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**“Enter the dream-house”: Evaluating the role of English
cinemas in public emotion, spatial appropriation, and
notions of modernity, c.1930-1960**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree. This thesis is my own original work.

James Jones

May 2018

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Abstract

This thesis asserts the importance of cinemas as influential sites of public emotion within mid-twentieth-century England. It argues that, as institutions, they offered much more than a recreational experience, allowing the formation of emotional communities within an environment which, on an affective level, differed from many other forms of public leisure activity. It combines approaches from the history of emotions and the history of space to introduce a novel methodological approach which allows a reassessment of the role of cinemas in twentieth-century life. The intersection between space and emotion is strengthened by using the records of Mass Observation, an archive imbued with powerful emotional narratives. In conjunction with two case studies of cinemas in Brighton and Bolton, which offer vivid local perspectives on historical cinema-going, the thesis argues that cinemas allowed cinema-goers to enhance, suspend, or even invert, their emotional comportment. This was permitted within a physical environment which fostered a hazy emotionality attractive to many people wishing to escape the dominant social codes of the age, such as the much-debated “stiff-upper-lip”.

The thesis suggests that whilst cinema-going was a universal activity, the economies of different towns affected the types of cinemas and the emotional landscapes within. It also highlights how cinemas were caught up in contemporary debates on working-class passivity, the considerable strains affecting the emotions of the nation’s youth, the face of the modern, and the value of emotional authenticity. Public emotion within the cinema auditorium was moulded by many factors, including gender, the darkness of the space, the reactions of one’s fellow patrons, film taste, and the emotional ambiguity of the space. The case of mid-century cinema-going reveals how public emotion developed in England within the context of mass culture, straddling a permeable line and oscillating between the private and the communal in spaces such as the cinema, allowing people to develop and contest their sense of emotional self.

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“You stay in the dark. You are invisible, anonymous; you are part of the mass for a medium made of light.”

David Thomson, *How to Watch a Movie*

“Enter the dream-house, brothers and sisters, leaving
Your debts asleep, your history at the door:
This is the home for heroes, and this loving
Darkness a fur you can afford.”

Cecil Day Lewis, *Newsreel*

Introduction

“Are we mad?” asked a letter to the film magazine *Picturegoer* in March 1939. “It would be interesting to note what exactly persons completely disinterested in films think of the average filmgoer”, continued the reader:

“What must be their opinion of us:

- a) Queuing outside the cinema in the pouring rain for an hour and
- b) Paying as much as 7/6d (in the West End) for a seat to see
- c) Moving shadows on a white canvas, kidding ourselves that they are actually speaking while
- d) Sitting in the darkness for three hours on end
- e) Laughing and crying to our hearts’ content, following up with
- f) Applause, which the characters cannot even hear to appreciate.

It doesn’t really make sense, does it?”¹

Reduced to these fundamentals, it appears to have been a valid question. Nevertheless, millions of British people visited the cinema on a regular basis between 1930 and 1960, affirming its position as one of the primary mass-leisure activities of the twentieth-century. The reasons behind the popularity of cinema-going were manifold and incorporated a range of social and cultural factors which assured cinemas a “special place in the life of the community”.² This thesis considers the role of cinemas in the context of the development of public emotion, which interacted with ideas about space and modernity in mid-twentieth-century society. It offers a new way of examining cinemas, suggesting that they helped to shape the emotional register of the country, enabling different scales of emotion to be carved out within the spatial confines of the darkened auditorium. It draws on strands of leisure history, the history of popular culture, film history, the history of emotion and the history of space to argue for a reassertion of the cinema as a site of significance in the everyday, as well as its importance in the development of the emotional cultures which affected historical cinema-going motivations and experiences. The foregrounding of emotion in this study is a distinctive

¹ Letter to *Picturegoer* from Harry A. T. Double, 25/03/1939.

² Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in 1930s Britain*, 3rd ed. (London: IBTauris, 2010), 1.

and insightful way to view these issues, and it offers innovative methodological and conceptual interventions to advance the academic study of cinemas.

Twentieth-Century Leisure

A study of the mid-century English cinema most obviously fits into the sub-discipline of leisure history.³ This historiography has asserted the role of leisure in the construction of cultural identities, emerging from a context of changing social and employment practices which altered people's perceptions of their free time.⁴ It has also problematised the very word "leisure", with some scholars such as Karl Spracklen noting that the term's meaning and its significance to historical actors has evolved since the early modern period.⁵ For example, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries, leisure came to be viewed by some as a matter of social concern, particularly when bound with debates about the morals of the working-classes.⁶ Definitions of leisure, recreation, and pleasure can also shift, especially when one considers, as Claire Langhamer has, the example of twentieth-century housewives who did not "necessarily experience a sharp distinction between work and leisure, and for many the two interacted, often occurring simultaneously".⁷

More broadly, the topic of leisure history (as well as leisure studies) has been informed by several different paradigms since its inception, including Marxist, feminist, and post-modern readings which have all brought new insights and complications to the field.⁸ The

³ This thesis often refers to "English", rather than "British", cinemas and society. This is largely a result of Mass Observation's focus on England, where its investigative heart lay and, therefore, from where most of the records originate. In some cases, the two terms could be used interchangeably, as debates about leisure affected the whole of the British Isles, and emotional reactions found in English cinemas could quite naturally have also occurred in Welsh or Scottish cinemas. There were, however, some marked differences (religious influences, industrial patterns etc.) which could have altered cinema-going experiences. As the case studies of Bolton and Brighton are used, and cinemas from outside of England are not discussed, it seems more appropriate to use "England" and "English" in most cases to avoid sweeping generalisations. There are many excellent works which focus on Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish cinemas such as Helen Richards, "Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930–1960", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 23, no. 4 (2003): 341–355; Trevor Griffiths, *The Cinema and Cinema-Going in Scotland, 1896–1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); and Sam Manning, "Post-War Cinema-Going and Working-Class Communities: A Case Study of the Holyland, Belfast, 1945–1962", *Cultural and Social History* 13, no. 4 (2016): 539–555.

⁴ Karl Spracklen, *Constructing Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Debates* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶ Robert Snape and Helen Pussard, "Theorisations of Leisure in Inter-War Britain", *Leisure Studies* 32, no. 1 (2013), 5.

⁷ Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 16.

⁸ Peter Bramham, "Hard and Disappearing Work: Making Sense of the Leisure Project", *Leisure Studies* 25, no. 4 (2006), 380.

epistemological scope of such studies often incorporates specific examples of leisure activities during any historical moment, and this allows for the interweaving of discrete research areas into grander narratives concerning issues such as consumption, economics, politics, and globalisation. John Walton, for example, uses the development of the British weekend to explore capitalism and religion, suggesting that the demarcation of Saturday and Sunday acted as “distinctive punctuation” in the “time-budget of British industrial society”.⁹ Similarly, by studying cinemas and cinema-going, this thesis can explore issues and themes which reach beyond entertainment, including gender, class, emotion, and modernity.

Modernity was an essential driver in the growth of leisure pursuits in England and, in particular, in the development of mass leisure activities.¹⁰ In pre- and early-industrial England, leisure was a rare commodity for anyone but the rich as, quite simply, the poor could little afford to spend time or money on recreation which took them away from paid or subsistence work.¹¹ With technological innovation, changes in working practices, and increased levels of disposable income, however, the late-nineteenth-century witnessed a growth in the provision of working-class recreation. This continued, and arguably accelerated, in the first half of the twentieth-century, driven by the extremes of social and demographic change brought about by the First World War and giving rise to a new class of proletarian consumer.¹² The historiography of leisure has highlighted how the recreational pursuits enjoyed by many working-class people (such as the music-hall or pub) attracted censure from both middle-class and political observers. These commentators were troubled by the lack of opportunity for self-improvement in these activities, something which they believed would erode the integrity of the population and damage their chances of becoming “good citizens”.¹³ Nevertheless, opportunities for working-class recreation flourished and gave the new class of consumers an unparalleled range of activities with which to engage. In doing so, they were able to forge fresh cultural and social identities through the active production of their leisure pursuits

⁹ John Walton, “From Institution to Fragmentation: The Making and Unmaking of the British Weekend”, *Leisure Studies* 33, no. 2 (2014), 204.

¹⁰ Spracklen, *Constructing Leisure*, 164.

¹¹ Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-2011* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 265.

¹² Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 15.

¹³ Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 45.

which took place in both shared and private contexts.¹⁴ The historical growth of this consumer society is intimately bound with leisure, which underwent a change to become, itself, a consumer product.¹⁵

Cinema Culture

At the forefront of the increasing commodification of leisure was the cinema, which had expanded rapidly and comprehensively since the invention of moving pictures in the nineteenth-century. Indeed, by 1926 there were some 3,000 cinemas in operation in Britain.¹⁶ Cinemas were not, of course, the only source of public leisure activity available to the general population. The music-hall had been a staple form of entertainment for Britain's urban working-class since the nineteenth-century and, from the 1920s onwards, the dance-hall could also lay claim to being a premier venue for public recreation. It offered a space in which distinct working-class cultures could be developed and where ancillary activities, such as courtship, could take place. Entrepreneurs saw great potential in the development of these spaces and, as James Nott observes, dance-halls "took their place alongside cinemas as the new 'people's palaces' of the high street, offering a degree of comfort and value for money typical of the new leisure industry".¹⁷ The growth of such institutions reflected the huge cultural impact of mass leisure practices, and the coming of cinema was to accentuate these effects. It was a change which was appreciated in the press at the time: in 1936, for example, the *Daily Mail* declared that the cinema "has not only revolutionised entertainment, but has helped to change the whole of life".¹⁸ Cinemas were proclaimed as the "true modern entertainment of a mechanical age" and one newspaper reported that "in an average year there are about one thousand million attendances at picture theatres...no other form of entertainment outside the home has this drawing power".¹⁹ Another paper detailed the many attractions of the picture-house which had "collected patrons at a rate which has no parallel in the annals of entertainment", not only on account of its cheapness but also the fact that "peripatetic

¹⁴ Robert Snape, "Everyday Leisure and Northernness in Mass Observation's Worktown 1937-1939", *Journal for Cultural Research* 20, no. 1 (2016), 1.

¹⁵ Royle, *Modern Britain*, 265.

¹⁶ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 11.

¹⁷ James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.

¹⁸ "Forty Years of Films", *Daily Mail*, 21/02/1936, 10.

¹⁹ "The Pictures: A Challenge to the Industry", *The Observer*, 25/05/1930, 20; "Cinema's Biggest Day", *Daily Mail*, 15/04/1936, 10.

workers of all classes with odd hours between engagements were tempted to look in and just see what was going on”.²⁰

The cinema contributed to the formation of a new cultural experience on a national scale. Films, whether from Hollywood or Britain, were a product available to the masses, released around the country within short timeframes, and were easily and cheaply accessible. They also spawned secondary media such as fan publications like *Picturegoer* which proved to be popular with new fandom communities centred on the acting stars of the age. The glamour of Hollywood fashion and hairstyles was appealing to many women and created conversations beyond the cinema auditorium (in the workplace, for example) about the latest film stars and the trappings of celebrity. For male audiences, too, the pervasiveness of cinema in English culture contributed to, and perpetuated, models of masculinity. Martin Francis has highlighted how, for example, in the 1955 film *The Dam Busters* “serious affective bonds between men were obscured by a language of understatement or displayed obliquely through teasing humour”, which characterised male emotion in terms of professional responsibility and comradeship, rather than as intimate friendship.²¹ Whether or not men were receptive to such representations of male self-possession is another question entirely, but the ubiquity in films of these gendered emotional codes emphasises the cultural impact of the cinema.

The cinema created an entirely new film culture which, in a relatively-short period of time, impacted wider English society to a significant degree. This does not mean, however, that cinema-going was a habit universally enjoyed by the entire English population: it predominantly drew its patrons from the middle- and working-classes, appealed more to younger people, and many people within these groups attended infrequently, if at all. It was, as Jeff Hill suggests, “a complex and social habit, and those who indulged in it were a highly fragmented group whose behaviour was made up of a multiplicity of individual decisions”.²² This fragmentation hints at the richness of studying historical cinema-going, but also at the challenges it poses to the historian trying to identify trends and change in an activity which often went unrecorded from the perspective of the millions who attended their local picture-houses every week.

²⁰ “Triumph of the Cinema”, *The Times*, 03/05/1935, 42.

²¹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40–41.

²² Jeff Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 62.

Nevertheless, the cinema exposed great swathes of the English public to the same cultural product even if, as Lawrence Napper notes, the national film culture “provided common points of reference rather than a monolithic unified ‘taste’” amongst the population.²³ This common recreational culture which emerged during the rise of the cinema was as nuanced as it was widespread, and cinema-going has been asserted in scholarship as a key element of twentieth-century leisure.

Cinema Scholarship: Changing Focus and New Directions

The field of cinema and film studies has shifted to a great extent in the years since its inception. Initially, scholars privileged the filmic text: the content of a film and its methods of production took centre stage in the analysis of the cultural and social impact of the medium. Film was studied in terms of interpretation, of what its cinematography and narrative could reveal about the wider context and society in which it was produced. The mid-1980s witnessed a shift in History from this focus on text to the cultural practices and habits which formed around the watching of a film. The field of Film Studies had largely been concerned with the close textual analysis of films, but the development of Audience Studies examined cinemas as institutions, as well as their exhibition methods, audiences and broader film reception.²⁴ Jeffrey Richards’ seminal work *The Age of the Dream Palace* is typical of the move towards a socio-cultural history of the cinema, and recent scholarship has continued to develop a more-rounded impression of the significance and experience of past cinema-going. Scholars such as Annette Kuhn and Helen Richards have used ethnographic methodologies to investigate memories of visiting the cinema, often revealing how they were sites of “transformative moments” for people, acting as “the locus of general dreams and aspirations” for some.²⁵ In the past 15 years, these new approaches have gathered momentum and made use of new technologies such as Geographical Information Systems which use quantitative data to produce cinema mapping projects which would previously have been too labour-intensive to undertake.²⁶ The physical act known as cinema-going, and all that it entailed, is now an

²³ Lawrence Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2009), 199.

²⁴ These developments can be traced in works such as Liv Hausken, ed., *Thinking Media Aesthetics: Media Studies, Film Studies and the Arts* (Frankfurt: PL Academic Research, 2013).

²⁵ Richards, “Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930-1960”, 350; Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: IBTauris, 2002), 232.

²⁶ Richard Maltby, “New Cinema Histories”, in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, ed. Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 3.

integral part of the academy's investigations into the medium of film. Moreover, this collective change in focus within the discipline has been termed "New Cinema History", building on the conceptual impetus given to the wider field in the 1980s and championed by academics such as Richard Maltby, Kate Bowles, Philippe Meers, Daniela Treveri Gennari, and Daniël Biltereyst.²⁷

In a general sense, New Cinema History can help to open up the study of cinemas and film to other disciplines and it is amenable to the different approaches of historical study. It can, for example, be studied through the lens of economic history, social history, cultural history, leisure history, and even political history. Indeed, the majority of sub-disciplines can be utilised to great effect when studying past cinema-going and one need only look to the historiography of the past 15 or so years to trace these debates. Rebecca Harrison, for instance, has used the development of cinema carriages on trains to consider themes of modernity and empire; the place of the cinema in the Second World War has been the subject of numerous studies; interactions between class and the cinema have been evaluated by Robert James in his study of working-class taste in 1930s Britain; Richard Farmer has asserted the importance of non-filmic elements, such as confectionery, in cinema-going experiences; Martin Francis has used film to explore male interactions with domesticity and homosociability in the post-war era; Christine Geraghty has similarly used gender to examine cinema in terms of its impact on women, childcare, and national identity; James Burns has placed local experiences of cinemas within the wider framework of British imperialism; the business practicalities of cinema and regulatory involvement have been considered by Peter Miskell; and numerous studies have been made of cinemas in specific towns and cities across Britain.²⁸ All of these works demonstrate not only the many ways in which the historical cinema can be examined, but also the many things that its study can reveal about twentieth-century life. This thesis advances arguments formed within the fields of both History and Film Studies by fusing the two methodologies of the

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Rebecca Harrison, "Inside the Cinema Train: Britain, Empire, and Modernity in the Twentieth Century", *Film History: An International Journal* 26, no. 4 (2014): 32–57; James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*; Richard Farmer, "'A Temporarily Vanished Civilisation': Ice Cream, Confectionery and Wartime Cinema-Going", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 4 (2011): 479–497; Martin Francis, "A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War", *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 163–185; Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre, and the "New Look"* (London: Routledge, 2000); James Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895–1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Peter Miskell, "Seduced by the Silver Screen: Film Addicts, Critics and Cinema Regulation in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s", *Business History* 47, no. 3 (2005): 433–448; Sue Arthur, "Blackpool Goes All-Talkie: Cinema and Society at the Seaside in Thirties Britain", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 29, no. 1 (2009): 27–39.

emotional and the spatial. The findings reveal how cinemas served a crucial function in crafting emotional registers on a personal level, whilst also framing the textured national emotional cultures which developed to such a great extent during the twentieth-century.

The Emotional “Turn” in History

Much scholarly attention has been paid in recent years to the history of emotions and many of its proponents have argued for its status as “a way of doing political, social, and cultural history, not something to be added to existing fields”.²⁹ The history of emotions emerged from the Annales school which, during its various incarnations in the first half of the twentieth-century, sought to understand the *mentalités* of earlier generations: that is, the inner thoughts and experiences of people in previous ages which would enable the historian to understand the past on its own terms.³⁰ The academic study of emotion continues to produce new findings, particularly in the sciences, where the latest neuroscience has revealed much about the physiological origin of emotion, and where psychologists have provided new interpretations about the lived experience of feelings. However, Lucien Febvre (the founding father of the Annales school and the history of emotion) cautioned against applying advances in psychoanalytical techniques to the past, suggesting in a 1938 essay that “the science of contemporary psychologists can have no possible application to the past”.³¹ As emotions scholar Thomas Dixon has noted, psychological anachronism was objectionable to Febvre “since each human group in the past had its own proper mental system, which worked to produce individual experiences in its own way”.³²

Nevertheless, the history of emotions has been developed from many conceptual standpoints, some of which will be explored in the following chapter. From a general perspective, the history of emotions aims to understand the origin, significance, experiences, and perceptions of feeling in the historical context in which they occurred. It

²⁹ Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns”, *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010), 249.

³⁰ Susan J. Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out”, *Emotional Review* 3, no. 1 (2011), 118; Yvonne Perkins, “Introducing the Annales Approach to History”, *Stumbling Through the Past* (blog), 2014, <https://stumblingpast.com/2014/11/18/introducing-the-annales-approach-to-history/>.

³¹ Lucien Febvre, “History and Psychology”, in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 5. Original work published 1938.

³² Thomas Dixon, “Sensibility and History: The Importance of Lucien Febvre”, *The History of Emotions Blog*, 2011, <https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2011/11/sensibility-and-history-the-importance-of-lucien-febvre> (accessed 08/02/2018).

not only traces how emotions were shaped by the time in which they were felt, but also how this affected people's outlook on life. Different times in history created new emotional landscapes, as well as altering existing ones. This makes emotions a useful category for the historian to study changes in society and culture. However, as leading emotions scholar Barbara Rosenwein suggests, the history of emotions "suggests a more fluid paradigm – an open floor plan, if you will – rather than a series of rooms decisively entered and exited", reflecting how emotions were agents of both change and continuity within the historical narrative.³³ To call this focus on emotion a "turn" in the study of history is, perhaps, slightly misleading as it suggests a move away from other forms of historical enquiry. In reality, it has been integrated alongside other methodologies to help form a more-refined picture of the past, and it is a particularly valuable way of introducing new insights into established topics, such as film and leisure history.

In common with other strands of History, the history of emotions plays host to many debates between its scholars. Peter Burke suggests that historians have to decide "whether they believe in the essential historicity or non-historicity of emotions. Either it is the case that specific emotions, or the whole package of emotions in a given culture...are subject to fundamental changes over time; or that they remain essentially the same in different periods".³⁴ Whilst such a proposition may at first appear to be the only choice for the historian of emotion, it is rather reductionist and threatens to eradicate the nuances of studying past feeling. It is more fitting to argue that scholars can adopt both strategies: whilst emotions have a biological basis (and are, therefore, essentially the same throughout time), these physiological reactions are, as Susan Matt points out, "shaped, repressed and expressed differently from place to place and era to era".³⁵ For instance, the feeling of intense sadness at the death of a loved one in Ancient Greece would have, fundamentally, been the same as that experienced by a mother losing a child in Victorian England. The *expression* of this grief, however, would have been inflected by the different beliefs prevalent at the time, and would have altered how it was viewed by both the person experiencing the emotional act and by those witnessing

³³ Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13.

³⁴ Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 109.

³⁵ Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History", 118.

it.³⁶ The focus of this thesis, consequently, is not necessarily on *what* emotions were associated with past cinema-going, but *how* these emotions were viewed and expressed within the context of the mid-twentieth century. In particular, this study considers the concept of public emotion, defining it as the experience of emotions outside the privacy of the home (in, for example, the workplace, the street, on public transport, or in a venue of entertainment). Public emotion encapsulates tensions between the private origin of feeling and the communal nature of human interaction, and explores how these moulded the emotional landscapes familiar to both society today and to previous generations. In many ways, it epitomises the debates about emotional experience and reflects the ways in which societal and cultural shifts can profoundly affect people's lives.

Combining Emotion with Ideas of Modernity and Space

The following chapters explore the connections between emotion, space, and ideas of modernity which illuminate the important role of cinemas in mid-twentieth-century society. Chapter One introduces the Mass Observation (MO) collection and sketches out its links with the cinema. It considers the methodology of MO, how its politics influenced its investigations into cinema-going, and the ways in which, as Langhamer has suggested, its focus on the individual produced "an archive of feeling".³⁷ Naturally, the cinema was not the only public recreational pursuit available to the everyday Briton, and MO observed many other forms of daily mass-leisure activity. In an attempt to disseminate its findings to the public, it published a book about its research in which the organisation's co-founder, Tom Harrisson, explained how the pub offered working-class people an active and participatory form of leisure. In his eyes, cinemas, by contrast, reinforced the sense that "I am I, and you are you; they emphasise the separateness of the individual, and they do not ask him to know anyone else".³⁸ This thesis will demonstrate that this was, in fact, not always the case, and that material from elsewhere in MO contradicted Harrisson's assertions about the total anonymity of the cinema. It was an institution which offered an exceptional chance for emotional interaction, which was simultaneously tempered and

³⁶ See David Konstan, "Understanding Grief in Greece and Rome", *The Classical World* 110, no. 1 (2016): 3–30; and Lydia Murdoch, "'The Dead and The Living': Child Death, the Public Mortuary Movement, and the Spaces of Grief and Selfhood in Victorian London", *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 3 (2015): 378–402.

³⁷ Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xvi.

³⁸ Tom Harrisson, *The Pub and the People: A Worktown Study by Mass Observation* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943), 219.

enhanced by the anonymity of the dark auditorium. MO's investigations into leisure also reflected wider societal anxieties about the passivity of working-class leisure, the benefits and dangers of active engagement with new forms of recreation, and the impact that such activities had on issues such as gender, class and the development of the nation, especially during the upheaval of the Second World War. As an archive, MO forms the backbone of this thesis, and acts as a powerful way to uncover past emotion on both an individual and collective level. As Rosenwein contends, the historian must create a dossier of sources which contains many voices in order to access historical emotion in a perceptive manner.³⁹ MO – with its numerous diaries, day surveys and questionnaire replies written by hundreds of people from around the country – is a prime example of such a dossier.

Chapter Two establishes the methodological and conceptual frameworks which guide readings of MO material from which the emotional landscape of mid-century cinema-going is constructed. The application of methods from the history of emotion, in conjunction with the history of space, identifies the key ways in which the cinema operated as an emotional arena, set within English society's negotiations of modernity and the requirements for emotional control in public. Space played a crucial role in the cinema-going experience and the emphasis on the feelings which evolved within those cinematic spaces offers a dynamic way to understand the lived experiences of people in the past. This study argues that the theories about the active production of space, pioneered by Henri Lefebvre, must be considered alongside the affective character of environments: that is, space cannot be understood in cultural or social terms without consideration of the emotional. Lefebvre's central thesis contends that space, rather than being inert, is an active and produced concept and is, therefore, subject to historical processes.⁴⁰ The decision to situate this study between 1930 and 1960 reflects this active concept of space, as cinemas were firmly established in the urban and cultural landscape throughout the 1930s, before being given new spatial meanings during the dangers of the Second World War, and then starting to decline in the post-war decade as television and other pressures reduced the importance of the cinema as a site of recreation. The fusing of the emotional and the spatial is a key intervention of this thesis and it provides a new way to study MO material, revealing how cinemas helped to extend domestic space for the working-classes.

³⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Journal of the History and Philosophy of the Emotions* 1, no. 1 (2010), 12.

⁴⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 46.

Underscoring these discussions is the notion of modernity which, as shall be demonstrated, is something of a problematic category. Just as the role of space within the historical narrative is sometimes difficult to determine, so too is the question of just what the term “modernity” signifies, both in terms of what it meant to people in the past and its consideration by the academy today. Study of general MO material reveals how people were contemporaneously aware of “modernity”: that is, they realised that they were experiencing modern progress in their lives. Modernity (or, at least, the *experience* of modernity) is, therefore, not something created with hindsight, but a lived and tangible concept. What is, perhaps, created in retrospect is how the process of modernity can be used as a conceptual framework with which to analyse the past, defined by a quickening of societal change and technological advancement (which was sometimes viewed as a threat). For the purposes of this study, modernity, as Colin Pooley suggests, embodies “progress rather than tradition...it represents an acceleration of social change and a new consciousness of time”.⁴¹ Moreover, its defining characteristic is often considered to be the compression of time and, importantly, space, which altered the way in which people experienced and perceived the world around them.⁴²

These ideas about space, emotion, and modernity are then developed alongside the theory of emotional communities, which takes centre stage in Chapter Three. Pioneered by Rosenwein, the emotional community model emphasises the relationship between the shared values of a group of people and their emotional responses. The study of these emotional communities, she argues, “alerts us to transformations at the core of human societies once considered invariable and offers new ways to think about the perennial historical issues of stasis and change”.⁴³ Taking the cinema audience as an emotional community, the chapter incorporates work on emotives, moodscapes, emotional styles, gender and class feeling, and the perceived authenticity of emotion, to suggest that an emotional threshold was constructed between the auditorium and the street outside, again reinforcing the interplay between emotion and space. Chapters Four and Five then return to these ideas to apply them to two local case studies which examine cinemas in Bolton and in Brighton.

⁴¹ Colin Pooley, “Mobility in the Twentieth Century: Substituting Commuting for Migration”, in *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Gilbert, David Matless, and Brian Short (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 80.

⁴² James Taylor, “Written in the Skies: Advertising, Technology, and Modernity in Britain since 1885”, *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 4 (2016), 770.

⁴³ Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 203.

Apart from the obvious geographical and economic differences which affected these two towns' cinema-going experiences, Bolton offers a wealth of information thanks to a project started by MO in 1937. Over three years, the organisation sent over 90 Observers to the town (renamed Worktown) to record the lives of those living in a "typical" northern industrial environment. The cinema provided a significant part of their investigations into the leisure activities of Boltonians, and therefore allows the application of the theoretical ideas and concepts outlined in this thesis. Brighton had a long-established relationship with cinema stretching back to the early days of film-making, and it provides a useful counterpoint to Bolton, not least in its tourist economy which influenced the spatial distribution and character of cinemas in the town. The selection of Brighton as a case study also allows for the exploration of other historical sources in a geographical area less associated with MO's activities than Bolton (although the town was, of course, featured in the project). The chapter draws on the records of individual cinemas in Brighton, the memories of residents, and local press reports.

This two-town approach results in a dossier of sources which are not wholly shaped by the preoccupations and concerns of MO, thereby offering a broader impression of the emotional landscapes which were carved out by cinemas around the country. This was not the original aim of the thesis: it was initially intended to examine the towns' cinemas solely through the lens of MO. As the project developed, however, it became clear that the case studies could be used to illustrate the wider conceptual, historiographical and methodological issues which are so crucial to understanding the emotional role of cinema: a fact which strengthened the Brighton and Bolton material and opened the findings to more academic fields. By framing these case studies with methods from the history of emotions, this work contributes not only to the aims of New Cinema History, but also to social and cultural history, propounding the importance of the institution in the emotional landscape of England which developed throughout the twentieth-century.

Chapter One

Mass Observation and the Cinema

As one of the central sources for this research, the records from the Mass Observation archive are fundamental in understanding the interactions between cinemas and public emotion in the mid-twentieth-century. The observational accounts, reports and individual diaries contained within the archive are often of a personal nature and are frequently framed by a subjective and intensely-personal tone which may be absent in other sources. As such, this makes the material valuable in assessing emotional experiences of cinema-going. There exists a significant body of literature on MO itself and an attempt to condense it in this chapter would do such scholarship a disservice.⁴⁴ It would be useful, however, to outline briefly the organisation and its aims before exploring its interactions with the institution of the cinema.

Established in 1937 by Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, MO sought to record the everyday lives of “ordinary” Britons and to distance itself from academic social science which, its founders suggested, was elitist and far-removed from the “voices” of the working-class. The pursuit of this “new science of ourselves” was ambitious and intellectually-driven, if somewhat idealistic. MO was keen to differentiate itself from establishment organisations and the media, and to bridge the “undoubted gap of knowledge and understanding between the small group of people who direct our civic and national life...and the vast majority of ordinary folk”.⁴⁵ Its research methods encompassed public questionnaires, monthly investigations on certain topics (known as “directives”), diaries and accounts from volunteer correspondents, and the collection of ephemera. The

⁴⁴ This scholarship is characterised by general studies of the nature of Mass Observation such as Nick Hubble's *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and James Hinton's excellent overview of the organisation: *The Mass Observers: A History 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Much of current academic debate about the organisation is to be found in the pages of journals from many disciplines. See, for example: James Buzard, “Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-Ethnography”, *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no. 3 (1997): 93–122; Anne-Marie Kramer, “The Observers and the Observed: The ‘Dual Vision’ of the Mass Observation Project”, *Sociological Research Online* 19, no. 3 (2014): 1–11; Liz Moor and Emma Uprichard, “The Materiality of Method: The Case of the Mass Observation Archive”, *Sociological Research Online* 19, no. 3 (2014); and Annebella Pollen, “Shared Ownership and Mutual Imaginaries: Researching Research in Mass Observation”, *Sociological Research Online* 19, no. 3 (2014). The historiography of the organisation also includes more focused studies about the individual subjects tackled by Mass Observation, exemplified by recent papers such as: Emma Uprichard *et al.*, “‘Food Hates’ Over the Life Course: An Analysis of Food Narratives from the UK Mass Observation Archive”, *Appetite* 71, no 1 (2013): 137–143.

⁴⁵ “Mass-Observation in Bolton: A Social Experiment”, draft articles. SxMOA1/5/1/1/C/2.

use of these varied documents creates questions of scale. For example, MO's work differed hugely in this regard, from national surveys to the idiosyncratic writings of volunteers' personal diaries. The different origins and levels of this documentation have informed the scales used in this thesis, with Chapters Two and Three considering cinemas around the country before focussing on the local in Chapters Four and Five. As well as geographical scales, this study also considers the different emotional scales found in the cinema, which ranged from the individual to the collective. As such, these different levels – found in both the primary sources and in the methodological approach of the thesis – can be interweaved: a tapestry of scales in which the local or national approaches taken by MO can inform the local and national commentary offered in the thesis as a whole. This chapter sketches the general approach taken by MO on a national level, acting as a useful preface to the local case studies.

Mass Observation's development was determined significantly by its left-leaning politics. This political stance was, however, built on the rather different ideologies of its founders. Madge was sympathetic to the Communist cause, whilst Harrison's politics favoured radical liberalism over the – in his words – “prejudiced approach” taken by Madge in pursuit of his Marxist ideals.⁴⁶ Both men, however, were united in their desire to “find common ground in the defence of democracy against fascism” and to allow the masses a means of self-expression.⁴⁷ In spite of a shared aim, the initial divide between the pair would worsen, and Madge left the project in 1940 when, in the context of war, Harrison pressed for more governmental funding. Political differences aside, the research methods employed by the two men effectively split the organisation in its early years. Harrison's approach was dictated by his anthropological background and by a desire to anonymously immerse himself and his Observers in the society under study. Madge, in contrast, favoured a more public approach, recruiting respondents to answer his frequent questionnaires.⁴⁸ Madge's different methodological approach was addressed by Harrison in an interview in 1974: “people were just going to document themselves. Now, I was doing the observing. It may well be that I was the Observation and they were the Mass!”⁴⁹ To Harrison, the detached anthropological approach was paramount. Any investigation into the cinema would, from his perspective, involve empirical observations of cinema queues

⁴⁶ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61; 368.

⁴⁹ Anthony W. Hodgkinson and Tom Harrison, “Humphrey Jennings and Mass-Observation: A Conversation with Tom Harrison”, *Journal of the University Film Association* 27, no. 4 (1975), 32.

and the covert recording of audience reactions to films. Madge, on the other hand, would have been far more interested in collecting the personal, subjective thoughts of the mass of cinema-goers and their responses to films. Both methods, nevertheless, would produce fascinating documentation.

One of the distinctive modes of research employed by MO – especially under Tom Harrison's control – was the embedding of Observers within the local communities it sought to investigate. As Harrison explained, the project “sought fully to penetrate the society we were studying, to live in it as effective members of it and percolate into every tiny corner of every day and every night of industrial life”.⁵⁰ Such a widespread and incisive exercise produced intriguing results, even if Harrison's belief that his Observers themselves went “unobserved” by their subjects was rather naïve. Despite claims that Observers could “record and register facts without upsetting the environment in which they record them”, they were far from invisible.⁵¹ On approaching potential interviewees outside cinemas and other public places, they were frequently criticised as “social snoopers”, identified as such by their public-school accents and “obvious class privileges”.⁵² A plain example of this can be found in reports sent to Harrison by an Observer – and prolific cinema-goer – called Joyce Ausden. In May 1941, she recounted that her cinema note-taking had concerned two of her fellow audience members who “objected to my writing and reported it to the manager. Later he sent for me and asked me to explain...his difficulty was that he had never heard of Mass Observation. Yesterday brought a detective who wanted to know all about the incident. He, too, had never heard of MO but was most interested to hear of it”.⁵³

Hinton has argued, moreover, that Harrison was acutely aware of his privileged background and never positioned himself outside the social elite, believing instead that his education and class gave him a responsibility to provide the working-class with a voice.⁵⁴ MO constructed itself as the “other” and its Observers – even if drawn from the working-classes – self-consciously set themselves apart from those under study. Although a noble aspiration, MO's ambition to become a mouthpiece for the working man was

⁵⁰ Harrison, *The Pub and the People*, 6.

⁵¹ “Memorandum on Emergency Problems and Mass Observation”, 29/8/1939, 4. SxMOA1/1/4/6/1.

⁵² Gary Cross, ed., *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and Popular Leisure in the 1930s* (London: Routledge, 1990), 10.

⁵³ Letter from J. Ausden to Mr Harrison, 04/05/1941. SxMOA1/2/17/1/B.

⁵⁴ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 12.

arguably weakened in its projection of middle-class values on the working-class: in some cases, by the judgements it cast on those under observation.⁵⁵ More widely, MO came under criticism at the time, and in the years after, for its rather disordered qualitative approach, perceived invasions of privacy, erratic research methods and openly-acknowledged political motivations.⁵⁶ The data gathered was often incomplete, unrepresentative, collected in a non-systematic manner, and was far from objective. That the project was not without flaws or critics does not detract from its value as a unique historical social record, and the unwieldy nature of the archive acts as an enticing challenge for the social historian.

Whilst London quite naturally became a key location for the Observers to undertake their research, the leaders of MO were keen to expand their activities northwards.⁵⁷ Bolton, moulded and scarred as it was by the Industrial Revolution, was chosen to be “representative of the industrial life-pattern which prevails for the majority of people in Britain” and was renamed “Worktown” for the study.⁵⁸ For many, Worktown became symbolic of the grim North, where the homogeneous masses of the working-class lived and worked, offering distinctive (and, at times, rather gloomy) opportunities for study: “anybody would agree”, wrote one Observer, “that the present state of Bolton is something that leaves a lot to be desired”.⁵⁹ As Gary Cross has suggested, “Bolton was the nadir of the ideal” for many contemporary commentators, and the pubs, churches and places of work inhabited by working-class people were in stark counterpoint with the urban environments found in the South of England.⁶⁰ That said, the population of the town was considered by MO to offer the chance to study a thriving and autonomous working-class culture, with a distinct sense of cultural identity. This would, it was hoped, reveal much about the lot of “ordinary” Britons in the first half of the twentieth-century, their political attitudes, social practices and general outlook on life.

⁵⁵ Peter Gurney has explored this notion in his work on the construction of working-class women's sexuality. He suggests that MO's research methods were debilitated by an explicit agenda brought to investigations which, in turn, produced results more representative of middle-class attitudes towards sexuality, rather than of those being observed. See: “‘Intersex’ and ‘Dirty Girls’: Mass-Observation and Working-class Sexuality in England in the 1930s”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8, no. 2 (1997): 256-290.

⁵⁶ J. Michael Hogan, “The Road Not Taken in Opinion Research: Mass-Observation in Great Britain, 1937-1940”, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2015), 412.

⁵⁷ Ian Gazeley and Claire Langhamer, “The Meanings of Happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton”, *History Workshop Journal* 75, no. 1 (2013), 163.

⁵⁸ “Mass-Observation in Bolton”. SxMOA1/5/1/1/C/2.

⁵⁹ “Bolton Through the Ages”, material prepared by Andrew F. Robinson, 6. SxMOA1/5/1/1/A/1.

⁶⁰ Cross, *Worktowners at Blackpool*, 7.

Such was the context for the Worktown project. It covered a plethora of subjects ranging from religion, sport, and politics to the weather, holidays, and the prevalence of swearing and graffiti. Positioned amongst these topics was the subject of film and cinema. The links between MO and the medium of cinema were established during the project's genesis. Alongside the efforts of Harrison and Madge, the documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings also helped to establish the project and, along with the documentary film movement as a whole, acted as "one of the most immediate influences" in MO's early years.⁶¹ This close interaction was heightened when Harrison and others decided to observe the leisure habits of the British public in both London and Worktown. Such a decision was underpinned by wider preoccupations in the 1930s about the nature of leisure, and many social scientists and commentators were keen to evaluate the possibilities and dangers of mass leisure in society.⁶² Cinema was, of course, an important component in these MO studies about recreation.

The Cinema and Leisure in Worktown

The turn of the century had seen the growth of leisure as a commercial enterprise and this, together with increasing working-class expenditure on leisure activity, became a significant facet of twentieth-century society.⁶³ Despite being a comparatively-new form of mass entertainment, the cinema had become a key element in working-class culture and amusement. By 1938 there were nearly 5,000 cinemas in the United Kingdom. The cinema was a medium popular with all social classes, although regional variation in audience demographics does offer an interesting point of study.⁶⁴ Scott *et al.* have argued that "given the limited space, overcrowding, and poor quality of much working-class housing, leisure was much less 'domesticated' than during the post-war era" and local sites of entertainment, such as the pub or the cinema, were regarded as an extension of the home.⁶⁵ The reassuring domesticity of these spaces, their accessibility, and the regularity with which they were attended by a significant section of the population

⁶¹ Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1987), 1.

⁶² Cross, *Worktowners at Blackpool*, 7.

⁶³ Peter Scott, James T. Walker, and Peter Miskell, "British Working-Class Household Composition, Labour Supply, and Commercial Leisure Participation During the 1930s", *Economic History Review* 68, no. 2 (2015), 659.

⁶⁴ The popularity of the cinema was to increase during the Second World War. Cinema attendances for each year between 1943 and 1945 reached well over 1.5 billion – a phenomenal figure which has never been surpassed.

⁶⁵ Scott *et al.*, "British Working-Class Household Composition", 663.

assured the cinema an important position in the leisure habits of millions and, in turn, in any cultural study undertaken by MO. The value of an enquiry into the cinema in Worktown was expounded in a document which set out the aims of the project: “no study of life in an industrial town, or for that matter in any community in Western Civilisation”, it read, “would be complete without a survey of the cinema and its place in the life of the people”.⁶⁶ The original aims of Worktown's investigation sought to discover the “new social patterns and behaviour forms” brought by the cinema and the activities which it had displaced; it asked the central questions “how does cinema affect the different classes, what are their reactions to the new horizons that it opens up to them, [and] how does it influence their everyday routine of life?”⁶⁷ It would be useful, then, to consider why MO privileged the cinema over some other forms of leisure activity.

Some of the most illuminating cinema records in MO are included in the “Films 1937-1948” Topic Collection. This collection of material ranges from observations of audience reactions to films, replies to questionnaires distributed by cinemas, reports on the cinema from individual Observers, cinema queue notes, and related ephemera such as press cuttings. The Worktown material, taken in isolation from the Films Topic Collection, is striking in the extent to which the cinema is given high cultural and societal currency: it is placed amongst religion and politics as a central constituent of the “modern industrial community”.⁶⁸ That the cinema was at the forefront of daily life in Bolton – in the minds, at least, of Tom Harrisson and Worktown cinema collaborator John Martin Jones – is not to say, of course, that it was the only source of mass leisure and entertainment. The Second World War had frustrated Harrisson's ambitions to produce a catalogue of publications detailing Worktown's findings, but one of the volumes which did manage to present the material in an organised manner was *The Pub and the People*, first published in 1943. The collection, arrangement and brief analysis of this material on the pubs of Worktown is a pertinent comparison on which to draw, and one which is valuable in then analysing the interactions between the cinema and MO as an anthropological project.

Before exploring the differences which marked out the distinctive approach to the cinema taken by MO, numerous parallels can be made between Worktown's study of pubs and its contemporaneous investigation into cinemas in Bolton. Just as the cinema, interwoven in

⁶⁶ “Synopsis – The Cinema”, 18/11/37, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/A/1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ “The Cinema”, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/A/1.

the lives of millions in England, assumed a dominant position in the urban landscape, *The Pub and the People* attached similar importance to the pub as a locus of social – and emotional – activity. Indeed, the volume opens with the assertion that “more people spend more time in public houses than they do in any other buildings except private houses and work-places”.⁶⁹ For working-class men, a visit to the pub was as habitual as a trip to the cinema (if not more so) and thus was an established and hugely-popular form of leisure practice. On a further level, pub-going and cinema-going were similarly “low-commitment” activities, characterised by Scott *et al.* as low cost, easily accessed and open to those without specialised knowledge of the activity itself or its social conventions.⁷⁰ Pastimes such as drinking and film-watching were in direct contrast with “high-commitment” activities such as theatre-going and sport, which necessitated a greater degree of commitment in terms of time and financial outlay.⁷¹

A common theme runs through the Worktown material on both the pub and the cinema, one which treats these institutions as key facilitators of people's negotiations through life. This rather philosophical view cast the pub as a “solution of the personal problem of existence” – a perspective often adopted when Mass Observers asked why the cinema was so popular.⁷² One's own life and troubles could be better understood through films in a cinema; in a similar manner, the pub was seen by some to be as spiritual an arena as the church. Such attitudes are indicative of the wider ideological approaches taken by MO. Central importance was placed on the close observation of Worktowners in the environments familiar to them, and pubs and cinemas were given value as *places* rather than mere spaces which saw the gathering of people in the pursuit of leisure (an idea which will be further developed in the next chapter). As such, the pub and the cinema are somewhat elevated in MO material as unique phenomena in British working-class society.

Whilst common themes emerge in the studies of Bolton's pubs and cinemas, there are a series of marked differences in the Worktown project's approach to the two leisure activities. Such differences reflect the extent to which there was something peculiar to the cinema in the material produced during the research, and the ways in which MO constructed it as vital to the concept of leisure. The cinema was a topic of great interest

⁶⁹ Harrisson, *The Pub and the People*, 17.

⁷⁰ Scott *et al.*, “British Working-Class Household Composition”, 663.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Harrisson, *The Pub and the People*, 336.

to Harrison and others, not only as a result of the dominant position it had assumed in mass entertainment, but also because it was viewed as exerting a great degree of influence and ideological power over the public. The “hypodermic needle” model that a passive cinema audience would readily accept any idea to which it was exposed is, of course, hugely-simplified and rather problematic.⁷³ Such a theory does factor, however, in the ways in which the cinema was treated by MO as an active and omnipotent force in society. Underscored by Madge and Harrison's (albeit rather antithetical) politics, the concerns held by MO about the cinema's influence on society led it to suggest that, as Hinton explains, there was a “correlation to be made between the spread of this new commercial culture and the indifference of so many working-class people to politics”.⁷⁴ If this indifference was a result of the mass consumer culture typified by the cinema, then its root cause was to be found in the fundamental change during the early twentieth-century: modes of working-class leisure moved from collective leisure practices and spaces (such as the pub) to more individualistic and passive activities. However, as Hinton suggests, although MO “came close to endorsing a simple contrast between a degenerate modernity and a lost golden age of social responsibility and active citizenship”, its analysis was often “a good deal more nuanced, avoiding the extremes of cultural pessimism indulged in by much of the cultural intelligentsia”.⁷⁵

Anti-American, Anti-Hollywood

Any hostility in MO towards the cinema was, in part, a result of the degree of anti-Americanism which pervaded some quarters of the British cultural elite. Chris Waters has suggested that such sentiments had been growing in Britain since the 1920s, centred on the idea that mass American culture was threatening the native, and more “authentic”, British working-class culture.⁷⁶ The Hollywood films which seemed to attract the largest cinema audiences became, for their critics, symbolic of everything which was immoral and corrosive about American culture. Indeed, the social researcher and reformer Seebohm Rowntree was highly critical of the “misplaced” aspirations evident in American films. In his *English Life and Leisure* volume, he praised the efforts of the British Film

⁷³ See Michael Sproule, “Progressive Propaganda Critics and the Magic Bullet Myth”, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 3 (1989): 225–246.

⁷⁴ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 42.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

⁷⁶ Chris Waters, “Introduction - Beyond ‘Americanization’: Rethinking Anglo-American Cultural Exchange Between the Wars”, *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 4 (December 1, 2007), 451.

Institute in improving the “cultural, technical and educational value of the cinema”, but wrote how he was “less happy about American films”, arguing that they were complicit in the “glorification...of false values”, and concluding that “this evil occurs far more frequently in American than in British films”.⁷⁷ Antagonistic attitudes towards Hollywood were not confined to the key figures in MO or the wider elite: many middle-class MO panel members evinced their disapproval of American films and culture in their responses, elevating “quality” British and European films above Hollywood’s product.⁷⁸ A letter from a cinema-goer (in a collection of *Picturegoer* magazine cuttings collected by MO in 1940) illustrates the hostility with which some regarded Hollywood’s influence in British cinemas: “I went to see *Night Train to Munich*, a British picture. How nice it was to sit back and relax, and to listen to English speech instead of laxly pronounced American gabble”.⁷⁹

Whilst the cinema was well-established by the time of MO’s investigations, the specific influence of Hollywood on the working-class of Britain remained a key element in contemporary discussions about the social ills of cinema-going. Much of this revolved around the idea that American film productions were a malign influence on the public. Intellectual opinion, as Peter Stead has argued, “could never accept that the mass attraction to Hollywood was entirely a natural and voluntary process and they were always ready to think in terms of manipulation and exploitation”.⁸⁰ In tandem with such prejudice, it was common during the 1930s for people to speak of two distinct cinema audiences: the “intelligent” and the “mass”.⁸¹ The latter, according to some in the intelligentsia, were vulnerable to moral corruption on account of their working-class identity and the content which was displayed to them in Hollywood pictures: content which was antithetical to their everyday life experiences. Again, Rowntree and Lavers were two of the most vociferous critics of the content of Hollywood films:

“We feel that the constant repetition of scenes of rather vulgar and ostentatious luxury, and the constant suggestion that ‘having a good time’ can only mean dining and drinking champagne in expensive restaurants...and living in rooms of absurdly large dimensions, must have a deleterious effect upon a nation that has,

⁷⁷ B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, *English Life and Leisure: A Social Study* (London: Longmans, 1951), 256.

⁷⁸ Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, “Moved to Tears: Weeping in the Cinema in Postwar Britain”, *Screen* 37, no. 2 (1996), 172.

⁷⁹ Letter to *Picturegoer* from Olga Townend, Halifax, Yorkshire, 06/10/1940. Recorded in SxMOA1/2/17/5/3.

⁸⁰ Peter Stead, “Hollywood’s Message for the World: The British Response in the Nineteen Thirties”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 1, no. 1 (1981), 25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

above all, to realise that its future lies in plain living, hard work and unsophisticated pleasures”.⁸²

Another element in the hostility towards the cinema suggested that, through exposure to American films, the working-class British man and woman would “begin to speak a new language, would become more disrespectful, would become less religious, more footloose and ambitious and less law-abiding”.⁸³ It is again important to remember, however, that criticism of Hollywood was not exclusive to the British middle-class. Although MO avoided explicit judgement on the content and the ubiquity of American films, some of the “ordinary” people interviewed in such projects as *Worktown* voiced negative attitudes towards Hollywood: “on account of the radio, better education and a steady rise in the intellectual tastes of the man-in-the-street, the average film-goer is beginning to appreciate a little more the art of correct speech; this we rarely obtain from American films”, suggested one *Worktown*er in 1938.⁸⁴ Critics of the impact of Hollywood on British society existed across the whole class spectrum, but it remains that audiences between 1930 and 1960 consumed American films with an enthusiasm of which many British film producers could only dream.

Jennings, the Documentary Film Movement, and the Pub

In its formative years, the influence of Humphrey Jennings and the wider values of the documentary film movement affected not only MO’s work on the cinema, but also its general ideological direction. Many parallels can be drawn between MO and the documentary genre, not least in a shared aim which sought, as Thomas Davis argues, “to create narratives of everyday life that would advance the interests of the British state by normalising its policies and activities”.⁸⁵ Both emerged from a similar intellectual environment, exemplified by the documentary movement’s founder John Grierson who was a proponent of fusing modernist and avant-garde techniques with contemporary social science.⁸⁶ Indeed, the documentary movement provided “an imaginative backbone for the projection of a modern nation” which was attempting to construct a collective British identity, negotiate paths of modernity and, above all, educate audiences about

⁸² Rowntree and Lavers, *English Life and Leisure*, 239.

⁸³ Stead, “Hollywood’s Message for the World”, 30.

⁸⁴ Response from Samuel Vaines, The Crompton Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/E.

⁸⁵ Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 27–28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29; 37–38.

democratic society.⁸⁷ Importantly for Grierson, this centred around the idea that the modern media – of which the cinema was a prime example – should have a social purpose.⁸⁸ In this endeavour, the documentary movement shared similar political views with MO and its attempts to better understand the ways in which new mass communications and technology could affect urban working-class taste and behaviour.⁸⁹ The close association between MO and the documentary movement is reflected in the frequency with which MO explored the types of films which were most popular and the use of interview questions asking *why* people preferred certain films over others. Of course, the collection of audience reactions was driven in part by Harrison's rather-unrefined wish to gather as much information as possible, but it still remains indicative of Humphrey Jennings' influence. In his film-making, Jennings, as Ben Jones and Rebecca Searle have posited, “was consumed by the attempt to document the imaginative and experiential transformations engendered by industrialisation”.⁹⁰ In turn, his co-founding of Mass Observation was a manifestation of this desire.

