'Exploiting the Daydreams of Teenagers': Press reports and memories of cinema-going by young people in 1960s Britain

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In 1960, following a conference on 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility' organised by the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the Incorporated Association of Headmasters (IAH) released a report.[1] Borrowing from the ideas of American sociologists such as Talcott Parsons and James Coleman, this report combined consumerism with concerns about the effect of cinema-going to make bold claims about 'powerful influences in society' that had reimagined 'pre-war adolescents' as 'teenagers':

> From such spellbinders the teenagers can only learn that happiness has little to do with self-control or the Sermon on the Mount, and much to do with being glamorous, rich, attractive to the opposite sex, the lucky winner, and all such stuff as adolescent dreams are made of.[2]

The Guardian reported the story in two articles in January 1961. The first was headlined 'Witchcraft Makes Teenagers' and the second 'Exploiting the day-dreams of "teenagers."' Attitudes to teenagers, as Louise Jackson has argued, could be portrayed as a measure of society's wellbeing.[3] The 'teenager' provided a focus for evaluating young people's behaviour and values in a new material, cultural and social context. During the 1950s, the popular press had created moral panics about young people who deviated from adult authority and social mores.[4] The sensationalist language in *The Guardian* articles rehashed terms used in the fifties to understand instances of bad behaviour during films such as *Rock around the Clock*.[5] The problem with press articles of this kind (and the report or reports on which they were based) was that they represented discourses *around* teenagers rather than the voices of teenagers themselves. Despite being constructed in newspapers as agents and products of social transformations, young people were rarely permitted to speak for themselves.

If press history is 'the first draft of history,' then perhaps oral history is the last word by those who were there.[6] This article contrasts 1960s newspaper reporting with memories from a later era of young people's cinema-going in Britain. From these different and often oppositional perspectives, we can gain a broader impression – even understanding – of 1960s

cinema-going and young people's position within a changing society. The range of viewpoints in reporting upon and reminiscences of such cinema-going suggest that the argument that the 1960s was a cultural revolution or, conversely, a continuation of the 1950s have both understated the fractured, different-paced and dynamic forms of social change that occurred in Britain.[7] It shows that instead, British social change was driven by the destabilising effects of metropolitan mixing that was communicated through films and newspapers.[8] These impressions of social change, interpreted reflexively as these oral histories demonstrate, provided narratives and symbolism for individuals to reimagine life and – subject to their personal situation and access to cosmopolitan spaces – decide to affect or reject normativity.

The newspaper articles analysed here were identified by keyword searching of digital archives. Journalists for *The Daily Mirror*, as it was positioning itself as a paper for the whole family, and *The Guardian*, which frequently reported on culture and the arts, wrote most about cinema-going and young people. The analysis follows Adrian Bingham's method for examining how the press construct and represent themes in diverse ways – analysing texts according to Stuart Hall's distinctions between encoding, content and reception.[9] Reminiscences by cinema-goers were gathered as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'Cultural Memory and British Cinema-going of the 1960s.' Cinema audience members narrated their experiences in interviews and questionnaires. The sources were analysed, as Annette Kuhn advocates, using an ethnohistorical approach.[10]

This article has four sections. The first establishes how newspapers and reminiscences differ when establishing cinema's role in young people's leisure activities. Newspapers of the time implied that the cinema was primarily a means of socialisation whereas most memories describe the cinema as a site of escapism and a means of alleviating boredom. The second sections analyses how the generation gap was constructed by papers and understood in the light of cinema-going practices: whether the generations mixed or had shared tastes (which they did, at least sometimes). The third section contrasts reports of deviance and criminality in the cinema with memories. Again, reminiscences undermine the press's reporting by adding locality, community and humour to cinema's portrayal as a social space disembodied from its social and geographical context. The final section begins with a case study on the reception of *Bonnie and Clyde* to understand the press's impression of the influence of film on young people and analyses ways that people appropriate ideas and fashions from film within a broader social context. Newspapers sought to attract and entertain readers as much as inform and therefore often provided a high-stakes, melodramatic view of the 1960s and

cinema-going. The idea of generational difference, deviant youth and a rapidly-changing society attracted readers. By considering memories together with these contemporary reports, however, the article establishes how the cinema was a place where certain possibilities for social change were represented cinematically, interpreted and, perhaps in some cases imitated, but these practices still retained a profound interplay with everyday life, the historical practices of cinema-going, and inter-generational and community ties.

