is one of the perks of the neighbourhood.⁷⁸ Less dependent on its location, the Savoy also attracts a third audience segment: the elderly, for whom it represents a comforting extension of their own past without the alienating loudness, largeness and youth-orientation of the multiplex. According to the Savoy's owner Pat Collington, that generation appreciates "the personal touch and the familiar faces", and their clientele includes: "quite a lot of regulars who did their courting here!"⁷⁹

For all these niche markets, the slightly shabby and faded Art Deco allure of the Savoy, along with the internal decor, constitute the charm of the experience. Consecutive managements have astutely combined a mix of the quaint old-fashioned and the modern that represent a commercial strategy incorporating both old and new.⁸⁰ The added inducement of a below-average pricing structure is also of particular import both to students and the elderly, together with its location on a main bus route.

The examples of both the Savoy and the Elite point to the nostalgic underpinning of cinema conservation, at least as they are figured in local

terms. While the qualities which now make the Savoy popular are not those that appear to have attracted the 1930s audiences, similarly, today's youth dancing at Media within the Elite building enjoy the quaintness of the red plush seats and the art deco fittings visible from the dance floor in a very different way to those of their grandparents' generation. For the 1920s and 1930s audiences the appeal of the huge new cinemas was that they were glamorous, modern, technically up-to-date, luxurious and romantic. Those qualities have now been bequeathed to the nightclub and, through the lens of nostalgia, the cinema is coded very differently.

On the basis of the examples analysed in this chapter I argue that, while preservation does have many positive attributes, it radically changes a building's original meaning and encompasses the risk of turning it into Boyer's "visual spectacle". In the case of cinemas, the pre-war cinemas which have been preserved and restored now represent a tiny minority and are appreciated by a minority made up of such different groups as students, pensioners and local historians.⁸¹ This means that they are appreciated for such factors as their age and rarity. By contrast, in the 1930s these cinemas were an everyday part of people's lives and were valued because they were part of that very rhythm. Furthermore, cinemas such as the Ritz offered a

luxury and modernity otherwise absent from so many people's lives. While cinema buildings such as the Elite are now valued for offering a window into the past, this very 'past' is problematic. As Pearce argues, much of the heritage industry, of which cinema preservation forms a part, is "not about the past but about the present. In other words it is about a sanitized and romanticized past which we have invented for ourselves and has much more to do with our values and tastes than those of our ancestors".⁸² The local press discourse on the Elite Building since the 1970s demonstrates this process. The value of the building in these terms is due to the convergence of three particular factors: its being a II* listed building, located in an eye-catching situation on one of the city's major thoroughfares and the fact that the interior of the building provides "a superb glimpse into the leisure market of the past".⁸³

The very different narratives of the city centre and suburban cinemas in the local press demonstrate that location is a crucial indicator of whether Nottingham's cinemas are preserved and appreciated for their architectural merit or community associations. As Hareven and Langenbach assert in relation to nineteenth-century industrial buildings, the problem is "how to weld together in the preservation effort the two aspects of human association, the intimate and that based on knowledge of art and history". They claim that "conservation broadly considered must juxtapose general criteria of social history and architectural analysis with the meanings that buildings have for local rehabilitation in terms of personal experience."⁸⁴

This approach offers a fruitful way of looking at the rationale behind cinema preservation and the meanings embodied in these cinemas. Whilst welcoming the survival of some examples of the 1930s cinema, this very survival cannot simply be regarded as an example of the innocent preservation of the recent past of the 'ordinary' person.

NOTES

¹ Tamara K Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, 'Living Places, Work Places and Historical Identity', in David Lowenthal and Marcus Binney, eds., *Our Past Before Us: Why Do We Save It?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) pp. 114-5.

² M Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996).

³ Ibid, p. 54. This is certainly evidenced in Nottingham, where currently the Lace Market in the east of the city is thriving, while the area around the main thoroughfare in the north of the city centre is declining.

⁴ Ibid, p. 407.

⁵ For a summary of nineteenth century preservation measures, see Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985) pp. 49-50.

⁶ English Heritage, *Something Worth Keeping? Post-War Architecture in England*, p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁸ David Pearce, *Conservation Today* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 2.

⁹ John R Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architecture and the Future City 1928-1953* (London: E and F N Spon, 1997) pp. 2-4.

¹⁰ Pearce, *Conservation Today*, p. 5. Nottingham's inner ring road destroyed most of the city's remaining Georgian architecture, while throughout the 1960s there was an over-enthusiastic demolition of Victorian slums in the city, including the largest redevelopment programme in Europe in the St Ann's area.