Investigations by MO into the cinema could have been used to understand the educational value of the medium, privileging realism and documentation over frivolous, *American* entertainment. The educational potential of cinemas was aligned with its democratising power, a distinct symbol of a modernity which narrowed geographical boundaries and opened up a national experience of recreation. “When the villager can see the same show as the city-dweller”, pronounced an editorial in the *Daily Mail* in 1936, “it is no wonder that the cinema is one of the world’s greatest industries”.⁹¹ Warnings were sounded, however, that the essence of the cinema as entertainment should remain unaltered, and the Chairman of the Manchester Libraries admitted that while “we need an escape from life in our great cities...if we make the film too much of an educational institution we are going to spoil the recreative side of it”.⁹² If there was any potential for education in the cinema, a fine balance had to be struck and, although cinema was not declared by MO as the debaser of working-class taste or political and social engagement,

⁸⁷ Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, “Introduction: The Documentary Film Movement and the Spaces of British Identity”, *Twentieth Century British History* 23, no. 1 (2012), 1.

⁸⁸ Jo Fox, “From Documentary Film to Television Documentaries: John Grierson and ‘This Wonderful World’”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, no. 3 (2013), 500.

⁸⁹ The key figures in the documentary movement shared many characteristics with the founders of MO: both were mainly young, well-educated middle-class men with liberal ideals.

⁹⁰ Ben Jones and Rebecca Searle, “Humphrey Jennings, the Left and the Experience of Modernity in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain”, *History Workshop Journal* 75, no. 1 (2013), 193.

⁹¹ “Forty Years of Films”, *Daily Mail*, 21/02/1936, 10.

⁹² “Libraries and the Cinema”, *The Manchester Guardian*, 03/06/1937, 20.

such a view certainly featured in the organisation's consideration of such issues.

Cinemas in England sat within a landscape burgeoning with opportunities for mass recreation. It was a cultural terrain which had emerged in the first half of the twentieth-century from Victorian ideals which extolled the value of leisure pursuits as a contribution to one's moral and educational development. As suspicion of working-class commercial (and more informal) entertainments grew, there was a concurrent growth of recreational activities organised by religious groups such as the Unitarians, a phenomenon which aimed to use recreational pursuits including dances, singing classes, tea parties and excursions to "moralise" the working-class.⁹³ This moralistic intervention was not limited to religious movements. As Rachel Vorspan has argued, leisure activities in the nineteenth-century were also moderated in the courts, where judges "coercively applied the criminal law to suppress disfavoured recreations, pursued a flexible middle course toward quasi-respectable establishments to enhance their more 'rational' features, and inventively employed statutory and customary law to foster 'desirable' leisure pursuits".⁹⁴ The moral panics provoked by the advent of cinema were not particularly novel in this regard, and many newspaper column inches were devoted to the potential for cinemas to corrupt and degrade its working-class audiences, a debate which was very much inherited from Victorian anxieties. All these factors would have figured in MO's consideration of the cinema as a cultural institution and in its wider investigations into the leisure lives of everyday Britons.

This is clearly evident in MO's recording of a report by the Political and Economic Planning (PEP) policy thinktank on the nature of leisure. Established in 1931, PEP formed a Physical Planning Group which, in 1942, commissioned a document which investigated the different types of recreational practice in Britain and their effects on the urban population.⁹⁵ The report declared that "the community has become deeply concerned in a wholesome and balanced use of people's spare time" and that, in a pre-war survey of Ipswich, "over one-half of all evenings spent outside private homes were accounted for by the cinema".⁹⁶ For the report's authors, the cinema was clearly not the most productive use

⁹³ Douglas Reid, "Playing and Praying", in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 787.

⁹⁴ Rachel Vorspan, "Rational Recreation and the Law: The Transformation of Popular Urban Leisure in Victorian England", *McGill Law Journal* 45, no. 4 (2000), 895.

⁹⁵ Daniel Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning: The Debate on Economic Planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 145.

⁹⁶ "Leisure", 1. SxMOA1/2/80/1/A/3.

of the population's leisure time, and it enthusiastically noted that "there are signs that the cinema gives way to better pastimes: in the summer the cinema attendance drops sharply (June only 64% of January); also better educated people frequent the cinema less often".⁹⁷ Statements such as this must be considered in the context of the moral and social concerns of some commentators, concerns which had developed from late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reflections on the suitability of working-class leisure practices.

In contrast with these debates about the character and appropriateness of certain leisure activities, the pub (whatever its social benefit or menace) was spared explicit moral judgement by the Mass Observers (if not by others): in his preface to *The Pub and the People*, Harrisson declared that the project had "no interest either in proving pubs are good or pubs are bad", perhaps on account of the fact that he was explicitly trying to rehabilitate the negative image of the pub.⁹⁸ Rather peculiarly, the pub was not viewed as an aspect of mass consumption, but as a socially-unique space and form of leisure in which the thoughts of patrons were not mediated, influenced or controlled. In establishing the significance of the role played by the pub in Worktown, MO declared that "it is the only kind of public building used by large numbers of ordinary people where their thoughts and actions are *not* being in some way arranged for them; in the other kinds of public buildings they are audiences".⁹⁹ This marked out the pub in fundamental opposition to the cinema. For Harrisson, pub patrons were given agency in this form of leisure activity: they were participators rather than spectators in an inert cinema audience. As such, it was perceived that the degree to which the activity of pub-going could unduly influence the population (aside from attendant issues such as drunkenness, prostitution, and gambling) was tempered by the fact that participants were active in the production of their own leisure. Moreover, the pub was, in the eyes of MO, much more than a vendor of alcoholic beverages; acting as a focal point for working-class (male) social activity, it was an established institution and its presence a reassuring emblem of tradition and ritual.¹⁰⁰ The cinema, on the other hand, was a far-newer and, arguably, more ideologically-potent institution, with more female patrons and an impact which was yet to be entirely understood. The Worktown documentation

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Harrisson, *The Pub and the People*, 10.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 336.

on the cinema appreciated this influence, asserting that “it has had in the short time of its existence a profound effect on the everyday life of all social classes. It has affected their education, fashions, morality, leisure and their social attitudes”.¹⁰¹

The Individual in Mass Entertainment

Alongside its readings of the pub and the cinema as important influences on society, MO explored the issue of spectatorship in mass entertainment. Naturally, the cinema was far from MO's sole focus. Cinemas were frequently mentioned together with other buildings such as dance halls, sporting venues, churches and – of course – pubs. Discussion in MO material on the relationship between the cinema and other forms of public leisure activity was often couched in terms of its potential for social interaction. Again, the participatory nature of the cinema and its ability to act as a social space was examined in MO's research: “unlike the pub and the dance hall, the cinema (as at present organised) does not give sociability in any direct form, but, like in sport, the participants are spectators”.¹⁰² This comparison with sport and methods of spectatorship is worthy of further consideration. Throughout the Worktown project and in subsequent investigations, MO collated material about sport and sporting participation, ranging from football and cricket, to gambling and wrestling. Its attitude towards sport spectatorship contrasted the emotional selfhood of a sports fan with the physical and emotional responses of a cinema-goer. The cinema audience, seated in darkness and outwardly sedate, was, for MO, defined by its relationship with the screen. It could only *react* to what it was viewing, rather than having the ability to influence proceedings. Football spectators, on the other hand, could directly affect the events they were witnessing: their collective cheers, shouts and general physical presence could motivate the players. In turn, this helped to develop a reciprocal emotional connection between the spectators and the spectated. Robert Snape has argued in his work on MO's treatment of all-in wrestling that the sport “drew a communal crowd that was active in the production of its leisure” and this certainly applies to the Observers' material on football matches.¹⁰³

Emotional states and characteristics were often ascribed in MO reports to football crowds:

¹⁰¹ “The Cinema”, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/A/1.

¹⁰² “The Cinema in the First Three Months of War”, 1. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

¹⁰³ Robert Snape, “All-in Wrestling in Inter-War Britain: Science and Spectacle in Mass Observation's ‘Worktown’”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 12 (2013), 1426.

one Observer recorded the “delight” displayed on the scoring of a goal, as well as the “vindictive [sic] nature of the crowd” and the “constant yells” directed at players who fouled.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, the language used to record reactions of cinema audiences was often less affective. Many of the cinema documents in the archive give moments in a specific film and, alongside, record the reaction of the audience. Most frequently, Observers recorded “no reaction” to the moments on screen, and when a reaction was given by the audience, it is often judged on their level of engagement with the film (or lack thereof), rather than on the explicit expressions of individual emotions. Notes such as “audience quiet” and “audience becomes alert” are made in reports, and moments of laughter are recorded, but the nature of this laughter – whether motivated by comedy, glee, irony or general happiness – is not stated.¹⁰⁵ A cinema audience is rarely described in MO as having collective emotions, unlike the vindictive or delighted football audience. Material written by respondents to MO directives and in diaries, on the other hand, uses much more emotive language when discussing cinema. The temptation to be too reductive must, of course, be avoided in this construction of normative audience feelings, but the differences between sport and film spectatorship contribute to MO's readings of audiences and their active or passive engagement with their leisure pursuits.

As one commentator wrote in the 1930s, “the main alternative to the cinema, if in any way it be an alternative, is football”.¹⁰⁶ The football terrace was a contemporaneous space where the open expression of fierce emotion was not only accepted, but encouraged. Attending a football match was, naturally, a very public affair, with its own set of emotional and social expectations. Unlike in the cinema, where emotional responses were more varied and spatially disparate, the emotionality of football spectators was more cohesive and defined in oppositional terms: crowded together on the terraces, individuals would share with those immediately around them the same dominant desire for their team to beat the opposition. Moreover, any emotional expression was much more explicit at a football match. Whilst many MO diarists recalled feelings of shame and the wish to conceal their emotions from others around them during a cinema visit, football spectators were much more explicit in their expression of feeling. One Observer for MO attended a football match at Wembley in 1942 and reported that the supporters around him “wanted to cheer and shout as though to deliberately forget everything else. At times it was almost

¹⁰⁴ “Observer Accounts: Bolton Wanderers”, 3-5. SxMOA1/5/3/4/A/2.

¹⁰⁵ Audience Report, “Men of the Lightship”, Gertrude Wagner, 14/08/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/8/A/7.

¹⁰⁶ Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, 152.

hysterical”.¹⁰⁷ Suggestive of the performative nature of being a football spectator, football terraces arguably became a space where individuals readily integrated themselves (in an emotional sense) into the collective. As Tim Edensor has explored in his recent study into the construction of atmosphere at football matches, supporters “eagerly subsume themselves in the collective crowd, and commit to a temporary sharing of values and affective practices that would be improper in most other spatial and social contexts”.¹⁰⁸ To some extent, the monolithic nature of a football crowd coerced individuals into conforming with the dominant emotions of those around them (although that is not to say that the feelings of individuals often contrasted with those of the crowd). Whilst, in the cinema, the film largely guided the emotional responses of spectators, the football terrace was a space in which emotion was dictated by the mass of spectators themselves.

When examining this point about space a little further, it becomes clear that the environments of the cinema and the football terrace played a role in experiences of emotion. Going to a football match (like cinema-going) was a habitual practice for many men in the mid-twentieth-century and the concomitant feeling of spatial familiarity arguably aided in facilitating the intense – or, in the view of the aforementioned MO Observer, “hysterical” – expression of emotion.¹⁰⁹ Supporters perceived the football terrace as a safe space where they could openly and vocally express emotion without fear of censure, just as cinemas took on a domestic (and therefore reassuring) dimension for many MO cinema-goers. The outside setting of football matches had a further effect on the leisure activity. As has been suggested, the emotional responses at a match were much more obvious than in the dark cinema auditorium. In broad daylight, one’s reactions to the game were on explicit display and, accordingly, a deviation from the emotional norm would have been easily visible to others. The darkness of the cinema, on the other hand, was an environment much more conducive to the concealment of emotion.

A useful example of this can be found in an MO match report from a game in Worcester in which the Observer found himself standing next to a “little man, who was a regular fan and knew even the latest comer to the team by name”.¹¹⁰ It soon became clear that the man

¹⁰⁷ “Wembley Football Match, Scotland v. England” by MC, 17/01/1942, 1. SxMOA1/2/82/2/E.

¹⁰⁸ Tim Edensor, “Producing Atmospheres at the Match: Fan Cultures, Commercialisation and Mood Management in English Football”, *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2015), 85.

¹⁰⁹ Football attendance rose steadily from the start of the century, reaching a peak of 41 million for the 1948-49 season. Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 29.

¹¹⁰ “Worcester Football Match” by JA, 14/09/1940, 2. SxMOA1/2/82/2/E.

took exception to several of the players, shouting abuse at them, and the Observer wrote that “all the time he kept looking at inv [sic] for support, and inv had to nod at everything he said”.¹¹¹ The “little man” was seeking validation and support from those around him for his display of emotional disgust. This feeling of anger directed towards the players was an emotion partly driven by the man’s sense of rational engagement with football, and validated by his knowledge of the game. Spectators often felt themselves to be experts in the sport, something which stemmed from the notion that the pastime was rooted in working-class culture.¹¹² This sense of collective right over the sport affirmed and justified fans’ emotional responses to events on the pitch, and displayed to those around them their knowledge and intellectual engagement with the activity on the pitch. Emotional expression in the terraces became a signifier of true football fandom. This will be illustrated further in Chapter Four, which considers football attendance in Bolton.

Cinema-goers, in contrast with football spectators, most often wished to hide their feelings, rather than keenly seeking support from other audience members. Additionally, in the same way that the behaviour of the mass of football spectators added to the enjoyment of the game, cinema patrons sometimes highlighted how observation of their fellow audience members contributed to their cinema-going pleasures. One MO diarist saw RKO’s 1939 adventure film *Gunga Din* and remembered her delight at seeing “kids in the audience [who] were very funny and got wildly excited, shouting to tell the hero when he was in danger. It was most amusing to hear them”.¹¹³ As in football, the vocal responses of those around her were evidently a substantial facet of the film-going experience. These reactions were viewed by MO as a method of assessing an audience’s emotional engagement with a film and the extent to which people’s feelings were being influenced. As one Observer wrote in 1947: “it seems to me that there are 2 types of talking. The first is the general chatter that seems to be a sign of lack of interest, and the second is what I should call interested talking i.e. talk about what is taking place on the screen”.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² See, for example, John Goulstone, “The Working-Class Origins of Modern Football”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 1 (2000), 135–143.

¹¹³ Mass Observation Diarist 5312, 07/11/1939.

¹¹⁴ “Newsreel Observation”, 18/09/1947. SxMOA1/2/17/15/1/2.

Class and Gender in Leisure

The influence of the cinema on society was all the more remarkable, given that the institution had existed for fewer than 40 years at the time of MO's initial research. The widespread impact of the cinema on many aspects of society, and its popularity amongst men and women of all ages and classes (unlike the predominantly working-class male environment of the pub) undoubtedly factored in the motivations behind MO's investigations. Set against the background of broader discourses on changing work patterns and how the urban working-class spent their free time, MO Observers called leisure a "vital problem of the day" which warranted investigation into how the everyday worker was "capable and willing to make conscious use of that leisure; [and] how far the use he makes of the leisure is in opposition to the fundamental needs and structure of the society in which he lives".¹¹⁵ MO sought to uncover a range of factors which impacted people's free time: the experience of leisure inside and outside the home; the formal organisation of recreation; the prevalence of religion and politics in leisure pursuits; and the extent to which leisure activity was communal or individual, passive or active.¹¹⁶

Contemplation of such issues necessarily requires a consideration of gendered practices of leisure. By the time that the cinema came under the scrutiny of MO, it had asserted itself as a key site of leisure in the urban landscape. It was not a sphere linked with a particular gender (unlike the pub), even if women comprised the majority of the nation's most avid cinema-goers.¹¹⁷ Arguably, different genres of film became more associated in popular discourse with gender, rather than the physical act of visiting the cinema. On the other hand, radio-listening was a leisure activity very much defined and conceptualised in terms of gender – a result of its inextricable link with domesticity. Maggie Andrews' work on television and radio is intertwined with a study of the mass media's impact on femininity in the twentieth-century home. Affirming other feminist histories, Andrews asserts that in the inter-war period, domestic space was "emotionally and symbolically constructed as a feminine space – a place of mundane belonging for women".¹¹⁸ The 1940s and 1950s were witness, however, to reconfigurations of the male role in domestic life. Various cultural and social authorities, as Francis asserts, "sought to make marriage and the home more

¹¹⁵ "Memo on a Study of Leisure", 02/01/1940, 1. SxMOA1/2/80/1/A/1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁷ As Jeffrey Richards has highlighted, age is a much more significant factor in determining who went to the cinema most often in the 1930s.

¹¹⁸ Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London: Continuum, 2012), 3.

attractive to both women and men through the promotion of the ‘companionate marriage’, in which teamwork and partnership replaced unquestioned patriarchal authority as the basis of domestic life”.¹¹⁹ Andrews highlights, indeed, how the radio became a “new weapon” in the control of domestic space depending on whether the man of the house chose the evening’s wireless programmes. Nevertheless, given that much radio-listening took place in the home during the day, it was, by extension, linked to femininity.¹²⁰ Of course, radio-consumption was more nuanced, but gender remained an important facet of the contemporary discussions on leisure.

The emblematic power of the radio – as a signifier of modernity and as a force able to deconstruct boundaries between public and private, male and female spheres – is much similar to that of the cinema. Whilst the cinema physically created groups of audience members with a shared emotional investment in a visual medium, the radio constructed an imagined *national* community on an aural level, into which the housewife could integrate herself. Simultaneously, the radio allowed the intense privacy of the home to be penetrated by the public world, whilst reinforcing the individuality of the radio-listening experience.¹²¹ The cinema, on the other hand, was situated outside the domestic, where one’s emotional reactions were sometimes on very public display. The primary site of women’s consumption of radio was, of course, the home – a fact which raises the issue of whether women’s use of the radio can be considered as leisure at all. This domestic setting meant that listening to the wireless could be enjoyed alongside manual work such as ironing or cooking and, as such, feminist histories argue that “a conceptualisation of leisure as separate and opposite to paid work *distorts* the experience of women”.¹²² Similar discussions are applicable to the advent of television (which was the subject of an MO directive, and a technology which had a potent – and damaging – impact on the cinema industry), again highlighting the tensions between the private and public consumption of leisure activity.¹²³ For many women, leisure became even further orientated toward the home: by 1957, 50% of British housewives reported that they never went to the cinema.¹²⁴ This raises questions of change over time, as recreational activities

¹¹⁹ Francis, “A Flight From Commitment?”, 166.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²² Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure*, 16.

¹²³ See: Helen Wood, “Television—the Housewife’s Choice? The 1949 Mass Observation Television Directive, Reluctance and Revision”, *Media History* 21, no. 3 (2015): 342–359.

¹²⁴ Melanie Bell, *Femininity in the Frame: Women and 1950s British Popular Cinema*, Cinema and Society (London: IBTauris, 2010), 11.

came to reflect more general shifts in society and in the emotional registers of men and women. The context of emotional experience and expression was key.

Active and Passive Forms of Leisure

As well as these gendered perspectives, the decision by MO to undertake an anthropological study of the cinema was driven by the simple fact that it was universally popular. The omission of it in any large social study would have been inexcusable. But this alone does not account for the approach adopted by MO towards the cinema. Another part of the answer lies in what the cinema represented: a fundamental change in the practice of leisure, one which simultaneously gravitated towards mass culture and (conversely) the individual. As Peter Bailey has argued, whilst the move towards mass culture in the early-twentieth-century homogenised leisure activities, individuals retained the ability to give such activities “life and distinction”, appropriating them for their own needs and desires.¹²⁵ In this manner, tensions were constructed between “the shifting emphasis of people's leisure from active and communal forms to those that are passive and individual”.¹²⁶ The cinema was a prime example, in Harrison's view, of the new insular modes of leisure where “members of the audience are brought into no relationship with one another”.¹²⁷ Again, MO's investigations into the cinema were motivated, in part, by its political concerns about a working-class becoming not only increasingly passive in its attitudes but also disengaged with the political process. For two Observers writing in 1940, there was a clear binary opposition: “the individual may either seek further to merge himself into the society in which he lives, or deliberately seek to detach himself from that social order”.¹²⁸ Such a shift in the production and consumption of mass entertainment was a new phenomenon and, coupled with technological innovation and film's communicative potential, marked the cinema as an important component of any study into everyday life. In the case of MO and, in particular, during its Worktown study, the tensions between working-class activity or passivity played an important role in the organisation's attempts to document and understand the construction of social and cultural communities. As Robert Snape highlights, the cultural agency of Worktowners was underpinned through aspects of their everyday lives such as their dialects and

¹²⁵ Peter Bailey, “The Politics and Poetics of Modern British Leisure: A Late Twentieth-Century Review”, *Rethinking History* 3, no. 2 (1999), 158.

¹²⁶ Harrison, *The Pub and the People*, 218.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ “Memo on a Study of Leisure”, 1. SxMOA1/2/80/1/A/1.

accents, familial and friendship networks, and participation in leisure pursuits such as sport, all of which contributed to the active production of an idiosyncratic culture divorced from the control of employers or other authorities.¹²⁹

Perceptions of a malignant passivity damaging the social fabric of mid-twentieth-century England can be taken in parallel when considering the tensions in MO material between the cinema, the theatre, and sport. Sports and the theatre had, obviously, been a feature of the British recreational landscape for hundreds of years. By comparison, the cinema was not yet half-a-century old. In common with the suspicions and anxieties which technological innovations so often provoke, cinemas became a prime example for critics of inactivity on the part of the audience, and reflective of the hostility with which the “new” is often regarded. Concerns were voiced that new technologies would excite novel experiences of emotion, potentially damaging to the public. The *Daily Mail*, for example, proposed to rename the entire medium of film “Emotions, Unlimited”. It contended in 1931 that the “conscientious film-goer...who is determined to sample every dish in this extensive menu, will find himself in need of a first-class digestion”: playing to fears that innovative technologies created an emotional strain which could overwhelm individuals and lead to neurosis.¹³⁰ In the privacy of the home, the advent of television some 20 years later was to elicit similar fears. Even today, the perceived inactivity involved in playing video games or using social media has become the latest moral panic. Mid-century concerns about the impact of the cinema, especially on the young, are encapsulated by a 59 year-old diarist who wrote of her dismay during a cinema visit at the lack of vivacity amongst the younger members of the audience. Rather triumphantly, she recounted how her local doctor agreed with her diagnosis of the country's youth: “he puts their apparent lack of stamina and energy down to a lack of spirits – due perhaps to too much cinema and passive entertainment”.¹³¹ The more “active” participatory nature of pastimes such as sport would, conceivably, have been considered by this diarist as a more suitable activity for the young. These views were not, of course, universally held, but such opinions nevertheless remain a key component in conceptual questions concerning passive and active forms of leisure.

¹²⁹ Snape, “Everyday Leisure”, 10; 6.

¹³⁰ “We Can Beat Hollywood Even at Gang Pictures”, *Daily Mail*, 17/08/1931, 5.

¹³¹ Diarist 5402, Miss M. Pratt, London. 28/01/1941. SxMOA1/4/18/2.

Emotional Communities in the Cinema

As has been noted previously, Harrisson's opinion that no relationship existed between cinema-goers is open to debate, and recent scholarship on the construction of emotional communities is certainly relevant to the cinema audience. This is an idea which runs throughout the MO material, suggesting that the cinema was an intensely-personal emotional arena, where the communal interactions and expressions of feeling were idiosyncratic. Ute Frevert's work on the history of emotions supports this notion. She claims that "emotions are inevitably personal and individual; a group, a community or an institution...cannot by nature have emotions".¹³² For Frevert, then, a cinema audience could not possess autonomous emotions in its own right: rather, the audience (as a group) could "influence and coordinate" the expression of individual audience member's emotions.¹³³ Barbara Rosenwein's work on emotional communities, however, adopts a different perspective, and it will be explored further in Chapter Three. She advances the thesis that emotional communities are formed from "a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values, and goals" and therefore share common affective traits.¹³⁴ By watching a film in a cinema auditorium, the audience members were certainly sharing a common stake in the consumption of the film being screened – a film which would elicit similar emotions and feelings from much of the audience. Caution should be exercised, however, in treating the cinema audience as an emotionally-monolithic entity. The subjective nature of film, and the wide variety of opinion voiced, reflects the need for a caveat before ascribing typicality to, say, positive responses in MO to *Gone With The Wind* (1939) or to cinema-going in general.¹³⁵ There was often an ignored minority who did not respond to films in the same way as their fellow audience members and, unless they made those feelings explicit in their MO accounts, their cinema reactions are somewhat irrecoverable.

Nonetheless, a distinct emotional community was formed in the cinema as soon as the house lights were dimmed. Ben Highmore's work on moodscapes suggests that the dimming of auditorium lighting had a physically-transformative effect on an audience which "recalibrated space, made neighbours recede and intensified the directional pull of

¹³² Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 213.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 24; 2.

¹³⁵ Ian Christie, *Audiences Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 16.

the screen”.¹³⁶ In this manner, the cinema audience was unified in both a physical and psychological sense. These concepts feed into readings of the individualistic expressions of emotion which were reflected in cinema questionnaires and interviews organised by MO. It also serves to highlight how the material referenced wider debates about the changing nature of personal experience and emotion in mass public leisure.

Mass Observation cinema research was also informed by social introspection on the nature of emotion. Such preoccupations stemmed largely from the British aspiration of “bettering oneself” through class mobility. Significantly, it was perceived that one of the avenues by which social respectability could be enhanced was through the tight control of the expression of emotion. Hera Cook has highlighted that there was an “insistence in interwar British culture that the emotions a person felt, not just those they expressed, should be sensible and reasonable”.¹³⁷ Such behavioural expectations were reinforced in a 1944 editorial in *The Times* which declared that three-quarters of the population “dislike fuss and public emotional display”.¹³⁸ In many ways a self-deprecating stereotype, emotionally-reticent British society was displayed in the very cinemas which MO set out to study. As film academics have remarked, the film *Brief Encounter* (released in 1945) simultaneously surges with emotion whilst endorsing the need to be “sensible” with one’s feelings.¹³⁹ When Laura continually tells herself to “control” her feelings for Alec, social expectations not only dictate her *displays* of emotion, but also act to suppress the very emotions she *feels*. As Andy Medhurst proposes, the film as a whole “explores the pain and grief caused by having one’s desires destroyed by the pressures of social convention”.¹⁴⁰ Other films, however, approached the issue of emotion from a different perspective, indulging in open emotionality. The Gainsborough melodramas, for example, enjoyed much success at the box office and emphasised both the dangers, and benefits, of overt emotion in their narratives. Often adapted from works of historical fiction written by female novelists, films like *The Wicked Lady* (1945) used their historical dimension to, as Dorothy Leng suggests, allow a “permissiveness in both dialogue and costume which would have been unthinkable in a contemporary melodrama”, thereby enhancing

¹³⁶ Ben Highmore, “Feeling Our Way: Mood and Cultural Studies”, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013), 430.

¹³⁷ Hera Cook, “From Controlling Emotion to Expressing Feelings in Mid-Twentieth-Century England”, *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 3 (2014), 628.

¹³⁸ “Foolish, Fond Farewells”, *The Times*, 09/08/1944, 5.

¹³⁹ Richard Dyer, *Brief Encounter*, BFI Film Classics (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 74.

¹⁴⁰ Andy Medhurst, “That Special Thrill: *Brief Encounter*, Homosexuality and Authorship”, *Screen* 32, no. 2 (1991), 204.

emotional display through themes of conflict between “good” and “bad” women.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, evidence of the emotional restraint championed in *Brief Encounter* (however pervasive it was in reality) can be found in attitudes from some MO material about weeping in the cinema. Respondents were asked in a directive in 1950 if they ever cried in the cinema, and the association between outward displays of emotion and social embarrassment, even in the emotionally-heightened context of the cinema, was made clear.¹⁴² In their analysis of the MO material generated by the directive, Sue Harper and Vincent Porter detail how emotional restraint was considered by many male audience members to be an expected feature of a cinema visit. Male respondents “made strenuous efforts to distance themselves from their own emotions, fearing that an uninhibited response to a weepie would ‘unman’ them in their own eyes, as well as those of others”.¹⁴³ Controlled behaviour such as this fitted into the broader emotional economy of the British stiff-upper-lip, as one male respondent to the directive suggested: “I try to conceal my emotion because of reserve”.¹⁴⁴ Harper and Porter's work goes on to analyse the responses more deeply in terms of gender, alongside other factors such as class and age, and the August 1950 Directive will be examined in Chapter Three. MO investigations certainly reveal much about the nature of emotion, both private and public, as it existed in mid-twentieth-century England.

Mass Observation's Wartime Treatment of the Cinema

In more general terms, the start of the Second World War gave new impetus to Mass Observation. By its own admission, the organisation's activities could not have continued in wartime without substantial government support, both in financial and practical terms. In August 1939, Tom Harrisson approached the Ministry of Information, seeking for MO “to be allowed or encouraged” to continue its studies of civilian life and behaviour; studies which, he argued, took on a new sense of urgency during a time of national emergency.¹⁴⁵ Harrisson even tried to persuade the authorities that the work of his Observers should be considered a form of National Service.¹⁴⁶ The presentation to the government of the

¹⁴¹ Dorothy Leng, “Melodrama, the ‘Woman’s Picture’ and 1940s British Cinema: Sexuality and Pleasure in ‘The Wicked Lady’”, *Changing English* 2, no. 2 (Autumn 1995), 135.

¹⁴² August 1950 Directive, Question 4. SxMOA1/3/128.

¹⁴³ Harper and Porter, “Moved to Tears”, 155.

¹⁴⁴ Directive Respondent 2142, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

¹⁴⁵ “Memorandum on Emergency Problems”, 6. SxMOA1/1/4/6/1.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

organisation as critical to the war effort centred on the argument that its work could measure the efficacy of cinemas as a means of disseminating propaganda. Negotiations resulted in MO being given a contract from the Ministry of Information (thanks to Harrison's friend Mary Adams, who was head of Home Intelligence) and an opportunity to contribute towards government policy. The MOI had tasked MO with recording public morale during the crisis months of 1940 (and any other subjects which the Ministry felt necessary) and a key component of these undertakings was the role of cinema on the morale of the British public.¹⁴⁷

MO was keen to uncover the ways in which the war had changed people's use of the cinema, as well as the film genres which enjoyed the greatest popularity and their effects on cinema-goers. Once again, MO appeared to fix the cinema at the centre of the cultural landscape of England, suggesting that it offered "a modification on the rhythm and tempo of everyday life which is likely to have special function in war time".¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the cinema acted as a cohesive force far beyond the vicissitudes of war, helping to construct ideas of national unity through a British film industry which had reached unparalleled popularity amongst both audiences and critics.¹⁴⁹ MO noted, however, that those in power could be somewhat dismissive of the cinema as a tool of the state, suggesting in 1939 that "unfortunately for the cinema, elderly people took charge of the war. Many in our Cabinet are far from cinema fans".¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the propaganda value of the cinema was acknowledged, and MO adopted an overwhelmingly-positive attitude towards cinema-going as a recreational activity which could enhance the nation's morale. "The film can in fact be immensely potent as 'propaganda'", claimed the organisation on the outbreak of war, "that is to say, as enlightening, encouraging and instructing the mass of people who do not adequately understand what is happening to the country and who want to understand".¹⁵¹

Although such sentiments were phrased in a rather condescending tone, the British public surveyed by MO appeared to agree. In 1942, MO surveyed girls aged 16-17 about their opinions on propaganda films and one response suggested that "the cinema does bring

¹⁴⁷ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 166.

¹⁴⁸ "The Cinema in the First Three Months of War", 1. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

¹⁴⁹ Andy Medhurst, "Myths of Consensus and Fables of Escape", in *Labour's Promised Land: Culture and Society in Britain 1945-51*, ed. J. Fyrth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 290.

¹⁵⁰ "The Cinema in the First Three Months of War", 3. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 37.

the facts before us much more vividly than the daily papers for instance, which makes much more of an impression on some people very lacking in imagination and the power to think for themselves”.¹⁵² The sense that the cinema, as a medium and as an institution, was an intense and captivating way to disseminate propaganda material to the public is present in the MO records, and Harrisson’s investigations into wartime cinema-going were guided significantly by the issue of morale. For example, an Observer’s report on the power of cinema on morale in Preston was highlighted by MO in its Films Topic Collection: “two months after the war [started] came that grand epic *Lion Over England* and wasn’t it patronised! It blew away the cobwebs of fear spun by the Nazi spider propaganda. I thought the Germans were almighty, when war was declared, and it is films like that one about the RAF which make me feel secure”.¹⁵³ Morale was, naturally, also an issue of central concern to the MOI, and the series of daily reports on civilian morale which were instigated by Mary Adams, Harrisson’s ally at the Ministry, were largely based on MO’s findings.¹⁵⁴ Overall, the great domestic upheavals witnessed in the first year of the war did little to damage the cinema in England and, in many respects, cemented its popularity as a leisure practice. MO concluded that whilst “we have had to accustom ourselves to many changes in the cinema, earlier hours of closing, the abolition of matinee prices, propaganda films and so on...these have not produced any cataclysmic change in our cinema-going habits”.¹⁵⁵ One need only look at box office figures to confirm this: admissions in Britain rose year-on-year from 990 million in 1939 to an impressive 1.58 billion in 1945.¹⁵⁶

Even before the outbreak of war, the treatment of the cinema reflected MO’s broader interests in the changing nature of society. The accelerating rate of pre-war technological advancement led MO to declare that “electricity, the aeroplane, the radio – are so new that the process of adaptation to them is still going on”.¹⁵⁷ Whilst the 1930s cinema may have lost some of its novelty, it was still an intriguing institution and, in some quarters, there was an uneasiness about its potential impact (for good or bad) on the masses. Indicative of the problematic negotiations of modernity, one of MO’s founding documents expounded these concerns and, although not directly addressing the medium

¹⁵² “Opinions About Propaganda Films From Girls Aged 16-17”, 27/02/1942. SxMOA1/2/17/1/C.

¹⁵³ “Cinema”, report from John Thornley, c.1941. SxMOA1/2/17/1/C.

¹⁵⁴ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 167.

¹⁵⁵ “Mass-Observation Film Questionnaire”, report from GW, 16/09/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/3/C.

¹⁵⁶ H. E. Browning and A. A. Sorrell, “Cinemas and Cinema-Going in Great Britain”, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 117, no. 2 (1954), 134.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass-Observation* (London: Frederick Muller, 1937), 16.

of film, its sentiments were certainly applicable to the cinema:

“These forces are so new and so terrific that they are commonly thought of as kinds of magic power that can only be wielded by a few men, the technicians. Hence there is a widespread fatalism among the masses about present and possible future effects of science, and a tendency to leave them alone as beyond the scope of the intervention of the common man. The technician, on the other hand, is not concerned with the implications of his activity or its effect on the masses”.¹⁵⁸

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the cinema figured in these thoughts on the balance of ideological power, the interactions between the elite and the masses, and the extreme possibility of a general, working-class public being manipulated by forces over which they had little or no control. The material produced by MO on the cinema – in Worktown, in London, and from diarists around the country – is as haphazard as it is insightful. The motivations behind its production show not only the privileged position of the cinema as a leisure activity, but also reveal the concerns of those who founded MO. These encompassed the very fabric of twentieth-century society: a period of rapid cultural and social change which was witness to shifting relationships between private and public life, the rise of mass media, and constructions of modernity. In this manner, it is a source-base charged with, and revealing of, the strongest of feeling. As a result, it is invaluable in the study of the emotional landscape of England in the mid-twentieth-century.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks:

the Histories of Emotion, Space and Modernity

In 1937, a commercial clerk replied to a Mass Observation Day Survey detailing a recent trip to a Birmingham cinema to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage* (1936). "We would have preferred to be going to the Royalty, a modern cinema, only a stone's throw away", explained the respondent, "but we had come over to see *Sabotage*. I had not been in Harborne Picture House since the 'penny crush' days of my childhood, but the same raddled & wrinkled blonde who pulled a lever to release our metal checks in the old days was in the pay box".¹⁵⁹ Aside from nostalgic reflections on his cinema-going past and on the particular form of modernity represented by the institution of the cinema, the Observer noted the "strong expressions of emotion throughout the audience" which consisted of "Ahs! Ohs [sic] & a general breathiness", as well as the blurred spatial characteristics of the cinema: "the clearcut [sic] division between image and audience became disturbed on account of the little cinema in the film being almost a counterpart of the one in which I was sitting. When, in the film, the audience was asked to leave the cinema after the bomb explosion I had the impression that we were expected to get up".¹⁶⁰ This record illustrates how, in his eye, the intersection between emotion, modernity (itself something of a problematic category), and space could define the cinema in the twentieth-century. The methodological approach of this study will explore how these three notions operated and interacted within wider social and cultural structures in England, factors which, in the minds of millions, elevated the institution of the cinema above that of simple entertainment provider.

The recent emotional and spatial "turns" in the study of history provide incisive opportunities for the cinema historian. They act as an avenue into a field which is, at times, rather intangible, insofar as the cinema-going experience was a highly-subjective activity in which, more often than not, the emotional dimensions were not usually captured. As Richard Maltby suggests, the field holds many practical challenges for scholars who "seek to capture (or at least record) something as insubstantial as

¹⁵⁹ Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 409, 1937. SxMOA1/3.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

dreams...[and], equally irrecoverable, we pursue the heterogenous purposes of the unidentified participant in a myriad of undocumented events”.¹⁶¹ Uncovering the social uses of the twentieth-century cinema, therefore, requires a multi-faceted methodological approach in order to distil a cultural experience which held a large range of personal meanings for a wide section of society. The varied range of sources which have been referenced in the preceding chapter can sometimes aggravate such methodological challenges, but they also offer much when examined against a tapestry of broader conceptual categories, such as emotion.¹⁶² To that end, this chapter weaves together scholarship on space, emotion and modernity with MO material to provide a robust framework to take forward into subsequent chapters. This should allow for the better understanding of the emotional role of cinemas and the evolvment, in the mid-century, of the diverse emotional narratives of cinema-goers.

The Impact of Space on Cinema-going

One of the common threads which runs through the historical records used in this study is the way in which the space of the cinema was treated by audiences as an integral part of their cinema-going. Considerations of space and place figured in MO recollections of attending the cinema just as frequently as references to the (voraciously-consumed) films themselves. The seating capacity of cinemas and the length of queues snaking outside them was often recorded, and one housewife took the opportunity in her MO diary to criticise the physical design of her local picture-house: it led to an “appalling draught” which left her “tensed, shrammed, with cold” and vowing never to return.¹⁶³ It may be a simple point, but it is worth remembering that, compared with the media landscape of today in which film-watching can, quite literally, occur in any space or location with the aid of a tablet computer, the act of watching a film in the first half of the mid-twentieth-century was circumscribed by the physical space of the auditorium. As Kate Bowles has highlighted, the cinema-going habit “was sustained by the rich and parochial interactions within the theatre and the local neighbourhood, as much as by specific films”.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, Giuliana Bruno suggests that it is space which turns film into cinema:

¹⁶¹ Maltby, “New Cinema Histories”, 33.

¹⁶² This is not to say that the voices of historical cinema-goers are lost or ambiguous: as this study shows, sources such as Mass Observation, fan publications, and ethnographic studies undertaken by historians such as Annette Kuhn, hold much information which helps to elucidate mid-century cinema-going.

¹⁶³ Diarist 5474, Mrs Frances Berner, Surrey. 08/11/1948. SxMOA1/4/112.

¹⁶⁴ Kate Bowles, “Lost Horizon: The Social History of the Cinema Audience”, *History Compass* 9, no. 11 (2011), 857.

cinema “needs a space, a public site – a movie ‘house’...[film reception is] changed by the space of the cinema and by the type of physical inhabitation the site yearns for, craves, projects, and fabricates”.¹⁶⁵

Ideas of space and place cannot, consequently, be divorced from an examination of historical cinema-going, and it is therefore appropriate to reflect on what exactly is meant when space is discussed. In many ways, the definitions of “space” and “place” are rather abstract and elusive for historians interested in following the spatial “turn” in scholarship.¹⁶⁶ Sociologists and geographers have often led the field in considering the character of space, its cultural and social dimensions, and its relationship with place. Political geographer John Agnew has, for example, broken down the term “place” into three distinct features.¹⁶⁷ Firstly, he suggests that place exists as a location: that is, an absolute with a fixed and quantifiable aspect (a map grid reference, for example). The second is place as a locale or, as Charles Withers has summarised, “the material setting for social relations”.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, Agnew argues that one can identify a *sense* of place or a local “structure of feeling”, which Withers notes emerges from “the affective attachment” that people have to a particular space.¹⁶⁹ These three components of Agnew’s formulation of place hint at the multitude of ways in which the notion of place and, indeed, space, is examined by the academy. This diversity affects how cinemas and cinema audiences can be located in historical study with varying degrees of specificity. For example, cinema space can be broken down into different scales: the immediate space surrounding the cinema-goers in their seats; the relationship between this intimate space and the wider auditorium; the location of the auditorium in relation to the cinema’s ancillary attractions such as the cafe; the entire cinema building and its position on the road; a cinema’s location in relation to a cinema-goer’s house or other sites of public recreation; the location of the cinema in a particular neighbourhood; the distribution of cinemas in an entire town or city, and so it continues.

¹⁶⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2007), 44–45.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example: Ralph Kingston, “Mind Over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn”, *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 1 (2010): 111–121.; Richard White, “What Is Spatial History?” (Spatial History Lab, Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis: Stanford University, 2010); Alistair Geddes and Ian N. Gregory, eds., *Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS and Spatial History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Courtney J. Campbell, “Space, Place and Scale: Human Geography and Spatial History in Past and Present”, *Past & Present*, 2016.

¹⁶⁷ John Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 28.

¹⁶⁸ Charles W. J. Withers, “Place and the ‘Spatial Turn’ in Geography and in History”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 4 (2009), 639.

¹⁶⁹ Agnew, *Place and Politics*, 28; Withers, “Place and the ‘Spatial Turn’”, 640.

In his influential work *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre emphasises the production of *social* space which incorporates the actions of both individuals and of the collective: the cinema auditorium, with its tensions between private and public, is a prime example of this.¹⁷⁰ Social space, Lefebvre continues, works “as a tool for the analysis of society”, again reinforcing the validity of using spatial history as a method by which to investigate the past.¹⁷¹ From the sources studied in this thesis, it is evident that the cinema, as a public space, held special meaning for many people in the mid-twentieth-century. Examination of Lefebvre’s thesis reveals how the singular notion of “space” can be broken down into several different forms which aid the understanding of how it functions, changes and is affected by social and cultural factors.

The cinema could be considered, to use Lefebvre’s term, as a “representational space”: that is, a space “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols...[a] space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate”.¹⁷² From the personal writings of Mass Observers, and from memories of cinema-going gathered by scholars such as Annette Kuhn, it is clear that many people considered cinema-going to be, through connotative associations, something of an habitual, or even a quasi-ritualistic, practice. As Kuhn highlights, memories of habitual cinema-going allowed time to be perceived in different ways: “time spent in the pictures is remembered as qualitatively different from ordinary time. It is more elastic, more flexible, more giving”.¹⁷³ This habit was characterised in numerous ways, from patrons always choosing to sit in a familiar section of the auditorium, to attending at a particular time and on a regular day of the week. On a further level, symbols of the cinematic experience – the paper tickets, the plush seating, the smart uniforms of staff – helped in the formation of the cinema as both familiar and exceptional and, for many, the cinema came to represent an antithesis to the everyday. Connotative associations also stemmed from physical aspects of the cinema space, not least from the exotic architecture of many cinemas constructed in England during the 1930s; they served to reflect and, indeed, enhance, the extrinsic quality of Hollywood films. Cinematic symbols, exoticism, and modern spaces thus became an integral part of cinema-going.

¹⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷³ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 224.

The oft-quoted “dream world” represented by picture-houses was reinforced by the darkness of the auditorium; and the smart uniforms of cinema staff emphasised the theatricality and exceptional nature of the space. The twentieth-century cinema was a representational space as the cinematic images and symbols found on both the screen and in the institution itself were appropriated by audience members into the multi-sensory, multi-faceted leisure practice known as cinema-going. In a film report written for MO in 1940, the Observer deemed it worth noting that, possibly in a nod to wartime patriotism, the “curtains around the stage and screen [were] in red, blue and white. Ditto lights illuminating them”.¹⁷⁴ Symbolism came to be intertwined with the act of film-watching, and the continuation of cinema-going during wartime was, for some people, a representation of defiance, a feeling encapsulated in a letter to *Picturegoer* in 1940: “it is a joyous thing to go to the pictures these days...our local cinemas are packed every night and it’s ‘a tonic in itself’ to hear the great shouts of laughter even though the ‘Jerrys’ are overhead”.¹⁷⁵

Lefebvre also discusses the idea of “abstract space” which presupposes a “spatial economy...[which] valorises certain relationships between people in particular places (shops, cafés, cinemas etc.) and thus gives rise to connotative discourses concerning these places; these in turn generate ‘consensuses’ or conventions”.¹⁷⁶ One of the most important elements of this concept of abstract space is the idea that in creating a spatial economy, abstract space exists with a set of behavioural rules to which people must adhere in order to satisfy social conventions. These determine the behaviour of the users of the space, and strong parallels can be drawn between this notion and the nature of the mid-century cinema. Making as little noise as possible and not talking were the most obvious examples of these cinematic codes of behaviour. In the pages of *Picturegoer*, one woman expressed her displeasure at her fellow audience members’ behaviour within the auditorium: “Can’t something be done about some of the rough noisy hoodlums who visit the cinema...one of our local cinemas is the noisiest where the boys yell and whistle to girls about half a dozen rows back. This is very unfair and annoying to others when it is their only pleasure after doing a hard day’s work”.¹⁷⁷ The dimming of houselights created a space in which this behaviour (a deviation from social convention) was a matter of concern or annoyance for

¹⁷⁴ Film Report, Gaumont Cinema, Watford, 21/05/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Mrs M. Harris, *Picturegoer*, 06/11/1940. Collected by MO. SxMOA1/2/17/6/A.

¹⁷⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 56.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from “A Regular Reader”, *Picturegoer*, undated. Collected by MO. SxMOA1/2/17/6/A.

many people. The abstract nature of the cinema space was not limited to poor behaviour. One of the most surprising aspects of studying the history of England's cinemas and, in particular, smaller venues, is the intense familiarity of the space: a feeling which informed audience behaviour. For example, an MO diarist writing in 1940 mentioned that her nearest cinema had "odd local customs about seats. Although most of the seats are technically unreserved, habitual patrons have particular seats. These are never filled until just before the show is due to begin".¹⁷⁸ This again emphasises the abstract nature of the cinema space, in which unwritten codes of behaviour – known to regular patrons who would have absorbed such rules through regular attendance – were created and affirmed.¹⁷⁹

The Value of Emotion Theory

In the context of debates around the meanings of space and feeling, it is important to refine the elusive notion of "emotion". The study of emotions revolves around a central debate which contests the origin of emotional feeling. Emotions may originate in, and be determined by, biology: that is, they are universal to humanity and are underpinned by a physiological reaction.¹⁸⁰ Alternatively, they may be viewed as social constructs, dependent on cultural context to acquire meaning and potency. Debates about the exact nature of emotion will continue interminably in the literature of sociology and psychology, but something of a consensus has emerged which casts the experience of emotion as a convergence of biological states and cultural expectations.¹⁸¹ Rather than being a fundamental physiological or psychological phenomenon, emotions become more malleable, affective concepts. As Simon Williams concludes, emotions have "irreducible biological dimensions" but are "endlessly elaborated, like colours on a painter's palette, across culture, time and place".¹⁸² In the context of this study, this union of physiological and cultural influences is crucial, and emotion should not be divorced from either the body or from society. The emotions experienced by cinema-goers, which form the basis of these discussions can, of course, be described in simplistic terms such as joy, sadness,

¹⁷⁸ Diarist 5280, Emmeline Cohen. December 1940. SxMOA1/4/17.

¹⁷⁹ A comparable abstract space which came under the study of MO is the pub. Social conventions and particular ways of behaving, particularly in a male-dominated environment, were prevalent in this public space, as *The Pub and the People* noted.

¹⁸⁰ Dariusz Galasiński, *Men and the Language of Emotions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

¹⁸¹ Jerome Kagan, *What Is Emotion?: History, Measures, and Meanings* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2007), 154.

¹⁸² Simon Williams, *Emotion and Social Theory: Corporeal Reflections on the (Ir) Rational* (London: SAGE, 2001), 132.

anger, and shame. It is vital, however, to go beyond these single, rather one-dimensional words, and to understand just what these emotional feelings represented, how they were viewed, why they were felt, and the extent to which they differed across the demographic of a cinema audience. The physiological act of crying at a film, for example, does not in itself indicate sadness. Understanding that emotions are primarily, but not exclusively, a result of cultural contexts (and therefore shift and modulate throughout history), permits a deeper analysis of the personal significance of cinema-going to people in the past.

As referenced in the Introduction, the application of Lefebvre's framework to England's cinemas is certainly a useful way to identify the key characteristics which made the cinema a distinctive public space; one which grew rapidly during the 1930s and began to decline significantly in the latter half of the 1950s. Lefebvre's work is enhanced, however, when combined with theories from the history of emotion. This methodological approach can draw out the relationship between space and feeling which was so crucial to experiences of mid-twentieth-century cinema-going. Lefebvre addresses the public and private nature of space, emphasising that one "situates oneself in space...one places oneself at the centre, designates oneself, measures oneself, and uses oneself as a measure...[adopting an] individual and a public identity".¹⁸³ This concept is particularly important when considering the expression of emotion in public, and the common aversion to an outward display of feelings in a public space. As the 1950 MO directive concerning crying in the cinema revealed, individuals not only placed themselves in the spatial dimensions of the auditorium, but also fixed themselves in relation to the audience, measuring their individual emotional responses with those around them. This allies with Sara Ahmed's discussion of the "sociality of emotions" and the difficulties of identifying the origin of emotion, whether from the individual or from the collective. Ahmed's approach stems from cultural studies and, as such, is not concerned with the historicising of emotions. Nevertheless, her work offers a useful contemporary commentary and conceptual framework on the conditions in which emotions are produced and experienced, and how these intricate environments (such as the cinema auditorium) can sometimes make it difficult for the historian to access historical emotion with clarity.

¹⁸³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 182.

Ahmed notes that emotion could either be viewed as originating from within the body and emanating outward, or “come from without and move inward”.¹⁸⁴ The “outside in” model is evident in crowd psychology (which, in this case, is to be found in the cinema audience) where “it is assumed that the crowd *has* feelings, and that the individual gets drawn into the crowd by feeling the crowd’s feelings as its own”.¹⁸⁵ However, such a model, as Ahmed notes, is problematic because it “assumes that emotions are something ‘we have’...Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others”.¹⁸⁶ One could consider whether the mid-century cinema audience aligned an individual’s emotional response to a film with the wider collective (with its attendant social expectations for emotional restraint), or did an emotional response originate in the individual spectator and consequently guide group feeling? For Ahmed, such a question is tangential: “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects”.¹⁸⁷ Application of this idea in a historical context, however, raises problems as emotions were perceived by respondents to MO in those very terms: individual and social. For the emotions historian, it is somewhat difficult to identify or retrieve the boundaries privileged by Ahmed in her discussion of contemporary feeling, and so the individual and social both act as a route into historical emotion. However, in a similar manner to Ahmed, Lefebvre also argues that the possession or consumption of communal spaces “cannot be entirely privatised”, and it follows that such public spaces must, to a certain degree, stimulate public displays of an individual’s private emotions.¹⁸⁸ The public/private tensions within the auditorium stemmed from the very nature of the cinema space, a space which then impacted the manifestation of emotional reactions to films, whether within the individual or the collective.