The Sprawl: Cinema, Newspapers and Young People

Despite the new framing of youth with the American term 'teenager,' the 1950s and 1960s discourse on youth cinema-going had antecedents.[11] The arrival of the cinema as a mass medium provoked debate about its social effects. In 1917 the National Council of Public Morals (NCPM), formed by religious groups in 1899, published *The Cinema: Its Present Position and Future Possibilities*.[12] The report called on T.P. O'Connor, the President of the British Board of Film Classification, which had been formed five years earlier/before, to outline what the British Board of Film Classification would censor.[13] The report was, however, pragmatic: it tried to 'win the sympathy of the men and women who are writing our books, are catering for public amusements, edit or own our newspapers, and have under their control the vast machinery for instantly and effectively reaching millions of people.'[14] The NCPM understood *their* power – both economic and in shaping discourse – so carefully hedged their words. The Report considered ways to improve programming, particularly for children, and supress 'certain evils that had thrown themselves on cinema halls.'[15] This included anonymous men's immoral and indecent conduct which included sexual assaults on women and children. Mr Goodwin, however, representing the Exhibitors of London, argued that sexual conduct in cinemas was typically 'the privileged manifestation of affection between the sexes.'[16] The report noted that children usually wanted 'crooks' to be caught, but representations of dangerous feats, misadventure and sexual innuendo were alluring, as was the temptation to steal to afford entry. It reminded its readers, 'it must be borne in mind that children who are looking at these pictures are at the impressionable period.'[17] The NCPM became the Public Morality Council in 1935 and their Cinema Sub-Committee scrutinised the cinema, particularly its effect on young people, until the group folded in 1969.

In the 1930s, *Sight & Sound*, the publication of the newly-founded British Film Institute, attempted to justify the cinema by arguing that film had a beneficial, if underused, role in education.[18] Annette Kuhn noted that a number of surveys investigated child cinema-

going during the early 1930s: they debated children's psychological well-being and film's moral influence as cinema-going gained a larger middle-class audience and calls to protect children's welfare generally increased.[19] The idea that film could influence in both beneficial and malignant ways, with straightforward social and psychological effects defined by expert commentators, proved an authoritative viewpoint. During the 1930s, however, cinema became a significant part of urban life and entertainment: around 25 per cent of the population visited the cinema on more than one occasion every week.[20]

Despite the 1960s being a period of cinemas closures, cinema-going remained a significant part of British leisure, however, and was an important centre of attraction for young people. Cinemas provided children and adolescents with a place to visit, with or without adult authority, and socialise. At the cinema they were exposed to specific types of advertising, opportunities to consume drinks, confectionary and ephemera, and, within films, certain symbols, image-sequences and narratives. This has led some, who advocate a psychoanalytic approach, to describe the cinema as a transitional space. Victor Burgin's *The Remembered Film* for instance, uses Donald Winnicot's idea of a 'transitional object' in which an adult self emerges 'between the primitive space of infantile omnipotence under maternal protection and the adult space of civil society.'[21] The cinema is a type of Foucaludian heterotopia where adolescents, in a stage of so-called 'crisis,' could deviate from social norms in a space that is not tied to normative uses of time and representations of reality.[22] These perspectives, however broadly valid they may have been (the cinema was a place for formative experiences of independent consumption and courting), imply a rather white, western, middle-class and heteronormative progression from childhood to disruptive adolescence to stable adulthood defined by reproductive and economic responsibility. They are in essence psychologically deterministic and, in matters of behaviour and identity, undermine the role of individual agency within cultural and social interactions. Judith Halberstram and Jodie Taylor have refined Foucault's work by arguing – particularly when considering queer lifestyles – that 'bricoleurs' discerningly appropriate popular cultural symbols and messages performing identities that evade 'straight time and space.'[23] These identities may or may not conform to traditional ideas of age transition but could, present opportunities for new understandings of the self and society. Consequently the symbols and social practices found in some cinemas could provide a cosmopolitan hub and alternative locus of social change.

The notion that cinema took on an important socio-psychological role is expressed in 1960s reporting that argued that the lack of a cinema in an area acutely affected young people

who were becoming socialised as adults. New Towns and areas that had been expanded after the war, to constrain urban sprawl and population overspill, had disproportionately large adolescent populations and thus provided a particular focus. Newspapers reported that these settlements struggled to provide entertainment for young people which resulted in maladjustment and bad behaviour. Cinemas were portrayed as a civic necessity that eased social tensions by providing young people with something to do. In 1965 *The Guardian* reported upon Kirkby, Lancashire, and *the Daily Mirror* covered the efforts of Stevenage in Hertfordshire. *The Daily Mirror* portrayed Stevenage's attempts to counter similar concerns as an example.[24] Stevenage countered a 'teenage bulge' by spending £150,000 on a building with a first floor that accommodated 'a dance hall, a gymnasium, a theatre, a cinema, a restaurant … and a coffee bar, skirted by a terrace-cum-patio.' Representatives from Kirkby and Scottish New Towns visited to which the article concluded: 'THE MORAL: Please note! Please copy!' Newspapers and figures of authority saw the cinema as a socialising force which could be used to engineer social cohesion and prevent deviant behaviour. *The Guardian* reported of Stevenage,

> More than half the population is under 21. There is no cinema, no dance hall. It has earned, unjustly its residents feel, the reputation of having a higher proportion of delinquents than any other city.[25]

Lancashire Education Committee investigated the problem generally, but *the Guardian* asserted, echoing the ideas about transition, influence and cinema-going's place in British cultural and social life, that the lack of a cinema impeded a 'social framework in which young people could learn to grow up.'[26]