¹¹ For an account of the early period of the redevelopment of the Lace Market, see Ibid., pp. 50-52.

¹² Ibid., p. 4.

¹³ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴ David Lowenthal, 'Dilemmas of Preservation', in *Our Past Before Us*, p. 220.

¹⁵ See, for example, the *Nottinghamshire Living History Archive*, Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', Gwyn Prins, 'Oral History', in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) pp. 93-113, pp. 114-139.

¹⁶ Although later examples may also be prized; for example the 1960s-built Nottingham Playhouse is a listed building.

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- ¹⁷ P. Morton Shand, *Modern Theatres and Cinemas: The Architecture of Pleasure* (London: B T Batsford, 1930) p. 16.
- ¹⁸ Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 9.
- ¹⁹ Shand, *Modern Theatres and Cinemas*, p. 20.
- ²⁰ Bevis Hillier, foreword to David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies* (London: Architectural Press, 1980) p. ix. The atmospherics, which originated in the USA, were a very escapist form of cinema architecture which created the impression of a deliberately artificial environment, such as, for example, an Egyptian palace. For a history of atmospherics in Britain, see Richard Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996) pp. 63-72.
- ²¹ Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, p. 83.
- ²² Richard Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, p. 134.
- ²³ Alan O'Shea, 'What A Day For A Daydream: Modernity, Cinema and the Popular Imagination in the Late Twentieth Century', In O'Shea and Mica Nava, eds., *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 249.
- ²⁴ Taylor, Ian, Evans, Karen and Fraser, Penny, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England. A Study in Manchester and Sheffield*. (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 44-45.
- ²⁵ www.c20society.demon.co.uk/docs/about/history.html
- ²⁶ Gray, *One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*.
- ²⁷ Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, p. xii.
- ²⁸ www.cinema-theatre.org.uk The CTA has lobbied English Heritage and supported locally organised 'save our cinema' campaigns. The CTA's casework now increasingly involves campaigning to prevent destructive alterations to, and even demolition of, listed buildings. In addition to its specific campaigns it also has a more diffused impact through raising awareness of the value of cinema architecture and helping to put it on the agenda. To that end it produces a magazine, *Picture House* and a newsletter, has its own web site and organises cinema visits across the country, including one to Nottingham in 1993. Aimed very much at the knowledgeable and enthusiastic amateur, the CTA is one strand of the growing cult of the cinema buff which has done so much to raise the profile of pre-war cinema.
- ²⁹ Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, pp. 7-8.
- ³⁰ Atwell, *Cathedrals*, p. xiii.
- ³¹ Andrew Saint, 'How Listing Happened', in Michael Hunter, ed., *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, England: Alan Sutton, 1996) p. 129.
- ³² *What Listing Means: A Guide for Owners and Occupiers* (Department of National Heritage, June 1994) pp. 2-3.
- ³³ Atwell, *Cathedrals* p. 179.

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- ³⁴ Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, pp. 134-6.
- ³⁵ www.cinema-theatre.org.uk
- ³⁶ Atwell, *Cathedrals*, p. 53.
- ³⁷ Gray, *Cinemas in Britain*, pp. 37-38.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p. 108, p. 113. (This appraisal was made after a feature article in *Picture House* on Cooper's cinemas.)
- ³⁹ NEP, 8 June 1933
- ⁴⁰ NDG, 8 November 1935.
- ⁴¹ NDG, 1 August 1935.
- ⁴² NEP, 9 March 1963, NEP, 26 October 1960.
- ⁴³ Within sight of the Elite building is its modern-day equivalent, the Warner Village complex, housing restaurants, bars, a nightclub, gym and hairdressing salon alongside the multi-screen cinema.
- ⁴⁴ NJ, 2 December 1926.
- ⁴⁵ NEP, 7 October 1975.
- ⁴⁶ NEP, 7 October 1975.
- ⁴⁷ NEP, 2 March 1977.
- ⁴⁸ NEP, 2 March 1977.
- ⁴⁹ NEP, 9 February 1991.
- ⁵⁰ www.burnitblue.com/outandabout/venue.asp?Venue=476
- ⁵¹ NDG, 20 August 1921.
- ⁵² Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, p. 418.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 310.
- ⁵⁴ Valentine, Maggie, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (London: Yale University Press, 1994) p. xi, pp. 85-86.
- ⁵⁵ Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Cinema Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003) pp. 241-2.
- ⁵⁶ *Something Worth Keeping?* p. 33.
- ⁵⁷ NT, July 1989.
- ⁵⁸ NR, 7 January 1993.
- ⁵⁹ NEP, 7 August 1992.
- ⁶⁰ Valentine, *Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, p. 184.
- ⁶¹ NEP, 2 February 1994. The article on the Astoria is representative of the local press accounts of the demolition of cinemas in that it foregrounds the personal reactions of members of the public or the past glories and latter day decline of the cinema, rather than the loss of an architectural asset.
- ⁶² Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, p. 137.
- ⁶³ Maurice Halbwachs, quoted in Boyer, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Hareven and Langenbach, 'Living Places'. in *Our Past Before Us*, p. 117.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 110.