“Minds are as big as their environment”: The Importance of Space

Ahmed’s semantic approach, discussing “surfaces and boundaries” of emotion echoes Lefebvre’s discussion of “visible boundaries” which affect the conditions and formulations

¹⁸⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 57.

of space.¹⁸⁹ This principle suggests that “any determinate and hence demarcated space necessarily embraces some things and excludes others”, allowing space to take on a distinct identity of its own.¹⁹⁰ The typical layout of a cinema, a foyer separating the darkened auditorium from the street, was an important element in its spatial identity: an identity from which an emotional threshold was constructed. The darkness of the auditorium was, arguably, the most fundamental element in the construction of this spatial identity. It exemplifies how light (or rather, the absence of it) had a vital effect on the conception and experience of space and, in turn, on emotionality. In 1940, a report for MO highlighted this unique spatial attribute: “the darkness provides the privacy in which one is not afraid to react as an individual and even perhaps to hiss a Minister whom you would only dare glare at in the flesh or daylight”.¹⁹¹ Although many enjoyed the cinema habit and the degree of emotional anonymity afforded them by the darkness, people often expressed guilt at entering the darkened auditorium during daylight hours (especially if it was dark outside once they left), again feeding into a popular perception that cinema-going was, perhaps, not the best use of one’s time. Of course, not everyone found the space of the cinema to be an enjoyable environment during either the day or at night, as one MO diarist noted in 1941: “came out [of the cinema] at 8.40 into moonlight and cool peace. Dislike the tiring stuffy noise of cinemas”.¹⁹²

As examination of MO material in the following chapter will reveal, the cinema boundary excluded (or, at the very least, subdued) social expectations of emotional restraint in public settings. It embraced a permissive attitude towards displays of feeling which was antithetical to many other public spaces in England in the twentieth-century. Consequently, the physical boundary of the foyer between street and screen served not only to delineate the leisure space in practical terms (namely, to allow for the payment of admission) but it also directly affected the formation of the emotional landscape within. One MO respondent, for instance, wrote how moving across the boundary into the cinema space (removed as it was from the outside world) would change her emotional responses and make her more likely to cry: “it has often struck me that similar incidents [to those shown in films] in real life, either in my own life or those connected with me, certainly wouldn’t move me to tears”.¹⁹³ Cavernous cinema-halls, cinematic technology

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁹¹ “Social Research and the Film”, by TM, 08/10/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/2/H.

¹⁹² Diarist 5423, Miss O. Cockett, London. August 1941. SxMOA1/4/112.

¹⁹³ Directive Respondent 3640, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

and, more generally, open public spaces, became associated with a particular type of emotion and general emotional health, as noted by an MO respondent in a 1937 Day Survey record:

“Minds are as big as their environment allows. The thoughtful individual suffers tortures in cramped surroundings...Noble streets and imposing facades encourage respectability, good public order, feelings of stability or dormant power (the City, any Bank, Selfridges, Marks & Spencer’s, and (lately) Woolworth’s). Small buildings make small minds, low ceilings make for depression, dark corners spread gloom by day, 40-watt yellow lamps ruin eyesight and drive people out of doors – to the public house, the cinema, the streets. Nerves suffer from alternating current lighting, neon signs, traffic, faulty sound equipment in cinemas”.¹⁹⁴

If, as Lefebvre suggests, boundaries help to demarcate spaces, then the separation of different spaces can be said to help create their distinct identities. Lefebvre develops this by calling for a consideration of “dominated” and “appropriated” space. Simply put, dominated space is a space which is created with a specific purpose in mind, and is subject to control by an authority. Appropriated space, on the other hand, is developed and moulded by those who use it. In order to further understand these concepts, and how they are applicable to the cinema, reference must be made to Lefebvre’s notions of *representational space* and *spaces of representation*, both of which are bound with spatial practices. Spaces of representation, for Lefebvre, are the rational spaces of engineers’ and architects’ drawings which determine how a space ought to be.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, representational space, as we have seen, considers space as “lived and experienced through a set of symbolic associations”.¹⁹⁶

This representational space is, ultimately, dominated space because it is “passively experienced” and is underpinned by the hegemonic spaces of representation which are often tools for the state to project a sense of power (say, for example, in urban development).¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Lefebvre argues that dominated space is “transformed – and mediated – by technology...in order to dominate space, technology introduces a new form into a pre-existing space”.¹⁹⁸ From the many cinema brochures which proudly

¹⁹⁴ Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 316, 1937. SxMOA1/3.

¹⁹⁵ Bruce D’Arcus, “Production of Space”, in *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Barney Warf (California: SAGE, 2006), 385.

¹⁹⁶ White, “What Is Spatial History?”, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 164–165; Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 102.

¹⁹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 164–165.

proclaimed that the “zenith” of “technical knowledge and mechanical equipment” epitomised the cinema experience, it is clear that technology played an important part in the cinema’s modern image.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, the development of sound in moving pictures was a major technological advancement in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Consequently, the cinema can be considered as a representational dominated space, complete with symbolic meaning and tangible technological advances (such as projection and sound reproduction), as well as more utilitarian technology such as air conditioning.

Lefebvre contends, however, that the idea of dominated space “attains its full meaning only when it is contrasted with the opposite and inseparable concept of appropriation”.²⁰⁰ At its most literal, the act of appropriating a space is when an individual or a group adopts a space according to their own needs, sometimes at odds with the intentions of those who originally constructed or devised the space. In many respects, the hegemony imbued in the domination of space is tempered by the appropriation of space, itself subject to historical processes. The notion of appropriated space has gained the most traction in discussion of the urban environment and the rights of people to use, occupy and access public spaces in the city.²⁰¹ As Mark Purcell summarises, Lefebvre envisages that “not only is appropriation the right to occupy already-produced urban space, it is also the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants”: people take an active role in the production of space (in both a physical and mental sense) according to their desires.²⁰² Essentially, the development of urban landscapes in England during the twentieth-century, and of public leisure provision within them, created a persistent tension between the public and private, the controlled and the unbounded, the dominated and the appropriated.

Children, the Cinema, and the Press

Lefebvre’s dominated and appropriated spaces, when applied to the cinema, are useful tools in uncovering the ways in which space interacted with emotion and modernity. Beginning with cinema audiences, it is clear that his assertion that people “are collective as well as individual subjects inasmuch as the individuals are always members of groups or

¹⁹⁹ Souvenir Programme for the Opening of the Savoy Cinema, Brighton, 01/08/1930. ACC 11464.

²⁰⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 165.

²⁰¹ Mark Purcell, “Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant”, *GeoJournal* 58, no. 2 (2002), 103.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

classes seeking to appropriate the space in question” can be a useful method to consider how cinema-going was a method of spatial appropriation.²⁰³ All cinema-goers appropriated the cinema space to various degrees, and children became voracious users of the space. In a series of reports for MO in 1941, one Observer commented that the cinemas of Watford were inundated with children on Saturdays who had been deposited by their mothers, and that the Playa was a cinema “in a working-class neighbourhood...very popular with children, for whom a Western film was always put on Saturdays”.²⁰⁴ This is an example of how cinemas, ostensibly sites of leisure, were appropriated by parents for practical childcare reasons, to both the parents’ and children’s advantage.²⁰⁵ Even well into the 1950s, the usefulness of the cinema space, situated as it was away from the domestic, was manifold for women, punctuating the rhythm of domestic work. As a writer in *Picturegoer* noted: “You learn a lot in cinema queues. While waiting for ‘I Want To Live’, I heard two women talking...[sic] ‘I go to the pictures because there you *have* to sit down – at home I’m always on the trot”’.²⁰⁶ Commercial imperatives were, of course, at play in the genesis of children’s clubs. As such, the process of appropriation by children and parents was weakened as child attendance was facilitated by the “top-down” control of the cinema managers and circuits who instigated Saturday morning clubs. Parents could not have appropriated cinemas in the same way had cinema circuits not provided the Saturday screenings. Nevertheless, the cinema remained a space in which children could develop a degree of autonomy, often away from parental supervision.

The prevalence of child cinema-going provoked much debate, particularly in the national newspapers of the time, as they considered the positive and negative effects of the cinema on the nation’s youth. Positive commentary on the relationship between children and the cinemas included a consideration of cinema clubs. Calls for children’s clubs had been made as early as the start of the 1930s, and suggestions were even made for the building of cinemas solely devoted to children.²⁰⁷ In the immediate post-war years, most of the prominent cinema chains established Saturday morning screenings specially for children, a natural evolution given the fact that many mothers already used the cinema as a form of childcare. Odeon created the “Mickey Mouse Club” (later renamed the rather prosaic “Odeon Children’s Club” by J. Arthur Rank) in anticipation of establishing the cinema-

²⁰³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 57.

²⁰⁴ Reports on Individual Watford Cinemas, by Joyce Ausden, 01/07/1941. SxMOA1/2/17/1/B.

²⁰⁵ Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure*, 166.

²⁰⁶ “Focus: Long Sit”, by Marita Leeson, *Picturegoer*, 05/12/1959, 3.

²⁰⁷ “Why Not Cinemas for Children?”, *Daily Mirror*, 26/03/1934, 12.

going habit in a young audience.²⁰⁸ The effort appeared to pay dividends, as between 1948 and 1952 general cinema admissions fell by 13%, whereas for children they rose by some 14%.²⁰⁹ Again, the educational potential of the clubs was recognised, and the *Daily Mirror* recommended that they could “be an effective instrument of enlarging the children’s experience for giving clear-cut knowledge of certain kinds”.²¹⁰

As with most aspects of the cinema, children’s cinema clubs attracted some criticism, especially in newspapers. At the start of the 1950s, estimates in the press put regular attendance at the clubs between 400,000 and 500,000 but *The Manchester Guardian* argued that their popularity was the result of “children not getting enough fun and stories either at school or at home...girls from unhappy homes are the most frequent attenders”.²¹¹ It would not, therefore, be unreasonable to conclude that the cinema was perceived by some to be an undesirable and inferior venue for children. In earlier years, the absence of more “worthy” cultural activities and, in particular, suitable provision for outdoor recreation, resulted in the cinema becoming the default pastime for many children. A report into children’s cinema attendance by London County Council in 1932, for example, concluded that “it is a great misfortune that thousands of children should spend Saturday afternoon in cinema houses, not because it does them moral injury, but because it is a clearly inappropriate expenditure of time”, and advocated “further extension of playgrounds and playing fields”.²¹² A proliferation of alternatives for the cinema were demanded, and *The Times* contended that boys “would prefer a well-equipped workshop and many girls a warm and well-ventilated playroom to the 2d or 3d...confinement” of the cinema.²¹³

In general, however, attitudes towards children’s cinema-going softened and by the post-war years cinema clubs were considered to be tools for social good, providing the nation’s youth with entertainment in a cultural landscape where the opportunities for organised (and, importantly, controlled) childhood recreation were rather limited. In 1946, the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Children’s Entertainment Films suggested that “facilities for entertainment, for recreation, and for encouraging constructive activities for

²⁰⁸ Stuart Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 88–89.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²¹⁰ “How Films Affect the Minds of Children”, *Daily Mirror*, 03/03/1932, 2.

²¹¹ “A Big Increase in Cinema-Going Among Children”, *The Manchester Guardian*, 19/12/1951, 6.

²¹² “How Films Affect the Minds of Children”, *Daily Mirror*.

²¹³ “Effects of Films on Children”, *The Times*, 03/03/1932, 9.

this age group are tragically lacking” and commended cinema clubs for “trying, in part, to meet this most urgent need”.²¹⁴ The cinema held a great attraction for children as it allowed them to spend time with their peer group, and film culture significantly permeated children’s lives.²¹⁵ Radio programmes and comics, in particular, extended film consumption beyond the cinema, and publications which presumed cinematic knowledge (such as *Film Fan*, featuring comic strip versions of characters and personalities from films) were very popular among children.²¹⁶ Media such as these, alongside the pervasiveness of childhood recreational roleplay such as “Cowboys and Indians”, demonstrate the centrality of film in twentieth-century children’s culture. At first glance, children’s cinema clubs may appear to have been simple commercial operations which exploited this predilection, but as Stuart Hanson describes, the children had to “abide by a series of rules that extended beyond the cinema, such as ‘I will be truthful and honourable’ and ‘obey my elders’”.²¹⁷ In this manner the clubs aimed to instil, through filmic entertainment, moral integrity in the minds of their young audiences and to affect their behaviour far outside the cinema’s walls. This control is another example of Lefebvre’s dominated space in which technology (a key element in the creation of dominated space) was used in a recreational context to reinforce social structures which implied the authority of adults over children.

To children (and, indeed, many adults) the figure of the cinema commissioner was a physical manifestation of the cinema as a dominated and regulated public space. Often ex-military and dressed in uniforms embellished with gold braid, commissioners cut imposing figures both within the cinema and at the entrance. They became, as Sarah Stubbings notes, “the representatives of cinema’s vociferous policing of behaviour” in which their smart uniforms were “central to their unarguable authority”, and were often remembered by cinema-goers as indomitable features of cinema-going right up to the late 1950s.²¹⁸ The authority of commissioners was never as visible as their patrolling of queues to enter the cinema, and an MO report of a queue to see *Gone With the Wind* at the Ritz in Leicester Square noted that “all the people were eyeing the commissioner

²¹⁴ “Children at the Cinema”, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, by Marjory Allen, 16/01/1946, 5.

²¹⁵ Terry Staples, *All Pals Together: The Story of Children’s Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 144.

²¹⁶ Owen Dudley Edwards, *British Children’s Fiction in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 89.

²¹⁷ Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*, 89.

²¹⁸ Sarah Stubbings, “‘Look Behind You!’: Memories of Cinema-Going in the ‘Golden Age’ of Hollywood”, in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 74.

with some concern, intent upon getting in”.²¹⁹ Similarly, the film critic Leslie Halliwell recalled a childhood attempt to see a re-issue of *King Kong* (1933) in Bolton: “I went down hopefully on my own, seeking strangers who might act as escort; but that very week the Odeon had acquired a brisk and hawk-eyed new commissionaire, who shooed me off at every attempt”.²²⁰ Sometimes, however, the authoritative commissionaire was a reassuring fixture of the cinema environment, as a 1939 MO interview with a representative of the Granada circuit made plain:

“A lot of things about us have become institutions. There’s Tiny the commissionaire at Tooting. He’s been there since the theatre opened. He’ll see a fellow bring a girl out for the first time, then they will be engaged, and finally they will bring the family along. He handles the queue like a father, keeps the old ladies in their places, looks after everybody, keeps them all happy while they are waiting. There’s an art to handling a queue. And he tells me this. If a girl and a fellow have a row in a queue, the fellow will leave the queue but never the girl; I didn’t know that before”.²²¹

The importance of the commissionaire runs slightly counter to Lefebvre’s emphasis on spatial characteristics as the constituent element in creating dominated space: rather, the dominated space of the cinema was sometimes created from the activities of people within the space itself.

On a practical basis, the popularity of cinemas was ascribed not only to their recreational value, but also “to the desire of parents to get them [the children] off the streets or out of the home at certain hours”.²²² Whilst cinemas may have been dominated spaces, they were also appropriated ones, acting as extensions of the home (which carried reassuring connotations of a domesticity familiar to both children and adults alike). The reply of a 15 year-old girl to J. P. Mayer’s 1948 sociological study of cinema audiences emphasised this in explicit terms, writing of the emotional comfort provided by the cinema after the death of her brother: “Mummy and I felt ‘at home’ in a cinema, I suppose that is why it was only two weeks after his death...that we went to the cinema”.²²³ More generally, the appropriation of the cinema signified for children an absence of parental supervision. An MO report from July 1947 into children’s clubs in Coventry found that noise in the auditorium became marked as children used the space for recreational activities aside

²¹⁹ Cinema Queues Report by PJ, 03/03/1942. SxMOA1/2/17/3/D.

²²⁰ Leslie Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts: Half a Lifetime at the Movies* (London: Granada, 1985), 64.

²²¹ Interview With Ewart Hodgson by LE, 28/12/1939. SxMOA1/2/17/4/A/7.

²²² “Local Censors Must Not Shut Children Out of Cinemas”, *Daily Mail*, 15/02/1932, 9.

²²³ J. P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences: Sociological Studies* (London: Dobson, 1948), 36.

from film-watching, although it recorded that managers believed discipline to be “satisfactory/good/all right”.²²⁴ Appropriation of the cinema space by parents in the transferring of responsibility for the children’s safety to the staff during cinema clubs is also evident in the document: “all managers, but especially those at the Plaza and Regal cinemas, took special precautions to prevent children running into the road after leaving the cinema”.²²⁵ This example suggests how spatial appropriation served a functional purpose, and how the cinema was a flexible space which was used in ways beyond that of a simple leisure venue.

The care taken by staff to prevent children from running into the road after exiting the cinema reflects another dimension of space: the characterisation of dangerous space. In his study of childhood freedoms in the twentieth-century, Mathew Thomson points to how the Second World War helped to idealise the home as a safe and vital space for the nation’s well-being.²²⁶ The outside world, in contrast, was cast as an unpredictable space, which “offered an experiment in exposing children to a landscape of danger, violence but also freedom” outside of the domestic.²²⁷ This point will be revisited in the coming chapters. In many ways, the cinema acted as a space fixed between these two extremes: at once not only homely but also public. On the one hand, it was a familiar and safe space for children, bounded by physical walls and controlled by figures of authority such as commissionaires. On the other, it was an exciting communal space, easily appropriated by groups of children, removed as it was from the parental supervision of the home.

Place vs Space in Spatial Theory

It would now be useful to move away from these specific examples to return to the different language used in discussions of spatial theory; and to consider how this theoretical framework can aid consideration of mid-twentieth-century cinemas. In his analysis of spatial dimensions, Michel de Certeau argues that there is a fundamental difference between the terms “place” and “space”. A place, he argues, is a fixed, stable

²²⁴ Report from the City of Coventry Training College Film Society – Survey of Children’s Cinema Going with Special Reference to Children’s Clubs, July 1947. SxMOA1/2/17/15/H/4.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

concept and a precise entity: the cinema building, in this instance. Space, on the other hand, is a “practiced [sic] place” and open to interpretation, change, and fluidity.²²⁸ The cinema foyer and auditorium (the place) becomes a space when people enter it, bringing their individual emotions, memories and perceptions to the film-watching experience. As will become clear in the following chapters, many recollections about cinemas in Bolton and Brighton delineate the space of the cinema – that is, the social dimension of the physical building – as an important element in choosing cinema-going over other forms of entertainment which were available in the towns. Reports in MO from mid-century cinema-goers consistently identify the cinema in emotive terms, and the affective familiarity which was ascribed to the leisure space (something which will become apparent in the following chapters) supports Tim Cresswell’s assertion that “when humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way...it becomes a place”.²²⁹ This runs counter to de Certeau’s argument that it is *space* which is produced from human uses of a *place*, but perhaps one should be less concerned with the precise language used in spatial theories and focus more on the central tenet of both academics: that places/spaces hold reciprocal relationships with those who inhabit those places/spaces, and who give physical environments social and cultural meaning.

In common with Lefebvre, many other academic theories on the nature of space emphasise how places/spaces are not fixed spatial vessels in which societal developments occur, but are always in a state of “becoming, always the results of historically-contingent processes and social practices”.²³⁰ Indeed, Richard White suggests that Lefebvre’s work introduced historians to the notion that space is not simply “filled by history...it is rather something that human beings produce over time”.²³¹ This agency is key: historical spaces have to be understood as active and shifting concepts, a direct result of social and cultural circumstances, rather than as passive arenas which played host to such conditions. Places can also be viewed as avenues to a “way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” and cinemas – as places in the urban landscape – are a good example of this.²³² A respondent to an MO questionnaire demonstrated this in 1938, writing that cinemas “help you to understand things better, and give you a good idea about cities, countrys [sic],

²²⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 118.

²²⁹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 10.

²³⁰ Withers, “Place and the ‘Spatial Turn’ in Geography and in History”, 642.

²³¹ White, “What Is Spatial History?”, 2.

²³² Cresswell, *Place*, 11.

people, and customs, of which otherwise you would know very little”.²³³ The environment of the cinema was far from an inert context in which to consume film media. It was imbued with a palpable spatial character of its own, thereby enjoying status as a useful and lived *place* for many people.

Post-modern spatial theories, in particular, offer historians much when considering this spatial symbolism and its function as a repository of social meaning.²³⁴ Ralph Kingston, for example, has suggested that “in order to become more self-fulfilled, an ‘inhabitant’ must develop his or her own spatial imagination, his or her own ‘lived space’”.²³⁵ Cinemas, in this manner, acted as leisure landmarks in the spatial imaginations of people, defining and symbolising life stages such as childhood and adolescent courting; a shared public space became a personal site for significant life experiences. One reply to MO’s 1938 “What is Happiness?” survey recalled a warm nostalgia for such events: “occasionally a rare visit to the cinema with my husband makes me feel happy and think of my courtship days”.²³⁶ These specific and potent meanings can be traced in MO material, and the value of these cinema accounts is also supported by Mike Pearson, who stresses the importance of memory and biographical narratives in formulations of space.²³⁷

Modernity

Key to the application of historical space as a conceptual category is its interaction with ideas about the modern, and the literary scholar Phillip Wegner highlights how postmodern theorists cast modernity as “both a historical and geographical-spatial project, a continuous dissolution and reorganisation of the environments, including our bodies, that we all inhabit”.²³⁸ Academic study of the development of modernity in the twentieth-century must, therefore, consider its relationship with the spaces which were familiar to people in the past. A clear example of the modernity symbolised by the space of the cinema and its position in mid-century English society is its technological

²³³ Response Dora Ball, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

²³⁴ Kingston, “Mind Over Matter?”, 112.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

²³⁶ Anonymous reply to “What Is Happiness” Survey, 1938. SxMOA1/2/7/1/A/2.

²³⁷ Mike Pearson, *“In Comes I”: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), 4.

²³⁸ Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11.

innovation. Indeed, the cinema auditorium was presented as a pioneering public space in which technology could enhance leisure time. A brochure for Brighton's Cinema De Luxe cinema assured its patrons in 1930 that "your health, quite as much as your entertainment, is considered when you visit this cinema. During your presence atmospheric disinfection is carried out with pleasantly perfumed germicides".²³⁹ In an account of the opening of the Rialto cinema in Blackburn in 1931, *The Manchester Guardian* reinforced the links between cinemas and modernity, declaring that it "embodies all the latest ideas regarding construction, accommodation, lighting, and appointments. It is spoken of as the wonder cinema".²⁴⁰ The paper continued its praise by portraying the cinema as a symbol of modernity: "audiences are sure to be delighted with the decorative colour and lighting of the cinema. It is in this department particularly that modern progress is most marked".²⁴¹

Indeed, cinemas often became a mark of civic pride. New suburban cinemas were described as "ornate and self-assertive, rather out of harmony with their surroundings of villas and shops".²⁴² Far from being a criticism, this was a favourable assessment of their architectural design, viewed as representing exciting and modern urban redevelopment. Moreover, these suburban cinemas were considered to be more community-focused and affordable than the larger and more anonymous cinemas located in expensive city centres. A diarist for MO noted a visit to a cinema in 1940, for example, and recorded that "as we went out of the cinema the commissionaire was saying, 'standing for 2/6, seats at 3/6 only'. And this was a suburban cinema": the clear implication being that such elevated prices were unusual for her local picture-house. Visual splendour and grand architecture were not the only means by which cinemas could assert their modernity. The Trocadero cinema in Elephant and Castle had opened at the beginning of the 1930s and was declared the largest cinema in the country, seating over 3,500 patrons.²⁴³ In an article subtitled "Wonder Cinemas of the Suburbs", the *Daily Mirror* reported that "great care is taken to keep the entire staff – nearly 200 – fit and well. They have their own gymnasium, and drilling classes are held once a week on the roof".²⁴⁴ Evolving from late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century developments in employee welfare, this was viewed in the

²³⁹ Programme for Cinema De Luxe, Brighton, February 1930. SB 791.4MIS.

²⁴⁰ "Colour Lighting and Comfort", *The Manchester Guardian*, 18/12/1931, 4.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² "The Cinema in Manchester: A Crisis Developing", *The Manchester Guardian*, 20/12/1931, 11.

²⁴³ The opening night of the Trocadero was far from an event of modern efficiency and wonder. The opening performance was marred by fog from a London pea-souper, which swept into the auditorium as the audience entered through the cinema's two entrances. So dense was the fog that only those in the front rows could see the screen, and the projectionist reportedly had to employ a pair of binoculars to carry out his duties.

²⁴⁴ "London Film Review", *Daily Mirror*, 01/01/1932.

contemporary press as a progressive and enlightened innovation by the cinema as an employer.²⁴⁵ All this served to create the impression that there was something distinctive, something enthralling, and something intensely modern, about the mid-century cinema.

A further example of this is the cinema's perceived cultural impact. When the Cinema De Luxe programme was released, cinema was still a relatively-new medium, but it had quickly come to be emblematic of modern forms of public leisure and media consumption. Cinema's dissemination of newsreels helped the rapid spread of news and ideas across the country in a format accessible to most people, and reflects modernity's key characteristic of quickening social processes. Film stars rapidly established their celebrity, and their fashions became a significant influence on the public. The cultural modernity engendered by the rise of the cinema excited many newspaper columnists and, writing in 1940, an Observer for MO claimed that the focus of his cinema-studying energies would be its "impact upon the whole structure of morals, culture, aesthetic tastes" of society.²⁴⁶ In conjunction with magazines and other more traditional sources from which women could take inspiration, films asserted themselves as prime indicators of fashion. Hollywood fashions in particular, as Anne Massey notes, were "highly influential, and British women were able to emulate them, adapting them to their own requirements and taste if necessary through home dressmaking".²⁴⁷ Magazines frequently used images of female film stars as fashion inspiration for their female readers, providing an example of a rapidly-expanding common culture in which the cinema – a modern and emerging industry – worked with other forms of popular media.

From a broader perspective, the cinema characterised a global modernity, exposing British audiences to different world cultures (or, perhaps more specifically, American culture). Accordingly, it reflected a key aspect of modernity: the compression of geographical distance. Global influences were also evident off-screen. "The vastness of the auditorium" of the modern cinema was, for a journalist in 1935, mirrored by "the rich, almost sickly effect of walls and ceiling ornamented to the last inch" which constructed a "definitely American atmosphere", serving to link British spaces with foreign continents.²⁴⁸ Ben Highmore has suggested that, in terms of modernity, "what counts as

²⁴⁵ See, for example: Samuel O. Idowu, "An Exploratory Study of the Historical Landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility in the UK", *Corporate Governance* 11, no. 2 (2011): 149-160.

²⁴⁶ Letter from Neil Hope to Leonard England, 21/03/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/2/F.

²⁴⁷ Anne Massey, *Hollywood Beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 136.

²⁴⁸ "Triumph of the Cinema", *The Times*, 03/05/1935, 42.

new, what is experienced as new, is not always the latest gizmo, but more often the foreign, the exotic”.²⁴⁹ The spatial dimensions of the cinema environment, with its tendency towards the exotic in terms of its architecture, and coupled with the remote and unfamiliar worlds depicted by Hollywood to British audiences, is a vivid example of this particular trope of modernity.

Emotional Modernity

The modernity displayed in the physical spaces of British mid-century cinemas also extended to new ways of behaving and expressing emotion in leisure practices. Borrowing from sociological theories of emotion, a fresh perspective can be established as to how cinema-going represented a modern form of emotionality: one which was less restrained, more tolerant and, arguably, more potent compared with other arenas of public recreation in twentieth-century England. Accounts in MO and in press commentary often characterised cinema-going as a quasi-ritualistic practice, with people conscientiously attending on particular days of the week, and the phenomenon drew religious comparisons: cinemas were “cathedrals” of entertainment.²⁵⁰ This regular attendance, and the ways in which the space was appropriated and perceived, can be linked with the emotions which patrons experienced whilst watching a film. Sociologists have argued that “we can look into the ways in which specific emotions – which are conceived to be individual, authentic, and spontaneous – are produced by modern forms of ritual”.²⁵¹ In this manner, cinema-going and its links with emotional experience can be considered a notable marker of the development of modernity.

Emotional display is, of course, a form of behaviour, and contemporary commentators noted cinema-going as a factor capable of altering traditional gender behaviour. In an article from 1931, a columnist for the *Daily Mail* discussed female modern fashions and, rather curiously, their role in women’s financial autonomy. “The psychological effect of trousers pockets on women should be extremely interesting”, he wrote, suggesting that if a woman “accompanies her beau to the pictures in trousers, may she not feel the twinges of

²⁴⁹ Ben Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12.

²⁵⁰ David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (London: Architectural P, 1980).

²⁵¹ Eva Illouz, Daniel Gilon, and Mattan Shachak, “Emotions and Cultural Theory”, in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions: Volume II*, ed. Jan Stets and Jonathan Turner (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 236.

conscience if she does not occasionally jingle the small change in her pocket and suggest that ‘this is on me?’²⁵² The cinema itself was a novelty, as were the behavioural modernities of its patrons, where a woman might possibly be able to display financial superiority over her male companion during a cinema visit. In reality, cinema-going established itself as a prime activity for courting couples, where social codes and gender roles placed the financial responsibility on the man. Indeed, this reinforces the sociological view of courting practices as rituals which are “constructed to produce [a] romantic atmosphere and emotions” through modern consumption activities such as cinema-going.²⁵³

That the rise of cinema attendance played a part in the wider development of emotional modernity in the twentieth-century is not an undisputed claim. From a historical perspective, Rosenwein argues that “modernity is an unhelpful and even retrograde turning point for the historian of emotions” and that, during the Middle Ages, “lively discussions” took place on the nature of emotions which were, instead, referred to as virtues and vices.²⁵⁴ Rosenwein’s claim that discourse on the nature of emotions was flourishing in civilisations many centuries ago and that, therefore, modernity should not be viewed as a watershed moment in the study of emotions, is perfectly valid. It is, however, important to recognise that, as a mediaeval historian, she would perhaps tend to advocate a move away from the “modern”. Instead of suggesting that modernity *created* debates about the nature and experience of emotions, or that some emotions are innately “modern”, it would be more productive to suggest that, in line with Rosenwein, emotions were altered and were conceived in different ways throughout the centuries. Modernity simply accelerated these changes. Emotional modernity, in the case of the cinema, centres on the twentieth-century development of a “modern” way of viewing the public expression of emotion, and the authenticity of such emotions when stimulated by a constructed filmic text (itself an explicitly-emotional product). These ideas will be elucidated in the coming chapters, but it is useful to consider briefly the anxieties which surrounded the development of collective emotion and modernity.

From a sociological perspective, emotions “have to be understood in relation to the form

²⁵² “Trousers for Women: Phipps Discusses”, *Daily Mail*, 30/05/1931, 9.

²⁵³ Illouz, Gilon, and Shachak, “Emotions and Cultural Theory”, 236.

²⁵⁴ Barbara Rosenwein, “Modernity: A Problematic Category in the History of Emotions”, *History and Theory* 53, no. 1 (2014), 72–73.

of sociability in which they occur”: in this context, the cinema audience.²⁵⁵ This idea can be traced in the historical record. A reader of *Picturegoer* wrote to the magazine in 1937 to suggest that cinemas were “anything but impersonal” public spaces as “the very atmosphere is charged with a feeling of mutual enjoyment. One feels fused with the rest of the audience – part of a crowd enjoying an experience in common”.²⁵⁶ For many, this was a key attraction of cinema-going. For others, however, it was symptomatic of the new and dangerous emotionality which modern institutions such as the cinema appeared to excite among the population. Keeping a wartime diary for MO, a 28 year-old printer’s agent expressed how he was “surprised by the vigour” of his emotions in the cinema, and another diarist warned that films “pander to so very much that is meretricious and sensational. So many modern people young, AND [sic] old, suffer from what I call: the ‘Hollywood Mind’”.²⁵⁷ Rather erroneously, this diarist also suggested that “the future historian will consider the films have done more harm, during the past 35 years, than anything else”.²⁵⁸ Other concerned commentators cited the collective nature of a cinema audience and the extremes of emotion displayed on-screen as evidence of the overwhelming impact of watching a film. One critic warned that cinema-goers would be “emotionally disintegrated by the violent demands made on their mood” by films and would, therefore, be unable to moderate their emotions in everyday life.²⁵⁹

These concerns mirror broader moral panics about the effects of the cinema (particularly on the working-class) and general anxieties about modernity. Modernity was a precarious process and there were some who used the events of the First World War to argue that technology was at the root of dangerous changes in society. James Mansell notes the warning that “‘modern civilisation’ had overtaken the body’s innate capacity to adjust and predicted that the human mechanism would buckle under the strain. Modernity was overstimulating, energy-draining, concentration sapping, an assault on the senses and the nerves”.²⁶⁰ Similarly, in his study of how the London Underground altered perceptions of space, time, and human interaction, Simeon Koole suggests that the environments of stations and carriages were ambiguous in nature, and sped up

²⁵⁵ Illouz, Gilon, and Shachak, “Emotions and Cultural Theory”, 237–238.

²⁵⁶ Letter from D. F. Deverell, “Kinema For Films”, *Picturegoer*, 13/11/1937, 28.

²⁵⁷ Diarist 5212, John Thornley. November 1940; Diarist 5122, Anonymous. December 1945. SxMOA1/4/16 and SxMOA1/4/77.

²⁵⁸ Diarist 5122, Anonymous. December 1945. SxMOA1/4/77.

²⁵⁹ Henry Durant, *The Problem of Leisure* (London: G Routledge & Sons, 1938), 140–141.

²⁶⁰ James Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 25.

perceptions of time.²⁶¹ The modernity represented by the Tube was subject to an “ongoing making and remaking of subjective boundaries in conditions of intrinsic indeterminability”; modern life, therefore, could sometimes be a threatening and unstable force.²⁶² In the case of the cinema, the apparent excessive heightening of emotion, originating in the modern technology of film, was stereotypical of the dangers which such an indeterminate modernity could bring. Despite these tensions, the cinema, in spatial, technological, cultural and emotional terms, became a site “emblematic of particular modernities”; these were recognisable as being both particular to the cinema, and reflective of British society’s wider experiences of the sometimes-slippery concept of modernity.²⁶³

The History of Emotion

The following chapter emphasises the study of emotion as a conceptual category with which historical cinema-going can be studied and better understood alongside issues of space and modernity. This methodological approach places the history of emotions at the centre of the social and cultural experience of attending the cinema, as well as offering a route into historical records such as those held by the MO archive. In the context of this study, “emotion” refers to the particular feelings described by mid-twentieth-century cinema-goers, such as sadness, joy, amusement and anger. It is also used when discussing physical reactions to films – crying or laughing – as well as more subtle feelings, such as contentment or nostalgia, which the environment of the cinema could stimulate.

Emotion (like modernity) is a complex and, at times, problematic category, partially as a result of the multiplicity of ways in which one can approach the origin, experience, and effects of emotions. The emotions scholar Jerome Neu explains this intricacy: “when we ascribe an emotion to ourselves or others, we are giving an interpretation of complexes of sensation, desire, behaviour, and belief, further complicated by contextual factors, both individual and social”.²⁶⁴ Emotions, even to those who experience them, are sometimes

²⁶¹ Simeon Koole, “How We Came to Mind the Gap: Time, Tactility, and the Tube”, *Twentieth Century British History* 27, no. 4 (2016), 537.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 551.

²⁶³ David Matless, Brian Short, and David Gilbert, “Afterword: Emblematic Landscapes of the British Modern”, in *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Gilbert, David Matless, and Brian Short (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 251.

²⁶⁴ Jerome Neu, *A Tear Is An Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

hard to describe or explain, and such an ambiguity therefore poses a challenge to the historian. As Ute Frevert notes, some scholars consider emotions to be “fluid and unstable, they escape the historian’s attention and remain hidden inside the human body. They seem to follow biological patterns that are impossible to be related to social and political events”.²⁶⁵ Frevert advocates an engagement with historical emotion which, far from being a biological phenomenon and therefore inaccessible to the historian, has a close relationship with the social and political experiences of people in the past. From a methodological perspective, the language used to recount and describe emotions can be enigmatic. Susan Matt, for example, suggests that “the relationship between words and feelings is not at all clear” in the historical record, and is open to the more general concerns which affect historical documents, such as questions of audience and what is accented or omitted in accounts of the past.²⁶⁶ This presents methodological issues in the use of MO material where writers were acutely aware of the fact that their work was to be read and, perhaps, published by the organisation, and may thus have moderated or altered their accounts of emotional experiences. A vivid, but perhaps unusual, example of this can be found from a diarist who wrote in 1941 that he received a letter from MO:

“They ask for more personal details, and sex problems, I feel that I should like to tell them more...but I detect or so it seems to me a womanly hand in the signature to the letter, and the thought of passing on such matter [sic] makes me feel hot down my back, particularly if it was to be read by women, still they very likely know more about such matters than I do. I dislike making a display of my private emotions, and sex is so tied up with emotion”.²⁶⁷

The complexity of historical emotion is undeniable, especially when aspects such as gender are introduced. This respondent, for example, framed his emotional responses explicitly in terms of gender, as well as the public nature of his writings to MO, providing a layer of uncertainty to the historian as to the truthfulness or accuracy of his emotional reactions. This intricacy should not, however, diminish the value of the study of historical feeling, especially in cinema-going, an obviously emotive activity.

²⁶⁵ Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 26.

²⁶⁶ Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History”, 119.

²⁶⁷ Diarist 5174, Hugh Price, Birmingham. October 1941. SxMOA1/4/27/1.

Emotion in Public: Individual, Social and Gendered Perspectives

Emotions are, of course, not limited to the individual: people read and interpret the emotions of others (with varying degrees of accuracy) in both public and private contexts. This constructs a tension between the individual/group and the public/private, evident in the nature of the mid-century cinema (and is an issue which will become clearer in subsequent chapters). Cinema-going between 1930 and 1960 was set within (and, at times, ran counter to) a British cultural environment where opportunities for the expression of emotion in public were limited. For Thomas Dixon, this “extreme restraint” peaked in the mid-twentieth-century and, in the case of crying in public, “made the ability to weep in the pictures such a welcome release”.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, Rosenwein and Monique Scheer argue that feelings, like thoughts, could be said to “undergo historical change and be subject to the forces of society and culture”.²⁶⁹ As well as being a key development in twentieth-century leisure, the coming of cinema and its immense social and cultural impact was one of the forces which affected historical change in the experience of emotion in public contexts. This gives the cinema an important role in public emotion in the twentieth-century, and asserts the significance of using feeling to study the cinema-going phenomenon which dominated public recreational practices. Similarly, Scheer contends that these public expressions and experiences of emotion must be considered in conjunction with an individual’s “dichotomy of ‘inner’ feeling and ‘outer’ manifestation”, and that the “mutual embeddedness of minds, bodies, and social relations” is key to historicising emotion.²⁷⁰

Emotion, as a tool with which to study cinema’s role in society, can reveal the ways in which people responded to films and to their fellow audience members. It can also illuminate more peripheral aspects such as the journeys made to and from the venue, the frequency of attendance, with whom, and the connotations – such as domesticity – attached to the cinema environment itself. These can then be used to feed into wider discussions on the nature of public emotion and the impact of cinemas on the configuration of public space and gender expectations in the twentieth-century. An MO study on crying in the cinema reveals the disparity between the emotional reactions of

²⁶⁸ Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5; 242–243.

²⁶⁹ Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion”, *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012), 195.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 196; 199.

men and women to films and, crucially, how these responses were viewed by cinema-goers, as well as by society more widely. Significantly, a male respondent wrote that “I know I cry in the pictures – or at least I go as far as a man will before he regains control of himself. I am conscious of not wishing to reveal my feelings to others”.²⁷¹

Films and the institution of the cinema helped to reinforce a sense of modern emotional behaviour, and Frevert suggests that such institutions acted “as essential amplifiers that helped to disseminate emotional norms and rules”.²⁷² This was particularly evident in male emotional behaviour when viewing war films in the post-war era. Sue Harper and Vincent Porter suggest that the Second World War had “released men’s hitherto repressed propensity to weep in the cinema”, especially when viewing realist films which focused on male wartime experiences of patriotism, comradeship and, conversely, loneliness and alienation.²⁷³ This softening of gendered behavioural codes in the cinema reflects the ways in which emotional economies are moulded by cultural and social developments: a point highlighted by Dixon who suggests that in later decades, football “led the way in providing men in particular with new models of emotional expression, with players and managers becoming more prone to tears”.²⁷⁴ However, caution should be exercised in suggesting that, in seeing managers weeping in public, men suddenly discovered their tear ducts. As this thesis will demonstrate, football in the 1970s and 1980s was not as much a watershed in the male experiences of emotion as Dixon advocates, and the picture which is created in MO cinema material is more nuanced. Nevertheless, his argument does offer many interesting perspectives on emotional display in public and on how leisure activities, across time, can be allied with feeling.

Male Emotion and the War Film

For some men, wartime experiences were concentrated in the cinema through the medium of film and, as such, inflected male emotionality in public settings. Male feeling in the cinema can be approached from another angle, as Martin Francis highlights in his discussion on masculinity in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Although the cinema often drew comparisons with the domestic, some men used it as an escape from

²⁷¹ Directive Respondent 3524, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

²⁷² Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 210.

²⁷³ Harper and Porter, “Moved to Tears”, 171–172.

²⁷⁴ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, 304–305.

their post-war domesticity, and Francis notes how some ex-servicemen used the fantasies of war films to “attempt to reclaim the emotionally satisfying aspects of wartime male bonding”.²⁷⁵ The cinema aided in “an imaginative male flight from domesticity” and prisoner-of-war films, in particular, “provided unapologetically homosocial fantasies” for men seeking a male-only refuge from their post-war domestic lives.²⁷⁶ “It is a yearning which was largely unspoken”, concludes Francis, “since most war films of this period vetoed verbal expressivity in favour of stiff-upper-lips and firm handshakes, even in the face of grief or failure”.²⁷⁷ In this way, the cinema acted as a facilitator for men in post-war Britain to travel “back and forth across the frontier of domesticity”, demonstrating how, as an institution, it was a flexible and affective space in everyday life, albeit still subject to the wider emotional regimes of the era.²⁷⁸

This domestic frontier was even reflected in what people saw in the cinema. *The Captive Heart* (1946) explicitly addressed the traversing of different imagined spaces when a Czech army captain (played by Michael Redgrave) assumes the identity of a dead British officer and writes letters to the man’s widow Celia in order to preserve his deception. This rekindles Celia’s love for her husband, who had left her and their children before the war, and the letters act as a tangible link from war-torn Europe back to the domestic space of the home. Similarly, *In Which We Serve* (1942) used flashbacks to the sailors’ home lives to juxtapose the sinking of the ship with their domestic lives, reinforcing the demarcation of emotion within different spaces and environments. Films made during the Second World War grappled with this division more frequently than war films made in the 1950s: these tended to look back on the war with a perverse sense of nostalgia.

Domesticity, in the masculine minds of war film protagonists, was coupled with femininity. As Penny Summerfield suggests, although rarely focused on the experience of women, these films never forgot the feminine, an issue which was always in the background raising “the question of whether fighting men should allow themselves to get

²⁷⁵ Martin Francis, “The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity”, *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002), 645.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 645. The sociological term “homosocial” refers to same-sex relationships which are not romantic or sexual in nature. Both men and women have been shown to present and, indeed, display a preference for, homosocial behaviour, constructing the strongest friendships with those of the same sex. Today, this is most evident in the use of the term “bromance” in popular culture. See: Danny Kaplan and Amir Rosenmann, “Toward an Empirical Model of Male Homosocial Relatedness: An Investigation of Friendship in Uniform and Beyond”, *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 15, no. 1 (2014): 12–21.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 646.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 637.

involved in the ‘normal’ heterosexual processes of courtship and marriage in wartime”.²⁷⁹ The actions of men in these films were influenced by a need to simultaneously separate their domestic world from their military lives for the greater good of war, whilst also acknowledging what they had left behind and the possible consequences if they, as providers for the family, were killed.²⁸⁰ The war films in the 1950s, then, were largely dominated by male perspectives on the divisions between their wartime and domestic lives, inherently associated with gender and emotions such as love and patriotism.

In contrast with the melodramas which offered emotional satisfaction to many women, war films were often cited in MO by male respondents as the films which roused the strongest emotional reactions. This was especially the case in the immediate years after the Second World War, when wartime memories were at the forefront of the minds of many male cinema-goers. A young male student recalled how “only war films disturb me, especially present newsreels on Korea, as they bring back unpleasant memories, which I have been trying to forget”.²⁸¹ Equally, others singled out war pictures as their favourite entertainment. Andrew Spicer has highlighted that war films and the heroes within their narratives appealed to many men as they “embodied an idealised golden age, and a patriotic noble Britishness, as well as meritocratic professionalism”, and several MO respondents suggested that these themes helped them to mediate their own war experiences through the screen.²⁸² The First World War has come to be viewed, for many reasons, as a watershed moment in twentieth-century history, not least in terms of its impact on notions of masculinity. As Mark Humphries has contended, there were “fears that the traditional traits of manliness – self-control, self-reliance, and aggression – had been dulled by industrialization and softened by modernity” in the years immediately before, and during, the Great War.²⁸³

Similarly, the upheavals of the Second World War further altered contemporary conceptualisations of masculinity, and provided many British men with a difficult task in reconciling their feelings within a stiff-upper-lip environment. The exceptional emotional

²⁷⁹ Penny Summerfield, “Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s”, *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 4 (2009), 939.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Directive Respondent 4705, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

²⁸² Andrew Spicer, “Male Stars, Masculinity and British Cinema, 1945-60”, in *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 96.

²⁸³ Mark Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1939”, *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2010), 507.

demands made through the war – and the equally forceful cultural expectations of male emotional reticence which they faced on returning home – may have marked out the cinema as a secure space; one in which ex-servicemen could express intense emotions, linked with their war experiences, without fear of censure. Such experiences were often so extreme and so far removed from their civilian lives, that men often became aware of how they had changed in their emotional outlook. “I cry quite often at the pictures”, commented an MO panellist, “I never did before the war, but I think the war unsettled me emotionally”, whilst another recalled how *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) had moved him to tears but that “before the war, I don’t think I ever cried”.²⁸⁴ Others, however, felt compelled to limit their responses in line with the emotional regime of male reserve. “If I find myself becoming emotionally upset”, explained a male teacher in his thirties, “I kill it by thinking ‘it’s just a play!’ Admittedly one loses much by this attitude but it’s better than making an exhibition of one’s emotions”.²⁸⁵ This sense that enjoyment in the cinema was secondary to the emotional restraint (which was perceived as a cultural obligation) can be traced in several other male MO responses. Adventure films also proved to be popular with male audiences, again a result of, as Francis argues, the “flight from commitment” which took place in the male imagination in the 1940s and 1950s and which was fostered by the “fantasised adventure narratives” found in the cinema.²⁸⁶ Many (but by no means the majority) of those men who returned to their domestic lives after the war struggled to carve out an identity which simultaneously both conformed to ideals of masculinity and also sat comfortably with their war experiences.²⁸⁷ Again, wartime events would have informed this “flight from domesticity”, as any post-war male ambivalence to the home and family was intensified by the “homosocial camaraderie” they had felt in their service lives, and which was only to be found again on a cinema screen.²⁸⁸

Women, too, experienced a diverse range of emotional returns when visiting the cinema. Extensive literature exists on the issues of female spectatorship, and works like Jackie Stacey’s *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* argue that for women, as well as men, the cinema offered “sensuous pleasures” during the tough conditions of

²⁸⁴ Directive Respondents 4266 and 1688, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Respondent 3880.

²⁸⁶ Francis, “A Flight from Commitment?”, 164.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

the Second World War.²⁸⁹ Whereas some men sought a sense of identification with the male characters of a war film (which played to their wartime experiences), Stacey suggests that many women found such identification in the social act of cinema-going, rather than in the films themselves. The attractions of sharing an emotional experience as part of a wider cinema audience (revealed in Stacey's own research and in this study's examination of MO material) leads Stacey to argue that this collective consumption "could be read as further contributing to the feminisation of cultural consumption: femininity being culturally constructed as relational and masculinity as more individuated".²⁹⁰ Female cinema-goers exploited a cultural idea that femininity was more interpersonal than masculinity and, therefore, they found pleasure in the "submergence of self into a more collective [film-watching] identity".²⁹¹ Moreover, Stacey suggests that aspects of Hollywood, such as the glamour of its female stars, created a cinematic space which was feminine in nature. "It is precisely this feminisation of the context of cultural consumption", she concludes, "which contributed to the pleasures of cinema-going at a time when such 'expressions' of femininity remained relatively unavailable to many women in everyday life in Britain".²⁹²

Similarly, melodramas provided female audiences with attractive and involving portrayals of feminine empowerment (even if tempered by contradictions of the mobilisation and validation of female desire).²⁹³ Although derided by many critics and social commentators during the pre- and post-war years, "women's pictures" have been reassessed by feminist scholarship which has contended, as Pam Cook notes, that the genre is "differentiated from the rest of cinema by virtue of its construction of a 'female point of view' that motivates and dominates the narrative, and its specific address to a female audience".²⁹⁴ In particular, Cook argues that the Gainsborough pictures emphasised women's fashion to establish female characters "as both subjects and objects of desire. Women adopt the accoutrements of femininity to attract men in the stories: fashion is an integral element of desire. But it can also function as a focus of

²⁸⁹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 184-185. Also see, for example: Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987); Sue Harper, "The Representation of Women in British Feature Film, 1945-1950", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 12, no. 3 (1992), 217-230; and Lisa Stead, *Off to the Pictures: Cinema-going, Women's Writing and Movie Culture in Interwar Britain*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 101.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* 102.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 185-186.

²⁹³ Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), 68; 89.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

identification for women in the audience”.²⁹⁵ This hints at the complex emotional and cultural dynamics (often different from those of men) which were at play for women in the cinema audience.

When visiting the cinema, social expectations of gender – in tandem with the genre of film being screened – had a strong bearing on the emotional reactions of patrons, suggesting the ways in which the individual reaction was always moderated by the wider social context in which films were received. The psychologist Jerome Kagan supports this reading, arguing that gender directly influences emotion: “gender generates a preparedness for particular hierarchies of emotions...children learn their gender category, usually by age three, and regard its biological features as fixed. As a result, serious deviation from the culturally approved standards for one’s gender has a greater potential to generate guilt”.²⁹⁶ In this manner, the performative nature of emotion within the cinema was affected by cultural expectations of one’s gender and the public context in which such feeling was expressed. Moreover, this performed emotion was instrumental in legitimising aspects of courtship in the cinema, such as a woman clutching the hand of her companion in reaction to a startling moment in a film. In a Worktown report which negated any impression that he was a disinterested onlooker, one MO Observer explicitly detailed a visit to a cinema with a girl and his physical interactions with her: “it was when the wild-looking man came on the screen that gave her an opportunity to appear afraid. She got hold of my hand – she leaned slightly forward. I put my left arm around her – she slightly lifted her right arm – so I put my hand around her breast – I ‘messed around’”.²⁹⁷ Whether a reaction to a genuine feeling of fear or not, films and the cinema environment allowed (and appeared to legitimise) such exaggerated interactions, especially in the double seats offered by some cinemas. (Performed) emotion in the cinema was a useful tool in the courtship ritual.

Authentic Emotion and Emotional Communities

One of the points raised by mid-century cinema-goers in accounts of their film-watching was the tension between experiencing strong emotion in the environment of the cinema

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 88.

²⁹⁶ Jerome Kagan, *What Is Emotion?: History, Measures, and Meanings* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2007), 152.

²⁹⁷ “Outing With a Girl Stranger”, by Walter Hood, 19/04/1938, 5-6. SxMOA1/5/8/36/C/1.

and reconciling this with the nature of the medium being consumed – that is, the film. As will be explored more fully in the following chapters, this can be traced in the reasons middle-class Mass Observers gave for not being moved to tears when watching films. “I’m too conscious of the artificialness of a film to be affected to such an extent”, wrote one respondent, whilst another claimed that “it does seem stupid to be moved by a celluloid emotion, which is nearly always spurious. One does not want to acknowledge having been moved by a false or cheap emotion”.²⁹⁸ The excellence of the (fictional) film being shown was tied to the integrity and perceived authenticity of real emotional expression in public, as well as the construction of a hierarchy of emotion in the minds of cinema-goers. Films with elevated production values and which dealt with strong moral or emotional themes – such as *Brief Encounter*, *Gone With the Wind* and *Mrs. Miniver* – were judged to be suitable material for the emotional investment of audiences and were frequently referenced in MO accounts. For male audiences, this sense of emotional investment was even more pronounced, and the term is useful as it implies a rationality behind an emotional response to a film, associated with such masculine traits of the era as level-headedness and pragmatism. Indeed, it fits nicely with the semantics of emotional economies: a metaphorical investment from which emotional returns are gained and, therefore, it is a legitimate action for a man to undertake (just as he would in the financial world).

These ideas of cinematic authenticity and emotional investment also correlated with the validity of certain emotions and their stimulation within the cinema environment. As Neu illustrates, “in crying at fictions the tears are certainly real; the question is whether the tears express emotion...tears must be mediated by thoughts of a certain (socially recognised) kind to count as emotional tears”.²⁹⁹ In this way, those mid-century cinema-goers who expressed discontent at crying in the cinema were aligning their emotionality with the broader social conventions which dictated that extremes of emotion should be reserved for intimate and private contexts like the home. One wartime reader of *Picturegoer* was rather cynical in his appraisal of film’s ability to make female audiences weep: “Hollywood knows its onions (or glycerine, or what have you). No one has better reason than a film producer for knowing that women still love to be made miserably happy”.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Directive Respondents 1478 and 4217, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

²⁹⁹ Neu, *A Tear Is An Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion*, 31.

³⁰⁰ Letter from “Deluded Male”, “They Have to Cry”, *Picturegoer*, 17/05/1941, 18.

The social norms of emotionality and the concomitant idea of authentic emotions were set within a leisure context which created (to draw on Rosenwein's work) an emotional community within the cinema auditorium. Rosenwein defines her concept of an emotional community as a group of people who "adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions".³⁰¹ The mid-century cinema audience clearly fits into this model, although on a different scale from Rosenwein. In her work as a mediaevalist, Rosenwein discusses emotional communities found within particular regions and cultures, such as Christianity in Europe. These are far-reaching and large-scale contexts and, whilst this study is, naturally, focused on a much more localised area, it does not diminish the application of Rosenwein's framework in order to explore the emotional landscape of cinemas.

At its most fundamental, the cinema audience in the period between 1930 and 1960 was comparable to Rosenwein's notion of an emotional community, with a shared interest and adherence to certain emotional styles or a propensity to devalue other emotions.³⁰² Importantly, an emotional community is not "coterminous with just any group. A crowded street does not constitute an emotional community".³⁰³ In this study, the common factor was the consumption of the film, and from this perspective, the cinema audience was certainly a clearly-definable emotional community (an idea which will be explored later in this chapter), set as it was within the wider context of leisure activity. Central to this concept is the way in which an individual's feelings functioned within the collective emotional economy of the cinema audience as a whole. MO material on the subject of the cinema is most valuable in mapping out the tensions between these two modes of emotional involvement, and in exploring the ways in which the cinema auditorium played host to shifting patterns of individual and group behaviour.

Cinematic emotional communities were confined and delineated by the physical space of the auditorium, in which the film and a cinema-goer's fellow audience members contributed to the construction of a permissive and effective emotional community. As Rosenwein claims, "while emotions may be expressed more or less dramatically" (a good example of this is crying in the cinema) "they are always mediated because...[they] involve

³⁰¹ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 24; 2.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24.

judgements about whether something is good or bad for us”.³⁰⁴ Whilst the permissive emotional community of the cinema sanctioned public crying as an explicit reaction to a film, audience members who *did* openly show their emotions always remained cognisant of the possibility of such physical reactions being viewed in a negative light by other people, even if those people belonged to the same film-watching (emotional) community. In recounting his cinema-going habits for MO, a 27 year-old man captured this tension (being integrated into an emotional community whilst remaining aware of others within that community): “[I am] not ashamed of this [display of emotion]; on the contrary I feel rather disappointed if the film leaves me cold. But I *am* ashamed insofar as I wouldn’t let anyone else see my emotion – a good reason for going to such films by myself, and if I chance to meet an acquaintance on leaving the cinema I have to forego my emotional orgy”.³⁰⁵

Rosenwein’s emotional communities can be scaled-down to the smaller, more spatially-concentrated site of the cinema auditorium. As such, these idiosyncratic environments can be linked to Ben Highmore’s work on feeling and mood, in which he explores the creation of moodscapes in social contexts according to the characteristics of the environments in which they are created. A focus on mood, he argues, has emerged from studies of emotion and sentiment and “is the activity of gauging the atmospherics” of a space.³⁰⁶ The mid-century cinema offered a space for the creation of a moodscape amongst the emotional community of cinema-goers according to the film being shown, its themes and the displays of feeling from patrons. Unlike an emotional community which remained intact until cinema-goers dispersed, a moodscape in a cinema was, as Highmore notes, a much more fragile entity and could be disrupted by altering the physical environment of the cinema – for example, turning on the houselights.³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, these moodscapes were attractive propositions, in which people felt able to flex their emotionality in a location set apart from other public spaces in British life. In 1950, one respondent to an MO directive highlighted this, explaining that he felt “generally exalted” at experiencing emotion in the cinema, “like I imagine some people feel exalted when they dance, play tennis, or sing well. They are exalted ‘cos they are using their physical attributes fully & successfully; I’m exalted ‘cos I’m using my emotions fully & successfully”.³⁰⁸ Being

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁰⁵ Directive Respondent 4483, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

³⁰⁶ Highmore, “Feeling Our Way”, 431.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Directive Respondent 4453, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

integrated into an emotional community, and expressing authentic and palpable emotion was, for this respondent, a clear source of personal enjoyment. Indeed, it could be suggested that mid-twentieth-century cinema-going was something done *in order* to experience extremes of feeling in an emotionally-tolerant space: a space removed from everyday life but also set within a familiar public and social context.

From a wider perspective, there remains the question of whether the cinema offered a stage for the practice of “modern” emotion or its expression in a “modern” way.

Rosenwein’s caution against approaching historical emotion through the paradigm of the modern must be borne in mind, although her call to address “easy assumptions about the nature of modernity and the primitive nature of the premodern past” needs some further consideration, especially in her claim that “emotions do not depend on technology, the nation state, or other factors associated with modernity”.³⁰⁹ Those emotions referenced by mid-century cinema-goers – such as sadness, anger, joy or pride (often expressed in the admiration of troops shown in Second World War newsreels) – have most certainly existed for millennia, but the *spaces* in which these emotions came to the fore can certainly be viewed as being modern. Whilst Rosenwein downplays the role of technology in emotion, Matt suggests that “technology often gives shape to emotion”.³¹⁰ To that end, emotions do not *depend* on technology to exist but they are, nonetheless, often affected and enhanced by it, and the rise of cinema (as a technological and spatial entity) is a powerful example of this.³¹¹

The cinema, as a public space, developed from other forms of mass entertainment such as the music-hall and the theatre, and strengthened the links between emotion and recreation. The music-hall, in particular, was a space dominated by emotion. This was manifest in vocal audience participation and the sense of working-class identity and cohesion (fashioned from coming together in a demarcated space to experience a common and proletarian culture). Indeed, music-hall songs made popular by entertainers such as Gus Elen and Marie Lloyd displayed an “excessive musical emotionalism” which appealed to audiences.³¹² These recreational spaces were eventually replaced by cinemas and the

³⁰⁹ Plamper, “The History of Emotions”, 260.

³¹⁰ Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History”, 122.

³¹¹ One need look no further for a contemporary example of this than the influence of social media on emotions.

³¹² Elizabeth Hale Winkler, *The Function of Song in Contemporary British Drama* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1990), 39.

emotionally-charged songs were substituted for the equally-emotive medium of film. As Andy Medhurst notes, “any history of British cinema that realises the need to situate the cinematic institution within its shifting webs of social relations needs to pay great attention to the legacies of music-hall”.³¹³ Public emotional spaces, then, had existed before the advent of cinema, but the way in which they were viewed by the British public is worthy of note. Central to this is how the cinema, defined as it was by technological advancement, came to be considered as a distinctive modern space in which the public manifestation of feeling (in a society which perpetuated the stiff-upper-lip ethos) was sanctioned and, sometimes, manipulated. Accounts in film fan publications and in projects such as MO suggested that patrons were happy to express emotion in a cinematic environment which, ordinarily, they would have not expressed in other contexts. Others argued that the value of the cinema lay in its ability to excite emotions not ordinarily experienced (or, at least, as intensely experienced) in everyday life. Writing in the *Daily Mail* in 1935, H.A.L. Fisher, a former Minister for Education, contended that leisure venues such as the cinema provided a modern arena not only for the stimulation of familiar emotions, but also for the experience of novel feelings through events in the film, suggesting that “we are not happily alive without new action, new knowledge, new emotion”.³¹⁴

In more general terms, the emergence of the cinema had an immense impact on working-class leisure practices, and cinemas themselves have been called the most significant new building type of the twentieth-century.³¹⁵ The theatre (an obvious comparison) had, of course, existed for hundreds of years as an emotionally-charged public space. By the 1920s, however, the theatre was financially usurped by the cinema, both in terms of its contribution to the national economy and in the cost advantage of a cinema visit.³¹⁶ The cinema opened up a localised, easily-accessible physical site of emotional expression, one which was affordable for those on a low income. Cinema-going, moreover, was a leisure activity which much of the urban working-class felt “belonged” to them, unlike the theatre which was considered to be culturally “off-limits”.³¹⁷ Similarly, the British music-hall tradition (a leisure activity very much defined in terms of class) offers a useful

³¹³ Andy Medhurst, “Music Hall and British Cinema”, in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr (London: BFI, 1986), 185.

³¹⁴ “How Shall We Use Our Leisure?”, *Daily Mail*, 26/08/1935, 10.

³¹⁵ Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, xi.

³¹⁶ Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71–72.

³¹⁷ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 221.

juxtaposition when exploring the social function of the cinema. As Medhurst has suggested, the evolution of the music-hall marked the “first instance of the transformation of hitherto unregulated patterns of recreation into the profitable commodity of leisure”, a move which he neatly concludes was the “pivotal point when entertainment underwent its own industrial revolution”.³¹⁸ The establishment of the music-hall as an institution of mass entertainment was largely shaped by its working-class social and political context. Crucially, it restored a sense of community for the urban proletariat (a class solidarity which had been damaged by new modes of industrial employment), and provided a new popular culture which offered “the sense of belonging, of solidarity, of togetherness in the face of hardship” for the working-class.³¹⁹

Such readings of the parallels between the music-hall and the cinema become more problematic, however, when one considers the relationship between audience and text. The cinema established a crucial divide between its patrons and the entertainment on display, unlike the music-hall which was a recreational experience driven by the agency of its audience. Music-hall audiences were active in the production and content of the songs and variety acts which became the staple of the entertainment, and in its early days such entertainment was acutely politicised and often redolent of local social issues. In contrast, cinema audiences held no such direct control over their entertainment. The one-way relationship with the screen was didactic in nature and, unlike the music-hall, ideological and political agendas were largely determined by the film studios and not by audiences. Nevertheless, cinemas in the 1930s and 1940s established themselves as institutions where collective and public displays of emotion – across social boundaries and in a communal setting – were comparable to the music-hall, and socially acceptable (even if embarrassment at showing one's feelings was sometimes keenly felt).

Different Levels of Public Emotion

As noted in the Introduction, this study explores “public emotion”, a multi-faceted concept which figured heavily in mid-century cinema-going. Public emotion encompasses feeling on different scales, from broad emotional regimes and economies, to more intimate group and personal emotion. It ranges from the experiencing of

³¹⁸ Medhurst, “Music Hall and British Cinema”, 169; 185.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179–180.

emotion in a public context, to the idea that a prevailing emotion can be said to represent a section of the public at any one time in the past. Moreover, sociologists have identified a foregrounding of emotion in contemporary public discourse in which “personal emotions become public and public emotions shape personal emotions...[which are] crucial for the public sphere because of their role in the forming and breaking of social solidarities”.³²⁰ Tensions exist within this model, not least in the social expectations for the expression of emotion in public life, and the first half of the twentieth-century was witness to debates about the acceptability of outwardly displaying one’s emotions. The debate was, however, as Francis notes in his study of political emotional economies, “more complex than a narrow opposition between self-control and self-expression, involving as it did complex patterns of response to selfhood and affective life”.³²¹ Nevertheless, the emotional binary of exterior/interior was a recognised and important influence on emotionality in public contexts, as was the opposition between emotion and reason. These borders were, to a certain extent, eroded in the 1940s and 1950s, especially by institutions such as MO. Indeed, Langhamer argues that “the organisation’s refusal to approach opinion and emotion as oppositional allowed their respondents to reverse the boundaries between public position and private feeling”.³²² This makes it a valuable source base as it allows for historical public (and private) emotion on all its levels to be accessed more incisively, something which will be developed in the following chapters. The different scales and levels of historical feeling feed into the wider state of public emotion in the twentieth-century and straddled a permeable line which oscillated between the private and the communal in spaces such as the cinema.

This chapter has set out some of the main methodological and conceptual approaches which frame this study of cinemas in England. At first, the three categories of space, modernity and emotion may appear to be discrete concepts, but this chapter has demonstrated how they are interconnected. When combined with sources such as MO, they offer a nuanced and illuminating approach to investigate how cinemas were used and perceived by the population in the decades between 1930 and 1960. Scholarship on

³²⁰ Mervi Pantti, “Disaster News and Public Emotions”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions and Mass Media*, ed. Katrin Döveling, Christian von Scheve, and Elly Konijn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 222.

³²¹ Martin Francis, “Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963”, *Journal of British Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002), 357.

³²² Claire Langhamer, “‘The Live Dynamic Whole of Feeling and Behaviour’: Capital Punishment and the Politics of Emotion, 1945-1957”, *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012), 440.

both space and emotion has emphasised the ways in which they are not inert concepts but shifting and active agents in the historical narrative. As Richard Dennis avers, space is “socially produced, not just a spatial container and never empty, but implying history, change, becoming”.³²³ Emotions are equally, if not more so, coloured by their historical context, and are therefore an important element in studying historical cinema-going, a recreational and industrial activity which used the public space of the auditorium to trade in emotion. Ultimately, as Frevert proposes, the historian must understand how “emotions are embedded into social and cultural environments, how they are stirred, mobilised and silenced” in modern spaces such as the mid-twentieth-century cinema.³²⁴

³²³ Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105.

³²⁴ Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 219.

Chapter Three

The Cinema Audience: An Emotional Community?

In August 1950, Mass Observation issued a directive to its national panel of respondents enquiring, amongst other questions, “do you ever cry in the pictures?”. This was followed, rather leadingly, by “how far, if at all, do you feel ashamed on such occasions?”.³²⁵ Amongst the plethora of responses received, a female publications officer, aged 32, wrote that she did indeed feel moved to tears in the cinema: “I think I catch it from the cinema audience and the general feeling of the auditorium...I don't feel very ashamed about this, especially as there is nearly always some one else near crying harder”.³²⁶ Indicative not only of a personal physiological reaction to a film, this answer also shows how individual viewers aligned their emotional responses with those of their fellow audience members. As has been shown in the previous chapter, recent scholarship on the history of emotions offers illuminating approaches to MO material such as this, and work on emotional communities is particularly useful in exploring the emotional returns resulting from cinema-going. This section will examine a range of MO documentation in order to explore how the cinema was used as a site for emotional expression, the ways in which emotional communities were formed, and the tensions between group and individual feelings. It will build upon the theories and concepts introduced in the preceding chapter and further develop the discussion to provide more explicit examples of how the theoretical approaches can be applied to cinema audiences of the past.

Cinema and the History of Emotions

The burgeoning field of emotions' history is certainly a useful way to uncover – and re-evaluate – the past. Key in this field are the works of William Reddy, Peter Stearns, and Barbara Rosenwein, and each has brought their own methodological and conceptual tools to the sub-discipline. Reddy explored the role of emotions in political life, aiming to unpick the “sticky relationship between language, culture, and the feelings...asking whether emotions exist apart from culture and the words used to describe them”.³²⁷ He

³²⁵ August 1950 Directive, Question 4. SxMOA1/3/128.

³²⁶ Directive Respondent 4266, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

³²⁷ Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History”, 119.

proposed the term “emotives” as a way to describe the act of expressing emotion through speech, as well as establishing the notion of “emotional regimes” which are a “complex of practices that establish a set of emotional norms and that sanction those who break them”.³²⁸ Stearns, on the other hand, championed the “emotionology” of a culture which gave shape to, and controlled the expression of, emotion.³²⁹ Separately, Rosenwein's central thesis rejects this emotionologist approach and the contention that, with the rise of the state, emotions became more regulated and standardised in society. As noted earlier, her research into emotion in the Middle Ages suggests that it has always been subject to control through emotional communities and that different emotions “come to the fore at various times” in history.³³⁰ All three of these academics are, however, united in the belief that “culture gives some shape to emotional life and that consequently, feelings vary across time”.³³¹ For Ute Frevert, a recognition of how emotions are embedded in society and how they are “stirred, mobilised and silenced” is not only essential to understanding the expression and suppression of particular feelings, but is also an important weapon in the historian's arsenal when undertaking research into social, cultural, political, and even economic, history.³³² Similarly, Rosenwein contends that historians must take emotions “as seriously as they have lately taken other ‘invisible topics’ such as gender”, and it is her work on emotional communities which is particularly applicable to the British cinema audience.³³³

The Cinema Auditorium as an Emotional Space

The cinema auditorium in the mid-twentieth century was, as now, simultaneously a private and a public space, charged with emotion both on and off the screen. In her ethnographic study of cinema-going memories, Annette Kuhn argues that the “pleasure of looking at the cinema screen is but a small part of an all-encompassing somatic, sensuous and affective involvement in the cinema experience”.³³⁴ For many, this cinema experience was emotionally subtle, guided by the film being screened and shaped by the context of

³²⁸ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 323.

³²⁹ For an insightful overview of the different methods employed by these academics, see Plamper, “The History of Emotions”.

³³⁰ Rosenwein, “Modernity: A Problematic Category in the History of Emotions”, 78.

³³¹ Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History”, 117.

³³² Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 219.

³³³ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 1–2.

³³⁴ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 147.

the cinema auditorium. Manifestations of emotion were displayed in several different ways. The aim is to refine this rather broad concept of “emotion” in the cinema by examining the ways in which the institution was used for emotional expression, how such feelings were displayed and fostered (both on an individual and group level), and the peculiar nature of the cinema auditorium (compared with, for example, the football terrace) as a space for the development of emotional styles in the twentieth-century.

Before examining the experience of individual emotion and how it fits with the construction of a cinema-going emotional community, it would be useful to consider the value of MO material in analysing the historical emotional landscape. One of the main strengths of the methods employed by MO is the way in which it questioned its respondents. The numerous directives issued by the organisation often contained questions which not only sought to uncover the public’s opinions on topics but, significantly, how they *felt* about such issues. This foregrounding of emotion in the questions may have aided in teasing out the feelings of respondents in their writing, feelings which may have otherwise remained hidden. As such, many of the records amassed by MO are valuable for their self-aware and reflective nature (even if the sample is somewhat unrepresentative of the population as a whole). The material is also valuable in tracing how respondents contextualised and theorised understandings of emotional selfhood, and how they negotiated the rapidly-changing social boundaries between public and private spheres.³³⁵

The cinema was viewed by some as a unique route into the psyche of the everyday man or woman. In a report on film research, one Mass Observer wrote that if “fundamental attitudes” about life were to be understood, investigations must “penetrate below the superficial words” of interviews.³³⁶ The Observer argued that study of “the film, in its environment of the cinema, is practically the ideal medium for the study of private opinion”.³³⁷ The cinema auditorium was considered a somewhat-anonymous space in which individual emotion could be freely expressed and it became a prime example of the new meanings of space which had emerged during the first half of the twentieth-century. Existing between the private and the open, the inside and the outside, and the domestic and the public, cinema auditoria were fluid spaces which helped to erode the divisions

³³⁵ Claire Langhamer, “Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s”, *Women’s History Review*, 2016, 5.

³³⁶ Report on “Social Research and the Film” by TM, 08/10/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/2/H.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

between public and private spaces and experiences of leisure. The cinema was self-evidently a public space: it was located outside the domestic home; it was a recreation experienced in the company of strangers; films entered the public discourse; and, as buildings, cinemas occupied a prominent position in the urban landscape.

Simultaneously, however, a visit to the cinema offered the chance for private emotionality in a space allied with safety – again, a safety found in the darkness of the auditorium. Through habitual attendance, this assumed a reassuring familiarity and a quasi-domestic dimension which extended domestic spheres for the working-class. Notions of “comfort” and “safety” were ascribed to the cinema, feelings most frequently associated with the home; and such readings support the argument that the cinema became an extension of the domestic which lay “beyond the worlds of home and neighbourhood while still remaining part of a real and accessible world”.³³⁸ These themes reflect an important change which took place in mid-century British society, one which expanded the experience of emotion. Emotional feeling was no longer confined by the walls of the private home and, as shown later, private emotion was brought further into the public arena (although it still remained tied to localised spaces such as cinemas).

Importantly for MO, the cinema auditorium also muted some of the social constraints on the display of feeling which existed in mid-twentieth-century public life. As such, the emotional narratives in respondent writings about cinema visits were deemed to be more “authentic” than those gathered by MO street interviewers. An Observer seeking public impressions about the cinema in Luton, for example, wrote that “quite a few people rushed away when I walked up to them, some giving a hasty paltry answer, some giving none at all”, indicating that the street was an emotionally-guarded space.³³⁹ Such a suspicious reaction was far from isolated, and was something which the founders of MO (particularly Tom Harrisson) wished to avoid, concerned that it might prejudice results. This concern with authenticity was central to the organisation’s ethos. In declaring that “the social consciousness is modified by the news reported in the newspapers and on the wireless”, MO set out to bypass the media and wider academic social science: it felt that they both distorted the voice of the ordinary Briton.³⁴⁰ The collection of diaries from around the country became a prime example of this pursuit of a “sincere” working-class voice. In reality, such ideals were somewhat unachievable (not least because many MO

³³⁸ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 141.

³³⁹ Note by Eric Gulliver on “Newspaper Train” Questionnaire, Luton, 11/02/42. SxMOA1/2/17/13/A/3.

³⁴⁰ Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass-Observation* (London: Frederick Muller, 1937), 30.

diarists were middle-class) but they were viewed as a route to a far more authentic documentation of society than was attainable through other means. On a further level, Harrison felt that the information gathered by MO could act as an accurate record of historical events, faithful to the life experiences of the population. The mythologised events of the Blitz are a useful example of this quest for “truth” which occupied much of Harrison’s thinking. His posthumously-published 1976 volume *Living Through the Blitz* sought to recount the “real” experiences of the Home Front, divorced from government propaganda and nostalgia, and to uncover the (in Harrison’s view) incompetent local leadership displayed in some bombed cities.³⁴¹ In doing so, MO used ideas of authenticity to delineate its research methods and to assert the importance of its activities.

That the cinema acted as a site of individual emotion is undoubted. MO panellists – in diaries, day surveys and directive responses – highlight a range of emotions which they experienced as film-goers. Beyond those emotions normally associated with cinema-going (such as amusement, fear, sadness or excitement), respondents frequently defined the cinema as a force capable of changing their mood for the better. As a leisure activity, cinema-going became, for some, an opportunity for emotional re-invigoration: “I felt very morbid and almost at the end of the proverbial tether”, wrote one woman to *Picturegoer* magazine (a letter recorded in MO), but after visiting a cinema, she left “refreshed, feeling I could carry on once more”.³⁴² This restorative quality was attributed to the cinema time and again in MO. One diarist, for example, described the emotional returns he gained from the “blend of a good story, intelligent acting and good camera work... [films] serve as an antidote to everyday worries, they offer relaxation”.³⁴³ Another keen cinema-goer even suggested that the pictures were a miraculous tonic for her health: “if I had a headache or felt sick, I went to a cinema and forgot all about it and I found that cinema going was much cheaper than doctor’s bills”.³⁴⁴ Such an endorsement of cinemas (as public spaces capable of enhancing the very well-being of patrons) is advanced by Richards, who argued that picture-houses in the interwar period became the focus for individual emotional expression, allowing people to be “taken out of themselves and their lives”.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 364.

³⁴² Letter to *Picturegoer* from Olga Townend, Halifax, Yorkshire, 06/10/1940. Recorded in SxMOA1/2/17/5/3.

³⁴³ Mass Observation Diarist 5043, 02/10/1948.

³⁴⁴ “Personal Note on Film Going” by Joyce Ausden, Watford. SxMOA1/2/17/1/B.

³⁴⁵ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 1.

Cinemas in the Second World War

At no other time in the twentieth-century was this cinematic diversion more important than during the tumultuous years of the Second World War. As previously noted, the war enhanced the social and emotional function of the cinema. Indeed, an MO report praised the power of modern cinemas to “give a luxurious release from the physical features of mass life”; it quoted an official from the Odeon Education Department who suggested that their value lay in “providing an antidote for worry and nervous strain. Indeed, the psychological value of the cinema in combating ‘jitters’ may well be its strongest claim to be regarded as a public servant”.³⁴⁶ In the fractured emotional economy of wartime Britain, leisure activities took on a new significance, particularly as a contribution to the upkeep of morale. At the forefront of them was the cinema.³⁴⁷ Amongst the many motivations behind wartime cinema-going, two opposing themes emerge. On the one hand, the cinema was an ideal medium for the dissemination of news and propaganda, and many patrons found newsreels to be a vital source of information which was much more vivid and compelling than newspapers or the radio. Film was described as “enlightening, encouraging and instructing [to] the mass of people who do not adequately understand what is happening to the country and who want to understand”.³⁴⁸ News-theatres remained popular in urban centres and, like their pure-entertainment counterparts, were viewed as being good for public morale.³⁴⁹ On the other hand, the escapism provided by the cinema became, for some, its key attraction. One Observer recorded in his diary that his local cinema “expected a good week because they have a film with nothing about the war”, and many did not wish to be reminded of the realities of the situation in which the country had found itself on the outbreak of hostilities.³⁵⁰ Tensions between these two aspects of the cinema are evident in MO’s wartime cinema research, and will be explored later in this section.

The exoticism of Hollywood films naturally factored in the escapism which was most frequently identified as one of the main attractions of the cinema. The film critic Leslie Halliwell recalled in his memoir on cinema-going in Bolton that film took “people

³⁴⁶ “The Cinema in the First Three Months of War”, 2. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

³⁴⁷ For a close reading of wartime films, propaganda, and the interactions between cinema and morale see, for example, Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London: IBTauris, 2007).

³⁴⁸ “The Cinema in the First Three Months of War”, 37. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

³⁴⁹ Cy Young, “The Rise and Fall of the News Theatres”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 2, no. 2 (2005), 236.

³⁵⁰ Mass Observation Diarist 5110, 03/05/1943.

furthest out of themselves, into a wondrous and beautiful world which became their Shangri-La".³⁵¹ This utopia was reflected in the exotic names of cinemas – the Orion, the Rialto, the Plaza, the Regal – and in the architecture of the buildings (which encompassed a range of styles including the clean lines of Art Deco and the high theatrics and excess of the “atmospherics”). Halliwell’s language is also redolent of the excesses portrayed in many Hollywood features: excesses which working-class audiences would have found to be both totally alien and exciting. Lavish productions such as *Gone With the Wind* and *Fantasia* (1940) were regularly cited by MO respondents as emblematic of the extraordinary fantasies displayed on the cinema screen. In Bolton, an answer to an MO questionnaire given out to customers at the Crompton cinema encapsulated the antithetical relationship between the cinema and the realities of everyday life: “as there is such a lot of gloom and sadness in the world, we come to the pictures for something bright and beautiful to cheer us up”.³⁵² The results of a questionnaire targeting the patrons of one cinema is, of course, not representative of the whole, but it does highlight how picture-houses offered, to many, a reprieve from familiar quotidian travails. The other-worldly, diversionary magic of the cinema had, naturally, existed since the medium’s invention, but this escapism was significantly magnified during the upheavals of the Second World War. A newspaper cutting collected in an MO file noted that “to millions of us the cinema to-day is more than ever an escape from the grim realities of existence”, whilst an MO volunteer reported that the cinema in the first months of the war gave him the chance “to be taken out of war depression for a blissful two hours”.³⁵³ Another wrote how the outbreak of war had increased the frequency of his visits to the cinema on account of his “unsettled spirits”, and one woman looked back on her year of cinema-going, recording that “when things have been at their blackest my one sure tonic has been the cinema”.³⁵⁴ As a leisure venue, cinemas were regarded as the inverse of a reality from which millions would seek respite, both during the war and in the subsequent years of austerity.

A broader development of this idea leads to an acknowledgement that the Second World War contributed to the re-drawing of spatial dimensions and to the potential for danger in

³⁵¹ Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, Preface.

³⁵² “Crompton Cinema, Bolton, 97 Replies to Questionnaire” March 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/E/1.

³⁵³ “British Films Just Won’t Die” by P. L. Mannoock, *Daily Herald*, 22/07/1941; “Cinema”, MO report by John Thornley, undated. SxMOA1/2/17/1/C.

³⁵⁴ “Film Questionnaire” by Leonard England, December 1939. SxMOA1/2/17/3/A; Letter from Marjorie Johnson, Chesterfield, 01/01/1941. SxMOA1/2/17/6/C.

public spaces. As James Greenhalgh has noted, urban space was reconceived, even before the Second World War, in discussions about “total war” and the ways in which city planning and infrastructure could provide protection from aerial bombardment.³⁵⁵ He also points to the “customary story” of “altered cityscapes of fear and destruction” engendered by measures such as the blackout which, although somewhat mythologised, nevertheless impacted people’s judgements of the safety afforded by public urban spaces.³⁵⁶ A letter to *Picturegoer* from an imaginative cinema-goer suggested that “a fortune surely awaits the syndicate which shows the enterprise to build a circuit of underground cinemas which are proof even against direct hits from bombs”, concluding that although “excavation may be a considerable expense, one has to remember that there need be no exterior ornamentations, which are usually so costly...they would confer a great boon upon suffering humanity by enabling them to sit for as long as they liked through air raids”.³⁵⁷

This reconceptualisation of space also affected cinema-going insofar that it altered the journeys which people felt able, or comfortable, to make to the cinema. MO’s wartime activities saw it conduct a survey of the cinema in England, and many people reported that the blackout conditions had limited their evening cinema-going. “The blackout has made a great deal of difference to cinema-going in this district” wrote an MO panellist in London, “before the war the cinemas on Saturday night were packed and many people had to queue up and stand, now however the cinemas are no fuller on a Saturday night than on any other night”.³⁵⁸ Another London respondent concurred, painting a more nuanced picture:

“the blackout has been both for, and against attendances at the cinema. On the one hand, it has stopped people amusing themselves out of doors, and has driven them to the cinema, and on the other it has kept the more timid sort in their own homes. Some people say they would rather sit at home, listening to the radio or reading, than risk their necks on the streets after dark, whilst others say that, rather than go mad sitting at home night after night, they would risk the undoubted dangers of the main road at night”.³⁵⁹

Darkness – once a protective cloak in the cinema auditorium – had become something

³⁵⁵ James Greenhalgh, “The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, the Blackout and the Home in Second World War Britain”, *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 2 (2017), 191.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁵⁷ Letter from Herbert Charles, *Picturegoer*, undated. Collected by MO. SxMOA1/2/17/6/A.

³⁵⁸ “The Cinema in Wartime”, by G. L. Wallace, undated. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

³⁵⁹ “War and the Cinema”, by Robert Carley, 1940. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

more threatening.³⁶⁰ Aside from the blackout, other practical challenges affected the geographies of wartime cinema-going. Writing in January 1940, an MO correspondent living in Leicester reported that “before the war, I used to run over to Birmingham occasionally to see a new picture, but cannot afford the petrol now”.³⁶¹ The 80 mile round-trip made by this respondent (clearly a film-fan) would have been rather remarkable at any time, but was entirely impractical during wartime. For many, the outbreak of war concentrated and reduced the spatial conditions of cinema-going, closing down the reach of individual cinemas in the urban landscape and reasserting the importance of neighbourhood picture-houses.

The vocal reactions of cinema-goers also attracted comment during MO’s wartime cinema reports. “Wartime cinema audiences are definitely more responsive than they were before the war”, wrote one Observer, hinting how some patrons became more free in their public emotional expression during times of crisis.³⁶² This extended to collective singing in cinemas which the Observer found to be a new phenomenon: “people will sing perfectly happily in a music-hall, and extremely unwillingly in a cinema, yet, when I went to one of our larger local cinemas...everyone, myself included, bawled happily at the tops of their voices”.³⁶³ In this manner, the cinema provided not only an escape to a filmic world, but also an escape from the social constraints on frank emotional expression. The vocal reaction in cinemas was a specific point of interest for MO: it compared audience reactions to the 1939 propaganda film *The Lion Has Wings* in cinemas in London and Bolton. It found that audiences in Leicester Square hissed German soldiers in the film at the beginning of the war but such feelings turned to laughter as the war progressed.³⁶⁴ Divisions between regional audiences, and intimations of class differences, were also highlighted: “the scene contrastin [sic] Hitler with Derby bookies created laughter in London and more boos in Worktown”.³⁶⁵

Other accounts in MO set such reactions within the context of the audience as a monolithic group with characteristics which were determined by the location of the

³⁶⁰ Historians have, however, highlighted the fact that blackout measures were a point of resentment as much as a source of anxiety. See: Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

³⁶¹ “Report to M-O on the Subject of Films in Leicester in War-time”, by Mr. W. E. Grist, 29/01/1940. SxMOA1/2/1/7/1/A/1.

³⁶² “War and the Cinema” by Robert Carley. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ “The Lion Has Wings – Summary of MO reports on the film”, 13/01/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/3/B.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

cinema. Provincial cinema audiences were perceived to be more open in their displays of emotion than more restrained metropolitan audiences. A wartime MO diarist noted a visit to see *Fantasia* and recorded that “at the conclusion of the film, the audience clapped loudly, a thing I have never experienced before in the sedate city cinemas”.³⁶⁶ For this diarist, the type of cinema one frequented could influence the behaviour of its audience. Large super-cinemas and the wave of plush Odeons which had swept into new suburban areas (there were some 258 by the time of Oscar Deutsch’s death in 1941) had come to symbolise not only the enchanting fiction of the screen, but also the advanced modernity of the cinematic medium.³⁶⁷ The grand nature of these buildings and the exoticism of their interiors, where one might encounter a Moorish village or an Italian villa, acted as a luxurious attraction to young lovers who wished to impress their partner (a flea-pit cinema would certainly not have held the same romanticism) and to those who sought an extension of the magical worlds shown in films. Even the less-ornate local cinemas held charm, and became known for their idiosyncrasies, with one MO panellist recalling the “small screen at our little suburban cinema, which cuts off a strip from the bottom of the film”.³⁶⁸

Furthermore, specific cinemas became associated with specific audiences. In a report on wartime cinemas in Watford, one Observer noted that the Empire attracted “upper-middle-class and titled people using the gallery” and “lower-middle-class” customers in the evenings, whilst the older Playa cinema was largely frequented by workers, on account of its position “in a working-class neighbourhood”.³⁶⁹ Another film report expressed surprise at the demographic of an audience in Rickmansworth: “the audience were not the usual ‘Picturehouse’ audience...there seemed to be more of the upper and intelligent (intellectual) classes present than usual, this was borne out by remarks made during the programme and by the larger number of cars in the car park”.³⁷⁰ MO panellists regularly made these class associations, particularly when discussing cinemas which screened foreign or European films. An MO cinema report from Leicester began: “it should be borne in mind for this report that the audience would be of higher intelligence than normal...[as] the main film was a French one (*Panique*) with a limited appeal”.³⁷¹ This

³⁶⁶ Mass Observation Diarist 5176, 16/10/1941.

³⁶⁷ Allen Eyles, *Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation* (London: Cinema Theatre Association, 2002), 232.

³⁶⁸ Mass Observation Diarist 5076, 30/01/1956.

³⁶⁹ “Reports on Individual Watford Cinemas” by Joyce Ausden, undated. SxMOA1/2/17/1/B.

³⁷⁰ “Film Report, Picturehouse, Rickmansworth”, 14/02/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

³⁷¹ “Cinema Report, Princes Cinema, Leicester”, 25/11/1947. SxMOA1/2/17/15/1/2.

indicates how cinema-going, although enjoyed by all classes, was not an activity removed from issues of class, and associations between the cultural elite and foreign cinema were often reinforced. Cinemas were not only defined in terms of the audiences they attracted, but also in their physical features: one MO respondent recorded a dream in which she visited a cinema and “saw an English film, and then there was to be a French film...we were in the circle, and it was a palatial place, not at all like most places that show foreign films”.³⁷² Certain cinemas became inextricably linked with particular types of film, as well as with particular patrons. It would be reasonable to suggest that, more generally, cinemas (in both cities and in rural areas) provided not only emotional escape, but also helped to facilitate the free vocal expression of emotion which, in other arenas, would have been socially unacceptable.³⁷³

Although the diversionary dimension is a significant aspect of the academic debate about cinemas, the role of the mid-century British cinema should not be reduced to that of a mere facilitator of fantasy. Whilst it is true that the cinema provided a radical diversion from the everyday, recent scholarship has shown that it became an important site for self-identification, emotional reassurance, and a medium through which people could navigate their own lives. The worlds projected onto cinema screens may have been alien, but the themes represented were often intensely familiar to cinema-goers. Many, Robert James contends, “appreciated gaining access to an unfamiliar world in which insecurities about their social status were addressed and, ultimately, resolved”.³⁷⁴ An example of this can be found in one MO respondent's report, suggesting that cinema-going provided “ideas about politics, make-up, wit, life...in fact, you go in and you don't know what you are coming out with. One might come out with a new hair-style, or a solution to the world's problems”.³⁷⁵

Audiences aligned their affective experiences with those of the stars of Hollywood (no matter how distant such figures were) and identified filmic themes to which they could relate. Hollywood pictures were not the only cinematic productions which allowed the vicarious experience of familiar lives. Post-war films such as *Good-Time Girl* (1948), *London Belongs To Me* (1948) and *Boys in Brown* (1949) explored contemporary social

³⁷² Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 6, September 1937. SxMOA1/3/10.

³⁷³ Football crowds were, of course, the obvious exception to this.

³⁷⁴ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*, 101.

³⁷⁵ “Why I Go To The Cinema”, BMC. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

issues, and their filmic worlds were even more recognisable to British audiences than those of Hollywood productions. Potent emotional reflexivity was also to be found in comparatively-modest British films such as Northern-based realist dramas of the 1950s (even if they were made by middle-class film makers such as Lindsay Anderson).³⁷⁶ This self-identification was noted in a report by Leonard England which suggested that producers had realised that a “good box-office could be found just as well in the life of the family next door as in the adventures of cowboys and Indians”.³⁷⁷ He warned, however, that the perceived realism in films increased the danger of the medium. Cinemas, he felt, were a leisure venue in which the public took “subconscious advice from what they see on the screen”, adding the caveat that the films which were voraciously consumed “look like life, but they are *not* like life” and therefore posed a danger to the working-classes.³⁷⁸

Emotives in the Cinema

In more general terms, many Observers recorded the overall “mood” of cinema audiences, couching their interpretations in terms of the vocal reactions (or lack thereof) of an audience. The noting of oral responses was perhaps the *only* way of uncovering emotional reactions to films through pure observation. The vocalisation of emotion (through laughs, comments directed at the actors, and hisses, for example) was the main way in which internal feelings were brought into the public arena, and became the sole means by which Observers could access the emotional economy of an audience. Reddy’s work on “emotives” becomes a useful tool in assessing this opportunity for MO to examine audience emotion. Asserting that emotives are the ways in which emotions are linguistically expressed, Reddy’s framework places great importance on the dynamic relationship between emotives and emotion. Importantly, emotives have the ability to shape, repress or intensify feelings and, as a result, the vocal expressions of emotion from individual cinema-goers may have, in particular circumstances, perpetuated and strengthened feelings of enjoyment for the audience as a whole.³⁷⁹

The reliance of emotives on language does slightly weaken their application to the MO

³⁷⁶ Barry Forshaw, *British Crime Film: Subverting the Social Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

³⁷⁷ “Film and Family Life” Report by Leonard England. SxMOA1/2/17/3/I.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ William Reddy, “Emotional Liberty: Politics and History in the Anthropology of Emotions”, *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (1999), 270.

material as specific words uttered by audience members were not frequently recorded by Observers. Nevertheless, the proposition can be advanced that emotives, as a theory, can be taken further than linguistics. The non-vocal manifestations of emotion can also be emotives which translate inner feelings into observable displays of emotions, influenced as they are by context and social expectation. For example, one Observer used laughter as a route to evaluate the emotive experience of both a man sat near him and of the wider audience. Leonard England observed the Ministry of Information film *Miss Grant Goes to the Door* (1940) on six occasions in different London cinemas, noting that in one screening “a man thought the whole film was a great joke and laughed loudly throughout. At first he had the audience with him and there was a great deal of laughter...but the rest of the film gripped, and the man laughed alone”.³⁸⁰ The man’s laughter acted as an emotive because it outwardly signified, if not enjoyment, his obvious amusement. The reduction in audience laughter was interpreted by England as a sign that the audience’s emotions had changed from amusement to excitement. Interestingly, the emotion of the audience in this case was indicated not through an emotive, but by the distinct absence of one.

Emotions are, by their very nature, intensely personal phenomena. As such, an Observer’s subjective reading of the limited displays of feeling in a cinema is a problematic method of investigating collective and individual emotional responses. In many respects, however, MO was less concerned about interrogating emotion in its cinema reports and more focused on examining audience engagement with a film. Emotions were relegated in favour of observing how involved (or otherwise) an audience was with proceedings on screen (not in emotional terms but in simplistic notes about the levels of coughing or talking in a film) and how much fidgeting or rustling took place during a screening.³⁸¹ In contrast to these cinema reports which focused on audience engagement, personal writing such as diaries and directive responses are much more revealing of emotion in the cinema, and will be examined later in this chapter.

The Emotional Threshold and Group Emotionality

Mass Observation correspondents clearly marked out the auditorium in direct contrast to

³⁸⁰ “Memo on *Miss Grant Goes to the Door*” by Leonard England, 13/08/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/8/A/6.

³⁸¹ “Report on Cinema Queue” by Leonard England, 24/05/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/3/D.

other public spaces. Several of the respondents to the directive about crying in the cinema recalled how, on the occasions when they shed tears, they remained seated at the end of the film until they “got over the emotion” for fear of displaying red eyes outside the cinema.³⁸² This constructed an emotional threshold between the cinema and the street: an imagined boundary across which people were reluctant to carry their affective reactions to films. A retired civil servant's response to the directive is typical of such behaviour: “I do try to remove traces of crying before I emerge into the public street as I should not like to be seen mopping up my tears outside the Picture House”.³⁸³ Such reluctance to openly display one's feelings is characteristic of the state of public emotion in the early-to-mid-twentieth-century, in which the cinema acted as a unique space: simultaneously both private and public. One MO panellist suggested that most people “under cover of a dark theatre...can indulge in a little sentimentality in a similar way as we react to great sorrow – in the quietness of one's own room”.³⁸⁴ Ostensibly a public leisure venue, the cinema became a locus of private emotion for many people and an extension of the privacy and emotional exclusion which was found in domestic settings.

Any autonomous emotional reaction in the cinema was, of course, positioned within – and influenced by – the responses of other people. Evidence in MO relating to the cinema continually contrasts individual emotion with the emotion of the cinema audience as a whole, creating a dynamic relationship between the two. Moreover, MO correspondents record how their emotionality was influenced by those with whom they went to the cinema. Whilst some felt that the strength of their emotions was enhanced by their friends displaying similar affective responses, others considered attendance with a friend to be inhibitive: “I am usually ashamed”, wrote one MO respondent, “if I am with somebody [and cry at a film]...I cry as much as I like if I go to the pictures by myself”.³⁸⁵ Another female respondent viewed a trip to the cinema with a friend as having a positive effect on her feelings: “it makes a great difference to my physical reactions whom I see a film *with* – seeing one with a sensitive and affinitive type of friend the emotion I feel is immensely enhanced and vice versa”.³⁸⁶ Interestingly, one respondent to MO's crying directive suggested that it was not her own emotional response of which she was embarrassed, but that of her husband who accompanied her to the cinema: “although my

³⁸² Directive Respondent 1981, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4004.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4582.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4750.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Respondent 3474.

husband does not weep he has on innumerable occasions squeezed my hand so tightly in emotional scenes that he has nearly broken my fingers. Of course I feel ashamed at such crackpot behaviour!”.³⁸⁷ In this case, an emotional response was stimulated by the emotionality of those with whom one went to the cinema, rather than by the film itself. Again, this suggests the multiplicity of emotional experience which was to be found in mid-century cinemas, as well as the range of reactions to that very emotional expression. Not every MO respondent, for example, viewed emotion as a negative result of a cinema visit. One panellist declared that he was not ashamed of his emotional reactions and that “on the contrary I feel rather disappointed if the film leaves me cold”.³⁸⁸ Emotional stimulation was marked out as a central goal of cinema-going, and many judged the success of a film on its ability to excite emotion.

The development of mass entertainment at the beginning of the twentieth-century had caused concern in many quarters, not least because it was frequently underpinned by commercial interests; but by the end of the 1950s, the social and cultural benefits of mass leisure were being proclaimed. In an article addressing the rise of television – but equally relevant to the cinema – *The Times* described the “mutually nourishing and interdependent twentieth-century phenomena” of “mass entertainment and the mass mind”.³⁸⁹ More generally, Siân Nicholas has suggested that mass media helped to construct a “common culture” in the twentieth-century, in which the cinema played a pivotal role.³⁹⁰ The discussions surrounding the “mass mind” of the nation which played themselves out in the newspapers of the day were over-simplified and problematic. Nevertheless, they indicate a twentieth-century society which was becoming increasingly aware of the impact of new forms of leisure, such as the cinema, even if its true effects were not understood. In tandem with such debates, MO talked of “mass reactions” rather than a “mass mind” when it discussed the impact of the war on the film industry: “the film has made so many assumptions about human beings and mass reactions that it inevitably gets on tricky ground when there are so many rapidly changing external factors to complicate the situation”.³⁹¹ In contrast to this contemporaneous debate, it would be reasonable to suggest that, instead of an over-arching structure of a national

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4305.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4483.

³⁸⁹ “A Mass Medium Addressed to Individuals”, *The Times*, 28/01/1960, 3.

³⁹⁰ Siân Nicholas, “Media History or Media Histories?: Re-Addressing the History of the Mass Media in Inter-War Britain”, *Media History* 18, no. 3–4 (2012), 384.

³⁹¹ “The Cinema in the First Three Months of War”, 3. SxMOA1/1/5/1/9.

mass consciousness, there existed many varied, and constantly evolving, localised emotional styles which were moulded by institutions such as the cinema. MO noted, for example, that audiences in the cinemas in the south of England cheered and clapped more readily at newsreels of the monarchy than did audiences in Worktown.³⁹² Although cinemas helped to create a real sense of a national cohesiveness, it is important to remember that, as Lawrence Napper has argued, “such cohesion came from shared exposure, rather than shared interpretation”.³⁹³

Cinematic Emotional Communities

Any group emotions which were elicited during a film screening helped to contribute to an emotional community in the cinema: a community defined by its broad emotions which guided and modulated the feelings of individuals within the audience. Such a thesis runs counter to Frevert's argument that, because emotional responses are essentially personal, “a group, a community or an institution...cannot by nature have emotions”.³⁹⁴ As has been noted in the previous chapter, Rosenwein conversely suggests that, whilst group emotions do exist, they are not defined by one or two feelings, but are composed of “constellations” of emotions to which individuals contribute their own affective experiences.³⁹⁵ Using this framework to explore the mid-century cinema audience, it becomes clear that emotionality was determined by, and reinforced with, experiences of individual and collective feeling. The sociability of a cinema visit was an important facet of people's cinema-going motivations (and was heightened, as has been discussed, during the extremes of the Second World War). “‘The more we are together, the happier we shall be’ is a phrase justified by experience in the cinema”, wrote a Londoner to *Picturegoer* in 1940, suggestive of the manner in which people found pleasure and reassurance in participating in shared emotional experiences.³⁹⁶ The reassuring nature of being part of a group became stark reality during the Blitz. Countless MO volunteers wrote how bombing raids during a screening would do little, if anything, to disrupt proceedings. At first, it may seem rather strange that people frequently preferred to remain in the cinema during an air raid rather than leaving for an

³⁹² “The Lion Has Wings – Summary of MO reports on the film”, 13/01/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/3/B.

³⁹³ Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*, 199.

³⁹⁴ Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 213.

³⁹⁵ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 26.

³⁹⁶ Letter to *Picturegoer* from a Mr Reynolds, Westminster, 1940. Recorded in SxMOA1/2/17/5/3.

official shelter. MO respondent “GW” reported a conversation between his sister and another woman which exemplifies many wartime cinema experiences:

“Sister: The other night when we were in the cinema, the sirens went and the manager said his little piece and I don’t think one person left.

Woman: I’m not surprised...I’ve noticed hardly anyone leaves, after all one is as safe in a cinema as out in the streets”.³⁹⁷

Confidence in the protection offered by cinemas was, inevitably, shown to be misplaced. In July 1943, a German bomber released eight bombs over the Sussex town of East Grinstead, hitting the Whitehall Cinema during a matinée screening, resulting in the deaths of 108 people. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* poignantly described the ineffective shelter which the cinema had given: “the plush carpet is still spread up the wide flight of steps which once led to the auditorium, but now leads into nothingness”.³⁹⁸ Although perceptions that a cinema auditorium was effective shelter against an air raid were somewhat naïve, they indicate how cinemas were again viewed as comforting and domestic spaces in which people found safety in a group. Indeed, an air raid warning notice was displayed to the East Grinstead audience, but few chose to heed it. Curiously, the passivity of a cinema audience during an air raid became a point of nationalistic pride for one MO respondent who recalled how “a bomb fell somewhere near and the building rocked. No one moved, there was scarcely even a murmur. When we came out Jules said, ‘I am not given to singing the praises of the British nation but when I see the way we can behave when something like that happens I begin to think we are not such a bad race after all’. Abroad there would have been pandemonium”.³⁹⁹ Another correspondent for MO recorded an air raid notice screened in a London cinema which read: “Don’t panic. Remember you are British”.⁴⁰⁰ Just as the British were perversely proud of their emotional reticence, this much-debated stiff-upper-lip mentality evidently extended itself to leisure practices.⁴⁰¹

In other respects, people’s emotional reactions were moderated by their fellow audience

³⁹⁷ Conversation Report by GW, 25/09/40. SxMOA1/2/17/2/H.