⁶⁶ HD, 25 April 1997.

⁶⁷ NEP, 17 June 1997.

⁶⁸ Hareven and Langenbach, 'Living Places', in *Our Past Before Us*, p. 112.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 119.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 118.

⁷¹ NEP, 9 March 1963.

⁷² NJ, 17 October 1936.

⁷³ English Heritage, SK54SE, 646-1/4/148, listing of the Capitol, 30 November 1995.

⁷⁴ NEP, 5 May 1981.

⁷⁵ NEP, 5 May 1981.

⁷⁶ BG, 20 March 1980.

⁷⁷ NEP, 21 October 1998.

⁷⁸ *Nottingham Park Residents Association Newsletter*, October 1983.

⁷⁹ NEP, 21 October 1998

⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, cosiness, the family motif and personal service were noticeable by their absence in the prepublicity for the Savoy's opening in 1935; it was sold on the basis of being "the latest in every respect" and "many of the [unspecified] features will not be seen in any other theatre." (NDG, 8 November 1935.)

⁸¹ An example of this trend is the restored art deco cinema at Stamford Hall near Nottingham, which displays a self-consciously referential nature and appeals to a minority audience. The cinema shows period films unavailable elsewhere, including some classic silent films with an authentic organ accompaniment. Members of the audience often dress up in period costume, thus intensifying the nostalgic experience. The meaning of that cinema experience for the audience is thus radically different to its original one as an unselfconscious form of mass entertainment. This mode of entertainment exemplifies Boyer's assertion that "the past, being over and done with, now falls prey to our invention. It is resuscitated or resurrected in partial or ironic refigurings, subsequently reinforcing our sense of loss and detachment". (Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, p. 6.)

⁸² Pearce, *Conservation Today*, p. 233.

⁸³ NEP, 12 January 1990.

⁸⁴ Hareven and Langenbach, 'Living Places', in *Our Past Before Us*, p. 122.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that meanings of 1930s cinema have been significantly constructed by the agendas of the local press and that those meanings have changed substantially over time. The thesis has highlighted these changing meanings through its analysis of both contemporaneous local press coverage of 1930s cinema and retrospective coverage up to the present day.

In the 1930s, cinema was the dominant mass medium, closely associated with technological progress due to the advent of sound and colour films. As Part One showed, Nottingham's local press reported the city's new cinemas as signifiers of modernity, luxury and technology. In the process they were portrayed as representing an important source of civic pride. The location of a cinema was significant in determining the position ascribed to it by the press. More specifically, in the city centre, the building of the Ritz in 1933 was instrumental in establishing the Market Square as a locus of middle-class consumption and display, while for the new suburbs, cinemas provided a means of contributing towards establishing their identity and sense of community. There was minimal negative coverage of cinema in that decade, and where it was apparent, the majority of stories concentrated on the moral and physical dangers of cinema-going in other parts of the country rather than in Nottingham. It was primarily through affirmative news items that cinema

retained a high profile in the local press throughout the 1930s. Thus the meaning of cinema in the 1930s was predominantly positive; cinema was a signifier of pride for the city and its suburbs. The type of coverage which cinema has received since then has been very different, demonstrating the changing meanings of cinema over time.

As Part Two noted, cinema remained largely absent from the local press from the outbreak of the Second World War until the mid-1950s. This post-war silence can be attributed to the lack of new cinema building, the deterioration and shabbiness of the majority of the existing cinemas, and the decline in attendance. In this period, television began to establish itself as the most significant mass medium in terms of leisure activity and consumption. Cinema has never since achieved such a consistently high proportion of news coverage as it did in the 1930s. However, the pre-war cinema was, from the mid-1950s, the subject of significant press reporting. That reporting was very different to that of the 1930s and, furthermore, it has altered significantly over the period. The 1950s and 1960s cinema closures were portrayed in the press as a signifier of an industry in terminal decline, in which the industry's response of undertaking modernisation programmes all too often represented 'too little too late'. Cinema's meaning was not only located in the past but also in a past that, materially, was dying out. While these losses were rarely lamented at that time, the 1930s cinema began to be valorised in the 1970s. Since the 1970s, retrospective press coverage has concentrated on two aspects of the 1930s cinema: memories of former cinema-goers, with an emphasis on

issues such as cinema's community function; and cinema architecture, some examples of which have now, to some extent, regained their former status as a source of city pride.