³⁹⁸ “Many Children in Bombed Cinema”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 10/07/1943.

³⁹⁹ Mass Observation Diarist 5401, 12/01/41.

⁴⁰⁰ Mass Observation Respondent, male, aged 25. SxMOA1/2/17/4/1/4.

⁴⁰¹ Typical of such debates are: Andrea Capstick and David Clegg, “Behind the Stiff Upper Lip: War Narratives of Older Men with Dementia”, *Journal of War & Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013): 239-254; and Stephen Heathorn, “How Stiff Were Their Upper Lips? Research on Late-Victorian and Edwardian Masculinity”, *History Compass* 2, no. 1 (2004): 1-7.

members and MO respondents remained alert as to how they were viewed by others. One woman recounted how she “was nearly convulsed with laughter and I felt that people near by were laughing at me and the noise I was making, rather than at the news reel”, highlighting how deviating from the emotional norms of one’s fellow cinema-goers could produce a feeling of embarrassment.⁴⁰² Another respondent used the cinematic emotional community to simultaneously validate emotion and hide any embarrassment: “almost everyone in the cinema was crying...so nobody took much notice of anybody else”.⁴⁰³ Whilst some were reluctant to publicly display their feelings when watching a film – “I never like betraying emotion in a crowd” – the emotional responses of others were expedited and enhanced by being part of an audience and by the cinema building itself.⁴⁰⁴ Cinema-going additionally brought, as Robert James suggests, “a sense of camaraderie and belonging that may have otherwise been denied” to many people; the social aspect was equally as important as the entertainment.⁴⁰⁵

The temptation to treat the cinema audience as a homogenous group, all conforming to the same emotional style and response to a film should, however, be avoided. There were always a few in an audience for whom the emotional experiences of those around them were antithetical to their own: and this minority was largely disregarded by MO in its reports. This group often defined its emotionality in direct contrast to the dominant emotions of the wider audience: “I am more embarrassed at my hardheartedness [sic] among weepers. It makes me feel arrogant and conspicuous”.⁴⁰⁶ Such observations again bring the tension between individual feeling and group emotion into focus. In 1937, the coronation of George VI was screened in cinemas across the country, and one MO Day Survey panellist highlighted how, by watching the film with others, he was “surprised how much I responded to the atmosphere of the crowd”, explaining that his fellow audience members encouraged positive feelings towards the King and Empire which were quite opposite to his usual opinions.⁴⁰⁷ Interestingly, he suggested that the cinema visit allowed him to experience unfamiliar “emotion and be in and of a crowd”, explaining that “one becomes very weary of always being in the minority...one is fighting against the herd instinct all the time”.⁴⁰⁸ An experience such as this indicates how the mood of a cinema

⁴⁰² “Report on Cinema in Wartime” by Joyce Ausden. SxMOA1/2/17/1/B.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, Respondent 2316.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4304.

⁴⁰⁵ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*, 17.

⁴⁰⁶ Directive Respondent 4568, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴⁰⁷ Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent Unidentified, May 1937. SxMOA1/3/6.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

audience had the potential to affect individual emotion, and how people were very much aware of this influence.

It would be appropriate to briefly consider the interplay between these concepts of emotion and mood. As explored previously, Rosenwein rejects the notion that groups of people can be dominated by one or two key emotions. She subscribes, instead, to the idea that networks of emotions exist within an emotional community. Whilst this is certainly a more refined and subtle way of examining groups such as historical cinema-goers, large groups of people can be, and frequently are, described (using adjectives such as convivial and energetic, for example) as possessing a principal mood which is recognisable to an outside observer. As has been demonstrated, there was often an identifiable difference between individual emotion and collective mood in the cinema. The emotional reactions stimulated by a film – such as anger, sadness or happiness – fed into a broader mood within the auditorium. A film like *Mrs. Miniver*, for example, may have aroused feelings of sadness within individuals. To an outside observer, the wider audience may, as a result, have appeared subdued: not an emotion itself, but a feeling informed and developed by the experience of emotion. Collective mood in the cinema was created by an emotional terrain which undulated with the affective responses of individuals.

The rise of the cinema continued this construction of community (both imagined and physical) through recreation. Cinema-goers were not only integrated into emotional communities, but also became members of a cinematic community outside the picture-house. Films quickly established themselves as points of conversation amongst friends and co-workers, and many subscribed to publications such as *Picturegoer* which enabled them to feel a part of an imagined community set within wider popular culture. In an interview conducted by MO, one cinema manager in Worktown asserted that his mailing list was most popular with “shopgirls and maids who like to feel grand by having every month the programme come to them”.⁴⁰⁹ Being a “fan” of the cinema was, for some, a tangible experience of modernity and, just like the music-hall, a route to a sense of cultural belonging. For others, the cinema was perceived, rather idealistically, as an anchor for those struggling to find a sense of social identity. In 1948, for example, J. P. Mayer concluded that the working-class “form those interminable queues in our big cities because they feel lost and empty without participating in this magic world of the

⁴⁰⁹ “Interview with the Manager of the Odeon” by J. M. J., 01/012/1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/15.

screen”.⁴¹⁰ This rather moot point reflects the way in which the cinema was often constructed by theorists and commentators at the time as an influential force to which millions would look for guidance throughout their lives.

A Gendered Emotional Space?

Much of the free and open emotionality displayed in the cinema can be attributed to its physical environment. Many MO volunteers identified the darkness of the auditorium as a key – and unique – feature of a cinema visit: a specific characteristic which afforded patrons a degree of privacy in their emotional and physiological responses even when in the company of others. A report on the influence of film remarked that “the whole set-up of the cinema, the darkness, the reasonably comfortable seats are all conducive to a mild sort of hypnotism”.⁴¹¹ This link between darkness, emotional concealment and the distancing of fellow audience members is most evident in the MO directive which opened this chapter. Many respondents said they only felt embarrassed by their weeping in the cinema when the house-lights were turned on, suggesting that the darkness during the film offered protection against openly losing their emotional reserve in public. Whilst a 40 year-old housewife wrote that she “always felt thoroughly and absolutely ashamed when the lights went up”, a female civil servant of a similar age recorded how she did not often cry in films, but if she did, she “shouldn't mind...as it's so comfortably dark!”⁴¹² Another hinted at the emotionally-permissive atmosphere constructed in the cinema, one which was destroyed the moment the lights were illuminated: “I don't feel ashamed but I would rather the lights should not go up while the tears are rolling”.⁴¹³ For many, the darkness allowed explicit emotionality, as long as any tears were dry by the time the film finished. As previously noted, others extended this relaxed, personal emotional economy further, choosing to remain in their seats once the lights had been turned back on until they had composed themselves, lest they venture out “into the light with red-rimmed eyes”.⁴¹⁴

The expectations of society – particularly for women in respect of their appearance, and for men in conforming to ideas of rational masculine behaviour – determined to a great extent attitudes to the dark film-watching environment. Weeping in the cinema, even

⁴¹⁰ Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*, 4.

⁴¹¹ “Film and Family Life” Report by Leonard England. SxMOA1/2/17/3/I.

⁴¹² Directive Respondents 1016 and 1066, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, Respondent 3426.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Respondent 1981.

under the cover of darkness, remained for some an unacceptable action. Several replies from men to the August 1950 directive “admit” to crying in the cinema (emotional display was, evidently, something to which men guiltily confessed), with one man writing that “tears come readily in moving scenes. I also feel it (perhaps wrongly) to be a sign of weakness”.⁴¹⁵ The tension between public emotional expression and public restraint was significantly inflected by dominant codes of masculine emotional culture, and was certainly not limited to the cinema auditorium, as Francis highlights in his exploration of emotion in post-war British political life.⁴¹⁶ It is interesting to note that there appears to be little correlation between the age of respondents and their opinions on public emotion. Older generations, perhaps surprisingly, appeared less hostile to the idea of men crying in response to films.

A 74 year-old clergyman, for example, differentiated the social expectations of male emotion with those of the wider cinema audience, exclaiming “being a man, I don’t cry. But being a human being, I find tears come behind the eyes sometimes”.⁴¹⁷ One 30 year-old customs officer was less charitable: “of course I felt ashamed afterwards; what man wouldn’t”, whilst a 22 year-old bank clerk dubiously claimed “I never cry at the pictures – its [sic] only the Welsh that do that – and a lot of silly women...if I did cry I should be ashamed and anyway a gentlemen always keeps his emotions to himself”.⁴¹⁸ Assertions about women and the population of Wales aside, such a reply indicates the extent to which particular social codes of male behaviour were dominant in the post-war era, engendered by the stiff-upper-lip mentality. Even in the context of the cinema, many MO respondents believed that a man should still maintain strict control over his feelings, underscored by the “traditional British training” in emotional restraint which one schoolmaster said kept him from “giving way” in the cinema.⁴¹⁹ Cultural reinforcement of this reserve extended across society in different ways including, as Hera Cook has highlighted, class experiences of emotional discipline. Arguing that “men of the upper classes combined ‘stoicism’ with positions of authority...[whilst] for those lower down in the hierarchy, emotional control was part of accepting the control of them by others”, Cook advances the case that emotional restraint was a gendered practice.⁴²⁰ Sadness (let

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Respondent 3634.

⁴¹⁶ Francis, “Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth”, 355.

⁴¹⁷ Directive Respondent 3204, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Respondents 4114 and 4475.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Respondent 2795.

⁴²⁰ Cook, “From Controlling Emotion to Expressing Feelings”, 635.

alone weeping) was certainly not an emotion to which the mid-century man, whether middle- or working-class, had easy access in the public arena.

Gender differences were explored by MO in August 1940, when it produced a questionnaire which sought to uncover the reasons why people went to the cinema. It concluded that “the escapist attitude is fairly consistent, being highest in the women”.⁴²¹ Such a conclusion intimated that gendered experiences of leisure produced different emotional returns, and Christine Geraghty has suggested that the cinema was an entertainment space over which women could exercise “more control” in their production of leisure.⁴²² The attitude that female wartime cinema-going was somewhat removed from male experiences can be found throughout MO, and an interview conducted with the manager of the Classic Cinema in Tooting is typical. On the subject of audiences, he claimed that his business was “kept by women” and that “in war-time they have husbands and sons serving...therefore in suburban halls we leave war films entirely alone”.⁴²³ The emotional response of audiences therefore became a key factor in the provision of cinema entertainment, and women’s emotional reactions were often linked in MO to the Hollywood melodramas which became known as “weepies” or “tear-jerkers”.⁴²⁴ In her examination of the work of female film critics in the 1940s and 1950s, Melanie Bell highlights how female audiences derived pleasure from seeing their lives (or imagined lives) and domestic concerns being played out on the screen in melodramas.⁴²⁵ In one particular case, Bell draws on a review written by E. Arnot Robertson of the Phyllis Calvert melodrama *The Golden Madonna* (1949), in which Robertson spent “half the review reporting on how housewives in the cinema expressed their satisfaction in seeing a realistic portrayal of housework on the screen”.⁴²⁶ Bell concludes that Robertson’s review gave a sense of “a woman sitting amongst others before a cinema screen and commenting on the female world around her”, thus constructing the cinema auditorium as a social space for women which provided a relaxed and “rich space for eavesdropping” on the lives of other women.⁴²⁷

⁴²¹ “Film Questionnaire 1940”, 12. SxMOA1/2/17/3/C.

⁴²² Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 5.

⁴²³ “Interview with the Manager of the Classic Cinema, Tooting”, 16/11/1939. SxMOA1/2/17/4/A/2.

⁴²⁴ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, 235.

⁴²⁵ Melanie Bell, “‘Quality’, Cinema and the ‘Superior Woman’ Persona: Understanding Women’s Film Criticism in Post-War Britain (1945–59)”, *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 5 (2010), 712.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

Emotional Styles in Mass Observation

Oppositional ideas about the emotional styles of men and women were also developed in the MO directive replies. Many men narrowed their definition of “crying” in their responses to exclude the earlier stages of physiological weeping (such as a lump in the throat) up to the point of tears actually rolling down the face.⁴²⁸ A civil servant, aged 34, noted that he did weep “if a moistening of the eyes and a desire to blow one’s nose can be described as crying...[it’s] as near as any man gets”.⁴²⁹ Again, such attitudes feed into the construction of the early-to-mid twentieth-century male as defensive and rather ordered in his public expressions – and recollections – of emotion, choosing to regard the act of crying as “effeminate” and “unmanly”.⁴³⁰ One 27 year-old man suggested that men were incapable of weeping like a woman, replying to MO that he was “sure no grown man ever really *crys* [sic] in the pictures”.⁴³¹ Women, on the other hand, were much more uninhibited in, and revealing of, their emotional practices in the cinema. The majority of female MO respondents were forthcoming in their cinema-going autobiographies: one teacher recalled “tears popping out of my eyes and cascading down to my lap”, as opposed to many male responses which noted a mere “moistening of the eye”, lest they be accused of uncontrolled emotion.⁴³² This was not universal, however, and some women expressed their “annoyance” at their public “weakness and sentimentality” in the cinema.⁴³³ Another female MO diarist took exception to *Sentimental Journey* (1946) – in which a husband wrestles with the death of his wife – and criticised the producers’ “nerve and the licence to make and distribute such harrowing, nauseating films for the sole entertainment of silly women who ‘like a good cry’ in the shilling seats”, subscribing to the notion that *any* emotional display in public was frivolous, regardless of gender.⁴³⁴ This response also highlights how class (as well as gender) was a key factor in the emotional experiences of cinema-going.

Stereotypically, women were viewed as more emotionally volatile, and in contrast to men’s recollections, female responses abhorred the physical results of weeping, rather than the semiotic, social concerns about public crying. Whilst feelings of shame or

⁴²⁸ Harper and Porter, “Moved to Tears”, 154.

⁴²⁹ Directive Respondent 2923, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, Respondents 3070 and 2817.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4708.

⁴³² Mass Observation Diarist 5412, 26/02/1943.

⁴³³ Directive Respondent 4361, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴³⁴ Mass Observation Diarist 5270, 12/10/1946.

embarrassment at one's emotional reactions *were* ascribed to cinema-going by female MO correspondents, the physicality of emotion, and how it was viewed by others, was equally prominent in their responses. The recollections of a middle-aged housewife are typical in this respect: she wrote that emotional displays in the cinema made her feel “uncomfortable – not because of the emotion I feel, but because I look a sight crying”.⁴³⁵ Other women echoed this aspect, explaining that any shame was a result of their looking “so ghastly afterwards”, rather than being embarrassed by emotional arousal itself.⁴³⁶ Again, individual emotion in the cinema was moderated, suppressed and developed by the emotional community of the cinema audience. The August 1950 Directive is revealing of the tensions between male and female modes of emotional expression in English society, which again reinforce Rosenwein's notion of “constellations” of emotions (male and female) operating within a single emotional community.⁴³⁷

Cinemas as Emotionally-Permissive Environments

The mid-century cinema was exceptional in its atmospheric construction of intimate private spaces in public places: few other mass leisure venues offered such a malleable emotional environment. For some, the cinema acted as a vent for private emotions (such as sadness or anger) which they were reluctant to express elsewhere, and one Observer praised the cathartic nature of cinema-going: “I am rather relieved and pleased that I have been able to rid myself of the emotions”.⁴³⁸ It would be valuable to briefly consider how this idea fits in with different models of emotion. The belief conveyed by this MO respondent (that emotions could be “jettisoned”) runs counter to theories from psychologists such as William James who, at the start of the century, claimed that emotions were fundamentally linked with rational thought and action. One could not experience fear, so their thinking went, without an external threat; consequently, emotions were necessarily *about* something rather than being abstract physiological phenomena.⁴³⁹ In this model, emotion in the cinema was inextricably linked to the affective events in a film, rather than existing as underlying psychological states which could be eliminated from people's everyday lives.

⁴³⁵ Directive Respondent 1362, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4299.

⁴³⁷ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 26.

⁴³⁸ Directive Respondent 2975, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴³⁹ John Deigh, “Emotions: The Legacy of James and Freud”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 82, no. 6 (2001), 1253.

Other psychologists suggested that cinemas occupied a special place in the life of the population, where extremes of emotion could be displayed without detriment to society. The suppression of emotion was perceived as a dangerous force which resulted in “neurotics” who were unable to control their inhibited feelings: the cinema allowed the controlled release of emotion in a context removed from the everyday.⁴⁴⁰ Sentiments such as these can be traced to the work of Sigmund Freud and the wave of popular Freudianism which materialised in the years after the First World War. As Graham Richards has suggested, Freud’s theories of psychological repression and the unconscious gained traction in England and in other countries due to the “uninhibited passion for new ideas on all topics”.⁴⁴¹ This created an environment in which the discipline of psychology (and the wider society itself) were “desperately seeking a modern psychological vocabulary appropriate to its situation...one in which the fading frontiers between sanity and madness, normality and deviance, could be re-established”.⁴⁴² Emotions – and, in particular, their repression – were tightly-bound with these ideas (especially after the graphic horrors of the First World War), and with notions of mental illness being a result of turbulent unconscious states. In line with Freud, a popular perception marked out institutions such as the cinema for the experience (and, to some, expulsion) of emotion in a measured manner, and in a regulated environment which allowed unconscious emotionality to be safely controlled.

This was not, however, a universally-held view. Those hostile to the social value of the cinema argued that it served little emotional purpose: “why pay money to weep when you can do it free?” asked one MO contributor, whilst another argued there was little wisdom “in paying to sit in the dark to watch other people’s ideas of sordidness...[when] there are enough tears in daily life”.⁴⁴³ As noted in the previous chapter, emotional experiences were also tied to the perceived worthiness of films, and many cinema-goers only felt comfortable with expressing emotion if a picture was deemed to be of an appropriate quality. Indeed, the apparent quality of a film acted as a determinant of people’s attitudes towards their own emotionality: one could feel unashamed about emotional expression if a film was sufficiently commendable and worthy of an emotional

⁴⁴⁰ Directive Respondent 3799, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴⁴¹ Graham Richards, “Britain on the Couch: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis in Britain 1918—1940”, *Science in Context* 13, no. 2 (2000), 199.

⁴⁴² Richards, 200.

⁴⁴³ Directive Respondents 3034 and 2994, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

response. A useful example of this can be found in an MO reply from 1950 in which a male student recalled “crying quite a bit in one film...I didn’t feel embarrassed because the film seemed worth it, but I did feel I was a bit silly when I nearly did the same recently over *Silent Dust* which was less worthy of any great emotion”.⁴⁴⁴ In the same directive, another panellist wrote: “I don’t hate myself for crying in say *Brief Encounter* but I do bitterly for succumbing to some of the emotional clichés in 2nd rate films”.⁴⁴⁵ Such resentment about being emotionally “manipulated” was fairly common in MO material.

The Power of Cinematically-Aroused Emotion

In his contemporaneous study of English leisure activities, the sociologist Henry Durant warned of the intense emotional nature of cinemas, suggesting that films which invoked strong responses could drain people’s emotional reserves, making them apathetic to everyday life. Durant was a seminal figure in the British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO), formed in 1936 as an offshoot of Gallup polling which had developed in America. Although BIPO shared MO’s aim of discovering the thoughts of the “everyday” person on the street, Durant favoured the collection of quantitative data, criticising MO’s qualitative approaches as journalistic and insisting that only quantitative methods were appropriate for gathering public opinion.⁴⁴⁶ Together with Mass Observation, BIPO contributed a great deal to the development of British sociological research and public polling, even if the enterprise itself was not beyond reproach: Durant often attracted criticism that a profit-making organisation (as BIPO was) could be far from independent.⁴⁴⁷ Debates about his research techniques aside, he proposed that cinema audiences’ “abrupt transition from the padded and sheltered world of the screen to the rough and tumble of their ordinary life leaves them in a state of confusion”.⁴⁴⁸ Describing filmic worlds (and, by extension, the auditorium) as sheltered again references connotations of domesticity and safety. The frequency with which many attended the cinema, the excesses displayed in much of the architecture and the almost womb-like darkness of the interior, all coalesced to reinforce this sense of security.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Respondent 3860.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Respondent 4223.

⁴⁴⁶ Mark Roodhouse, “‘Fish-and-Chip Intelligence’: Henry Durant and the British Institute of Public Opinion, 1936–63”, *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 2 (2013), 231; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 260.

⁴⁴⁷ Roodhouse, “‘Fish-and-Chip Intelligence’”, 232.

⁴⁴⁸ Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, 140–41.

Once again, this fits with the broader framework of the history of emotions and, in particular, with William Reddy's work on emotional regimes and refuges. If wide-reaching emotional regimes emerge at different times in history, each with their own set of normative emotions and specific emotives, then set within these overarching structures are emotional refuges. Reddy suggests that these refuges offer a space in which emotional "norms are relaxed or even reversed [and where] mental control efforts may be temporarily set aside" in a context conducive to the development of affective connections with others.⁴⁴⁹ The cinema certainly operated as an emotional refuge, set within the restrictive and stifled emotional regime which arguably dominated much of the twentieth-century. Dixon has argued in his study on weeping in Britain that this extreme of emotional restraint – which has become something of a stereotype – was, in fact, "an aberration in our national history": it was quite removed from the more permissive and open emotional regimes which came before and after the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁵⁰ Nevertheless, social expectations of individual emotional control assured the cinema a distinct place in the lives of many in the twentieth-century; it became both a physical and imagined emotional refuge where one could hope to openly express feelings which were incongruous with the dominant emotional regime. When a secretary was asked by MO if she cried in the cinema, her response centred on this opportunity for emotional sanctuary: "one just did not cry for personal sorrow in front of the servants or young children, or at public school (in which latter place one had to lock oneself in the lav. for the luxury of a good cry)...but in films, what matter!!! [sic]".⁴⁵¹ For this woman, crying was clearly an indulgence and cinemas thus became emotional refuges which, Reddy concludes, "helped to make the current order more liveable for some people, some of the time".⁴⁵²

As has been discussed, the dim auditorium worked to concurrently isolate people from their neighbours, reinforcing their sense of emotional self, whilst enabling them to inconspicuously integrate themselves into a communal film-watching experience. Another example of the way in which the cinema acted as a site of both individual and public emotion in the mid-century was its popularity with courting couples, and the

⁴⁴⁹ Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 128.

⁴⁵⁰ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, 5.

⁴⁵¹ Directive Respondent 3474, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴⁵² Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 128.

darkness gave a privacy to young lovers which was unparalleled in other public leisure spaces. Some cinemas actively promoted their suitability for courting couples, just as others would market themselves to an affluent middle-class audience.⁴⁵³ Cinema-going became a method for couples to assess the personality of their lover and, by extension, their suitability as a long-term partner. For some, this cinema appraisal was an important part of the process of courtship, and any emotional divergence might have proved fatal to the development of the relationship. One woman, for example, wrote how she cried at a film in the presence of “a man I was friendly with. I know he laughed about it and I knew right away that I wouldn’t be seeing him anymore!!! [sic]”.⁴⁵⁴

As Annette Kuhn has argued, the cinemas most often used for courtship were the luxurious, modern super-cinemas, perhaps the antithesis of the smaller, more humble picture-houses which many would have visited as children.⁴⁵⁵ Large Odeons, with their exoticism and palatial surroundings became “heterotopias of courtship”, allowing young lovers a degree of emotional and physical freedom from their domestic lives.⁴⁵⁶ In many recent ethnographic works on memories of cinema-going, those questioned often cite the cinema as the location of significant life events, such as a first kiss and the transition between childhood and adulthood. Again, the darkness of the cinema was the ideal arena which, to some extent, legitimised the explicit expression of emotion which would have provoked disapproval in other public places. In a further respect, the cinema was a space which not only allowed emotional freedom, but also physical freedom for young couples, away from the confines of parental control at home. A 26 year-old woman in Manchester recorded in her diary for MO that her younger brother “put his best suit on tonight, but would not say where he was going. After being sent upstairs and made to take his suit off, Mother got it out of him that he was taking a girl to the pictures...After a bit of arguing together, Mother and Dad decided to let him go on the condition that he apologised for his insolence”.⁴⁵⁷ That her brother was eventually allowed to go unaccompanied again highlights the ways in which cinemas were viewed as safe spaces in the locality, but also how they were far enough removed from the home to become attractive to those seeking escape from parental supervision. Not everyone, however, approved of the romantic freedoms to be found by going to the pictures. An MO Day Survey writer recalled a

⁴⁵³ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 113.

⁴⁵⁴ Directive Respondent 4727, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁴⁵⁵ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 141.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Mass Observation Diarist 5261, 05/08/1942.

conversation with his landlady about the romantic uses of cinemas:

“about holding hands in cinemas and the furtive caresses of the semi-darkness we could both agree, though from different viewpoints; she from the moral side and I from a detestation of the un-sensual nature of all such caresses and the starved vulgarity of the surroundings. I think that anyone who indulges in cinema-caresses must be starved both emotionally and sexually; it is degrading to think of the artificial stimulus required for such adolescent yearnings after half-sensations”.⁴⁵⁸

Passivity and the Working-Classes

More broadly, film-watching featured in debates about the active and passive nature of leisure activities. As previously noted in Chapter One, MO’s research took place against the backdrop of a British liberal elite sensitive to the apparent passivity of the working-classes. For some, cinema-going became a key example of a static recreational activity which exposed people to the (dangerous or otherwise) ideas of others, and which fostered an apathy towards political engagement. An MO report on the nature of leisure highlighted pursuits which were felt to be “active” and those which, it believed, were more “passive”.⁴⁵⁹ The cinema was, perhaps unsurprisingly, placed in the latter category. Interestingly, football spectatorship attracted similar criticism from some quarters with regard to its potential for encouraging passivity. As has been shown, watching a football game permitted an explicit – and very public – emotional reaction, and as such, spectators were largely active in the production of their own leisure. Despite this physically-active behaviour from football fans (not least in their shouting and cheering), watching football was perceived by some to be, as Joseph Maguire has argued, “morally debilitating” as it deviated from the ethos that sports participation was to be a wholesome activity.⁴⁶⁰ Spectatorship was viewed by many commentators as inferior to the actual playing of sport, especially when it encouraged a “passive” lifestyle alongside vices such as drinking and gambling.⁴⁶¹ Although many in the middle-class were anxious about a working-class culture defined by passivity, they paradoxically did not wish to see any development in working-class agency. Maguire subscribes to the notion that the gathering of large groups

⁴⁵⁸ Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 564, July 1937. SxMOA1/3/8.

⁴⁵⁹ “Memo on a Study of Leisure”, 02/01/1940, 1. SxMOA1/2/80/1/A/1.

⁴⁶⁰ Joseph Maguire, “The Emergence of Football Spectating as a Social Problem”, *Sport in Society* 14, no. 7–8 (2011), 887.

⁴⁶¹ Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, *Mud, Sweat and Beers: A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 71.

at events associated with class (such as football matches) became, for some middle-class observers, a physical manifestation of the increase of workers' power through unionisation, and a worrying move towards a politically-active working-class.⁴⁶²

Mass Observation was a project preoccupied with – indeed, defined by – issues of class. Those who came under observation were coded in reports according to their perceived class: “A” for “rich people”, “B” for “the middle classes”, “C” for “artisans and skilled workers”, and “D” for “unskilled workers and the least economically or educationally trained”.⁴⁶³ The classification of a response in an MO film questionnaire, for example, read “F20B”, meaning that the person interviewed was a 20 year-old middle-class female.⁴⁶⁴ As such, the data collected throughout MO’s investigations on the cinema was underscored by deliberations on class experiences of cinema-going. From its earliest days, the cinema had attracted low cultural status and an undeserved reputation as a form of debased entertainment, serving only those in the lower echelons of society. By the time of MO’s work, such sentiments were still prevalent, if somewhat tempered with an appreciation for cinema’s broader social potential. Archetypal of these rather-condescending attitudes is a letter written to Leonard England in 1950: “there is something snobbish about a picture show. It seems an abuse of one’s intelligence, therefore the strong influential man would not like to be seen entering or leaving his local Odeon”.⁴⁶⁵ The letter then implied that studios produced poor-quality films because working-class audiences were satisfied by them and that the “cleverest people only go once in a blue moon”.⁴⁶⁶

Whilst it is correct to say that working-class patrons did comprise the majority of the mid-century cinema audience, one must be careful not to isolate cinemas as the preserve of the working-class. As has been discussed, specific cinemas became associated with certain audiences, and Oscar Deutsch did much to try and encourage a more “respectable” middle-class audience through his modern and well-appointed suburban cinemas.⁴⁶⁷ Class association also extended into the cinemas themselves. Inside, auditoria became hierarchical spaces divided in terms of class, largely determined by the price of a cinema

⁴⁶² Maguire, “The Emergence of Football Spectating as a Social Problem”, 890.

⁴⁶³ This coding featured in a table at the beginning of the MO publication *War Factory: A Report by Mass-Observation*, 1943.

⁴⁶⁴ “Film Questionnaire 1940”. SxMOA1/2/17/3/C.

⁴⁶⁵ Letter from H. C. Timewell to Leonard England, 09/11/1950, “Chance of a Lifetime” Correspondence. SxMOA1/2/17/15/E/10.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*, 68.

seat. MO reports often spatially delineated the auditorium on this basis – “at the start of the show there were (in the stalls) 31 [sic] 1/6s and only 1 [sic] 2/6” – and cast economic, and by extension, class, judgement on those sitting in particular areas of the cinema.⁴⁶⁸ During a showing of *Birth of a Baby* (1938), one Observer explicitly couched his notes in terms of class, recalling that there were “not so many so-called common people” in the audience.⁴⁶⁹ Balcony seating (with the best view of the screen, and a price to match) was often judged to be the domain of the well-to-do, middle-class cinema-goer.

Cinema pricing also served as a measure of affection: should a young girl be lucky enough to find herself sat in a balcony seat with a boy, or in a double seat at the rear of the auditorium, she was invariably assured of his admiration for her. One MO diarist recorded how her boyfriend “likes to take me to the Rep at 2/-...but next week we have 7/6 seats at the Hippodrome. I gave him 5/- towards it”.⁴⁷⁰ More widely, Kathleen Box in her 1946 Social Survey found that higher-income groups paid on average 2/2d for a seat, compared with a 1/7d average for lower income groups.⁴⁷¹ The cost of a cinema visit, although within the means of the majority, did serve to exclude the very poorest who simply could not afford to attend regularly.⁴⁷² Issues of class presented themselves not only in the economics of visiting the cinema. As with much of the material produced during MO’s studies, the distorted nature of the class composition of its cinema respondents is significant. MO’s ambitions to become a representative voice for the working-class were significantly compromised when twice as many respondents identified themselves as middle-class than as working-class.⁴⁷³ This resulted in cinema reports which largely emanated from the middle stratum of society, illustrating how class permeated the experiences *and* the recollections of cinema-going.

A Public Space Defined by Emotion

The general picture which emerges from the MO material on emotional experiences in the cinema is a subtle and complex one. It reflects the ways in which public emotion was

⁴⁶⁸ Film Report – Leicester Square Theatre, London, 16/03/1940. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

⁴⁶⁹ Report on Screening of *Birth of a Baby*, Hammersmith Gaumont, by BMC. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

⁴⁷⁰ Mass Observation Diarist 5420, 05/12/1947.

⁴⁷¹ Kathleen Box, *The Cinema and the Public: An Inquiry into Cinema Going Habits and Expenditure Made in 1946*, New Series 106 (London: Ministry of Information, 1946), cited in Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*, 69.

⁴⁷² Richards, “Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930–1960”, 349.

⁴⁷³ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 271.

enhanced in the twentieth-century, as tensions between individual feeling and group emotion manifested themselves in cinema auditoria around the country. Emotional communities (centred on the film) were formed as patrons crossed the emotional threshold of the box office; these communities were also developed by the physical environment of the cinema. The darkness, the exoticism and, conversely, the familiarity of cinemas marked them out as emotionally-hospitable spaces in cities and towns, where feeling was still subject to the accepted norms of English culture; crucially, such feeling was allowed to develop in a more permissive and anonymous space. Many MO cinema-goers viewed their emotional experiences in the cinema as rather atypical in their lives, and their affective responses to the films (and to their own emotionality) were influenced by a range of factors including class, gender and the collective nature of the cinema audience. Although the cinema, as a public arena of emotion, elicits comparisons with other mass entertainments such as football, it was clearly viewed by many people as a distinctive form of leisure which underscored their private – and public – emotional practices. Indeed, to quote one MO diarist, many were “surprised at the vigour” of the emotions they felt in the cinema, just as another diarist mused that it was “strange how feelings get the better of you. I surprised myself by almost jumping to my feet and cheering”.⁴⁷⁴ It seems that surprises were not only to be found in narratives on the big screen, but also in the personal emotional narratives of millions of cinema-goers.

⁴⁷⁴ Mass Observation Diarist 5212, 17/11/1940 and Diarist 5236, February 1942.

Chapter Four

Bolton Case Study

As with many scholarly inquiries, historical studies of a particular period are often presented in topographical terms. That is, an academic study declares its geographical focus, be it a work of micro-history, local history, national history or, indeed, trans-national history. In doing so, the aims of a project are set out, approaches defined, and limits set. Recent historiographical debates have interrogated the relationship between (trans-)national and local histories, and balanced the benefits and disadvantages presented by each type of study. A perceived increase in the popularity of localised studies of the past has led some to caution that historians must not become confined or blinkered in choosing to focus on specific, delineated geographical locations, at the risk of overlooking the wider implications of their findings. As Simon Naylor has highlighted, academics such as Jim Secord subscribe to the notion that, in the case of micro-history, “the localness of things is seen as a reasonable outcome of research...[becoming] an end in itself, rather than a method of analysis”.⁴⁷⁵

Discussions about the merits of both temporal and geographical micro-histories, and the role of the historian more generally, have recently been fuelled by Jo Guldi and David Armitage’s *The History Manifesto*. Guldi and Armitage argue for a return to the *longue durée* approach to history taken by the Annales School which, they contend, was eclipsed in the 1970s by historians who turned to intensive archival research and “small-scale projects within short-term time frames”.⁴⁷⁶ They argue that “the spectre of the short term” threatened to significantly reduce the impact that historians’ research could have not only on the wider public but also on public policy-making.⁴⁷⁷ Many micro-historians developed a suspicion of grand narratives, so *The History Manifesto* continues, and “rarely took the pains to contextualise their short time horizons for a common reader; they were playing in a game that rewarded intensive subdivision of knowledge” at the expense of both their

⁴⁷⁵ Simon Naylor, “Historical Geography: Geographies and Historiographies”, *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 2 (2008), 271.

⁴⁷⁶ Brad S. Gregory, “‘The History Manifesto’. By Jo Guldi and David Armitage (Book Review)”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 46, no. 2 (2015), 265.

⁴⁷⁷ Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

historical works and their application to contemporary issues.⁴⁷⁸ Guldi and Armitage's thesis has provoked many responses – both positive and negative – in journal reviews and in the wider academy, with some taking issue with the representation of the micro-historian as methodologically short-sighted and unwilling to consider long-term historical narratives or frameworks.⁴⁷⁹ Whilst intensely-focused local studies do have the potential to lose impact in any conclusions reached, this does not mean that they are invalid methods of historical investigation. Indeed, a micro-historical study can become a powerful methodology with which to approach the past. It often gives the historian conceptual clarity because it provides vivid examples of sometimes-abstract concepts, as they were lived and experienced in people's day-to-day lives. It can become a particularly productive technique when considering, as this study does, thematic approaches such as the history of emotion and the history of space; it can drill down to specifics of feeling, community, and historical agency in emotional practice, which are necessary components of wider narratives of the past. As long as localised studies remain cognisant of these broader national pictures (which, themselves, are sometimes rather imprecise) and are used to support or challenge more wide-ranging findings, works of local history can work very effectively to enhance national histories. The two methodologies are not mutually-exclusive, and the following chapters will demonstrate this as they move from the nationwide discussions of the previous chapter to the local.

Accordingly, this chapter seeks to make a case study of the role of cinemas in the urban area of Bolton during the mid-twentieth century. It is not intended to be a comprehensive and intimate study of each cinema in the town, but it does seek to explore how local experiences can contribute to a better understanding of the emotional history of cinemas in England as a whole. In a similar manner, Chapter Five will then examine cinemas in the southern coastal town of Brighton, allowing comparisons with Bolton to be developed. For much of the period between 1930 and 1960, cinemas in both Bolton and Brighton enjoyed rude health. Indeed, Bolton was declared by Boltonian Leslie Halliwell to be a Mecca for 1930s film fans, with over 20 cinemas only a short journey away for the town's inhabitants.⁴⁸⁰ Such a multiplicity of cinemas in the urban centre meant that opportunities for visiting the cinema outside the town were very

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 46; 52.

⁴⁷⁹ See, for example, "Responding to The History Manifesto", *Modern British Studies Birmingham*, 2014, <https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/responding-to-the-history-manifesto> (accessed 18/10/2016) and Mark Koyama, "'The History Manifesto' (Book Review)", *The Journal of Economic History* 75, no. 2 (2015): 584-587.

⁴⁸⁰ Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, 12.

limited, resulting in an environment which John Sedgwick has called “a sealed...microcosm of cinema-going in the industrial north”.⁴⁸¹ It therefore provides a valuable source of information about cinema-going habits and experiences. Similarly, residents of Brighton were well-served cinematically, with some 24 cinemas in the centre in 1940, and the town had an illustrious history of film-making which began in the early years of the twentieth-century. In this chapter and the next, these two towns will offer vivid perspectives on historical cinema-going from both the north and the south of England. They allow for any differences or similarities in regional experiences of cinema leisure activity to contribute to wider impressions of the institution’s role in conceptions of modernity and public emotion in the mid-twentieth-century.

Mass Observation and Worktown

Amongst the varied sources which concern the cinema in Bolton, the Worktown project is one of the richest. As outlined in Chapter One, Bolton was selected by Tom Harrisson as representative of a “typical” northern industrial town and, between 1937 and 1938, he undertook an observational project which became known as “Worktown”. It sought to uncover how the working-class of Bolton lived, worked, and – importantly for the purposes of this study – spent their leisure time.⁴⁸² Harrisson wished to go unobserved in his work (unlike the very public recruitment drive for MO panellists initiated in the south east of England by co-founder Charles Madge): a technique which inevitably exposed him to accusations of social snooping in the town.⁴⁸³ James Hinton, however, has argued that other criticism that Worktown was essentially “an encounter between middle-class intellectuals and the Bolton working-class is fundamentally misleading”, and that Harrisson never denied his privileged middle-class background, nor thought of himself as superior to the Worktowners he was keen to study.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 103.

⁴⁸² This chapter uses both “Worktown” and “Bolton” to refer to the town. “Worktown” is used when referring to the activities and research of Mass Observation. The term “Worktown” is, of course, problematic and loaded with the preoccupations and class musings of MO: that Bolton was essentially a working-class and industrially-dominated northern conurbation. “Bolton” is used when discussing broader themes and ideas which could be equally applicable to other towns across the country.

⁴⁸³ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 61.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

Historians have suggested, however, that it was this sentiment – that Worktowners were “just like us” (that is, like the liberal intelligentsia) – which meant that MO “failed to take working-class selfhood seriously”.⁴⁸⁵ Peter Gurney contends that Harrison was unwilling to theorise about Worktown in terms of class because, as Harrison explained during a 1938 radio interview, he believed that there were few class divisions to be found in England, and that those which did exist operated independently from the isolated world of Worktown.⁴⁸⁶ Harrison professed, instead, to be more concerned with the cultural conflict to be found in the divisions between, for example, smokers and non-smokers, Catholics and Protestants, pub-goers and non-pub-goers.⁴⁸⁷ The ideological result of this was that Harrison and others “tended to isolate the working-class and represent them as a passive object...the logic of Mass Observation consigned them to a strange, cocooned world of their own” (to which MO applied – despite claims to the contrary – entrenched class, gender, and cultural prejudices).⁴⁸⁸ Working-class people sometimes expressed resentment at such treatment, and the allegation that MO Observers were snooping was not uncommon.⁴⁸⁹ Interestingly, during the project’s early years Harrison, far from distancing MO from such accusations, actively promoted the social espionage involved, writing in the *Daily Mirror* under the headline “Public Busybody No. 1” that “a Mass Observation unit have been spying in Halifax...listening to conversations in public-houses and tea shops”.⁴⁹⁰ Perhaps in an effort to increase its public exposure and therefore attract more Observers and concomitant funding, MO appears to have been somewhat complicit in perpetuating aspects of the controversy surrounding the embryonic project. Ideological and methodological problems aside, the Worktown project remains a distinctive and valuable source of material.

“An Epoch in the Entertainment Life of Bolton”: Worktown’s Odeon

An important element in MO’s findings in Worktown was its study of picture-houses. Cinemas were a fundamental component of the cultural and recreational landscape of the town, and Jeffrey Richards has pointed out how the population of Lancashire “took easily

⁴⁸⁵ Gurney, “‘Intersex’ and ‘Dirty Girls’”, 261–262.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ “Public Busybody No. 1”, by Tom Harrison, *Daily Mirror*, 06/12/1938, 14.

and rapidly to the cinema”.⁴⁹¹ Contemporaneously, Harrisson appreciated their significance in the region, writing in 1937 that a study of cinemas “takes its place beside those of religion, politics and sport, with which it must be compared, and in the light of which its importance and influence can be assessed”.⁴⁹² Material collected during the project included copies of cinema brochures and programmes, observations of film screenings, interviews with the managers of various cinemas in the town and questionnaires distributed, through the cinemas, to Bolton’s cinema-going population.

One of the most significant events during the gathering of this research was the opening of a new Odeon on Ashburner Street in August 1937. The opening was attended by the civic leaders of the town and the *Bolton Evening News* reported that proceedings were conducted “with more than ordinary ceremony” as the bagpipes of the 1st Battalion Royal Scots “heightened the appreciation of a ‘full house’”.⁴⁹³ Harrisson attended the evening and reported for Worktown how the queues outside stretched for 50 yards in anticipation of entering the foyer, itself decorated with “gold paint, flowers, [an] air of luxury” and staffed by “chaps in tails”.⁴⁹⁴ Hailed as Bolton’s “palatial cinema”, the Odeon could comfortably seat over 2,500 people and the clean lines of its exterior architecture and interior opulence represented, through recreation, the further development of cultural modernity in Bolton.⁴⁹⁵ The coming of the Odeon also contributed to a degree of geographical democratisation in entertainment by placing Bolton on an equal footing (or, at least, giving the impression of equality) with cinema releases in the south of England. The local press proclaimed that the Odeon would screen “the best of the leading releases...[which] will be shown immediately after their London debut, and in some cases before this”.⁴⁹⁶ Increasing parity in film distribution cannot be viewed only in terms of a north/south divide. Cinema centres such as Bolton opened up opportunities for film-watching to people living in surrounding rural areas: a modern cinematic experience was only a bus ride away. Again, this did not mean that taste in films was homogenised on a national scale, but it did show that a significant section of the population was at least *exposed* to the same media, even if regional idiosyncrasies prevailed.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹¹ Jeffrey Richards, “Cinemagoing in Worktown: Regional Film Audiences in 1930s Britain”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 14, no. 2 (1994), 148.

⁴⁹² “The Cinema”, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/A/1.

⁴⁹³ “New Cinema: Ceremonial Opening of Odeon”, *Bolton Evening News*, 23/08/1937.

⁴⁹⁴ “Odeon Cinema Opening” Report by Tom Harrisson, 21/08/1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/6.

⁴⁹⁵ Front Page Advertisement in Advance of the Odeon’s Opening, *Bolton Evening News*, 17/08/1937.

⁴⁹⁶ “New Bolton Cinema”, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 12/06/1936. It would be interesting to investigate whether Bolton cinemas actually screened any films ahead of a London release.

⁴⁹⁷ See: Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 119–123.

The souvenir programme for the cinema's opening declared that "the coming of the Odeon is an epoch in the entertainment life of Bolton" and emphasised to Boltonians its aim of giving "the best in entertainment in the most artistic surroundings possible".⁴⁹⁸ Moreover, this reflected the way in which cinemas predominantly marketed themselves to local residents, rather than to outsiders or visitors to the town (unlike in the tourist-driven economy of Brighton). The luxurious, "high-class" surroundings of the Odeon were not the only marketing tool used in the programme: the advanced heating and ventilation system was advertised as the "most up-to-date installation of its kind in the country".⁴⁹⁹ A statement such as this shows how cinemas, as spaces, were commonly defined by notions of comfort, demonstrative of how the physical characteristics of the cinema environment were celebrated as much as the films screened within. They were also a manifestation of design becoming an attraction in itself, not only an intrinsic part of the cinema-going experience but also a tangible emblem of modern life. Leslie Halliwell attended the cinema's opening night and much of his recollection of the evening's events focused on the physical attributes of the building:

"the décor was undeniably sumptuous...the immensity of the red velour curtains; the cunningly concealed lighting; the great golden honeycomb grills on each side of the screen; the green octagonal clocks in which the letters THE ODEON took the place of numerals; all these played their part in the magnificence of that massive decorated space. It was more overwhelming than being in St Mark's Church, or even Manchester Cathedral".⁵⁰⁰

In several respects, the Odeon, quite unlike any other building in the town, acted as a route into the experience of modernity. For an admission cost of between 6d and 1/6d, audiences could participate in the technological and cultural advances characterised by companies such as Odeon.⁵⁰¹ In doing so, they could assert and develop their own social positions by visiting modern public spaces which were reflective of the filmic wonders displayed on the screen. The identity of "everyday" spaces such as the cinema was being shaped by the preoccupations and attitudes of those who visited them, and familiar environments such as cafés adopted new cultural meanings when placed in the context of a cinema. The Odeon itself boasted a "splendid little café...amid luxurious

⁴⁹⁸ Souvenir programme, "Grand Opening of the Odeon Theatre, Bolton", 21/08/1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/D/1.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, 59.

⁵⁰¹ Peter Swain, *The Golden Age of Cinema-Going in Bolton* (Bolton: Worktown Publications, 2014), 76.

surroundings”, and the December 1937 newsletter suggested to readers that “in the near future you arrange to meet your friends ‘In the Odeon café’?”.⁵⁰² This consolidated the notion of a cinema both as a venue of social interaction, and – in the auditorium – as a space for private emotional experience. Cafés were one of a number of communal spaces – some new, others more established – which developed the codes and rules of public social interaction, and which represented a lived practice of modernity.⁵⁰³ The existence of a café in the Bolton Odeon was, presumably, an economic imperative for the company, but it also added to the allure of the cinema when one could display to friends, in the café’s luxurious surroundings, a degree of cultural sophistication. It was an ancillary attraction which could be easily integrated into the other recreation of film-watching, an example of the modern phenomenon of different public amenities being unified in a single building.



Figure 1: The clean lines, sweeping forms and imposing columns of Bolton’s Odeon marked it out as a temple of film for both Halliwell and many of his fellow Boltonians.

<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/18619/photos>

⁵⁰² “Manager’s Chat”, Odeon Bolton Newsletter, December 1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/D/1.

⁵⁰³ John Montgomery, “Café Culture and the City: The Role of Pavement Cafés in Urban Public Social Life”, *Journal of Urban Design* 2, no. 1 (1997), 89.

The Cinema Social Survey in Worktown

In 1938, three cinemas in Bolton collaborated with Worktown and conducted a Social Survey of its patrons. Collaborations with the press and other companies were a common technique used by MO to elicit personal writings from people, and competitions and surveys promoted by the organisation investigated topics such as all-in wrestling, “What is Happiness?”, and “Why I drink beer”.⁵⁰⁴ The cinema questionnaire took the form of a postcard with a series of questions and a space for general comments on films and cinema-going, to be posted or returned by hand to the Odeon, the Palladium or the Crompton. The selection of these establishments reflected the hierarchy of cinemas which existed in many towns: the Odeon was a first-run cinema, the Crompton occupied the middle of the market, and the Palladium was a flea-pit cinema with prices ranging from 4d to a shilling.⁵⁰⁵

Over 500 replies were received and Richards has called the resulting cache of responses “a virtually unique insight into the cinema-going preferences of a single urban community”.⁵⁰⁶ Worktown reported the findings as the Odeon’s manager, Mr Abercrombie, had summarised them. The questionnaire itself was centred on attitudes towards British and American films, and the subsequent Worktown report was most concerned with examining film taste: it found the most popular genres with Bolton audiences to be musical romances, dramas and tragedies, historical pictures and love stories.⁵⁰⁷ The creation of these questionnaires also brings forward issues of individual agency and audience participation. Martin Johnson has proposed that by “revealing names, occupations, and home addresses” (as well as genre preferences) to cinemas and production companies, “movie audiences were encouraged to discard their anonymity”.⁵⁰⁸ The various industries of film entertainment, in Johnson’s view, shared “an interest in removing the spectator from the disciplinary space of the cinema, and inserting them into a world where one is always a potential movie-goer...[creating] the conditions for the pervasive visibility of film culture in the twentieth century”.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 38.

⁵⁰⁵ David Hall, *Worktown: The Astonishing Story of the Project That Launched Mass Observation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2015), 226.

⁵⁰⁶ Richards, “Cinemagoing in Worktown”, 151.

⁵⁰⁷ “Film Survey: Bolton Questionnaire”. SxMOA1/5/8/35/A.

⁵⁰⁸ Martin L. Johnson, “The Well-Lighted Theater or the Semi-Darkened Room? Transparency, Opacity and Participation in the Institution of Cinema”, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12, no. 2 (2014), 202–203.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

Amongst the individual replies highlighted in the document, certain themes emerge which complement those from the national MO studies, and which were discussed in preceding chapters. Cinemas, for example, were associated with feelings of familiarity and safety, with one respondent writing that he and his wife preferred the Odeon cinema above others as “it is the most homely and comfortable cinema in Bolton...the courtesy shown by your staff to we old folks too, is fully appreciated”.⁵¹⁰ This impression of cinemas as domestic spaces is reinforced by Kuhn’s ethnographic study of 1930s cinema-going, which concluded that many of the respondents to her questionnaire identified their favourite cinema as one which “embodied...homely qualities: convenience of location, value for money, friendliness, a sense of belonging”.⁵¹¹ Another reply featured in the Worktown report read: “although coming from Atherton to visit the Odeon in Bolton should be a compliment alone, I still add that yours is the best programme to be seen for some miles around the district”.⁵¹²

Such a response illustrates that, whilst cinema-going in the mid-twentieth-century was habitual and widespread, some people were discerning in their choice of venue, often visiting a cinema which, geographically, was not the most immediately accessible. Indeed, analysis of the home addresses of respondents reveals spatial patterns which suggest that people were willing to travel across town to visit the Odeon (often making journeys of over one mile and passing other cinemas en route), whereas smaller and less-luxurious cinemas, such as the Palladium and Crompton, drew their audiences from the immediate vicinity.

⁵¹⁰ “Film Survey: Bolton Questionnaire”. SxMOA1/5/8/35/A.

⁵¹¹ Annette Kuhn, “Cinema-Going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19, no. 4 (1999), 536.

⁵¹² “Film Survey: Bolton Questionnaire”. SxMOA1/5/8/35/A; Atherton is located some five miles south-west from Bolton.

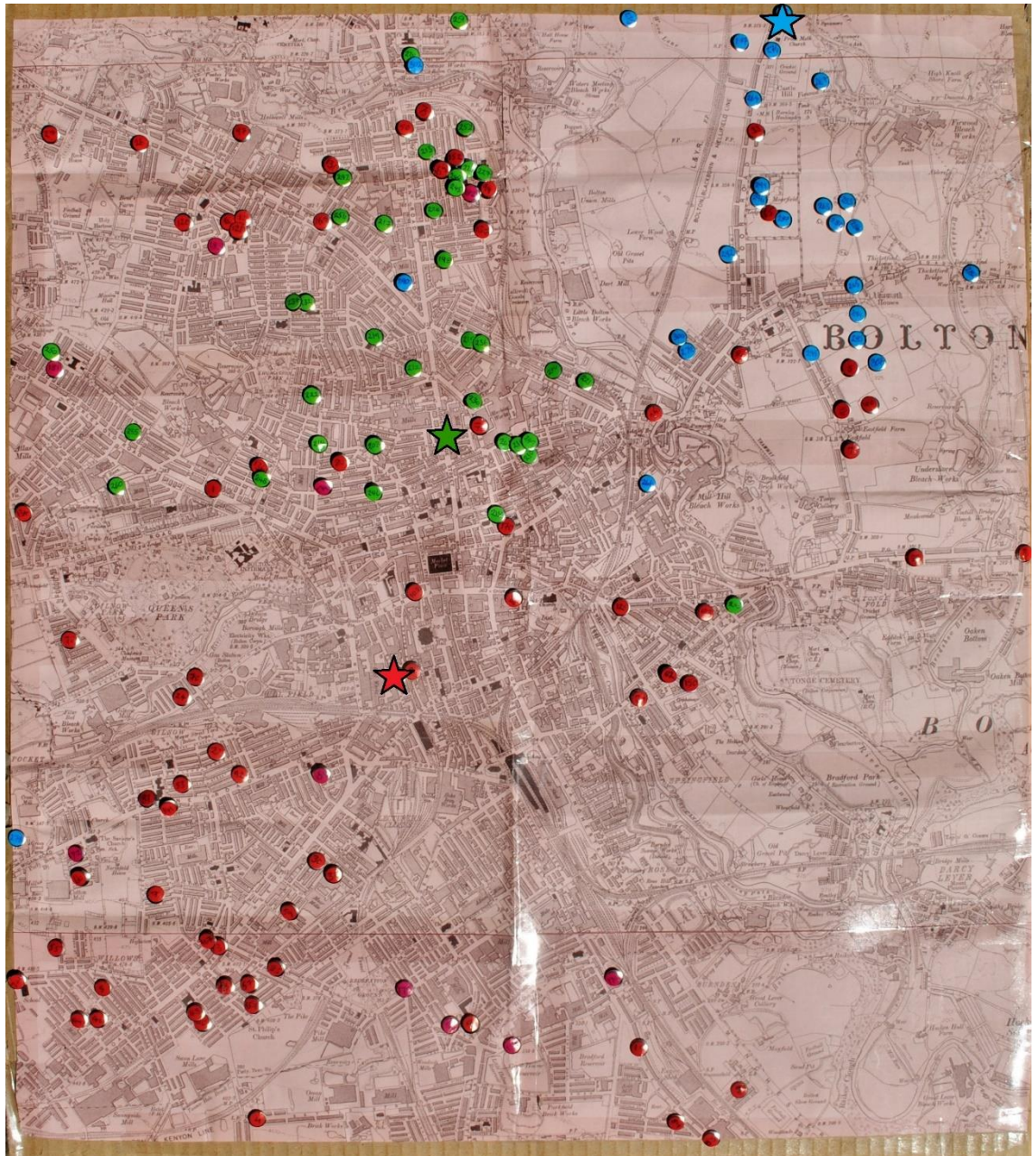


Figure 2: Map created with data from the Worktown cinema survey. The stars indicate the location of the cinemas (red for the Odeon, green for the Palladium and blue for the Crompton) and the dots represent the home addresses of survey respondents, coloured according to which cinema they visited.

The latter half of the 1920s witnessed a significant improvement in public transport within the urban area of Bolton, with an increase in the size of bus fleets and more local bus routes necessitating the construction of a new garage on Crook Street in 1929.⁵¹³ This strengthening of transport infrastructure allowed people to venture out of their homes

⁵¹³ Peter Gould, "Bolton Corporation Transport, 1900-1969", 2017, http://www.petergould.co.uk/local_transport_history/fleetlists/boltoni.htm (accessed 31/08/17).

more easily, cheaply, and quickly, allowing activities such as town-centre cinema-going (especially in the evenings) to be better integrated into everyday life. As the following chapter will demonstrate, this was particularly the case in Brighton, where cinemas were concentrated in the tourist-saturated centre and local Brighton residents had to journey from the outlying suburbs into the town centre in order to visit a large cinema.

Worktown's analysis of the cinema survey was limited to perceptions of film taste and the influence of American cinema. It would, therefore, be useful to return to the original questionnaires themselves to examine in more depth historical cinema-going in the town. Of the three cinemas which distributed the questionnaire in conjunction with MO, the Odeon received the most replies (349) and also the highest number of prose answers. These offer a unique insight into popular attitudes towards cinema-going in Bolton. Close examination of the responses reveals that, contrary to assertions that patrons were indiscriminate in their cinema-going and would go to the cinema whatever film was showing, Boltonians often took care in selecting the films they watched. This, of course, does not preclude the idea that cinema-going in the 1930s and 1940s was an habitual practice, but it suggests that even the most avid film-goers were discerning media consumers. One Bolton resident wrote that her film-going was "based on judicious selection of what I am led to believe are outstanding films" and, through regular columns such as "The Week on the Screen" in the *Bolton Evening News* and the *Bolton Journal and Guardian's* "Let's Go to the Pictures", Bolton cinema-goers could form critical judgements about which films to see in the town's cinemas.⁵¹⁴

Other responses suggest that the myriad of cinemas available to Worktowners were characterised and ranked by the public, based on the quality of the films on offer. Although some of the Odeon competition entries may have been slightly obsequious in tone (the £1 prize offered for the best answers presumably being a factor), they often identified the Odeon as offering a consistently-good programme. "I think the Odeon show [sic] the best films" opined one woman, whilst another wrote that "the Odeon appears to be the centre attraction for the best and varied films of real interest, humour, musical and drama shown in Bolton", intimating that it was superior to other comparable picture-houses in the town.⁵¹⁵ In visiting Bolton's Odeon, people felt that they were "sure of good sound entertainment" (perhaps based on the reputation built by Oscar Deutsch in his

⁵¹⁴ Response from Edna Pearson, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, responses from Miss B. L. Brown and Miss L. Dalley.

attempts to marry architectural excellence with filmic quality).⁵¹⁶ In a similar way, many replies stressed the technological advancement of the town's Odeon, suggesting the manner in which the "modern" was viewed and interpreted by mid-century Boltonians. Recent scholarship on the development of modernity in Britain has suggested that debates about continuity or rupture should be softened in favour of examining socially- and culturally-informed "experiences", rather than focusing on modernity as a wholesale and sudden rejection of the old.⁵¹⁷ Emotional modernity, as discussed in Chapter Two, is a leading example of how these experiences were idiosyncratic, keenly-felt and produced by a coalescing of many factors within society.

Moreover, the relative political stability of the country during the first half of the twentieth-century meant that change took place "within flexible traditions [which] allowed Britons to embrace a modernity imbued with a sense of historical continuity".⁵¹⁸ The emphasis, then, is on modernity as an evolutionary process. In this way, leisure activities acted as a cultural conduit for fluid notions of what exactly constituted "modern life", and (thanks to developments in technology) built upon previous forms of recreation. A Bolton resident highlighted in 1938 how the cinema was distinctly modern, emerging from older entertainment forms to assert its dominance: "the advent of talking apparatus is certainly becoming the main factor in the death of the provincial Music Hall".⁵¹⁹ Cinema-going is thus an example of how British modernity can be considered as a "conservative modernity": a cultural and social manifestation of the modern, but one which evolved from, and was set within, more established and traditional leisure practices, such as the music-hall.⁵²⁰

A reply to the Crompton cinema questionnaire suggested that its author would visit the cinema to see films with very specific themes: "although there is a type of person who will enjoy any type of picture, I think much popularity is given to the film which deals with the ordinary man and woman, living an ordinary life in an ordinary home".⁵²¹ Unfortunately, the writer did not name specific films which featured characters "like you or I", mirroring a

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, response from Mrs N. Cockshott.

⁵¹⁷ Jones and Searle, "Humphrey Jennings, the Left and the Experience of Modernity in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain", 208.

⁵¹⁸ Bernhard Rieger, "'Fast Couples': Technology, Gender and Modernity in Britain and Germany During the Nineteen-Thirties", *Historical Research* 76, no. 193 (2003), 366.

⁵¹⁹ Response from Reginald Grant, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵²⁰ Rieger, "'Fast Couples,'" 366. The popularity of musical comedies in the cinema attests to audiences' fondness for music-hall traditions.

⁵²¹ Response from Samuel Vaines, The Crompton Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/E.

wider trend in MO material which frequently saw only the biggest box-office hits being mentioned by name.⁵²² Praise for the cinema's programme continued, with another contributor writing that the cinema's "choice of pictures is also very excellent...I should like to thank you for getting them in Bolton so early".⁵²³ For this group of Bolton cinema patrons, at least, the perceived quality of a film (itself linked with specific cinemas) played a key role in cinema-going motivations.

Others, however, placed as much importance on the physical environment of the cinema. In a similar manner to responses to other MO directives from around the country, several Bolton questionnaire replies aligned the cinema with notions of domesticity, largely created by the design and location of the building. This impression was centred on the intimacy of the space, provided in part by the "high-class" seating which the Odeon boasted was "spaced to give ample room for comfort".⁵²⁴ The Regent on Deane Road drew further comparisons with the home, proclaiming itself to be "Bolton's Cosy Cinema" on signage above the entrance. Similarly, a 12 year-old girl hailed the Odeon as "the most comfortable picture-house in town. The organ is very beautiful, and when I get settled in one of the seats, listening to the music, I feel that I could stay there forever".⁵²⁵ The cinema was clearly a public space in which she felt relaxed, contented and (key to the links with the domestic) safe. A gendered perspective can be introduced here, as the cinema was one of the few public spaces in which women felt largely secure if they were alone. A lone woman at the cinema during the afternoon could hope to feel relatively inconspicuous, in contrast to the criticism which an unaccompanied woman would have attracted in visiting one of Bolton's pubs.⁵²⁶ Another reply explicitly identified the connotations with the home: "since the Odeon as [sic] opened I have enjoyed all your pictures, and feel at home".⁵²⁷ Indeed, the word "comfort" appeared in many survey responses, with a typical reply describing the Odeon as "the most comfortable cinema in Bolton".⁵²⁸ Mirroring the national picture, cinemas in Bolton were extensions of the home for many and, as public spaces, elicited feelings more commonly associated with the safety, ease, and privacy of the home.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

⁵²³ Response from H. Lomax, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵²⁴ Souvenir programme, "Opening of the Odeon".

⁵²⁵ Response from Constance Thomas, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵²⁶ Richards, "Cinemagoing in Worktown", 147.

⁵²⁷ Response from Mrs E. Smith, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, response from Mrs J. Webster.

The lavish appointments of cinemas such as the Odeon also provided a unique spatial context which could enhance the film-watching experience, and the contrast with the severe industrial Bolton townscape was, of course, marked. One respondent highlighted: “a word of praise for modern cinemas – their luxurious interiors certainly increase one’s enjoyment of a show”.⁵²⁹ The cavernous spatial dimensions of the auditoria of several Bolton cinemas were also discussed in another reply, which admired the “spaciousness” of the environment – a physical attribute which was sometimes echoed on the screen itself.⁵³⁰ A visit to the cinema was described by some as providing a sense of expansive mental freedom: an emotion directly related to the content of the films. “When you have spent a dull, dreary day in the spinning room” wrote a respondent in reply to the Palladium cinema’s survey “you want to see some open air life as you usually get in Western films”.⁵³¹ The physicality of the cinema and the spaces represented on the screen coalesced to create public buildings which were, as Helen Richards has argued, “personal utopias” for many cinema-goers.⁵³² Cinemas acquired idiosyncratic meanings for Boltonians, their public nature sometimes becoming a main attraction for those who sought recreation outside the privacy of the home. In a request for cinemas to reduce the number of “sob” films screened, for example, one middle-aged man explained that he could “get that at home on the wireless, I come out to the cinema for a change and expect something to clear the cobwebs off”.⁵³³ In 1939, the manageress of the Rialto expressed to Worktown her support for the concept of the cinema as a site spatially and psychologically removed from the neighbourhoods in which people lived: “people are tired of being at home and that makes them come out [to the cinema]”⁵³⁴. Although she believed the cinema to be separate from the domestic sphere, this study has demonstrated how it was, in fact, an annexe of the home for many people.

Opportunities for Leisure in Bolton

Bolton’s cinemas were not, of course, the only source of working-class leisure in the town. Sports such as football (both as a spectator and participatory event) were encouraged through the establishment of teams drawn from the town’s cotton mills, a practice which

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, response from John Woodhead.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, response from Eric Barlow.

⁵³¹ Response from Thomas Weatherall, The Palladium Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/D/1.

⁵³² Richards, “Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930–1960”, 352.

⁵³³ Response from George Horrocks, The Crompton Cinema Questionnaire, 1938, SxMOA1/5/8/35/E.

⁵³⁴ “Xmas Entertainment, Conversations with Staff at 7 Cinemas”. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/36.

blurred boundaries between work and leisure. Robert Snape has suggested that this made “sport a sphere of identity in the workplace”.⁵³⁵ In a similar manner, Bolton’s picture houses – on account of their associations with both the public and private – helped Worktowners forge leisure identities which overlapped different spaces (both real and imagined). These spaces included the local industrial environment of the town, the sense of a developing national culture, and the vicarious, imagined spaces on the cinema screen. More broadly, Snape concludes that “Worktowners pursued active and engaged leisure lives” which were not disrupted by the rise of mass culture such as the cinema but, instead, were “absorbed and integrated into existing patterns of everyday life” in many different localities.⁵³⁶ These localities became a significant factor in the experience of leisure in the town, especially for women, for whom “going to the pictures” became a primary leisure practice situated outside the context of the household. Most importantly, (as previously noted) it was one which could be integrated with other more mundane daily activities such as shopping and childcare.⁵³⁷ High levels of female employment in the cotton mills also gave Bolton women greater disposable income when compared with other areas of the country, opening up opportunities for regular cinema-going and increased general spending on leisure activities amongst the female population.⁵³⁸ Bolton’s cinemas, then, operated in several spheres of everyday life, with diverse meanings for different people.

The centrality of the cinema to leisure provision in Bolton is not only found in the replies to the cinema questionnaire. As part of the Worktown project, several managers of the town’s cinemas were interviewed, offering a commercial perspective on cinema-going. In December 1938, the manager of the Embassy cinema (located in the town centre on Deansgate) was interviewed by MO and claimed that cinema was the “first entertainment” of the town.⁵³⁹ As might be expected, the manager continued to emphasise the importance of his business to the lives of Worktowners, recalling: “I’ve spoke [sic] to several of my patrons, all working-class, and they don’t think they’ve been anywhere if they haven’t been to the cinema twice a week...I get 6,000 people or more who come here regularly twice a week”.⁵⁴⁰ Cinema managers recognised that much of their

⁵³⁵ Snape, “Everyday Leisure and Northernness”, 4.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵³⁷ Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure*, 165.

⁵³⁸ Swain, *The Golden Age*, 31.

⁵³⁹ “Interview with Hull of the Embassy Cinema”, 14/12/1938, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/29.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

audience was composed of regular film-goers, for whom a visit to a cinema at least once a week was a customary practice. Evidence for the prevalence of habitual cinema-going in Bolton can also be found in the oral history project which was conducted there during the 1980s, which interviewed residents born between 1900 and c.1925. One male interviewee recalled how:

“films were so popular [in] the Picture House on Chorley New Road [that] the same people had the same seats week after week after week on a Saturday night and the only time they changed is that the’d [sic] go to the box office and say I’m sorry I can’t come on Saturday and will you let somebody else have mi [sic] seat and there was always a cue [sic] of people waiting for any seats that became vacant.”⁵⁴¹

The integration of cinema-going in Worktowners’ daily lives powerfully reinforces the relationship between mid-century leisure and work patterns. The manager of the Embassy highlighted the link, as he saw it, between the fortunes of Bolton’s cotton mill workers and his box office receipts:

“You take any dispute concerning working people, in any mill or foundry in Bolton. During that dispute your evening takings drop, but your afternoon goes up. It proves that however hard up they are they still want the cinema, so they take the cheaper seats in the afternoon.”⁵⁴²

Despite the manager’s claims, the very poorest could not afford to regularly visit even the cheapest of Bolton’s cinemas, familiarly known as “bug hutches” (the Palladium and Gem cinemas attracted such an appellation). Andrew Davies’ study of working-class culture in Manchester and Salford has highlighted how a Manchester University Settlement study of 1937-1938 found that 17 per cent of deprived families in one district never used the cinema.⁵⁴³ This is not to say that they didn’t want to visit the pictures: many people were very much aware that they were missing out.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, Davies suggests that “some women were simply too poor to go to the cinema” and, unless they were “treated” to a ticket by their husbands, “women who wanted to go to the cinema had to find the admission fee out of their housekeeping”.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴¹ Bolton Oral History Project Transcripts, Male, Born 1901, TL/CG/045/42. Bolton Museum and Archives, B025.178B PRO.

⁵⁴² “Interview with Hull”, 2. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/29.

⁵⁴³ Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 74.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

Cinema-going in Working-class Boltonian's Lives

The apparent shift in the cinema-going habits of Worktowners during periods of industrial dispute reflects how employment and recreation were intimately intertwined with one another. On occasion, the environments of work and leisure merged in Bolton as workers visited the cinema immediately after finishing their shift in the mills. Leslie Halliwell recalled how the auditorium of the Atlas cinema often smelled “because some of its less thoughtful patrons came straight from the mill and brought with them the sickly sweet odour of cotton seed oil”: evidence, indeed, of the need for the “advanced ventilation” systems promoted in cinema advertisements.⁵⁴⁶ Several replies to the Worktown film survey also aligned cinema-going with the patterns of the working day, calling the cinema a “most entertaining occupation, after a day’s work” which helped “one to forget the workaday world”.⁵⁴⁷ The responses to the Worktown cinema questionnaire offer a unique opportunity to directly access the voices of Bolton’s film fans and can help illuminate the cultural and social climate in which 1930s cinema-going took place. Whilst the replies to the questionnaire naturally represent a very limited section of the film-going population of Bolton (and the offer of financial reward from the cinemas may have coloured the opinions expressed), it nevertheless remains hugely valuable in assessing the motivations behind this aspect of working-class leisure activity.

As Robert Snape contends, Worktowners played a significant part in “the creation of their everyday leisure activities and networks which contributed to the formation and continuity of a specifically northern and Bolton identity”.⁵⁴⁸ This cultural agency extended to cinema-going. Although ultimate control remained with the established order of those companies which produced films and the exhibitors who determined their availability, cinema-going allowed working-class consumers to integrate themselves in a film-watching community which was informed by the films they chose to see. Cinema-going became a “cultural signifier”; that is, one could develop and project a sense of (an often modern) social identity based upon what one saw and where.⁵⁴⁹ Keen to appeal to this cultural aspiration, cinemas presented themselves to the residents of Bolton as prominent beacons of modernity, advertising their technological and cultural advancement in the

⁵⁴⁶ Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, 70.

⁵⁴⁷ Responses from Margaret Ward and George Thomson, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵⁴⁸ Snape, “Everyday Leisure and Northernness”, 2.

⁵⁴⁹ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*, 2010, 17–18.

pursuit of increased box office figures.

Amongst the ephemera gathered during Worktown's studies was a significant collection of cinema advertising material, ranging from promotional leaflets to commemorative brochures and regular newsletters such as *Bolton's Tatler* which was distributed monthly "in the interests of picture and theatregoers".⁵⁵⁰ Worktown catalogued the souvenir brochure for the opening of the Odeon which declared that the cinema was "a distinct and unique addition to the amenities of the town", asserting itself as a key component of the recreational landscape.⁵⁵¹ Similarly, rival company ABC (which owned the Capitol cinema on Churchgate) asserted the importance of cinema-going to the town's cultural practices, including its festive celebrations. The Capitol's December 1937 magazine included a piece from Lionel Durban, the cinema's manager, which proclaimed "if we seldom have a 'white' Christmas nowadays...this is compensated for by the amount of indoor entertainment. All over the Kingdom ABC Theatres will be busy helping to add to your pleasure this yuletide".⁵⁵² These seasonal pleasures extended to Christmas Day itself, with many cinemas opening in the mid-afternoon, screening films into the late-evening. This declined in post-war years as television grew in popularity and as the National Association of Theatrical and Cine Employees campaigned for their members to be given the entire day as holiday.⁵⁵³ Throughout the 1930s and into the Second World War, Bolton's local newspapers also carried prominent film listings on their front page, suggesting the importance which the cinema held for residents. It is no coincidence that this practice faded as the 1950s wore on and more households acquired television sets, resulting in the demotion of film listings (along with advertising in general) to the back pages of the newspapers.

Cinema-going as an Emotional Pursuit

Cinema patrons in Bolton, as in the rest of the country, viewed cinema-going as an emotional experience, tied to both the familiarity of the spaces in which the films were screened and the content of the films themselves. Representative of this attitude was a response from Edith Worthington, a 34 year-old Boltonian who, in 1938, replied to the

⁵⁵⁰ "Cinema Brochures". SxMOA1/5/8/36/D/1.

⁵⁵¹ Souvenir programme, "Grand Opening of the Odeon Theatre, Bolton", 21/08/1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/D/1.

⁵⁵² ABC Capitol Cinema Magazine, December 1937. SxMOA1/5/8/36/D/1.

⁵⁵³ "No More Christmas-Day Cinemas", *The Manchester Guardian*, 27/03/1946, 5.

Worktown questionnaire which was examined earlier in this chapter. She maintained that an overriding aim of her cinema-going was to “come away feeling better for our visit”.⁵⁵⁴ Such a sentiment reflects much of the contemporary discourse surrounding cinemas in the 1930s and 1940s: they were perceived as an antidote to people’s worries and as a restorative form of leisure. Emotion was viewed as an integral part of a visit to the cinema, as an ethnographic work by Bolton resident Agnes Fish, held by Bolton Museum and Archives, shows. In remembering her childhood in the suburbs of Bolton, she describes visiting the Ritz cinema on Peel Street to see *Now, Voyager* (1942): an event which resulted in her “weeping copiously (and enjoying myself)”.⁵⁵⁵ This use of language implies that the act of crying in the cinema was associated with pleasure, rather than sadness, suggesting that weeping in the safe and permissive context of the cinema auditorium was a positive experience.

As a melodrama (with a major female star in the form of Bette Davis) *Now, Voyager* was marketed as the archetypal “women’s picture”, and is another example of how issues of genre and gender interweave with emotion in the cinema. Upon its release, *Variety* declared that the film would be sure to “win audience reaction by its high-powered emotional impact alone, particularly from the women”, mirroring the heavy marketing of the film as a superior romantic drama for women.⁵⁵⁶ In the case of *Now, Voyager*, emotional stimulation was explicitly directed at women in the cinema, and revolved around themes of love and female agency (Davis was well-known for her cigarette smoking: a sign of the modern and liberated woman).⁵⁵⁷ The experiences of watching *Now, Voyager* which were recounted in Bolton’s oral history project reflect broader national trends: trends which are seen in sources such as the MO 1950 crying directive, where obvious displays of emotion were considered to be a legitimate outcome of engaging with a film. Importantly, these public emotional displays were tied with, and given validity by, film genre. Social convention permitted women to weep whilst watching melodramas, whereas men would have been castigated for doing so. The interplay between genre and gender informed a very particular set of social, cultural, and spatial conditions which guided the public experience of emotion in Bolton’s cinemas.

⁵⁵⁴ Response from Edith Worthington, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵⁵⁵ “Farnworth and Kearsley: Memories from Childhood” by Agnes Fish, December 1981, Vol. 8, 920 FIS. Bolton Museum and Archives.

⁵⁵⁶ “Now, Voyager”, *Variety*, 19/08/1942, cited in: Martin Shingler, “Bette Davis Made Over in Wartime: The Feminisation of an Androgynous Star in *Now, Voyager* (1942)”, *Film History: An International Journal* 20, no. 3 (2008), 273.

⁵⁵⁷ Shingler, “Bette Davis Made Over in Wartime”, 271.

It would now be beneficial to examine how cinemas operated within the broader emotional economy of the town, and whether this emotional landscape was representative of, or antithetical to, national cinema-going practices. Monique Scheer's work in the history of emotions and, in particular, her emphasis on emotional practices, offers an innovative perspective with which to approach the role of cinemas in the everyday lives of mid-century Boltonians. Scheer advances the thesis that emotional practices are "things people do *in order to* have emotions" and are "frequently embedded in social settings".⁵⁵⁸ Cinema-going is an obvious example of a historical emotional practice, and it played a major role in the broader emotional economy of Bolton. The model of emotional practices stresses the interdependency between emotions as an *experience* and their *performative* nature; emotional practices are not acts which are simply accompanied by emotion but, instead, are fundamentally shaped by the emotions themselves.⁵⁵⁹ This dualism does not, of course, imply that – away from the picture-house – feelings of anger, sadness or excitement were emotions absent in the lives of Bolton's cinema-goers. It does, however, suggest that cinema-going was a significant opportunity for emotional stimulation and, thus, an important emotional practice in the mid-twentieth century. In visiting the cinema, Boltonians participated in a social habit which allowed for the stimulation of emotions (both individually and collectively) in an environment largely devoid of light.⁵⁶⁰ Johnson has argued that this semi-darkness gave an "opacity" to audience members, allowing them to "establish relational identities with each new image, narrative and star" on the screen.⁵⁶¹

This point can be taken yet further. It has already been argued that a relationship was not only established between the audience members and the screen, but on an emotional level with those around them – a fact readily understood by Boltonians. In a regular "Town Topics" column, the *Bolton Evening News* called in 1935 for a news cinema to be opened in the town. Aside from providing those "with a little time to kill" with a worthwhile activity, the paper emphasised the attractions of "these intimate little places" in establishing a convivial viewing atmosphere.⁵⁶² The manager of the town's Embassy cinema concurred with this, suggesting that "people don't like the big barns, they like to

⁵⁵⁸ Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)?", 194; 211.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁶⁰ Johnson, "The Well-Lighted Theater or the Semi-Darkened Room?", 209.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁶² "Town Topics: News Cinema", *Bolton Evening News*, 23/10/1935.

be in a crowd. You go in a great barn of a place. You go in when there's bad picture [sic], and a few people dotted about and you feel lonely".⁵⁶³ He later evidenced his assertions by claiming that another small Bolton cinema took more money than a 2,000 seat cinema nearby.⁵⁶⁴ As an emotional practice, the communal dimension of cinema-going was enhanced by the ability to observe (and hear) fellow audience members in the half-light of the auditorium. Reading, interpreting and appropriating the emotional experiences of others became a significant part of one's own emotional responses in an environment in which, to return to Scheer, "other people's bodies are implicated in practice because viewing them induces feelings".⁵⁶⁵ The opportunity to experience a recreational pursuit rooted in a homogenous, group emotionality allowed cinemas to enjoy a privileged position in the leisure life of Bolton.

Debates in the Press About Sunday Openings

The cinema's impact on public emotion in Bolton – and in the country more widely – was also affected by other issues, such as Sunday opening. A letter published in the *Bolton Evening News*, for example, positioned cinemas as a key influence on the emotions of the town's inhabitants, suggesting that without Sunday screenings, one could "hardly be met with anything else but 'gloomy looks'" in the street and that a Sunday cinema visit would result in "fewer 'Monday morning blues'".⁵⁶⁶ Sunday opening did, however, have its critics. As the traditional Christian day of rest, the question of whether people should be permitted to indulge in superficial cinema entertainments on a Sunday was the central issue for organisations such as the Lord's Day Observance Society, which campaigned against Sunday opening. One MP declared that a 7 day working-week for cinema staff "would be a public danger", whilst church authorities feared that it would draw people away from church services.⁵⁶⁷ Although the status quo was supported in law, dating back to the Sunday Observance Act of 1780, a significant number of cinemas between 1900 and 1930 (both licensed and unlicensed) already opened on Sundays.⁵⁶⁸ In July 1932, the government passed the Sunday Entertainments Bill which permitted those cinemas which already opened on Sundays to continue to do so, and allowed other cinemas to follow suit,

⁵⁶³ "Interview with Hull of the Embassy Cinema", 14/12/1938, 1. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/29.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)?", 211.

⁵⁶⁶ "Bolton's Sunday Evening", Letters to the Editor, *Bolton Evening News*, by Reginald Chapman, 24/11/1939.

⁵⁶⁷ "Cinemas Bill", *The Times*, 08/06/1932, 9.

⁵⁶⁸ G. I. T. Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 58.

should there be a regional demand. This decision highlighted the varying intensity of religious feeling in the country, with nearly all cinemas in London opening on Sundays (and a quarter in England as a whole) by 1934. In contrast, fewer than 10% opened in areas where Sabbatarianism was stronger, such as Wales and Scotland.⁵⁶⁹

The new opportunity for regional variations in Sunday opening also exposed the extent to which some resented the loss of autonomy in their local communities. Soon after the Bill was passed, the Bolton Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association applied to the Town Council for permission to open on Sundays. *The Manchester Guardian* quoted a Bolton cinema owner's objections to the plans: "Sunday should be the Christian's day of rest. My staff, as well as myself, does not want to work on Sundays, and neither do the majority of locally owned cinemas. Surely Bolton will not allow outside cinema interests to dictate what it shall do on a Sunday".⁵⁷⁰ In contrast, Brighton was strongly opposed to these views: its status as a seaside resort and the attendant focus on the provision for public leisure meant that, as David Fisher suggests, "entertainment was too important a part of Brighton's economy on any day of the week to deny access to it".⁵⁷¹ Unlike the manufacturing centre of Bolton, the social landscape of Brighton was orientated towards outside visitors and a leisure economy, of which cinemas and their Sunday opening was an important part.

As the eventual passage of the Sunday Entertainments Bill demonstrates, significant support for Sunday cinemas existed, support which was often voiced in the press. Changing patterns of work (especially in urban industrial centres such as Bolton) along with more defined and structured working weeks led many to advocate Sunday cinemas. One writer to *The Times* argued that workers could not go to the pictures on a weekday as they "come home tired and late. They have food to prepare and other things to do, whereas on a Sunday they have the day to themselves and can take the fullest advantage of the mental relaxation provided by the cinemas".⁵⁷² As the cinema was a cheap and accessible form of recreation, the *Daily Mirror* declared in 1931 that "public opinion is, on the whole, in favour of Sunday cinemas".⁵⁷³ It continued, rather uncharitably, that "a

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ "Bolton Sunday Cinemas: Opposition From Exhibitors", *The Manchester Guardian*, 31/01/1933, 18.

⁵⁷¹ David Fisher, *Cinema-by-Sea: Film and Cinema in Brighton & Hove Since 1896* (Brighton: Terra Media, 2012), 35.

⁵⁷² "Sunday Amusements", Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, by R. H. Elliot, 14/03/1931, 8.

⁵⁷³ "Watch That Cinema Bill", *Daily Mirror*, 18/04/1931, 9.

strong, well-organised and fanatical minority are marshalled in opposition to this Bill, as they would be to any measure that might offend a Puritan instinct ineradicable from the temperament of the busybody”.⁵⁷⁴ *The Observer* also criticised the fears of some in the church that the cinema would dilute people’s faith: “the notion that people leave their homes on Sunday evenings with the idea of entering places of worship but are seduced from their path by the commissionaire at the door of some picture-palace, all posters and electric lights, is too absurd for examination”.⁵⁷⁵

In reality, Sunday cinema-going had little direct impact on church attendance and, for some evangelical Christians, the principle of participating in frivolous entertainment on a Sunday was the greater moral danger, rather than the possibility of the cinema ensnaring congregations. In 1938, the *Bolton Evening News* reported that a local cleric supported Sunday screenings, explaining that “if all the cinemas in Bolton were open on Sunday nights, he did not think they would take half a dozen people from their congregation. The church and the cinema were not competitors. They dealt in different commodities”.⁵⁷⁶ The following year, however, an angry letter to the Editor of the paper exclaimed “whatever is coming over Bolton? I am still rubbing my eyes after reading to-night’s paper that George Formby and other artists are to appear in a variety entertainment given on Sunday...this [is a] profanation of the Lord’s Day”. Clearly, not everyone in Bolton subscribed to the Reverend’s viewpoint.

The tensions between the church and cinemas were somewhat lessened in the 1930s by two key suggestions. Firstly, that a proportion of profits from Sunday screenings could be donated to charity (it was reported in 1932 that £3,000 a week was donated to hospitals as a result of Sunday admissions), thus reducing some of the moral objections to entertainment on the Sabbath.⁵⁷⁷ Secondly, the diverting power of the cinema was again raised, this time in support of the cause. Rather than arguing that it damaged church attendances, the case was made in the pages of the *Daily Mail* that “the cinema is more and more widely being regarded as a desirable Sunday recreation for which a less desirable substitute might be found if the cinema were closed”.⁵⁷⁸ This less desirable substitute was, of course, the greater evil of the pub. It is interesting to note, however,

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ “Church and Cinema”, *The Observer*, 14/12/1930, 14.

⁵⁷⁶ “Use of Sunday: Church and Cinema Not Competitors”, *Bolton Evening News*, 14/11/1938.

⁵⁷⁷ “Fate of Sunday Cinemas Bill in Balance”, *Daily Mirror*, 14/04/1932.

⁵⁷⁸ “When Sunday Cinemas Are Legal”, *Daily Mail*, 12/04/1932, 10.

how there has always existed a tension between different forms of public leisure activity, with frequently-voiced observations that one form must necessarily damage or replace another. There was, for example, a perception that pubs were in decline partly because of the increase in cinema-going: a perception which led to the refurbishing of many during the inter-war period in an effort to increase their respectability and, in turn, their profits.

An Everyday Activity: Cinema-going for Bolton's Youth

Whilst Bolton's cinema-goers expressed preferences for certain genres of film over others, the cultural practice of "going to the pictures" was not solely determined by the films themselves.⁵⁷⁹ For many, visiting the picture-house was a habitual activity, and a Worktown respondent hinted at the routine nature of her cinema-going: "it is our custom Hubby and I to go to the Paladium [sic] 2 weekly [sic] Monday and Thursday".⁵⁸⁰ As Kuhn explains, cinema-going for the population as a whole was "about the place of this activity in the context of their daily lives, interactions with family and friends, and comings and goings within and beyond the neighbourhoods in which they lived".⁵⁸¹ Kuhn evidences this by suggesting that respondents to her study rarely referred to specific films at length in their memories of cinema-going but, instead, to the general experiences of visiting the cinema.⁵⁸² Similarly, Boltonians remembered cinema-going as a set of almost ritualistic practices which revolved around other aspects of working-class life. For example, an interviewee in Bolton's oral history project described how, as a child, his three-times-a-week cinema habit was facilitated by frugal street enterprise: "we used to go round scrounging jam jars and sell [sic] jam jars and make a few pence that way so we could go to the cinema".⁵⁸³ That the focus of his money-making enterprise was admission to the cinema indicates the extent to which regular attendance was, for many of Bolton's youth, a significant aspect of their leisure experiences. Moreover, Brian Rigby has suggested that such activity was an element of "the exciting world of working-class street life, which was experienced as a relatively autonomous realm free from the control and scrutiny of family, school and church...going to the cinema for young working-class males was an extension

⁵⁷⁹ See Sedgwick's comparative study of audience tastes in Bolton and Brighton, 1934-1935: *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 126-141.

⁵⁸⁰ Response from Mary Gibson, The Palladium Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/D/1.

⁵⁸¹ Kuhn, "Cinema-Going in Britain in the 1930s", 5.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, see Conclusion.

⁵⁸³ Bolton Oral History Project Transcripts, Male, Born 1914, AB/MS/1A/012. Bolton Museum and Archives, Bo25.178B PRO.

of this street life”.⁵⁸⁴ Another interviewee, when asked what young people did for recreation in Bolton (apart from visiting the cinema), simply replied that there was “practically nothing”.⁵⁸⁵ The prevalence of cinema-going amongst under 18 year-olds in Bolton is also evident in the 1938 Worktown cinema-going survey, in which the replies from children suggested that they went, on average, nine times per month.⁵⁸⁶ For many children, the cinema was an attractive proposition as it was one of only a limited number of organised public entertainments in Bolton which were cheap, familiar and, significantly, situated outside the parental controls of the home.

Contemporary commentators often observed that the cinema offered children a relatively-benign place to spend their free time (compared with, for example, loitering on the streets), and this commentary extended to the question of adolescents and their use of space outside the domestic sphere.⁵⁸⁷ Studies of mid-century cinema-going on a national level have indicated that the practice offered an important space for courtship to take place, and Bolton appears to have been little different. During the Worktown investigations, a report of a screening of *The Saint Strikes Back* (1939) at the Palladium highlighted the use of the darkness of the cinema for potential lovers: “giggles in dark from side suggested flirtation, but obs did not see any evidence”.⁵⁸⁸ Another Observer who attended a showing of *Devil’s Squadron* (1936) remarked on how courtship activity took precedence over the film, reporting that “when two cars crashed violently on the screen, the lovers in front of us didn’t even look up...[they] kept close cheek to cheek during the whole proceedings”.⁵⁸⁹ Bolton’s cinemas acted as “courting rooms”, imbued with a sense of intimacy which was at odds with the ostensibly-public character of the space.⁵⁹⁰ It was an environment in which children could share feelings of joy and excitement with their friends, and where adolescents could meet lovers away from parental supervision. In this way, as Sam Manning notes, “the social practices of cinema-going were linked closely to developments in the life cycle”; as a leisure activity, cinema-going adopted new meanings and provided new experiences as audiences moved from childhood to adolescence and,

⁵⁸⁴ Brian Rigby, “Bolton and the Cinema: From Mass-Observation to the Diaries of a Nobody”, *Manchester Region History Review* 5, no. 2 (1991), 4.

⁵⁸⁵ Bolton Oral History Project Transcripts, Male, Born 1908, JP/SP/1/013. Bolton Museum and Archives, Bo25.178B PRO

⁵⁸⁶ Analysis of 65 child replies to the Odeon, Palladium and Crompton Cinema Questionnaires, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1; SxMOA1/5/8/35/D/1; SxMOA1/5/8/35/E.

⁵⁸⁷ Response from George Winstanley, The Odeon Cinema Questionnaire, 1938. SxMOA1/5/8/35/C/1.

⁵⁸⁸ Palladium Cinema Report, by AH, 17/02/1940. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/37.

⁵⁸⁹ Palladium Cinema Report, by Henry Novy, 26/02/1940. SxMOA1/5/8/36/B/38.

⁵⁹⁰ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 113.

ultimately, adulthood.⁵⁹¹ The binary opposition of public/intimate created tensions with some cinema-goers. They raised objections in the pages of local newspapers about the private activities of courting couples in the context of a very public place.⁵⁹² Indeed, even cinema staff expressed discontent at the behaviour of some of their patrons. In an article in *Picturegoer* subtitled “Public Enemies”, a projectionist declared that “the following types irritate intelligent patrons beyond words: the paper rustler – should be lynched; the commentator – should be gagged; the latecomer – should be barred entry; the heads together couples (except in back rows) – should be in the park”.⁵⁹³

The cinema, nevertheless, remained a primary venue for Bolton’s young lovers to meet and develop a relationship and, crucially, was perceived by parents to be an acceptable space to allow their children to indulge in such behaviour. In her recollections of growing up in Bolton, one woman recounted how her father would occasionally allow her to visit a late house at the cinema with a boyfriend, finishing at 10:30pm (well past her usual 9:30pm curfew). Her father, however, would be “on the doorstep or on the corner of the street watching for you coming back to make sure that you did come right back”.⁵⁹⁴ Outside the confines of the cinema, his daughter’s night-time behaviour was, apparently, more problematic, hinting at the ways in which cinemas were viewed as relatively-secure public spaces (from both a physical and moral perspective). In the 1930s, the social need for cinemas was advanced by a mother who, in a speech supporting the Sunday opening of cinemas, appealed to “mothers in over-crowded homes, where there is only one settee or sofa. The young courting couple sit down, they become embarrassed...and finally they slink out. If they are driven to the fields the Devil will always find trouble for them. Why should they not go to the pictures?”.⁵⁹⁵ There can be little doubt that in such situations, the development of the cinema had a potent impact on the lives of the young, as a space of physical freedom from more regulated spaces such as the parental home.

⁵⁹¹ Manning, “Post-War Cinema-Going”, 6. For examples of work on emotion and childhood, see Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, “Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children’s Writing”, *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 1 (2016): 101–123.; and Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander, and Stephanie Olsen, “Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood”, in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 12–34.

⁵⁹² Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 113.

⁵⁹³ “Focus on Films: Public Enemies”, by H. Butterworth, *Picturegoer*, 29/10/1949, 3.

⁵⁹⁴ Bolton Oral History Project Transcripts, Female, Born 1916, AB/JJ/1A/010. Bolton Museum and Archives, B025.178B PRO.

⁵⁹⁵ “Mother of Six Wins Sunday Cinemas for Her City”, *The Daily Mirror*, 29/06/1937.

Moral Panics, Teenagers and the Cinema in Worktown

Whilst the cinema was often judged in positive terms, the experiences of cinema-going in Worktown offer vivid reflections of broader national concerns about its effect on the population. Most prevalent in the decade before the Second World War, discussions about the negative effects of cinemas centred on their potential for encouraging a passive lifestyle in Bolton (diverting people away from more “wholesome” activities such as sport and church-going) and for developing false values. Alarm about the impact on audience behaviour, emotions, and the supposed glamorisation of crime in films remained a feature in newspaper reports throughout the period, and perhaps the most notorious example of this was the 1956 film *Rock Around the Clock*. The film, and its music, became something of an anthem for the nation’s youth and it was widely reported that cinemas around the country had experienced disturbances during screenings of the film. Reports of criminal damage amounting to hundreds of pounds and “a thousand screaming, jiving, rhythm-crazy teenagers” seemed to validate the concerns of some about cinema’s influence on the young; reporters seemed to be most shocked at the audience members who “jived in the aisles to the film’s jazz music”.⁵⁹⁶ Again, social issues came into play and, as an institution, the cinema became intimately bound with the rise of youth culture in England.

The concept of “the teenager” drew both derision and admiration in the 1950s and 1960s. Those critical of the culture found it to be a threat to long-standing generational deference and a distillation of all that was wrong in post-war Britain. Such a representation was concurrently contested, as Selina Todd and Hilary Young have argued, by “a large, influential group of journalists, social investigators, left-wing politicians and – crucially – many parents...[who] promoted a competing, positive vision of the teenager as a figure of meritocracy, affluence and classlessness – the cornerstones, they argued, of a modernity that should be celebrated rather than feared”.⁵⁹⁷ Even though the cinema was a pastime popular with all ages, young people comprised the most avid cinema-goers, and in this manner, both the institution of the cinema and the concept of the teenager (and their interdependent relationship) became emblematic of modernity. Representing a fundamental shift in social relations, teenagers carved out their own sites of emotional expression and became associated with modern public spaces such as the cinema: “they

⁵⁹⁶ “1,000 Rock n’ Roll Rioters Take City by Storm”, *Daily Mirror*, 10/09/1956, 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Selina Todd and Hilary Young, “Baby-Boomers to ‘Beaststalkers’: Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain”, *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 3 (2012), 456.

live where their parents live – in back streets where they suffer the boredom and malaise of a dreary urban civilisation from which they can escape only to the cinemas, dance halls and cafés among the bright lights”, wrote one correspondent to *The Times* in 1958.⁵⁹⁸ Indeed, as early as 1930, cinemas were being held responsible for altering young people’s priorities and progression through life. A letter in the *Daily Mail* posited why young people did not want children: “young people of to-day spend so much money on sports and pleasure of all kinds that they shirk parenthood because it would entail giving up...the continual going to the cinema, which nowadays people seem to regard as necessities, instead of occasional treats”.⁵⁹⁹ This echoed debates in the late nineteenth-century about a perceived increase in the number of spinsters: an observation which was linked with the attitudes of middle-class men who apparently spurned marriage and familial commitments.

Despite the promotion (or otherwise) of teenage culture as a progressive and egalitarian symbol of modernity, authorities in Bolton and around the country remained concerned about the behaviour which films such as *Rock Around the Clock* appeared to provoke. In September 1956, Bolton’s local Watch Committee decided to ban the film, on the grounds that “the display would be likely to lead to disorder”.⁶⁰⁰ The *Bolton Journal*, however, supported the town’s youth, arguing that “the greatest fear seems to be, not that the young people of Bolton will not behave themselves, but that there will be an influx of troublemakers from other parts of Lancashire”.⁶⁰¹ The regional specificity of cinema-going is clear: the film was not banned in other towns around Bolton, a fact pointed out by a local councillor: “if the young people of Bolton want to rock ‘n’ roll they must get on the No. 25 bus at the top of Halliwell”.⁶⁰² To opponents of the film, cinemas acted as a focal point in the region for anti-social behaviour. However, one psychologist interviewed by the *Daily Mirror* downplayed the role of cinemas in social unrest, suggesting that those who caused trouble “would tear the cinema down with Mickey Mouse on the screen if they felt that way”.⁶⁰³ Newspaper columns occasionally presented cinemas as powerful forces capable of stirring unruly behaviour on a national scale. *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, reported that the words “we want rock ‘n’ roll” were

⁵⁹⁸ “Teddy Boys”, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 09/05/1958, 13.

⁵⁹⁹ “A three-year-old’s Mother”, Letters to the Editor, *Daily Mail*, 03/07/1930, 10.

⁶⁰⁰ “Rock ‘n’ Roll Film Not For Bolton”, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 05/10/1956.

⁶⁰¹ “Rollers Still Hoping”, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 21/09/1956, front page.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*

⁶⁰³ “Rock n’ Roll Film Ban in 2 Towns”, *Daily Mirror*, 12/09/1956, 7.

found painted on the doors of the Shire Hall in Taunton: a response, it said, to the local authority's decision to require cinemas to apply for permission should they wish to screen *Rock Around the Clock*.⁶⁰⁴ As institutions, cinemas thus operated as national sites of cohesion for teenage culture and, as they had done since their earliest days, had to constantly deflect accusations of encouraging depraved behaviour within society.

Public and Private Leisure in Bolton: Cinema and Television

The irrepressible rise of modern mass culture reformulated conceptions of public and private spaces and, if the cinema came to represent entertainment in a public space with a private dimension, then, by the 1950s, television was very much the symbol of private and domestic recreation.⁶⁰⁵ "Television reaches in a most intimate way into family circles", cautioned *The Times* in a warning about the changing dynamic of domestic spaces and the role of mass entertainment in people's lives.⁶⁰⁶ As the domestic setting increasingly became a site for recreation, television was occasionally portrayed as encouraging a damaging withdrawal into the home, away from the more socially-authentic experience of the cinema. Stuart Hanson notes how Marxist intellectuals argued that television, as an intruder into the privacy of the domestic sphere, relied on the fetishisation of commodities to captivate its audience: an argument which became more robust after the launch of the commercial broadcaster ITV in 1955.⁶⁰⁷ In response to this development, the cinema industry spuriously claimed that cinemas operated outside this corrupting sphere of a capitalist society.⁶⁰⁸ The relationship between cinemas and television was a contentious one, nuanced by the fact that a central element in press analysis of television was its negative influence over the cinema-going habits of the nation. The initial arrival of television was, perhaps naively, not considered to be a threat to cinemas. As early as 1934, the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association was reported to have formed the view that there was "no danger that television would be a complete entertainment by itself attracting assemblies of persons away from theatres or the cinemas", emphasising instead the *experience* of cinema-going as a modern affair epitomised by the "large screen and good definition of picture and sufficient brightness", with which television could not

⁶⁰⁴ "They Want 'Rock' at Taunton", *The Manchester Guardian*, 20/09/1956, 4.

⁶⁰⁵ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 113.

⁶⁰⁶ "All the Wonders", *The Times*, 01/01/1955, 9.

⁶⁰⁷ Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*, 105–107.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

compete.⁶⁰⁹

Comparisons were also drawn with America, with one newspaper arguing that television there had created a situation where “old and young alike have to a large extent abandoned books, cinemas, and theatres and sit day after day, night after night, in front of the television screen”.⁶¹⁰ It judged, however, that there was “no strong evidence” that television had had the same effect in Britain.⁶¹¹ Nevertheless, the television became symbolic of modern domestic happiness and in 1953 the Bolton furnishing and homeware shop Proffitts urged readers to “get a TV set – no home is complete without one”.⁶¹² Interestingly, the increasing prevalence of television sets was deemed to reinforce the cinema’s popularity with the young: “the majority of cinema-goers today are young people”, one newspaper suggested, “who don’t like sitting at home watching TV”.⁶¹³ Cinemas adopted new meanings for different generations: in the 1950s they were spaces appropriated by young people keen to escape the confines – and parental control – of the home. The (suppressed) emotional topography of the home could be transferred to the cinema: it acted as a public, and more relaxed, extension of the domestic. Bolton’s newspaper readers were asked in 1956 to consider how new entertainment forms such as the television had affected “established customs and habits” as people retreated to the home in search of insular recreation.⁶¹⁴ The *Bolton Evening News* suggested that some people were “confident that there would eventually be a reaction against the present form of armchair paralysis, that people would tire of their nightly home entertainment and that they would again seek more communal interests”.⁶¹⁵ Cinema, of course, was an obvious alternative.

The Decline of Bolton’s Cinemas: A Press Perspective

Uncertainty about the future of the cinema in Bolton, and in England more widely, can be traced in newspaper reports from the early 1950s onwards. Studies found that more than half of professional workers and a third of clerical workers visited the cinema less frequently on account of having a television, whilst the average time spent on recreation

⁶⁰⁹ “Television and the Cinema”, *The Times*, 15/06/1934, 10.

⁶¹⁰ “Effect of Television on Reading”, *The Times*, 19/11/1951, 2.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹² Proffitts Advertisement, *Bolton Evening News*, 10/06/1953.

⁶¹³ “Does Anybody Want a Cinema?”, *Daily Mirror*, 22/11/1956, 11.