As John Baxendale and Chris Pawling claim, "as the present changes, the relationship between past and present changes also, and with it the meaning the past – and the Thirties – has for us."¹ Through studying the local press over a seventy-year period, I have analysed the changing meanings of the 1930s cinema in Nottingham. I have identified and mapped out these changes with reference to local documentary sources, principally Nottingham's local press. However, I have taken into account that the local press is a specific kind of document which is determined by certain agendas. These agendas often relate to cinema's place in the city's self-image. In my investigation of this material, I have drawn on Stuart Hall's approach to press analysis, whereby the newspaper text is understood to represent "a structure of meanings, rather than ... a channel for the transmission and reception of news."² From being represented in the local press as a signifier of modernity in the 1930s, 1930s cinema has subsequently been associated with cultural decline, and, more recently, valorised in part because it is seen as an emblem of the past, and, more specifically, seen by some as a symbol of the 'Golden Age'. My use of the local press has provided me with a specific 'window' through which to undertake a precise examination of changing meanings over time. Furthermore, studying cinema through local press coverage has enabled me to map a broad discourse of Nottingham and its suburbs which takes into

account the contexts in which cinema is reported. Through utilising this methodology it has been possible to consider such issues as cinema's changing place within the city and its suburbs and the changing perceptions of its architectural value. Basing research on the local press has enabled me to depict both the changing narratives of cinema and to analyse how its representations have been utilised by the local press as a component of its own socio-cultural agenda. This has allowed me to analyse the role which cinema has played and continues to play in the city as a whole, as reported in its press.

The ever-changing meaning of cinema-going is made evident through an overview of Nottingham's cinemas today. When I began this thesis in 1999, Nottingham could still claim two 1930s cinemas in operation in the city centre, offering eight screens between them. The competition of the Warner complex proved unassailable for the last remaining one, the Odeon, suggesting that the meaning of the obsolete cinema buildings, "waiting gaunt and derelict" for their demolition, has altered even within the span of four years.

The nature of the contemporary cinema-going experience, then, is markedly different to that of the 1930s and, consequently, embodies very different meanings. The composition of the audience of the Savoy represents one element of this difference. For the elderly the Savoy represents a continuum of the experience of their youth, while for elements of today's youth it functions as a quaint and somewhat rare experience, part of the pleasure of which is its very differentiation from a visit to a multiplex.

Currently there are three other cinemas in Nottingham. The out-of-town multiplex, the Showcase, opened in 1988. Its large car park and location on a dual-carriageway without a main bus route illustrate that the Showcase is aimed primarily at car owners. In 2001 the Warner Village complex, the Cornerhouse, opened in a large, imposing building in the city centre, which also incorporates bars and restaurants, a night-club, hairdressing salon and gym. Nottingham's fourth cinema is an arts cinema, the Broadway, the origins of which go back to the Nottingham Film Society in 1950. Its programming draws principally on an 'art house' canon, including foreign and classic films, and is aimed primarily at a well-educated, cine-literate audience.

This market segmentation of today's cinemas indicates the pronounced difference between cinema-going in the 1930s and in the new millennium. A cinema aimed at the student or the car owner instigates very different forms of social practice to those of the 1930s when the different meanings of cinema-going were largely determined by the difference between the local 'flea-pit' and the 'picture palace', and all that they respectively signified.

Buildings such as the Cornerhouse have impacted substantially on the discourses of 1930s cinema. The Cornerhouse project led to the closure of the Odeon (the 1930s Ritz) and, partly in response to that, prompted a substantial number of letters to the local press which contrasted cinema-going in the 1930s with the different and, to the letter writers, greatly diminished practice which it is today. For example, according to one writer the "sad end to the Odeon" was due to the competition from "the noisy monsters that now go

under the name of cinemas where there is no personal service any more”.³

This type of response provides an example of the ways in which the changes in the present impact upon the meanings of the past. As the cinema-going practice continues to evolve, so will the discourses surrounding the cinemas and the cinema-going practice of the 1930s.

Partly in response to changes in the present, the meaning of the 1930s cinema has changed substantially since that time and, as an ever-changing construct, its meanings and value will continue to be reconstructed in the future.

¹ John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p. 6.

² A C H Smith with Elizabeth Immirzi and Trevor Blackwell, with an introduction by Stuart Hall, *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change 1935-1965* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) p. 76.

³ NEP, 27 October 2000.

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