⁶¹⁴ “Will People Again Seek Communal Interests?”, *Bolton Evening News*, 29/09/1956.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

outside the home had also reduced.⁶¹⁶ Television had a significant detrimental impact on cinema-going and certainly contributed to the well-documented general decline in the number of cinemas. In 1950, the average Boltonian went to the cinema 44 times, compared with 36 times just four years later: a drop in attendance which was bigger than any other large town in Lancashire.⁶¹⁷ Television was, however, just one of the many social, economic and cultural factors which contributed to the fall in cinema attendances (in both Bolton and in the country more widely) and which gathered pace in the 1950s. From a peak of over 1.6 billion annual admissions in 1946 (a truly astounding figure), box office receipts showed a steady decline to around 500 million by 1960.⁶¹⁸ The development of television is the first of three key factors which Hanson argues contributed to cinemas' decline. Secondly, increasing levels of affluence (characterised by enhanced incomes and rising levels of home-ownership) led to a lessening in demand for the cinema: driven by a diversification in leisure practices which were orientated towards the home, and extended beyond the local neighbourhood by the motor car.⁶¹⁹ Thirdly, Hanson contends, social upheavals in the 1950s meant many "traditional working-class communities were moved out of inner-city areas as part of slum clearance programmes" to areas without cinemas.⁶²⁰ This complex tapestry of factors coalesced to result in the closure of countless cinemas throughout the 1950s. This situation had been anticipated by the *Manchester Guardian* in 1936 which reported that overbuilding in America had left many super-cinemas "closed and idle, their owners having failed, and the builders and mortgage companies holding the empty bag".⁶²¹

A cogent example of the British exhibition industry's predicament can be found in the case of Bernard Woolley, a Bolton-based businessman who, in 1956, was reported to have 56 cinemas on his books, all in need of selling. In an article headlined "Does Anybody Want a Cinema?", Mr Woolley was described as "supervising the funeral of the flea-pit".⁶²² In affirmation of *The Manchester Guardian's* warning from two decades earlier, the article warned that 1,000 cinemas were under threat of closure, painting a gloomy assessment of the future of even the exhibition industry: "now the rot is spreading to the carpeted,

⁶¹⁶ "TV 'Enriching' Family Life", *The Times*, 07/11/1953, 3.

⁶¹⁷ Swain, *The Golden Age*, 32.

⁶¹⁸ Launching Films, "UK Cinema Admissions, 1935 To Date", <http://www.launchingfilms.com/research-databank/uk-cinema-admissions> (accessed 31/08/2017).

⁶¹⁹ Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*, 101–102.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶²¹ "Redundant Cinemas", *The Manchester Guardian*, 11/06/1936, 3.

⁶²² "Does Anybody Want a Cinema?" *Daily Mirror*, 22/11/1956, 11.

softly-lit foyers of the super cinemas”.⁶²³ Halliwell lamented the decline of Bolton’s picture-houses, recalling that “their décor got tattier and their seats less and less reliable; this was the age of post-war austerity, and by the time their owners were permitted to renovate them, they could no longer afford to”.⁶²⁴ The experience of cinemas in and around Bolton was typical of the national trend. It must be noted, however, that such closures were not always a result of outside pressures on the industry. As contemporary studies noted, the growth of super-cinemas in urban areas damaged smaller- and medium-sized picture-houses which could no longer compete, either in terms of price or in the quality of films on offer.⁶²⁵ Warnings in the 1950s of an urban landscape saturated by cinemas were far from new. Reports had surfaced at the beginning of the 1930s that exhibitors themselves believed there were “too many cinemas in the city and suburbs”, and that the luxurious attractions of the super-cinemas would lead to the eradication of the “small cinema, with its hard seats and flickering screen”.⁶²⁶

The array of reasons behind the closing of cinemas was, ultimately, underscored by the faltering of the cinema-going habit, something which dominated cinema press discussion from 1950 onwards. Statistics appeared in newspapers throughout the decade which intimated that the decline of cinemas was terminal, until the very end of the period when suggestions were made that a radical shift in film exhibition practices could save the industry.⁶²⁷ In 1960, *The Times* quoted Mr D. D. Farrelly, the general president of the National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees, who argued that towns such as Bolton, which had “more than a dozen cinemas”, did not need more than two or three “in this modern age”.⁶²⁸ *The Guardian* also referenced Mr Farrelly’s opinion in its discussion about how the changing social uses of cinemas had necessitated a restructuring of cinematic exhibition: “after the dead wood has been lopped off”, Mr Farrelly asserted, “the cinema industry will settle down to a compact and prosperous future”.⁶²⁹ To ensure financial viability, the need for a radical reduction in the number of cinemas in the country (particularly in urban areas) was plain. Attempts were made to encourage audiences away from other forms of entertainment and *The Times* reported

⁶²³ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁴ Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts*, 112.

⁶²⁵ Browning and Sorrell, “Cinemas and Cinema-Going in Great Britain”, 137.

⁶²⁶ “The Cinema in Manchester: A Crisis Developing”, *The Manchester Guardian*.

⁶²⁷ See, for example, accounts of cinema decline in *The Times*: “Fall in Cinema Takings”, 26/05/1951, 8; “Fall in Cinema Admissions”, 27/05/1953, 2; “Fewer People at Cinemas”, 03/08/1955, 3; “Cinema Decline Continues”, 26/06/1957, 6; “Cinema Audiences Still Falling”, 28/01/1959, 8.

⁶²⁸ “Compact Future for Cinemas”, *The Times*, 18/05/1960, 17.

⁶²⁹ “‘Prosperity’ for Cinema Industry”, *The Guardian*, 18/05/1960, 3.

that “the most conspicuous sign of the industry making an effort to revive the habit of cinema-going is the staging of very long runs of a few prestige films”.⁶³⁰ These efforts saw the industry also promote the latest in technology (such as 3D techniques, enhanced sound quality and screen size) to tempt patrons back into their local cinema.

Emphasising the novelty of these innovations was key to this approach: looking to the future of cinematic exhibition was more common than invoking the nostalgia of the heyday of cinema-going.⁶³¹ Attempts to stabilise the social and financial position of cinemas against a diverse range of threats may have been successful to a certain degree, but the cinema as a whole was never again to return to the eminent position it had enjoyed in the late 1940s.

Bolton: A Cinematic Town

At first glance, selecting Bolton as a case study with which to examine mid-century cinema-going and its role in public emotion may appear to be an unusual choice. It is, however, a location with a rich film-going history which was moulded by working-class culture and changing social practices. Records such as MO’s Cinema Social Survey of 1938 provide a distinctive insight into the urban film-watching population and, when placed in conjunction with MO’s national studies (such as the August 1950 crying directive), they offer valuable testimony on historical emotionality. The precise experience of cinema-going (and what it signified for Bolton residents) can be somewhat blurred by studies on the macro level, but by using the records of MO’s Worktown, these idiosyncratic leisure activities can be better understood. As Snape affirms, micro-historical approaches which use sources such as MO “have the capacity to reveal the agency of ordinary people in the production of their own leisure practices and spaces”.⁶³² Cinema-going in Bolton emerged from an evolving leisure landscape influenced by technological and societal change, but one which was also tempered by a distinct sense of a Boltonian (and working-class) identity. This was clearly emphasised in MO’s reports.

The ways in which Bolton’s cinemas were viewed and used by its residents reveal how space played an important role in perceptions and negotiations of modernity.

⁶³⁰ “The Cinema Fights Back”, *The Times*, 29/12/1960, 7.

⁶³¹ John Belton, “Digital 3D Cinema: Digital Cinema’s Missing Novelty Phase”, *Film History* 24, no. 2 (2012), 188.

⁶³² Snape, “Everyday Leisure and Northernness”, 2.

Furthermore, it also speaks to the emotional economies which were formed within their auditoria, a landscape of feeling which was palpable to Bolton's cinema-goers who often sought emotional refuge in a space which was quite different from comparable public contexts. Patterns of cinema-going in Bolton were, of course, not unique, and cinemas in towns and cities across the country enjoyed similar levels of popularity with the public. In comparison with Bolton, the following chapter investigates cinemas in the southern coastal resort of Brighton, a town which offers a counterpoint in geographical, economic, and demographic contexts. These similarities and differences can serve to advance the study of emotion and space in the twentieth-century to provide a better understanding of how cinemas became key sites of feeling in the English cultural landscape.

Chapter Five

Brighton Case Study

In a similar manner to Bolton, cinemas in Brighton assumed central importance in public leisure provision. This town on the southern coast of England was renowned as a holiday destination, and offered many leisure venues which created an environment saturated with opportunities for pleasure and relaxation. From theatres on its piers offering music-hall entertainment, to beach amusements and ample bathing opportunities (with reputed health benefits), Brighton was a prime holiday destination. Indeed, it was one of the first great seaside resorts in England, and as early as 1898 one magazine proclaimed “let no one imagine that Brighton does not afford scope for a good holiday, for emphatically it does”.⁶³³ Underpinning this leisure activity was the representation of the seaside resort as a delineated and culturally-permissive space in which, as Andy Croll surmises, “normal rules of behaviour can be suspended, or even inverted”.⁶³⁴ As such, Brighton – with its distinct economy, geography and social composition – makes for an interesting counterpoint with the northern industrial milieu of Bolton. Moreover, it gives this study more freedom as Bolton can, sometimes, be a little over-determined on account of Mass Observation’s activities. Although a small number of MO records did originate from Brighton, there were nowhere near as many produced as in Bolton. As such, it was something of a methodological risk to choose Brighton as a case study, but one which paid dividends in allowing other types of sources to complement the focus on MO in the previous chapters.

Brighton and Bolton Cinemas

In contrast with the manufacturing centre of Bolton, the economy of Brighton was driven by leisure, and the town’s cinemas played an important role in providing entertainment for visitors and residents alike. Brighton, in line with other comparable seaside resorts such as Bournemouth and Blackpool, enjoyed its marked popularity with holidaymakers thanks to the Victorian railway infrastructure which connected it directly to London. The

⁶³³ “Holiday Haunts”, *The Windsor Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly for Men and Women*, August 1898, 347.

⁶³⁴ Andy Croll, “The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century (Book Review)”, *Twentieth Century British History* 14, no. 1 (2003), 85.

dramatic architectural scales of seaside resorts, the open span of the promenade, and the expansive vistas of the beach and sea acted to mark coastal towns as sites of an exciting, and liberal, modernity.⁶³⁵ To city dwellers accustomed to the confines of metropolitan life, Brighton represented an accessible space of liberation and socially-sanctioned transgression, and the opportunities for entertainment were often aimed at this city demographic.⁶³⁶ The cinema was one of the many different types of public recreation on offer to Brighton's holidaymakers and, aside from the obvious beach-based activities such as bathing, the provision for leisure in Brighton was impressive. It boasted a racecourse, for example, which was established only a mile from the town centre and attracted crowds of over 20,000 in the immediate years after the Second World War. An aquarium, opened in 1872, boasted a concert hall capable of seating over 1,250 people and, indeed, films were shown in the inter-war period when it was briefly known as the Aquarium Kinema. In contrast with high levels of spectatorship in Bolton, football was less of a prominent leisure activity in Brighton. The *Daily Mail* suggested in 1938 that the town "has never appeared to be football minded. It has a bigger public to draw upon than other towns which keep prosperous, expensive-to-run First Division teams, but the crowds do not roll up".⁶³⁷ Any comparative lack of engagement with the sport in Brighton could, in part, be explained by the high percentage of visitors to the town who would be unlikely to attend a football match during their holidays, given a lack of connection with the local club and the availability of such novel attractions as the beach. A waxwork museum, pleasure gardens, and several theatres including the Hippodrome and Grand Theatre were popular with tourists, as were the pleasure piers which came to be emblematic of the town's leisure economy. It was in this saturated and heterogeneous recreational landscape that Brighton's cinemas operated and thrived, well into the 1950s.

In demographic terms, the post-war populations of both Brighton and Bolton were approximately equal (around 160,000) and each town had, at certain points, over 20 cinemas serving the population.⁶³⁸ The range of Brighton's picture-houses mirrored that of Bolton, from first-run establishments (including two Odeons) to smaller second- and

⁶³⁵ Paul Rennie, "Postwar Promenade: Pleasure, Reconstruction and the Festival of Britain", in *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 204.

⁶³⁶ Rennie, 204.

⁶³⁷ "Brighton Fight Against Apathy", *Daily Mail*, 18/08/1938, 14.

⁶³⁸ GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, Brighton & Bolton MB/CB, Population Statistics, Total Population, *A Vision of Britain Through Time*.

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10107489/cube/TOT_POP;
http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10003179/cube/TOT_POP.

third-run cinemas such as The Academy on West Street, which was converted from a Turkish Bath into a cinema in 1911.⁶³⁹ As in Bolton, the openings of new cinemas in Brighton were significant civic occasions. When the Astoria on Gloucester Place opened in 1933, the *Evening Argus* reported that “Brighton has watched the almost magically rapid growth of this ‘cinema supreme’ with the keenest interest. It had already formed the opinion that the building, a fine example of modern architecture, was a distinct embellishment of the town...it is ultra-modern in character and peculiarly pleasing and effective”.⁶⁴⁰ In common with national trends, these new cinemas became emblematic of a modernity which was accessible, both physically and financially, to the vast majority of Brighton residents. In the 1920s and into the 1930s, an evening cinema show in central Brighton, with some light refreshments and a return bus fare from the northern suburbs, would cost around 2/6d for two adults.⁶⁴¹ Average wages for a male worker in 1935 were between 52s and 60s per week: regular cinema-going was, therefore, well within the reach of many.⁶⁴² For children, too, the cinema was the focus of much of their spending, and it was deemed to be such an important social activity that groups of children would often subsidise their friends who could not immediately afford a ticket.⁶⁴³

Cinemas in Brighton’s Leisure Landscape

It would be useful to consider how cinemas contributed to, and worked within, wider experiences of space, leisure, and public emotion in Brighton between 1930 and 1960. The town’s cinemas sat alongside a plethora of other entertainment establishments which offered organised recreational activities to both visitors and locals alike. As has been noted, the economic bedrock of Brighton was formed from tourism, an industry which had begun to dominate the town from the early nineteenth-century. This created a leisure landscape quite removed from that of Bolton, in which public space operated in different ways and for a distinct community. Whilst recreational establishments in Bolton predominantly marketed themselves to local residents, the attractions of Brighton were expounded in national press advertisements to people who lived outside the town (most notably, in London). In a 1931 advertisement in *The Times*, for example, the Royal Albion

⁶³⁹ *Back Row Brighton: Cinema-Going in Brighton and Hove* (Brighton: QueenSpark Books, 2009), 2.

⁶⁴⁰ “The Astoria Opened”, *Evening Argus*, 22/12/1933.

⁶⁴¹ My Brighton and Hove, “History of the Early Picturehouses”.

http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/page_id_5568.aspx (accessed 10/10/2017).

⁶⁴² Ian Gazeley, “Manual Work and Pay, 1900-70”, in *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*, ed. Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, and Andrew Newell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

⁶⁴³ Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*, 191-192.

Hotel commented that visitors would “not lack entertainment at Brighton: there are first-class theatres, cinemas, concerts; golf to be played and horses to be ridden in the tonic air of the high South Downs”.⁶⁴⁴ In tandem, attractions such as the beach, the pleasure piers, the royal history, and the bathing opportunities of Brighton further enhanced its status as one of the foremost seaside resorts.

Many of the largest – and most well-appointed – establishments were to be found in the central area of West Street and North Street, catering to the high numbers of pleasure visitors who would have been unlikely to venture to Brighton’s suburban cinemas. The distribution of cinemas in Brighton, although rather uneven, was a significant element in the cinema-going patterns and habits of the town. The concentration of cinemas in the town centre, for example, meant that they were easily accessible by public transport. This was a trend noted by MO, and it collected a report in 1942 from the Political and Economic Planning thinktank which suggested that cinemas in large towns were “not evenly distributed over the urban area, but cluster together in a cinema-land as it were”.⁶⁴⁵ The physical position of Brighton’s cinemas was often emphasised in their marketing material: the Odeon in Kemp Town, for example, announced that “bus routes 1, 3, 4, 7, 12 stop at the door”.⁶⁴⁶ Similarly, the prominent position of the Astoria, next to the hub of Brighton’s tram system, allowed cinema-going to be a logistically uncomplicated pastime and “ensured that it drew large audiences from a wide area despite being the ABC chain’s second cinema in the town”.⁶⁴⁷

Whilst public transport allowed cinema-goers from further out of town to easily access the majority of Brighton’s cinemas, issues of class presented themselves in the geography of the town’s film-going. Working-class residents were often limited in their choice of cinema by financial constraints, frequenting only those cinemas in their immediate neighbourhoods (which required no bus fare). These were often second- or third-run cinemas and were smaller, cheaper, and less luxurious than their town-centre counterparts which served the town’s tourists. As one Brighton resident recalled: “the kids in East Brighton came from very poor backgrounds – cinema-going was there, but

⁶⁴⁴ “Royal Albion Hotel”, *The Times*, 19/11/1931, 8.

⁶⁴⁵ “Leisure”, 7. SxMOA1/2/80/1/A/3.

⁶⁴⁶ Programme for the Odeon Cinema, Kemptown, undated. SB 791.4 MIS.

⁶⁴⁷ *Back Row Brighton*, 14.

there was a kind of mental divide – people didn't travel very far, so going to the town – crossing the London Road – was a huge mental step".⁶⁴⁸

Brighton's Audiences: the Release of *Bicycle Thieves*

Although cinema-going was pervasive in Brighton, it was localised to very specific areas of the town, with each cinema serving a discrete audience. Cognisant of the class associations implicit in a cinema's location, managers took great interest in the social composition of their audiences when choosing which films to include in weekly programmes. In a report to ABC's London office, the manager of the Astoria cinema explained his initial worries about marketing his screenings of *Bicycle Thieves* (1948): "for a theatre of the Astoria type which usually runs the type of film suitable for a working class district the booking of *Bicycle Thieves* looked at first as though it was going to be very difficult to put over".⁶⁴⁹ The manager clearly thought that the Italian film would not hold as much appeal for Brighton's working-class (the main demographic for his cinema) as a British or Hollywood production. Upon the film's release, *Picturegoer* agreed that it was unlikely to be widely seen, but argued this was due to its limited release schedule which meant that audiences "will see it only after long journeys, for the prejudice against foreign pictures still persists among film people, and the number of cinemas to show it may at first be small".⁶⁵⁰ The article also hinted at the commercial pressures under which cinema managers operated (perhaps the prime reason for the Astoria manager's pessimistic view). It suggested that readers write to their local cinema manager to request the film, but also warned: "poor chap, he hasn't very much power and there isn't much he can do about it, but he can pass the request on to head office".⁶⁵¹

Nationally, *Bicycle Thieves* confounded the concerns of some managers, and questionnaire respondents to MO frequently cited the film as an example of powerful acting and an emotionally-engaging story.⁶⁵² The manager of Brighton's Astoria was, perhaps, justified in his suggestion that the film would struggle to attract working-class patrons: anything other than English-language pictures was viewed as highbrow fare,

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁴⁹ "Exploitation of 'Bicycle Thieves'". Scrapbook relating to George Evans' Management of the Astoria. ACC 11442/2.

⁶⁵⁰ "Bicycle Thieves", by Connery Chappell, *Picturegoer*, 28/01/1950, 21.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² See, for example, responses to the August 1950 directive. SxMOA1/3/128.

accessible only to the well-educated.⁶⁵³ From the organisation's earliest days, the social composition of MO's panel reinforced such attitudes, with as many as three-quarters of panellists considering themselves to be lower middle-class, or above, in social status.⁶⁵⁴ It is natural, therefore, that films such as *Bicycle Thieves* featured in panellist writings, given middle-class tastes and predispositions towards "high culture". This manifested itself in their consumption of publications such as *Sight & Sound* which, in 1952, placed *Bicycle Thieves* at the top of its inaugural best films of all time poll. As one MO respondent wrote in 1950, "most films I regard as utter tripe, but...[films like *Bicycle Thieves* are] genuine articles of the type which keeps an intelligent patronage going to the cinema".⁶⁵⁵ Working-class audiences often expressed preferences for comedies and musicals, a legacy from the cinema's formative years when it developed from such other commercial entertainments as the music-hall.

Class and Cinema-going in Brighton

To suggest that the mid-century working-class of England only enjoyed a limited selection of films, however, threatens to reduce their tastes to a crude monolith of uniformity. Preferences varied to a significant extent on a regional level; the most popular films in Brighton were different from the favourites of Bolton cinema-goers. For example, John Sedgwick has highlighted this regional variation by compiling Top 20 lists of the most popular films shown in Brighton and Bolton in 1934-1935. He suggests that Bolton most enjoyed British comedy films, and that "the prominence of Gracie Fields...and the phenomenal success of George Formby's *Off the Dole* suggests strong liking for things 'northern' amongst Boltonians".⁶⁵⁶ On the other hand, costume dramas were relatively unpopular in Bolton, in contrast with Brighton where "historical/costume dramas and adventures were the most popular genres at the time, taking five of the Top 6 places in 1934 and the Top 3 places in 1935".⁶⁵⁷ Boltonians took readily to historical films such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) – a picture which enjoyed much success at both the American and British box office – and to the later Gainsborough costume melodramas of the 1940s such as *The Man in Grey* (1943), which were marketed towards female

⁶⁵³ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*, 2010, 141.

⁶⁵⁴ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 375.

⁶⁵⁵ Directive Respondent 4637, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁶⁵⁶ Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 135.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

audiences.⁶⁵⁸ Despite regional differences within England, the cinema was an indicator of a common culture, grounded in a sense of participation and belonging which local audiences, each with its own idiosyncrasies, could appropriate for different emotional and social needs.⁶⁵⁹ Within the exhibition conditions of Brighton's cinemas and in the wider film trade there was, as Robert James contends, an "acute awareness" of these working-class tastes, and "fiscal demands ensured that film personnel became highly responsive to the working-class consumer's demands".⁶⁶⁰

Issues of class also presented themselves in the Astoria manager's marketing of *Bicycle Thieves* to the cinema's usual audience, who may not have been attracted by posters alone. He arranged for an advance screening and invited six local companies to send four of their staff to the preview, along with the local press. In reporting to ABC's head office, George Evans wrote "I felt that by doing this a large percentage of workers in the town would get details of the film from these people by word-of-mouth".⁶⁶¹ There was clearly the belief that, if the cinema's marketing could infiltrate the workplaces of Brighton, then its usual working-class audience might have been more receptive to going to see a such a film. Moreover, contemporary commentary often drew class associations with particular film genres. Foreign films and art films were conflated in the British public's mind: art films were defined by their foreignness, and foreign films were perceived to be exclusively art-house works. This is not to say, of course, that Italian or French cinema lacked big-budget popular films, but that such films simply didn't receive theatrical releases in England. Any continental film which did receive a British release was considered to be the preserve of intellectual, middle-class audiences, the antithesis of the unsophisticated musicals and comedies which starred working-class heroes such as George Formby. Foreign and art films were, to the majority of the British mid-century cinema-going public, one and the same.

Conclusions about issues of class can also be inferred from newspaper coverage of the uses of cinemas. Press discussion about the geographical differences in cinema-going, and the changes to city and urban space witnessed in towns like Brighton, were often couched in social terms. The arrival of the Regent super-cinema in Brighton, which seated over 2,000

⁶⁵⁸ Jim Leach, *British Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201.

⁶⁵⁹ Medhurst, "Music Hall and British Cinema", 179–180.

⁶⁶⁰ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste*, 2010, 25.

⁶⁶¹ "Exploitation of 'Bicycle Thieves'". Scrapbook relating to George Evans' Management of the Astoria. ACC 11442/2.

people, was greeted with much excitement in the local newspapers. On the cinema's opening, the *Sussex Agricultural Press* wrote that "as an amusement and social resort, the Regent in Queen's Road, Brighton, is making a big reputation, not only with holiday visitors, but with Sussex residents".⁶⁶² "The secret of its success", it continued, "lies not only in the palatial character of the building and its beautiful decorations, but the high-class character of the entertainments provided" which, in turn, drew middle-class audiences from around the county.⁶⁶³ Nationally, too, the development of such cinemas in subsequent decades was declared to be a new "permanent feature of the suburban landscape" which brought "comfort and technical perfection to the door of the suburban dweller, which were at one time the prerogative of the 'down-town' house".⁶⁶⁴ This hints at the ways in which regularly visiting a modern, palatial super-cinema in the suburbs could be used, if not as a route to social betterment, to give the *appearance* of social advancement. Regional differences interacted with class issues, and were also delineated in the article which argued that cinemas in different areas had fundamentally-different audience compositions, judging city audiences to be "more sophisticated as a rule...the suburban audience, however, since it goes to the cinema as a habit, is content to see almost any kind of programme".⁶⁶⁵

In general terms, leisure practices were bound with class, and frequenting one of Brighton's new Odeon cinemas served to be a tangible, lived experience of class, and a statement of one's middle-class aspirations. It would be too simplistic to suggest that cinemas within Brighton were tightly stratified along class lines, but they were ranked in the minds of Brighton cinema-goers according to a range of criteria including the age, location, and atmosphere. One resident, for example, recalled in a local history project that the Savoy in East Street, with its curving Art Deco exterior, "was quite a posh place to go", whilst another suggested that the Academy "was a really old, musty theatre with torn curtains – but it was the friendliest of theatres to be in".⁶⁶⁶ The cinema, as an institution, certainly became intertwined with issues of emotion and social identity and, as Jeffrey Richards has noted, whilst it welcomed all classes, those of different social status seldom mixed with one another in the auditorium.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶² "The Regent, Brighton", *Sussex Agricultural Press*, 26/08/1921, 7.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ "The Cinema in Manchester: A Crisis Developing", *The Manchester Guardian*, 30/12/1931, 11.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁶ *Back Row Brighton*, 6; 67.

⁶⁶⁷ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 17.

This segregation was largely determined by seat-pricing structures. In the 1930s, the cheapest seats in Brighton could be purchased for around 6d whilst the most expensive in the seafront cinemas cost around 2/6d. This price differential was a primary factor in forming the character of the space of the auditorium, largely separating people according to their age and class. The least expensive areas of the auditorium (such as the front rows) attracted children spending their pocket money; more expensive balcony seats were predominantly frequented by middle-class patrons with more spending power and, at the very back, adolescents in search of privacy and intimacy with their lovers (made more appealing if a cinema had double seats at the rear of the auditorium). The space of the cinema was, therefore, often split into discrete areas, each with its own distinct demographic and emotional community. One respondent to a 1937 MO Day Survey recalled a cinema visit and identified fellow audience members explicitly along class lines: “I noticed there weren’t more than about fifty people...most of them bunched together about a dozen rows away from the screen (this despite the fact that the sixpenny seats they occupied extended at least another dozen rows back). There were also four or five people in the 1/-s, apparently of the same ‘class’ as those in front”.⁶⁶⁸ In a similar manner to theatres, some of Brighton’s cinemas – such as the Regent – had several entrances which led directly to either the balcony/circle seats or to the stalls. This further divided the space along financial and, by extension, class lines, and also led to opportunities for exploitation: groups of children could evade the commissionaire by entering through a backdoor or side entrance opened by one child who had paid the admission price.

More widely, class awareness in cinematic terms continued through the mid-twentieth-century. A telling example from the mid-1950s can be found in an unusual article from the *Daily Mirror* which reported how a court ruled that an Odeon in Hounslow had to pay compensation to a woman whose coat became stuck to a cinema seat with chewing gum. Whilst the event itself does little to illuminate issues of class in cinema-going, a quote from the cinema manager in the article suggests that the auditorium was very much delineated in terms of class. When lawyers debated how the chewing gum had found its way onto the seat, the *Daily Mirror* asked “did the gum drop from the cinema circle?” before quoting the cinema manager: “‘people who buy circle seats don’t eat that sort of thing’, said Mr. Edwin Walton”.⁶⁶⁹ Contemporary associations between class and

⁶⁶⁸ Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 269, June 1937. SxMOA1/3/7.

⁶⁶⁹ “Cinema To Pay Wife Who Was ‘Glued to Seat’”, *Daily Mirror*, 13/04/1954, 6.

cinema seat prices (as well as the consumption of chewing gum!) can be drawn out in this case. Wider inferences can also be made about how visiting the cinema was not a superficial, simple experience, but a multi-faceted and nuanced practice which was determined significantly by class.⁶⁷⁰ As one volunteer for MO's national film panel noted in a cinema visit report, "people were buying the dearer seats...people seemed to be mostly middle-class matrons, some fairly smart younger people".⁶⁷¹

Cinematic Quality and Emotional Authenticity

Interestingly, films which were perceived to be more sophisticated, with powerful themes, were deemed by some to be more worthy of a deep emotional reaction by Brighton audiences. This attitude was not solely limited to high-quality fictional films. In 1946, the Colonial Film Unit (part of the Ministry of Information) filmed a state ceremony in London which saw soldiers from foreign units parade down the Mall, and the resulting documentary, *Victory Parade*, secured a theatrical release in Brighton. The *Evening Argus* suggested that Brighton's audiences would enjoy the "massed bands, a cast of hundreds of thousands, streets gay with flags and pageantry", all of which made it "impossible to watch this huge spectacle without a quickening of the emotions".⁶⁷² In this case, emotional reactions were given legitimacy and were validated by the subject-matter on screen, and it is not difficult to imagine that a documentary with a different, less-patriotic, subject-matter would not have received quite the same level of praise in Brighton's local press. Reinforcing the earlier findings of this study, this cinematic discernment (through the projection of middle-class respectability in one's choice of film) was allied with the experiencing of authentic emotion. This resulted in Brighton cinemas acting as arenas for class and feeling, interwoven in a context and environment somewhat different from other comparable forms of public leisure in the town.

The value of this particular type of deep emotional response was, however, not a universally-held view: *control* of emotion in public was considered by some to be more important. When, in 1948, Mayer undertook his sociological study of British cinema

⁶⁷⁰ Although centred on America, Daniel Robinson's study of the historical development and social significance of chewing gum is an interesting and perceptive one: "Marketing Gum, Making Meanings: Wrigley in North America, 1890-1930", *Enterprise & Society: The International Journal of Business History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 4-44.

⁶⁷¹ Report on Screening of *Birth of a Baby*, Hammersmith Gaumont, by BMC. SxMOA1/2/17/1/A/1.

⁶⁷² "Stage & Screen", *Evening Argus*, 18/06/1946.

audiences by asking *Picturegoer* readers to write in with their “Motion Picture Autobiographies”, one 22 year-old woman wrote how critically-well-regarded films such as *Rebecca* (1940) gave her the ability to moderate her emotional reactions. The box office success of this film (essentially a melodrama or “woman’s picture”), is a useful example as it encompassed the issues of taste, genre, gender, and class. All these were at play when the woman wrote that it had “made me appreciate acting, and instilled in me a sense of criticism which must have partly counteracted the effects of emotion...which haunted my teen years, and which still break out if not kept under control”.⁶⁷³ Public emotional restraint, was, for this woman, one way to project a sense of being a sophisticated middle-class film-goer in the mid-twentieth-century.

Ideas of emotional authenticity within the cinema also extended to the commonly-voiced opinion that cinematic technology should be an instructive and worthwhile pursuit for the nation’s youth. As outlined in Chapter Two, the development of children’s cinema clubs aimed to harness the educational power of the cinema and to instil authentic and “proper” values in young film-goers. The Lido in Hove was one of the first cinemas in the country to launch a children’s cinema club, which later became the “Mickey Mouse Club” when Odeon acquired the cinema in 1944. The popularity of the scheme led the *Evening Argus* to declare to its readers that such clubs offered children the chance to “learn the essentials of good citizenship to help one another and to help those not able to help themselves”.⁶⁷⁴ During the meetings of the Mickey Mouse Club, Brighton’s cinemas became important examples of Lefebvre’s dominated spaces, in which expectations of proper conduct were emphasised alongside the “authentic” expression of emotion in a regulated public context.

The Cinema in the Suburb

The suburban landscape of Brighton, and its relationship with the cinema, is worth further consideration, especially when compared with that of Bolton. Suburban expansion occurred in both towns and, in Bolton, much of this development occurred after 1946 around the cotton factories which dominated the urban centre.⁶⁷⁵ In Brighton,

⁶⁷³ Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*, 84–85.

⁶⁷⁴ “Popular Cinema Club”, *Evening Argus*, 12/01/1937.

⁶⁷⁵ The Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit, “Bolton Urban Historic Landscape Characterisation: Interim Report” (Manchester: The University of Manchester, September 2008), 18.

suburbanisation gathered pace slightly earlier, and the inter-war period was witness to extensive housing estate construction. As Richard Dennis has argued, in the first half of the twentieth-century, suburbs were perceived to be at the forefront of the modern, with new services and modern infrastructure making the development of suburbia, and participation in it, a positive goal.⁶⁷⁶ On a national level, the construction of cinemas in these new suburbs is an obvious example of this suburban preoccupation with modernity.

The growth of Brighton was constrained by the sea, meaning that any expansion was confined to the north, and along the coast to the west and east. The process of suburbanisation in the town was relatively rapid and during the 1930s, over 4,000 council houses and flats had been constructed in and around Brighton, with around 84 percent of these located in suburbs on the periphery of the town.⁶⁷⁷ Despite Brighton boasting many cinemas in the inter-war period, few were found in these new suburbs (unlike in other areas of the country such as London where cinemas became symbolic of suburban development).⁶⁷⁸ This was probably due to the town's tourism which necessarily concentrated venues of entertainment in its centre. Indeed, only a few cinemas such as the Gaiety and the Regal (renamed the Curzon in 1936) lay beyond the town centre. The suburb of Patcham, however, was identified by post-war developers as being large and forward-looking enough to accommodate a new picture-house.⁶⁷⁹ The plans, however, never came to fruition. This suggests that the relationship between suburb and cinema in Brighton was dissimilar to other urban areas of England where, as institutions, they were potent emblems of the progressive modernity which suburbanisation had come to represent (although a key complaint often levelled at post-war suburban development was its lack of provision for leisure facilities). Rather than being a fundamental part of the fabric of a new suburb, Brighton's cinemas lay just beyond its housing estates, centred, once again, on the tourist economy of the town.

The creation of "Greater Brighton", as it came to be known, highlighted how the town's experience of suburbanisation was influenced by its leisure economy, unlike in Bolton where processes of suburban growth were driven by industrial concerns. It could be

⁶⁷⁶ Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, 180–183.

⁶⁷⁷ Benjamin Jones, "Neighbourhood, Family and Home: The Working Class Experience in Mid-Twentieth Century Brighton" (PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, 2009), 121.

⁶⁷⁸ Geoffrey Mead, "'Scattered Squalor' and 'Downland Homes': Interwar Housing at Patcham, Brighton" (PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, 2012), 309.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

argued that the development of estates such as Whitehawk to the east of Brighton and Hollingdean to the north established spatial divisions in the town which were defined by either their residential use or their recreational use. Holidaymakers travelling from London by train were delivered straight into the urban centre of the town. To these tourists, the suburbs of Brighton were liminal spaces, to be travelled through, rather than visited. The town of “Brighton”, in the minds of these visitors, signified a discrete area comprising, perhaps, five main roads, the seafront, piers, the railway station and, from the 1930s onwards, the Lanes. This area of the town lost its shabby and down-at-heel image and became a leisure space in its own right when shopping was established as a recreational activity. For tourists, the spatial character of Brighton was more homogenous than residents’ conceptions of space in the town, and was governed by its provision for leisure. Local Brighton residents, on the other hand, naturally viewed the public spaces of Brighton in a different manner, for the town played host not only to recreational facilities such as the cinema, but also to the working environments and domestic spaces which defined everyday life. The grand cinemas which were a defining part of holidaymakers’ impressions of Brighton as a locality were, for residents, more incidental, being but one element of their hometown. More broadly, this means that cinemas had a direct impact on how urban space was perceived and appropriated, depending on the nature of the town or city in which they were located. Picture-houses in an industrial area such as Bolton, for example, were less significant to visitors than the imposing cotton mills which characterised the town. In a holiday destination such as Blackpool or Brighton, however, cinemas were integral to the identity of the towns as havens of recreation. The significance of cinemas in their urban environments was subject to considerable variation across the country.

Just as in Bolton, Brighton’s cinemas catered to different audiences. The more cosmopolitan demographic of Brighton meant that its cinemas accommodated a wider range of patrons. In Bolton, the majority of cinema-goers were Boltonians, and visitors to the town would have made up a comparatively-small percentage of patrons. Brighton’s cinemas – especially the large theatres located along the seafront or in the town centre – enjoyed much more diverse audiences, comprising both holidaymakers (a varied group in its own right) and the town’s indigenous population. The excellent provision for leisure in Brighton (and the large range of first- and second-run cinemas) meant, of course, that locals could enjoy the leisure economy for themselves. Brighton residents were no less attracted by the impressive architecture and unique environments of

cinemas like the Regent than were holidaymakers. The excellent quality of the cinemas in the tourist areas of the town meant that Brighton residents were often willing to travel into the centre. A souvenir programme for the opening of the Savoy in 1930 informed readers that “all Corporation tramcars, all Southdown buses, most Tillings buses, pass the doors”, suggesting that travel to the cinema from the outer suburbs of Brighton was fairly straightforward.⁶⁸⁰ For the more affluent, the Savoy even advertised a soon-to-open garage for patrons’ cars.⁶⁸¹ In Bolton, save for perhaps two or three grand cinemas, cinema distribution and cinema-going practices were much more localised, with Boltonians most often frequenting smaller neighbourhood cinemas, unless travelling across town to specifically visit the Odeon.

Beyond Entertainment: Flexible Public Space in Brighton

As public spaces, Brighton’s cinemas had multiple uses in addition to the screening of films and they operated within broad social structures. The idea of the cinema as a key feature of any community was a long-established one, and one which certainly came to the fore during both World Wars. In his study of the various schemes which saw injured servicemen being employed as projectionists during the First World War, Lawrence Napper highlights how cinema managers eagerly supported such programmes of war-related charity as they “boosted business by establishing the centrality of the cinema in the public and patriotic life of the community”.⁶⁸² This “practical patriotism”, he continues, relied on the harnessing of “the connection between the cinema, the community and wider wartime concerns” as cinemas were decorated with patriotic emblems, offered themselves as venues for public discussions and fundraised for the national effort.⁶⁸³ Similarly, Richard Farmer notes that cinemas were dream palaces of great “utility” which, during the Second World War, were enhanced as exhibitors “recognised and traded upon the linkage that existed between their cinemas and the environments in which they operated”.⁶⁸⁴ Wartime conditions gave cinemas a new importance and their strategic locations, dispersed widely in urban and rural environments, gave authorities an effective network through which to disseminate

⁶⁸⁰ Souvenir Programme for the Opening of the Savoy Cinema, 01/08/1930. ACC 11464.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² Lawrence Napper, “Disabled Operators: Training Disabled Ex-servicemen as Projectionists During the Great War”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 15, no. 1 (2018), 97.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁸⁴ Richard Farmer, *Cinemas and Cinemagoing in Wartime Britain, 1939-45: The Utility Dream Palace* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 5.

newsreels and propaganda into communities.⁶⁸⁵ As Michael Hammond notes in his study of cinemas in Southampton during the First World War, the town's cinemas "were places that stressed the social utility of the space as part of the cinema-going experience", a phenomenon explained, in part, by the need for individual cinemas to differentiate themselves from local competitors.⁶⁸⁶

Cinemas, then, were important community institutions and were used for far more than the exhibition of films. In Brighton, for example, the *Evening Argus* reported that "in an attempt to reduce the number of cycle thefts in the area, Brighton police are running a foyer display in conjunction with the showing of the Italian film *Bicycle Thieves* at the Astoria".⁶⁸⁷ The popularity of the cinema in Brighton meant that it held a certain appeal to local government and other institutions as a way of disseminating material to the public in the context of recreation. Suggestions were made in 1937 that the cinema, on a national scale, was a positive tool for the educational improvement of the "masses" who had such a voracious appetite for films. "As a means of imparting education and intelligent recreation", one newspaper suggested, "the cinema had incalculable possibilities".⁶⁸⁸ It reported that a speaker at the Library Association conference of 1937 had argued that "it was not too far-fetched to envisage a day when they would see local authorities administering cinemas in the same spirit as they at present administered public libraries".⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁸⁶ Michael Hammond, *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War 1914-1918* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2005), 21-22.

⁶⁸⁷ *Evening Argus*, 01/02/1950, 5.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ "Libraries and the Cinema", *The Manchester Guardian*, 03/06/1937, 20.

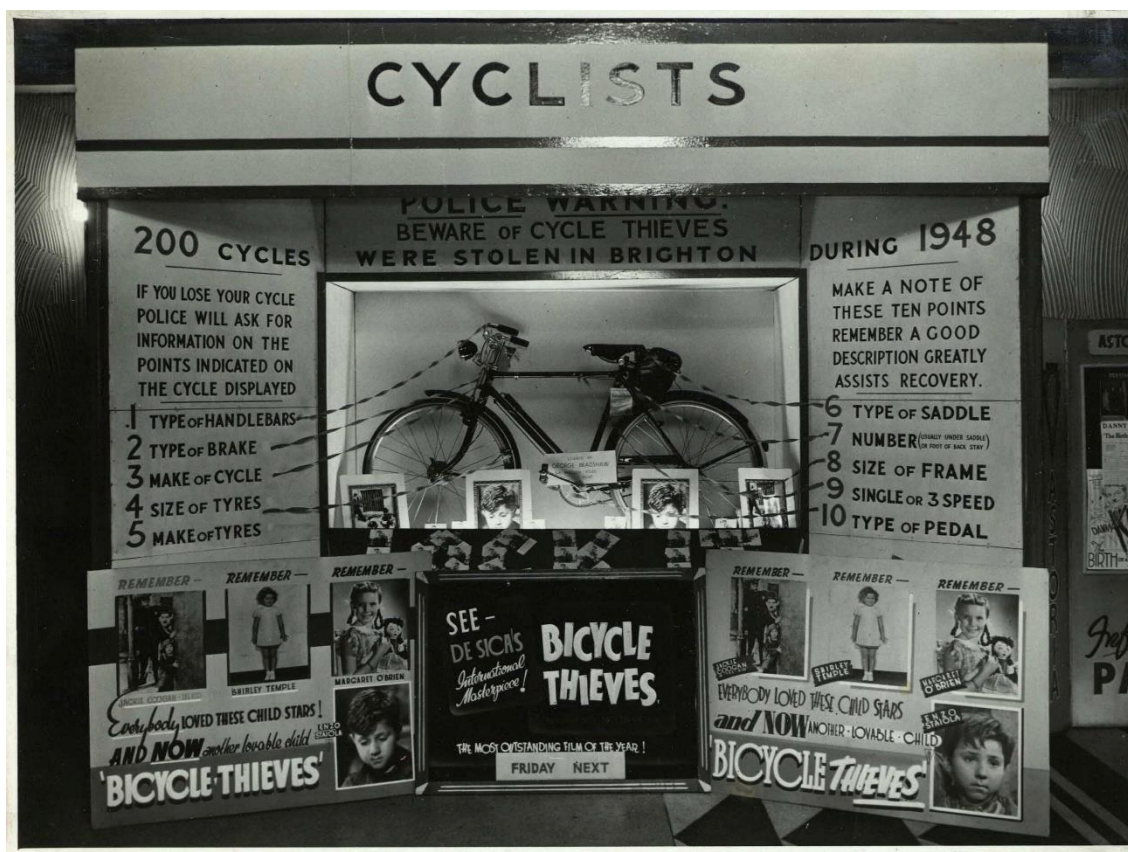


Figure 3: The Astoria foyer display, run in partnership with Brighton police in an attempt to reduce bicycle thefts in the town. Image ref ESRO ACC 11442-2.

The use of the cinema as an instrument of education also alludes to the flexibility of the space, allowing the cinema to contribute to the good of the community in which it was situated. Cinema innovation and developments in design – particularly with the rise of national chains like Odeon – opened up the space for sundry functions. The Curzon on Brighton’s Western Road (previously the Regal/Scala/Queen’s Picturedrome), for example, advertised a new tea lounge to customers, writing in its programme from as early as the 1920s that “this cinema is now the popular rendezvous of the Elite”.⁶⁹⁰ Cinemas highlighted the sociability of their establishments, frequently organising competitions and events (for children and adults alike) which were linked with the current film programme. In 1950, for example, the Astoria ran a competition which asked people to send in a photograph of themselves in a Tarzan look-alike contest, where “the best entrants – men who consider that they have a physique resembling that of Tarzan – will appear on the stage of the Astoria to be judged by the audience”.⁶⁹¹ The promotion

⁶⁹⁰ Queen’s Picturedrome Programme, undated. SB 791.4MIS.

⁶⁹¹ Brighton & Hove Gazette, 25/03/1950.

attracted praise from ABC's head of publicity, who wrote to the Astoria manager praising his campaigns which "so far have been excellent and, of course, they are not only helping the films you exploit but, equally important, you are constantly focusing the local spotlight on your theatre".⁶⁹² The facilities offered by Brighton's cinemas were not only an important way for cinema owners to promote their business over others; they also projected a sense of community and modernity which was attractive to potential patrons. This was particularly the case for women, many of whom perceived the cinema as a modern, safe, and respectable space.⁶⁹³

Cinemas such as the Regent, with its restaurant, café and ballroom, also offered women a space in which a number of recreational activities could take place in one building and, as Brad Beaven has surmised, "the cinema coffee shop was the focal point of the afternoon, with many women preferring this leisure activity to the film itself".⁶⁹⁴ In a series of surprisingly-accurate predictions, the president of Universal Pictures gave his views to the *Daily Mirror* in 1934 about how he believed the cinema in 1960 would look. Predicting the development of shopping malls, he asserted that cinemas would be built in vast entertainment complexes with restaurants, swimming pools with artificial sunlight lounges, and shops "where a morning's shopping may be done within four walls".⁶⁹⁵ Pertinent to this study's focus on the role of the cinema in public emotion, he also wrote how he was often asked whether "the development of home entertainment will keep people at home. Never. A visit to a cinema in 1960 will be, as in 1933, an emotional experience".⁶⁹⁶

Holidaymakers and Brighton's Leisure Economy

Many of Brighton's leisure pursuits were weather-dependent and, should the English weather have hampered beach-based activities, the cinema was a natural alternative for entertainment.⁶⁹⁷ Trade from tourism was vital for the town-centre cinemas of Brighton and, as David Fisher has noted, the largest "changed their programmes mid-week so that holidaymakers staying from Saturday to Saturday would have a chance to see two films

⁶⁹² ABC Inter-office Letter from J. Andrew Neatrou to G. E. Evans, 20/04/1950. ACC 11442/2.

⁶⁹³ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, 62.

⁶⁹⁴ Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*, 198.

⁶⁹⁵ "The Cinema of 1960", *Daily Mirror*, 01/08/1934, 10.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ Fisher, *Cinema-by-Sea*, 31.

during their stay”.⁶⁹⁸ Furthermore, the disparate spending power of holidaymakers was clear in admission prices: the Odeon on West Street set its prices between 1/2d and 3/6d, compared with the Odeon in Bolton which charged between 6d and 1/6d when it opened in 1937.⁶⁹⁹ Price differentiation between the two towns could, of course, be explained in part by north/south economic trends (although such a dichotomy should not be overstated).⁷⁰⁰ Holidaymakers certainly comprised a substantial section of the audiences for these large town-centre cinemas, but local Brighton residents would obviously also have used such cinemas for general cinema-going and, for women in particular, for life-cycle stages such as courting. The ease of access allowed the cinema to be integrated into the infrastructure of the town, a fact which would have encouraged locals to frequent the up-scale picture-houses by the seafront. Nevertheless, it is clear that many cinemas in the centre of Brighton catered to a comparatively affluent and peripatetic audience who would not, unlike local people, have established habitual patterns of visiting the town’s cinemas.

The likes of the Odeon on West Street and the Savoy near the seafront – with their up-to-date programmes, ease of accessibility, and palatial surroundings – appealed to both holidaymakers and permanent residents of Brighton. Unlike in Bolton, where small neighbourhood cinemas were to be found across the town, the majority of Brighton’s cinemas were located in the tourist districts and main streets which radiated out from the railway station. There were, however, one or two cinemas in Brighton which were predominantly used by local residents. These picture-houses were located in the suburbs, away from the tourist trail and, as might be expected, were smaller, more intimate establishments, in contrast with the majestic and cavernous spaces of first-run cinemas. Robert James has observed in his study of film-booking patterns in Portsmouth that certain cinemas were considered too small or low-brow to attract audiences from wide areas, and thus only held local appeal for the immediate area in which they were located.⁷⁰¹ Cinema programmes were “principally determined by their understanding of their patrons’ specific social and cultural identity”, and this observation of cinema provision in Portsmouth is equally applicable to Brighton cinemas.⁷⁰² The Gaiety and the

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ Directory of Cinemas, *Brighton on Film*. http://www.brightonfilm.com/cinemas/Odeon_WestStreet.htm (accessed 12/06/2017); Richards, “Cinemagoing in Worktown”, 151.

⁷⁰⁰ See, for example, Alan R. H. Baker and Mark Billinge, eds., *Geographies of England: The North-South Divide, Material and Imagined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷⁰¹ Robert James, “Cinema-Going in a Port Town, 1914–1951: Film Booking Patterns at the Queens Cinema, Portsmouth”, *Urban History* 40, no. 2 (2013), 317.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 335.

Pavilion, for example, were two cinemas which were out of the town centre, located on Lewes Road and in Portslade respectively. The Gaiety, complete with a striking 15 metre neon-lit façade, was built in 1937, one of the few cinemas in Brighton built to serve new housing estates, such as Hollingdean, to the north of the town. As one Brighton resident recalled, the modernity of the Gaiety caused a stir in the local community: “it was such an innovation that we cycled or walked to it to witness its splendour. The odd richer ones caught a 31b Southdown bus [to see it]...snobbery was on the way, and kids felt good to say they’d been to the Gaiety”.⁷⁰³ In general, however, the most modern of Brighton’s cinemas catered mainly for the holidaymakers who arrived every year.



Figure 4: An artist's impression of the Gaiety in 1937, complete with its towering neon columns.

<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/44575/photos>

⁷⁰³ My Brighton and Hove, “A Glorious Blaze of Colour”, by Ron Spicer.

http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/page/gaiety_cinema?path=op115p115p19op963p (accessed 12/08/17).

That said, some cinemas strove to place themselves at the centre of communities in order to create within their establishments a shared local space with which regular local patrons could engage. In 1950, the *Evening Argus* informed readers that the Odeon in Kemp Town (which had some 400 fewer seats than its counterpart on West Street) would be putting on a “Home Hobbies” exhibition displaying crafts made by local people, quoting the manager that “the idea is to foster a happy family atmosphere among the patrons”.⁷⁰⁴ The space of the cinema was, in this way, opened up to perform a social and recreational function somewhat removed from the commercial activity of film-watching. As Deborah Allison *et al.* argued in their ethnographic study of the Phoenix Picturehouse in Oxford, cinema-goers could develop a sense of affinity with their local cinema which “helped to dissolve traditional boundaries between the business operation and its patrons”.⁷⁰⁵ Some cinemas in Brighton proclaimed their importance in the development of the town. The souvenir programme for the opening of the Astoria in 1933 maintained that “wise and progressive” authorities in Brighton had “widened its thoroughfares, built new main and coast roads, embellished its beautiful sea front, and has housed its people in comfortable homes amidst healthy surroundings. It is therefore right and proper that with the evolution of the Cinema, new and better theatres should be built”.⁷⁰⁶ Keeping pace with these suburban developments, the social impact of the technically-advanced Astoria was also championed in the literature:

“The electrical development of the Astoria in Gloucester Place not only means electrical development for the Cinema itself, but by arrangement with the Brighton Corporation has provided for that area a means of distributing Alternating Current at pressures in accordance with the electrical development scheme which is taking place all over Great Britain, and offers the residents in the vicinity facilities for obtaining Alternating Current, which might otherwise not have been available to them for several years to come. The Astoria Cinema, therefore, is not only in itself up-to-date as to the form of electrical current which it uses, but has been the means of providing additional facilities to the immediate neighbourhood”.⁷⁰⁷

The cinema was projecting itself as a force for social good, serving the community in which it was located in ways beyond simple entertainment, and becoming a physical manifestation of architectural and technological innovation. This urban modernity in

⁷⁰⁴ “Patrons Put On Own Show At Cinema”, *Evening Argus*, 26/09/1950.

⁷⁰⁵ Deborah Allison, Hiu M. Chan, and Daniela Treveri Gennari, *The Phoenix Picturehouse: 100 Years of Oxford Cinema Memories* (London: Picturehouse Publications, 2013), 188.

⁷⁰⁶ *The Brighton Astoria Opening Night Souvenir Brochure*, December 1933.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Brighton's highstreets and suburbs was not, however, universally appreciated. One Brighton resident complained to *Picturegoer* that, whilst films had reached a quality to rival that of the theatre, Brighton's cinemas displayed "the most tawdry and vulgar form of advertising...[including] highly-coloured, ugly and exaggerated posters" on their exteriors.⁷⁰⁸ Unfortunately, he did not name any films which he found to be particularly disagreeable, but concluded that these "vulgarily ornate cinemas, silly slogans, and a glut of superlatives to describe each picture" were "shoddy" and undignified additions to the urban landscape, and an affront to the modern film-lover.⁷⁰⁹ Concerns about the social impact of cinemas were also expressed in Bolton, where one resident wrote to the *Bolton Journal* in 1932 to complain about a local cinema which was displaying a poster advertising the chance to become a film star. "I think statements of this kind should be censored", wrote the correspondent, "for, to a certain type of girl, contests of this description are irresistible...whilst the majority of girls have more sense than to place any reliance in a vague promise of this description, there are yet a considerable number who, if vain enough, or flattered enough, would throw caution to the winds".⁷¹⁰ Some eight years later, the *Bolton Evening News* expressed similar grievances, suggesting that the cinema's promotion of fame was a social ill: "said to be obsessed with the idea that she was to be a film star at Hollywood, a good looking brunette girl of 16, employed as a lady's maid appeared before the Juvenile Court in Blackburn on a charge of stealing money belonging to her employer...the welfare officer said the accused spent most of her leisure time at the cinema".⁷¹¹ It appears that in both Bolton and in Brighton, cinemas were censured by some for the sensationalist nature of their exterior film posters: one did not even need to enter the building to be influenced by the cinema, a modern institution which held great significance in the communities in which they were located.

That new cinemas tried to place themselves both physically and psychologically into the social structures of Brighton is hardly surprising: the integration of picture-houses into local communities was commonly to be found in towns and cities across England. But the study of Brighton's cinemas does complement other comparative academic studies into regional cinema-going, and punctuates general trends found on a national level with bold and apposite examples of how cinemas were public spaces imbued with meaning for the millions who used them. The modernity characterised by cinemas (and particularly

⁷⁰⁸ Letter from Bernard Heath, *Picturegoer*, 25/04/1936, 42.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ "Getting on the Films", Letters to the Editor, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, by F. H. Taylor, 12/08/1932.

⁷¹¹ "Thinks She Will Be Film Star", *Bolton Evening News*, 11/04/1940.

those constructed in the 1930s) also held different meanings, rousing emotions of excitement and wonder for some, and uneasy feelings of change for others. In this context, cinemas in Brighton, and further beyond, mirror wider conceptions of how modernity, as Christine Geraghty suggests, is “intimately bound up with...[how] changes and transformations are felt viscerally as both exciting and frightening”.⁷¹²

A Cinematic Town: Brighton’s Wider Links with Film

This chapter has, thus far, considered how the institution of the cinema operated within the social and cultural environments of Brighton. It would, perhaps, be useful to consider briefly the town’s wider links with cinema in general. Unlike Bolton, Brighton can lay claim to an intimate relationship with film stretching back to the early years of the medium. The first film show outside London was given in Brighton at the Pandora Gallery, opposite the West Pier, in March 1896, and six permanent cinemas had opened in the town by 1910, followed by nine more a year later.⁷¹³ Moreover, Brighton and Hove became a centre for early film-making. In 1889, local resident William Friese-Greene built a “chronophotographic camera” which could take “animated photographs”, and in 1900, George Albert Smith opened a film studio in Hove, introducing ground-breaking film techniques such as the close-up.⁷¹⁴ Other prominent Brighton film pioneers such as James Williamson and Alfred Darling helped to ensure that, as Fisher notes, few could “claim an equal role to Brighton and Hove in advancing mere film towards its status as ‘cinema’”.⁷¹⁵ This might suggest that the town’s cinema-goers had a much deeper relationship with cinemas than the general population but, in reality, Brighton’s links with the birth of cinema were little-known, and this remains the case even to the present day.

Another facet of Brighton’s relationship with film (and one which did not figure in the case of Bolton) is in its own portrayals on the big screen, most notably in the 1947 film *Brighton Rock*. The film, based upon the novel by Graham Greene, captured a gloomy sense of twentieth-century populism, portraying the darker side of Brighton and the criminality of teenager Pinkie Brown, a sadistic and razor blade-wielding gang leader (played by Richard Attenborough).⁷¹⁶ As was to be expected, the representation of

⁷¹² Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 24.

⁷¹³ Fisher, *Cinema-by-Sea*, 10; 21.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷¹⁶ Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 78.

Brighton as a centre of gang violence was not welcomed by many people, a fact recognised by the BBFC which noted that “Brighton Town Council may not appreciate having this unpleasant and sinister tale located in their holiday resort”.⁷¹⁷ Relying so heavily as it did on reputation, the tourist economy of Brighton could not afford adverse publicity, although there is no evidence to suggest that the film had any impact on visitor numbers. *Brighton Rock*, however, was not universally considered to be the primary threat to the town’s tourism industry. In a letter to the *Evening Argus*, one Brightonian suggested that it was the cinemas themselves, so fundamental to Brighton’s leisure economy, which threatened to deter holidaymakers. After referencing the popular debate over the negative effects of *Brighton Rock*, Alec Royston suggested to the paper that “a good start to making the town a paradise for visitors would be to give the staffs of our many fine cinemas a lesson in the essentials of courtesy...the treatment that one receives at the hands of the minions at many of our cinemas is enough to make any but the most hardened filmgoer stay away”.⁷¹⁸ Never mind the threat from Pinkie, for this cinema-goer, it was Brighton’s cinema staff who could do the most damage: “the doormen or commissionaires talk to you as though you were a bunch of P.O.Ws on parade. The foyer attendants can’t be bothered to tell you where the cloakroom is, and the usherettes are usually too busy discussing the ‘New Look’ or the latest boyfriend to show you to a seat. If they do condescend to notice you they trot agilely down the aisle with the aid of their torch and leave you groping in gloom behind”.⁷¹⁹ The study of Brighton’s cinemas also aids understanding of the ways in which space interacted with notions of leisure and the development of particular social practices in the twentieth-century. The historical sources which have been used in this study have revealed the voices of cinema-goers who frequently attached importance to cinemas as spaces of consequence in their lives (in both a public and private sense); and memories of cinema-going in Brighton gathered by local history publisher QueenSpark Books often cite the cinema as a public space which held special meaning in life events such as courting (echoing sentiments in Worktown material).⁷²⁰

As explored in Chapter Two, theories about the differences between spaces and places are useful in interrogating further the spatial characteristics of cinemas in Brighton. Long-

⁷¹⁷ BBFC Scenario Reports 1946-47, No. 55, *Brighton Rock*, 04/03/1947, cited in: James Chapman, “‘Sordidness, Corruption and Violence Almost Unrelieved’: Critics, Censors and the Post-War British Crime Film”, *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 2 (2008), 190.

⁷¹⁸ “Oh, Mr Commissionaire”, Letters to the Editor, *Evening Argus*, 22/01/1948.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁰ See recollections in *Back Row Brighton* (2009).

established cinemas such as the Regent and the Savoy were, to follow Michel de Certeau's thesis that places are directly affected and moulded by people's use of a space, potent *places* in Brighton's landscape. They signified a continuing tradition for Brighton residents who may have first visited in their childhood and continued to do so throughout their lives. This familiarity extended to holidaymakers who may have attended the same cinema each year, thus constructing a place tied to memory and feelings of happiness. The stability of these "practiced [sic] places", and the habitual nature of cinema-going, allowed them to mature as *spaces* in which emotional reactions and displays were informed by audiences' impressions of the cinema as a safe, familiar, and welcoming space. The previous chapter on Worktown has shown that the creation of a permissive emotional atmosphere (in which weeping was socially acceptable within the confines of the auditorium) was driven by the cinema as a space: the collective of people all participating in the same activity, often following emotional cues from their fellow patrons, occurred in a clearly-defined and familiar place. This, in turn, allowed an emotional space to be created. In this way, space and place were interdependent, and allowed emotional landscapes to be carved out in very specific locations in Brighton.

These emotional landscapes evolved within an urban environment which Nicola Moorby suggests was "symbolic of many benefits of the modern world, such as improved transport links and increased leisure time"; Brighton was a place in which modernity could flourish and emotional experiences unfold through leisure activities.⁷²¹ Moorby stresses this through a case study of how, in the early twentieth-century, it became an outpost for the British *avant-garde*, with movements such as the Camden Town Group and artists like Spencer Gore identifying Brighton as a location of cosmopolitan modernity. Painting in the 1910s, Gore, she contends, found in Brighton a certain "spirit of place combined with spirit of age", and in his paintings of the promenade frantic with tourist traffic, and of the bathing machines with their strange geometric forms marking the beach at regular intervals, he represented an urbanity which emphasised modern order in entertainment pursuits.⁷²² To this group of artists, Moorby concludes, modernity was not "necessarily all that is new, but all that is contemporary, familiar, recognisable and accessible to the man or woman on the street. It is in everyday environments such as Brighton's seafront, Gore is

⁷²¹ Nicola Moorby, "London to Brighton: The Indian Summer of the Camden Town Group", in *Modernism On Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Witney: Peter Lang, 2009), 58.

⁷²² *Ibid.*

saying, where the experience of modern life is best visualised”.⁷²³ Brighton offered a vibrant context for notions and experiences of emotion to develop within an environment predisposed to the modern – a topography of feeling which accentuated the interdependency of space and emotional practices.

By participating in the recreational opportunities on offer in Brighton (such as sea bathing, cinema-going, and pier amusements) day trippers to the resort were engaging in activities which stimulated powerful emotions such as joy, nostalgia and excitement. Such emotions were, of course, experienced by people when not visiting Brighton, but for many who made the trip down from London and from elsewhere, the town signified an opportunity to indulge in certain emotions more explicitly than they would during their everyday lives. Emotion was at the heart of Brighton’s leisure activities which were, in turn, at the centre of the town’s social and cultural character. The town’s cinemas were not only emotive sites in their own right, but they also contributed to the broader economy which marked Brighton as a site of positive emotional experiences for many people. Space and feeling, therefore, were important influences on one another. Brighton’s cinema auditoria – in common with those of Bolton – exemplified this relationship, as well as the interactions between space and place which figured so heavily in the development of leisure practices in the twentieth-century.

The War and the Stiff-Upper-Lip

Brighton’s cinemas – as spaces and as places – held, just as in Bolton, connotations with the domestic, and attendant feelings of safety and security. To return to an important example which has been discussed earlier in this thesis, one of the most vivid illustrations of how cinemas were viewed as refuges by members of the public occurred during the Second World War. Although cinemas were initially closed on the outbreak of war to prevent the gathering of crowds vulnerable to bombing raids, the decision was soon rescinded and most cinemas outside London quickly returned to their pre-war opening patterns.⁷²⁴ Cinemas were viewed as a vital tool in the dissemination of information and propaganda, particularly in the screening of newsreels.⁷²⁵ One resident in the Brighton suburb of Patcham reflected another prevailing national opinion that cinemas offered an “invaluable national service” in keeping up morale and that their closure was

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷²⁴ Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, 1.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

counterproductive.⁷²⁶ “I live in the centre of a large evacuation reception area”, she wrote to *Picturegoer*, “and in talking with mothers and children now, we trust, safely lodged here, I am amazed at the place ‘the pictures’ hold in their affections”.⁷²⁷ A class dimension may also have been at play here: although she was corresponding with a film magazine, cinema-going might not have figured as prominently in this woman’s cultural life as it did in those of the evacuees.

Reopening cinemas – whether for the national good or for economic reasons – came with several conditions, namely that when an air raid warning was received “the audience should be informed verbally by the manager or some other responsible person from the stage...the entertainment should, if possible, be continued”.⁷²⁸ Again, accounts in MO and in the press suggest that such warnings were most often not acted upon by audience members, who chose to remain in the cinema rather than venture out to a public shelter. Indeed, one cinema in London marketed its sheltering potential in a pamphlet collected by MO: “the Berkley Cinema is built well above the average level of air raid shelters and is therefore one of the safest entertainment houses in London”.⁷²⁹ The reported inaction of audiences during air raid warnings confirmed the perception of cinemas as safe and secure spaces.

Such behaviour could also be linked with the prevalent notion of the British stiff-upper-lip, characterised in the popular imagination as a sensible control and moderation of one’s feelings and personal conduct. Cinemas were spaces in which Brightonians could see the stiff-upper-lip being put into practice on the screen, and films such as *The Way to the Stars* (1945) exposed audiences to the stoicism of RAF pilots battling both in the skies and with their emotions on the ground. *Mrs. Miniver* and other, rather decorous, war films again reinforced the need for emotional self-control, symbolising a trait of the British character (albeit as characterised by Hollywood) which was certainly prominent in the minds of many. Interestingly, it was suggested that these films were delivered to a cinema-going public conditioned by wartime circumstances to respond to such themes. Writing in 1950, *Picturegoer* magazine suggested that *Mrs. Miniver* “burst upon a picture-going

⁷²⁶ Letter from Gertrude A. Rogers, *Picturegoer*, 07/10/1939, 28.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁸ “Instructions to cinemas agreed with the Police and the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association”, 19/08/1940. HO 199/268.

⁷²⁹ Berkley Cinema Pamphlet. SxMOA1/2/17/4/1/4.

audience primed to receive it...on a wave of genuine public emotion it swept to success”.⁷³⁰ In the years after the Second World War control of public and private feeling was romanticised as a contributory factor towards Britain’s success in the war. Such emotional understatement was referenced by a cinema manager who wrote to the *Daily Mail* in 1940, praising his patrons for their “equanimity” on the occasions he had to go onto the stage to warn that the air raid sirens were sounding.⁷³¹ “You do not rush out of your seats and fight your way to the exits”, he explained, “no, you just calmly sit there...to keep up morale is a sure and quick way to help win this war”.⁷³²

The comfortable (and often homely) surroundings of Brighton’s cinema auditoria would have appeared to many to be as safe a place as any during a bombing raid, and the emotional stoicism displayed on screen would have reinforced the notion that one should not overreact in the event of an air raid. This point raises something of an interesting dichotomy. Many films were charged with intense emotion, designed to stimulate an emotional response from an audience who, indeed, were psychologically prepared by the physical environment of the cinema for such a reaction. At the same time, many films buttressed the social dictate that personal emotions should be concealed or controlled. As Dixon has surmised, audience reactions to *Brief Encounter* are a good example of “a very modern and very British phenomenon – weeping over the stiff-upper-lip, crying at people not crying”.⁷³³ This simultaneous provocation of an affective response and a reinforcement of a restrictive social code clearly demonstrates the complex role which cinemas played in contesting and developing the emotional landscape of England.

The sense of the cinema environment as a protector was to be shattered in Brighton, however, on the 14 September 1940. In an effort to escape pursuit from a Spitfire, a stray German bomber released its remaining bombs whilst passing over Kemp Town, two of which hit the Odeon. The cinema was screening a Saturday matinee performance and, consequently, had groups of children inside. Over 50 people were killed, many of them children. In a poignant report, the *Evening Argus* wrote that “three little boys should have gone to the cinema as they always did every Saturday afternoon, but they bought penny sweets on the way, and they didn’t have enough money to pay for their seats.

⁷³⁰ “The Second Mrs. Miniver”, *Picturegoer*, 28/10/1950, 17.

⁷³¹ “Seeing It Through”, Letters to the Editor, *Daily Mail*, 28/11/1940, 2.

⁷³² *Ibid.*

⁷³³ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, 244.

Those bags of sweets had saved their lives”.⁷³⁴ The tragedy exposed the cinema’s reputation as a protective space to be something of a fallacy.

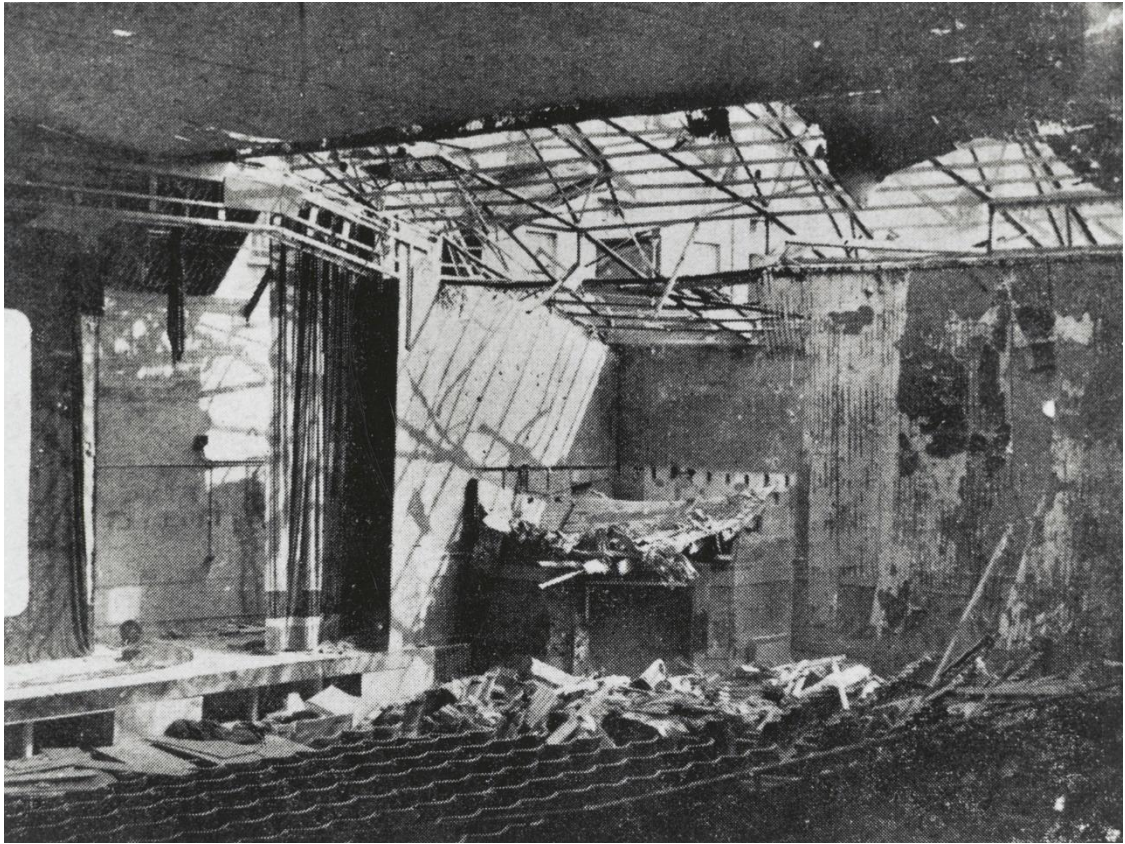


Figure 5: The aftermath of the explosion at the Odeon in Kemp Town. Much of the auditorium was destroyed (although later quickly re-built) and many were killed. Copyright Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove.

In broader terms, the types of cinema found in Brighton were more diverse than those of Bolton. The fundamental differences between the economies of the two towns naturally influenced any provision for leisure and the demographic composition of cinema audiences. The geographical distribution of picture-houses in Brighton was dominated by town-centre cinemas which were close to hotels and boarding houses, and which enjoyed business from tourists and locals alike. A small number of cinemas also lay in the suburbs that holidaymakers would not ordinarily have visited. These cinemas served local people, fostering a sense of community which contributed to their appeal. Tourism certainly shaped the development of Brighton’s picture-houses more than any other factor, but it raises something of a dichotomy when considering the cinema. Brighton’s leisure economy dictated the town’s character and, as the quotation from Andy Croll at the

⁷³⁴ “Raids on Sussex Coastal Towns: Direct Hit on Cinema”, *Evening Argus*, 16/09/1940, 3.

beginning of this chapter demonstrated, coastal resorts were perceived to be more liberal environments in which the liminality and permissiveness of the space, away from holidaymaker's homes, allowed people to deviate from conventional expectations of behaviour.⁷³⁵ In this regard, Brighton's cinemas were incongruous public spaces in the unfettered context of the holiday resort, as they were examples of Lefebvre's dominated spaces, in which technology and imposing commissioners were used to exert authority over the public.

The lack of tourism in Bolton meant that the majority of cinemas in the town were smaller-scale neighbourhood picture-houses, but these were spread more evenly throughout the town than the cinemas in Brighton. They were frequented by, and marketed to, native Boltonians (although it is important to remember that this demographic itself contained a range of discrete audiences within it), and were located in areas which were easily accessible (often by foot) to the working-class. The study of Brighton's cinemas, and comparisons with Bolton, demonstrates how common threads can be traced in the role of cinemas in England during the mid-twentieth-century, but also how social and cultural differences in towns and cities affected how cinemas operated, and how they were perceived by their audiences. The two case studies also underline how cinema-going was, for many people, a manifestation of emotional freedom, largely unimpeded by emotional regimes which dominated other aspects of British (public) life (such as the stiff-upper-lip mantra, although this still figured in people's emotional experiences within the cinema). Emotion, space, and modernity interacted with one another in both Brighton and Bolton (albeit in different social and demographic contexts) to delineate the cinema as an institution with great significance for its patrons in their everyday lives.

⁷³⁵ Croll, "The British Seaside", 85.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how the cinema shaped the emotional register of public and private life in England during the mid-twentieth-century: landscapes of feeling which were central to its immense popularity. Even the briefest of glances through the diaries kept by members of Mass Observation's national panel will reveal the elevated status which cinemas enjoyed. Ironically, the word "cinema" could almost have been synonymous with the word "queue", as wartime diarists registered the cinema's attraction by recording queues snaking outside. One panellist complained in 1941 that his attempt to see *Escape* (1940) was frustrated by a queue which was "so long...that we decided to come back home": a situation which almost repeated itself three years later on another visit which began with "a big queue when we arrived, and we nearly turned away. However, after half an hour's wait we managed to get a seat".⁷³⁶ A primary school teacher in Manchester noted the "very long queues" outside her cinema to see *Random Harvest* (1942); a man from Beverley, Yorkshire, was "astonished at the Q [sic]" to see *Snow White* (1937) and a woman in Edinburgh lamented that she had to stand "in a queue in the rain to get into the new Fred Astaire film".⁷³⁷ Other diarists reported their "records in endurance" waiting in line, the "huge queues of people waiting, or perhaps I should say hoping, to get in at the Ritz cinema to see *Gone With the Wind*", and their time in a "hell of a queue, and although I hung about for a bit there was little sign of any movement so I came away, disgusted and disappointed".⁷³⁸ Clearly, queues and the cinema went hand-in-hand. The examples provide a useful insight into how space and emotion intersected, not only in the auditorium but also in the public areas outside the nation's picture-houses. Waiting in a queue often elicited feelings of excitement, frustration at being disciplined by commissionaires, and an eagerness to enter. Such feelings were frequently described by people in their accounts for MO and, as this thesis has argued, these spatial and emotional dimensions were interdependent and offer new insights into mid-twentieth-century cinema attendance.

⁷³⁶ Mass Observation Diarist 5076, 19/08/1941; 01/05/1944.

⁷³⁷ Mass Observation Diarist 5256, 03/07/1943; Diarist 5068, 02/10/1944, and Diarist 5415, 28/06/1942.

⁷³⁸ Mass Observation Diarist 5307, 13/09/1942; Diarist 5132, 04/08/1941, and Diarist 5176, 30/04/1943.

Getting Emotional in New Cinema History

Long queues outside England's cinemas were one of many elements which constituted the leisure activity of cinema-going and which featured in the memories and recollections of those who wrote for MO. Cinema-going, and the cultural institution of the cinema, was a mass activity with a highly-idiosyncratic dimension, holding a wide range of meanings for film-goers, all of which centred on the experience of emotion within a public space.

Accordingly, this thesis has engaged with, and contributed to, recent scholarship. This continues the shift from examining film history through the textual analysis of films, to considering their consumption within cinemas (which, themselves, facilitated social and cultural exchange).⁷³⁹ This New Cinema History advocates a multi-faceted, multi-discipline approach which is concerned “with the cinema as a commercial institution and with the socio-cultural history of its audiences”.⁷⁴⁰ Crucially, this scholarship considers the entirety of the historical film-watching experience, and foregrounds an understanding of “how and why audience behaviour might be both locally idiosyncratic and at the same time attached by complex cultural practices to other sites, other imagined audiences and other imagined mores”.⁷⁴¹ By using the case studies of cinema-going in Bolton and Brighton, alongside supplementary MO material from other towns and cities, this thesis has highlighted these dualisms in order to contribute to studies which acknowledge the role of both the regional and the national in historical experiences of emotion, space and modernity.

This New Cinema History has emerged from the seminal work of scholars such as Jeffrey Richards, whose examination of the role of cinema in 1930s British society emphasised the historical *experience* of film-watching. His study stressed the importance of understanding the wider context in which films were made and received, and helped to drive an academic focus on cinemas themselves. Richards argues that “in order to understand the function of the cinema in society it is necessary to look beyond the ritual forms of cinema-going and star-worship to assess just what beliefs and attitudes were being preached, what star types adored, what world-views promoted”.⁷⁴² Class dynamics are at play in this, and the fact that cinema-going was most popular with the working-class guides Richards into considering the hegemony associated with mass media and the

⁷³⁹ Maltby *et al.*, *Explorations in New Cinema History*, 3.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁴² Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 2.

relationship between the film industry and its patrons. Richards' overall study can only be enhanced by examining, as this thesis has, the emotional economies of cinema audiences which matured in these public spaces around the country.

In adopting the methodologies from the history of emotion, this thesis has reasserted the importance of the individual in these academic discourses. These discussions range from the experiences of the solitary cinema-goer to the great machinery of the international film industry. It has also set out to use the cinema (which Richards placed at the centre of hegemonic power wielded by authorities such as the monarchy and the Empire) to explore shifting conceptions of public and private feeling within the context of British society and leisure.⁷⁴³ The novel methodological approach of this study has combined the emotional and spatial turns in history to examine how cinemas functioned as sites of emotion within the first half of the twentieth-century, a methodology which is strengthened by the re-examination of MO material, in conjunction with local case studies.

The aims of New Cinema History are certainly important. It regards film as a cultural product, and therefore socially experienced; it focuses on the relationship between cinema and place, as well as its links with urbanity and modernity; it adopts socio-economic and ethnographic approaches which uncover the historical position of the cinema in social and cultural conditions (which were influenced by issues such as race, class, gender and ideology); and it uses spatial data and mapping to plot past cinematic exhibition.⁷⁴⁴ In short, it integrates films and the act of film-watching into the everyday lives of people in the past. Despite such diverse approaches, however, the role of feeling in the history of cinema-going is largely absent from much of this scholarship. By using the history of emotion as a category of analysis, this thesis has aimed to redress this imbalance, contributing to both the project of New Cinema History and to such wider areas of historical study as cultural history.

Cinemas and Emotion in the Mass Observation Archive

The relationship between MO and the institution of the cinema, and the access it gives the historian to the voices of the cinema-going public, makes it a valuable archive with

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁷⁴⁴ Lies Van De Vijver and Daniel Biltereyst, "Cinemagoing as a Conditional Part of Everyday Life: Memories of Cinemagoing in Ghent from the 1930s to the 1970s", *Cultural Studies* 27, no. 4 (2013), 562–563.

which to evaluate historical public emotion in the English mid-century. During the genesis of MO, this relationship was nurtured by co-founder and film-maker Humphrey Jennings who was fascinated by imagery and the potential to find “webs of hidden meanings embodied in symbols or images surfacing from the collective unconscious”.⁷⁴⁵ His belief in the power of film as a symbolic medium, coupled with the general popularity of cinema-going, assured the institution a prominent position in MO’s investigations into leisure. More generally, the use of the word “mass” in the organisation’s title suggested a broadening of the social consciousness in British society which took place in the twentieth-century: one which reflected the contribution made by cinemas to a common (film) culture throughout the country.⁷⁴⁶ Cinemas were also at the forefront of the minds of many panellists who so frequently mentioned cinema-going in their diaries, day surveys and in response to directives about entertainment and recreation. The extracts of MO material which have been used in this thesis reflect the personal narratives of regular cinema-goers (and, indeed, some infrequent cinema-goers), helping to uncover the emotional encounters and experiences which took place in the mid-century cinema auditorium. As this thesis has demonstrated, the language used by MO correspondents suggests that the cinema was an extension of working-class domestic space, allowing, for example, adolescents to pursue active leisure and romantic lives outside the confines of the parental home. A further advantage of using MO is the diversity of the material collected by the organisation, not only in the personal writings of respondents but also in the ephemera collated, such as cinema promotional material and reports on cinema queues and specific screenings. Such records are often not available elsewhere and MO thus offers a unique social and cultural historical record in this area.

From a methodological point of view, the strength of using MO in a study such as this is two-fold. Firstly, the diversity of MO in terms of its geographical coverage, the range of topics covered, and the variety of collection methods (such as its directives, diaries and observational accounts) offers material which is, arguably, unrivalled in terms of its temporal proximity to the experiences of the respondents. This diversity allows the historian to construct a more-nuanced impression of the emotional and cultural significance of mid-century cinema-going, instead of solely relying on documents from the film and exhibition industry, and from other sources such as newspapers and fan publications. Secondly, it is a source base imbued with explicit emotion, not only in the

⁷⁴⁵ Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 8.

⁷⁴⁶ Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life*, 3.

material relating to the cinema, but in the archive as a whole. Although panellists knew that their writing was to be archived and read by an outside audience, the highly-personal nature of their recollections, and accounts of their daily lives, is often striking. The directives issued by MO often probed the feelings of its panellists in a subtle way by asking for their opinions and thoughts on subjects, whilst at other times, the focus on feeling was much more explicit (for example in the August 1950 directive on crying and shame in the cinema). Such records act as a route into the often intangible experiences of historical cinema-going. The ethnographical narratives found in MO are also an important element in formulations of historical place and space, a conceptual and methodological approach which has framed this thesis alongside the history of emotion.⁷⁴⁷ The result is a deeper understanding of how cinemas became sites of emotion, spaces in which the public and private competed to create a place which people often identified as being atypical in their everyday affective lives. Consequently, this study demonstrates how cinema-going can be used to explore contextual issues and themes outside the auditorium, such as debates about working-class passivity, the cultural and emotional upheavals of the Second World War, and the prevalence of the British stereotype of the emotionally-restrained stiff-upper-lipper. These offer revealing insights not only to cinema historians, but to scholars working in broader cultural and social history.

The analysis of MO cinema material elicits comparisons with work on memory and ethnography. The area of memory reclamation has been gaining popularity within film studies in recent years, and was initially championed by scholars such as Annette Kuhn and Helen Richards as a way to understand people's experiences and relationships with the mid-century cinema.⁷⁴⁸ As Carrie Hamilton has suggested, oral history "would seem to have a privileged relationship to the history of emotions", built upon not only the physical relationship between interviewer and interviewee but also the "wider range of emotional evidence" offered by interviewees (their changes of pace, tone, facial expressions, silences and gestures: obviously absent in documentary evidence).⁷⁴⁹ The methodology of oral history certainly allows an immediate access to emotion – which often dominates recollections of past events – but, unlike MO, some clarity can be lost for the simple

⁷⁴⁷ Pearson, *In Comes I*, 4.

⁷⁴⁸ Allison *et al.*, *The Phoenix Picturehouse*, 181.

⁷⁴⁹ Carrie Hamilton, "Moving Feelings: Nationalism, Feminism and the Emotions of Politics", *Oral History* 38, no. 2 (2010), 86.

reason that participants were recounting events which took place many decades before. Accounts of cinema-going in MO, on the other hand, were much closer to the event in temporal terms and, therefore, offer a unique record of leisure practices and contemporaneous emotion as they occurred, rather than being affected by the passing of time. This is not to reduce the importance of using memory studies in conjunction with documentary evidence to reconstruct historical cinema-going, but, rather, to substantiate the notion that memory is a “text to be deciphered, not a lost reality to be discovered”.⁷⁵⁰

As with any archive, MO is far from perfect. Its idiosyncratic nature results in a collection of material which, although catalogued according to date and theme, is sometimes cumbersome and unwieldy.⁷⁵¹ The nature of its panel, drawn from a largely middle-class demographic, makes it a rather unrepresentative source base which does not reveal the voices of the British working-class to the degree that its founders had hoped. The accounts given, although often very personal, were written by people who knew that their writings were going to be read by an outside organisation, and this may have had an influence on what they chose to reveal or suppress about their cinema trips. Unsystematic data collection frequently led to missing information about the respondents, and for every detailed diary or directive reply, there is another which sketches out only the barest of information: often frustrating for the historian. Nevertheless, its haphazard nature adds to the intrigue and attraction of MO as a historical archive, and allows it to be approached from different conceptual and methodological angles. As Annebella Pollen suggests, “the sense of confrontation researchers may experience when material will not fit neatly into prescribed research categories can offer a productive way to understand...inconsistency, heterogeneity and even incoherence” of real-world experiences.⁷⁵² Further, she suggests that the “mixed and disruptive methods of MO provide a unique means of access to that experience and offer a satisfying challenge to established ways of thinking in contemporary history”.⁷⁵³

The eclectic cache of MO material gives texture and depth to historical embodied and lived emotional practices; the loyalty given to the organisation by many of its correspondents often provides raw and explicit accounts of emotion, and the

⁷⁵⁰ Richards, “Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930–1960”, 341.

⁷⁵¹ Liz Moor and Emma Uprichard, “The Materiality of Method”, 1.

⁷⁵² Annebella Pollen, “Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: ‘Scientifically, About as Valuable as a Chimpanzee’s Tea Party at the Zoo’?”, *History Workshop Journal* 75, no. 1 (2013), 230.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

introspection engendered by contributing to such a project draws out more nuanced and considered reflections than might be found elsewhere in the historical record. Indeed, this thesis has taken a new approach to the vivid cinema material in MO; it has used the history of emotion as a lens through which to view the significance of cinemas in people's everyday lives throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. Such an approach was used by Harper and Porter in their work on MO material about weeping in the cinema, but this study has reassessed the material to synthesise it with other MO records under the framework of the history of emotions and, importantly, has done so with consideration of historical space.

Cinema Spaces in Bolton and Brighton

The use of the two local case studies of Bolton and Brighton has allowed for an in-depth application of the theories and methodological approaches which have guided this study. The value of comparing and contrasting the towns has been demonstrated, not least in the ways in which their different economies affected the development of leisure provision. Alongside their geographical differences, the two towns were, in the first half of the twentieth-century, economically and socially discrete, but both had a voracious appetite for the cinema. The development of picture-houses in both places occurred in slightly different ways (the tourist industry in Brighton drove much cinema construction in the town centre; in Bolton the demographic composition of the town gave rise to many more local picture-houses in workers' neighbourhoods) and this makes them valuable choices when considering the social role of cinemas. That said, common themes emerge in both locations, such as the need for an emotionally-permissive public space in which the dynamics between public and private feeling could be enhanced and altered.

The importance of space (not just in terms of geography but also in areas such as architecture) to the experience of feeling has been asserted in this thesis, as have its strong links with historical emotion in cinema-going. It has been argued that the cinema, as an important public environment, was a flexible arena which was open to appropriation by its users in terms of both its recreational and affective practices. This contributes not only to scholarship on film history, but also to other disciplines such as historical geography and histories of twentieth-century space, as well as to cultural and urban studies more widely. People appropriated the space for their own needs (women using it

as a form of childcare when doing the shopping or adolescents romancing a lover away from the prying eyes of the parental home). These different uses were often linked to life stages, and as Kuhn suggests, the cinema was a primary factor in children's "inner and outer struggles for collective and individual autonomy. For the 1930s generation, cinema provided a safe space for challenges to adult rules and for assertions of independence from parents, teachers and other authority figures".⁷⁵⁴ The simple entertainment value of film was an important, but not the sole, element in cinema-going motivations, and the ease of spatial appropriation within cinemas only added to their popularity.

Parallels with other popular mid-century public leisure activities, such as visiting the pub, show not only how cinema attendance was integrated alongside other pursuits but also highlight the aspects which made the cinema unique in the emotional lives of millions of Britons. Evidence from MO suggests that many people viewed their local picture-house, whether a flea-pit or a first-run super-cinema, as a reassuring and familiar space which was characterised by a hazy emotionality which fluctuated between the individual and the group. One MO respondent, for example, suggested that being in a cinema audience produced "more emotional disturbances than the theatre", emphasising the distinctiveness offered by a cinematic experience.⁷⁵⁵ This ambiguity (in terms of space and the subsequent experiences of emotion within that space) lay at the heart of what the mid-century cinema signified to people and is key to the arguments made in this thesis. In few other areas of British life were emotional regimes (extremes of which were represented by the stiff-upper-lip mantra) softened to such a degree, and this made the cinema a very attractive proposition. Yet, there is something of a dichotomy in the experiences of mid-century cinema-goers. Films like *Brief Encounter* were consumed within this permissive environment, eliciting strong emotional reactions in the audience (as accounts in MO reveal). However, such films reinforced Victorian and Edwardian models of behavioural composure, simultaneously demanding emotional restraint whilst stimulating quite the opposite in the cinema space. In more general terms, cinemas in Brighton, Bolton, and around the country acted as liminal spaces, occupying a position on the boundary between the domestic and the public which allowed emotion to be concurrently experienced as both communal and private. The methodological intervention made in this study has allowed access to this liminality, and, crucially, to

⁷⁵⁴ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 62.

⁷⁵⁵ Directive Respondent 2221, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

the emotional landscapes which were, thanks to the spatial dimensions of the film-watching experience, crafted in powerful ways by cinema patrons.

“Enter the Dream-House”: Cinema Space and Emotional Communities

Space, feeling, and ideas of modernity intersected in the cinemas of Brighton and Bolton, making people aware of their own emotional selfhood in ways which, perhaps, would have been unlikely in other public contexts. As an emotional practice, cinema-going between 1930 and 1960 was more diverse than other comparable activities. Partly as a result of MO’s interest in the activity, this study has drawn on mid-century football attendance as a useful example of this, and argues that the emotional practices of cinema-goers were more varied, spatially disparate and private than those experienced by football fans on terraces around the country. Although both were hugely popular working-class activities, football-spectatorship and film-watching highlighted the different ways in which emotion was experienced in public. Football fans formed more homogenous emotional communities along the lines of team allegiance, whereas various constellations of emotions formed within the cinema audience, guided by the film being screened, and influenced by one’s own affective temperament.⁷⁵⁶ Crucially, the darkness of the cinema environment presented the opportunity to experience strong emotionality in public, in the anonymous environment of the auditorium. Again, no other public space facilitated this to such a degree within mid-twentieth-century English society, and this uniqueness reveals how emotional culture developed in specific contexts and in precise locations.

Rosenwein’s work on emotional communities has been particularly useful in exploring the dynamics between emotion and space during the heyday of British cinemas. The enclosed and demarcated space of the cinema auditorium, containing a distinct group in the form of an audience, is an obvious example of an emotional community. As the accounts in MO have shown (particularly in the 1950 “crying in the cinema” directive), people were aware of both their own emotions and the feelings of those around them, looking for validation or reassurance that their emotional reactions to a film were being mirrored by their fellow patrons. In this manner, Rosenwein argues that “although we tend to speak of the emotions of individuals, emotions are above all instruments of

⁷⁵⁶ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 26.

sociability”.⁷⁵⁷ Cinema-going in the British mid-century was, therefore, as much a social activity as a recreational one. The application of Rosenwein’s framework to MO material has approached audience studies from a new angle, synthesising historical, ethnographical and film studies methods. In doing so, the relationship between film-going and emotion (and the position of those emotions in wider society) can be used to help make mid-twentieth-century British culture more “intelligible”.⁷⁵⁸ The study of historical emotion is inextricably linked with the prevailing cultural expectations of any given time, as well as social expectations attached to ideas such as gender.⁷⁵⁹ As Martin Francis has highlighted in his study of the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, “male flyers were subject to sterner public emotional standards” than their female WAAF counterparts.⁷⁶⁰ It is important, he argues, “to appreciate that it was not just public codes of masculine emotional restraint which contributed to the flyers’ reluctance to put their feelings of fear and loss into words. They might well have been concerned that, once they gave verbal expression to those feelings, it would no longer be possible to keep them under control”.⁷⁶¹ Cultural expectations for different genders directly impacted the experience of emotion: it was not simply a biological phenomenon. Emotions, therefore, have a history, and a powerful link to society and culture which makes them a vital element in the investigation of past cinema-going habits.

Reasserting the Importance of Space and Emotion

A common thread in this thesis has been the material from the Mass Observation archive, and its value as a record of historical emotion has been demonstrated not only here but in other studies of elements in twentieth-century society and culture.⁷⁶² The MO material is, perhaps, strongest in Chapter Four, thanks to the in-depth nature of the Worktown project which gave rise to records such as the cinema questionnaire, circulated to three of Bolton’s cinemas in 1938. Of course, MO collected material from around the country

⁷⁵⁷ Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods,” 19.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁵⁹ Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History”, 118.

⁷⁶⁰ Francis, *The Flyer*, 120.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² See, for example: Abigail Knight, Julia Brannen, and Rebecca O’Connell, “Using Narrative Sources from the Mass Observation Archive to Study Everyday Food and Families in Hard Times: Food Practices in England during 1950”, *Sociological Research Online* 20, no. 1 (2015): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3579>; Claire Langhamer, “Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth-Century England”, *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 173–196; and Vanessa May, “When Recognition Fails: Mass Observation Project Accounts of Not Belonging”, *Sociology* 50, no. 4 (2016): 748–763.

(reflected in the investigation of cinema-going from a national perspective in Chapter Three) and building a picture of a population (or, at least, an MO panel) for whom the cinema played a central role in recreation and in the wider landscape of public emotion.

This analysis has been underpinned by the theoretical approaches detailed in Chapter Two. The categories of emotion, space, and ideas about modernity have intersected and have provided a novel methodological approach with which to study MO. Firstly, the interplay between the terms “space” and “place” suggests the multiplicity of ways in which historical locations can be examined, with de Certeau suggesting that a place can only become a space when invested with meaning by people. These semantic differences can be overstated, but it is important to recognise the value of analysing such terms, particularly when studying institutions closely linked with emotion such as the cinema. Reflections on Lefebvre’s concept of space highlights how cinemas functioned as representational spaces in the historical moment, defined by the symbolic power found in its architecture, the authority invested in staff such as commissionaires, and the exoticism of foyer and auditorium décor. These also aligned with Lefebvre’s idea of abstract space which demanded that certain behavioural conventions be followed during a film screening (such as a cessation of conversation once the space had been recalibrated by the dimming of the houselights). Secondly, discussions about dominated and appropriated space encapsulated some of the tensions found in mid-century cinemas. They were buildings constructed with leisure in mind, controlled by an authority (in ideological terms, by film studios, and in practical terms, by commissionaires) and, therefore, were dominated spaces. Concurrently, they were appropriated spaces, moulded by their patrons who used them for various reasons according to factors such as age, gender and affective character. Binary oppositions of dominated/appropriated, public/private and individual/group space can be easily identified in the institution of the cinema, but by using the detailed material of MO, subtleties can also be found to construct a more-nuanced historical picture.

The history of emotions and its conceptual interventions have driven much of the analysis throughout these chapters. As Rosenwein argues, “just as issues of gender are now fully integrated into intellectual, political, and social history, so the study of emotions should not (in the end) form a separate strand of history but rather inform every historical inquiry”.⁷⁶³ By introducing the methods of emotions’ history to areas of

⁷⁶³ Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods”, 24.

leisure and cultural history, this thesis has followed Rosenwein's call to integrate emotion within broader frameworks and within the different areas of study undertaken by historians. Concepts such as emotional communities, emotional regimes, and emotional practices are common to both of the comparative case studies of Brighton and Bolton. Such concepts have the potential to be extended to the whole country. These comparative studies of cinemas employ not only an in-depth application of the methodologies of the history of emotions, but also provide an opportunity for the identification of cinema-going trends on a national level. There is a caveat, however, in using two towns (although at different ends of the country) to ascribe typicality on a nation-wide scale. This is, arguably, where other similar works of local cinema history fit in to help broaden the picture (as discussed at the beginning of Chapter Four). Using two regional case studies has contributed to the tapestry of British cinema-going experiences found in recent film scholarship. Moreover, the differences between Bolton's and Brighton's cinemas reveal the malleable and varied nature of cinema-going, as well as the commonality of film-watching, set within the defined and emotional public space, familiar to millions across England.

Emotional Space: A Promising Methodology

The use of the MO archive alongside the history of emotions offers many exciting possibilities for the future of New Cinema History. MO has been championed in this study, without apology, as a vital and unique source of information about historical cinema attendance and concomitant experiences of emotion. There are, of course, many other sources and records which would have made for an equally-compelling study of the role of mid-twentieth-century cinemas in people's lives. The fan magazine *Picture Show*, for example, provides a more audience-focused record of cinema attendance. It may have been useful, moreover, to include corporate records from cinema chains such as Odeon and ABC, as well as trade publications like *Kinematograph Weekly*. These could have helped to examine cinematic emotion from an industrial/trade angle: something which is not included in this thesis or in other scholarship. The records of HANSARD, the Board of Trade and other parliamentary records would provide an official perspective on the function and impact of picture-houses around the country. This would have been particularly the case between 1939-1945, when issues such as morale and public safety were of central concern to authorities when considering the position of cinemas in

national life.

Indeed, the Second World War acted as a turning point in the emotional topography of England: its vicissitudes readjusted the affective outlook held by many people and altered their conceptions of emotion and the appropriateness of its expression in both private and public settings.⁷⁶⁴ Most noticeably, it opened up opportunities for male tears in the post-war years. Men often justified their display of emotion in the public setting of a cinema through their choice of film. A war film, with its themes of heroism and camaraderie, reminded them of their war experiences, allowing them to once more experience the intense emotions associated with wartime male bonding and comradeship.⁷⁶⁵ The more “worthy” ideals of loyalty and service which were represented in such films (and with which male audiences could identify) gave legitimacy to any male tears which might be produced in the cinema auditorium. “I cry a lot and like it”, wrote one 26 year-old male respondent to MO, “it all depends, surely, on how much one identify’s [sic] oneself with one of the characters”.⁷⁶⁶

Perceptions of space were shaped by emotion, although they could sometimes have antithetical outcomes. As the immediate closure of cinemas on the outbreak of war demonstrated, the auditorium was considered by some in officialdom to be a space of imperilment, rather than as the safe and comforting environment so often described by MO panellists. The war did, however, shift the emotional perspectives of some Observers when it came to the safety of cinemas, as one recorded in his MO diary of 1940: “a phrase near the beginning [of the film] struck Obs rather forcibly: ‘rats in a trap’. Yes, we should be like that in this huge building if a cake fell...Obs and friend glanced at one another sev [sic] times with apprehensive grins when the guns were extra loud”.⁷⁶⁷ More broadly, this reflects how different periods of history produce drivers of emotional change, and how different spaces took on different affective hues at particular moments in the past. These emotional shifts were often subtle, but were keenly-felt in lived experiences such as cinema-going. Cinemas can now be understood in terms of their concurrent sociality and privacy, which helped to provide people with the emotional tools with which to navigate their lives.

⁷⁶⁴ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 9.

⁷⁶⁵ Francis, “A Flight from Commitment?”, 168.

⁷⁶⁶ Directive Respondent 3810, August 1950. SxMOA1/3/128.

⁷⁶⁷ Diarist 5130, Bill Lee, Ickenham. 11/09/1940. SxMOA1/4/112.

In terms of future possibilities, it would be interesting to compare how cinemas were viewed and experienced in smaller towns and villages, where emotional spaces may have been different and where opportunities for cinema-going were more restricted.⁷⁶⁸ The study of emotions encompasses social, cultural, and even political themes, and the methodology of fusing space and emotion provides the cultural historian with an insightful way to assess both the physical and affective landscapes of the past. As Peter Burke suggests, “cultural historians, like historians of architecture and historical geographers before them, are coming to read the ‘text’ of a city...[Foucault has] helped draw the attention of historians to the importance of space – sacred and profane, public and private, masculine and feminine and so on”.⁷⁶⁹ Arguably, this necessitates a consideration of the emotions which occurred within such spaces and the reasons for which certain feelings were suppressed, celebrated or ignored.⁷⁷⁰ This approach could be applied to other areas of MO, such as the Happiness topic collection or, perhaps more significantly, to areas with fewer obvious connections to emotion such as the Housing, Family Planning or Gambling collections.

This framework can go far beyond the MO archive, and could be equally useful in other areas of study. The emotional topography of government institutions like the Ministry of Information is an obvious example of this, and could be used to investigate the motivations and decisions made by those in officialdom. Rather than simply dealing with the exhibition of films, it could encompass the production side of the industry and examine how emotion shaped the development of the film business in the twentieth-century. The wider fields of leisure and social history are also open to examination within the emotional/spatial framework. Historical urban growth, and understanding how it was experienced by the populace (especially during times of rapid change such as the Industrial Revolution), might be particularly fruitful areas of study. It is not just in History or Film Studies, however, where this foregrounding of the spatial and emotional results in established topics being re-examined with fresh insight. Other areas of academic study such as the social sciences or architecture can reflect this approach: the designs of public buildings such as prisons, hospitals or places of worship, for example, often elicit strong

⁷⁶⁸ Examples of this include the mobile film shows organised by the Ministry of Information during the Second World War which toured villages to set-up screenings for organisations such as the Women’s Institute in village halls, and the experiences of cinemas and audiences in the mining communities of South Wales.

⁷⁶⁹ Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 69.

⁷⁷⁰ Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods”, 11.

emotions. Margrit Pernau notes that human bodies (from where emotions originate) are “necessarily situated in space, and they bear the imprint of the spaces they are moving through...different spaces become linked to different emotions. This relation is neither random, nor is it given once and for all: the connection between an emotion and a particular space can change over time and the same spaces can trigger off vastly divergent emotions in various people”.⁷⁷¹

In asserting cinemas as key emotional spaces in twentieth-century England, this thesis suggests that, as institutions, they offered far more than a recreational experience. They facilitated the formation of emotional communities within an environment which, on an affective level, greatly differed from those found in other forms of public leisure activity. As a study, it sits not only within New Cinema History, but contributes to broader debates about the transformation of emotional cultures in England and reveals how public emotion developed within the context of mass culture. Public emotion – experienced as both communal and private – inhabited an ambiguous place in national life, and this ambiguity was most keenly felt in spaces such as the cinema, allowing the audience the flexibility to develop and contest their sense of emotional self. An understanding of the links between emotion and space – so crucial to the everyday experiences of ordinary people – is, accordingly, significantly enhanced. The cinema will never, of course, regain the immense popularity which it enjoyed during its post-war heyday. This study has, however, demonstrated that the unique cultural position which cinemas then occupied was due to a wide variety of factors which went way beyond, as one MO diarist candidly recorded, getting “some vicarious satisfaction from seeing James Cagney punching people”.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷¹ Margrit Pernau, “Space and Emotion: Building to Feel”, *History Compass* 12, no. 7 (2014), 541.

⁷⁷² Mass Observation Day Survey Respondent 561, March 1937. SxMOA1/3/4.

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