Respondents to the cinema-memories project saw the cinema as a significant site for leisure but from a considerably different perspective. Cinema-going was more likely to be seen as a remedy for boredom rather than a remedy for alienation and misadventure. This perception was slightly more commonplace with people from provincial areas. Frank, who lived in Barnstaple, Devon, until he was 18, described the rationale behind visiting the cinema to an interviewer:

> Interviewer: *But you generally preferred the weekend films then?*

Respondent: Yes, but that is also to do with the film-going, as well, so you might go for a drink beforehand, you seeing your mates and we've got nothing else to do and it is the weekend; because that was interesting in a small town as well, they used to turn out the street lights at...was it eleven o'clock? Was it even half past ten, the last bus home was at twenty past ten, 'cause I lived about a mile outside and if you were walking it suddenly went dark. But you know we accepted that.[27]

A significant proportion of participants described escapism as the deciding factor in how and why they chose films. These choices can be woven into narratives that encompass class solidarity and the collective lack of entertaining possibilities. When asked if his film teenage film choices resonated with his particular perceptions of 1960s Britain, Mervyn from Birmingham wrote:

I lived in a working-class neighbourhood which meant that the films I liked were escapist. Life was humdrum and with little opportunity, it seemed to me, for travel or any kind of new experience. We didn't even go on holidays![28]

Three other respondents made almost identical claims (men and women from Nottingham, Durham, and Kent) and a significant proportion of respondents described similar sentiments. Films, as the cliché goes, are everyday life without the boring bits while mass market newspapers balance between a family-friendly homeliness and salaciousness to build popular appeal. Freer from the necessity to entertain (albeit some might perform for the interviewer), by invoking boredom, respondents' narratives confers authenticity by alluding to a widely-shared social deprivation: such memories are bound up with similar ideas of class and poverty available in oral history accounts of the 1930s.[29] The lack of entertainment is rarely, if ever, remembered as having a bearing on socialisation or preventing deviant behaviour. Boredom as a narrative device alludes to a number of people who experiences a slower 1960s than media representations might allow. It therefore reinforces Bingham's contention that understandings of the 1960s often rely upon a 'journalistic cliché' – what Mark Donnelley describes as the 'media sixties.'[30]

Total Trash: Generational Difference and Social Change

The press trope that young people needed the cinema suggests that they attended cinemas to see specific films at times exclusive of other age groups. This, however, belies many experiences described by a number of survey respondents. While trips to the cinema with parents were less frequent during adolescence, they did happen, and even when escaping parental authority, young cinema-goers were surrounded by people from their communities. Establishing this element of cinema-going locates youth within broader social ties. Young people were, of course, granted types of independence by going to the cinema: making choices about films, who they would meet and what they might consume. A respondent described the 'excitement of going out without your parents, being in control of your destiny, allowed to buy two ounces of sweets for 3d in the sweet shop on the way.'[31] Films could, however, be watched multiples times with parents and then again with friends. Rebecca remembered seeing a number of films twice: 'Usually this was because I'd seen it with my parents and wanted my best friend to see it.'[32] Young people were often taken to the cinema by older family members, even during adolescence. Pop music, so often used to symbolise a generation gap, was no impediment to inter-generational cinema trips: Gerry who was 13 in 1964 saw *A Hard Day's Night* with his parents; Jacob and his older sister, a teenager, saw *Help!* with their grandfather.[33] Jacob's reminiscence carefully balances ideas of generational difference and the practicalities of family life:

> My Granddad managed to sleep through the whole thing, and when he woke up it was 'load of old rubbish' which I think he'd decided it was going to be anyway, but he had to come because we couldn't leave him on his own so the whole family trouped out.[34]

The extent of cinema-going as a part of everyday life meant that people saw a range of films with a number of different people – friends and family. As a result young people and adults were not as divided (in terms of socialising or taste) as might be imagined.

Newspaper of the 1950s developed a myth that a fundamental divide in taste, behaviour and values was opening between a youth and their elders. Film came into this conversation in 1961 when *the Daily Mirror*'s Marjorie Proops, a highly influential agony aunt, took 70 teenagers to see *The Young Savages*.[35] She reported on her experience under the headline: 'Seventy teenagers see a serious film about young killers, and THEY SAY… IT'S DEAD FUNNY!' The headline might have made light of the teenagers reactions, but Proops

seemed concerned. She explained how scenes of violence in the film, set in the United States, had unfortunate parallels in Britain,

> The victim of his murder is blind. His sister is a prostitute. Fiction, of course. But based on fact that happens every day in America. And in St. Pancras, London, this week a boy was stabbed in the back by a gang of youths.[36]

The experience of watching the film with these youngsters, she confessed, had made her 'flesh creep,' particularly when she thought about the number of young men and women in Borstal. Proops invited some young people to defend themselves: they argued that were simply happy to see teenagers on screen, disputed that specific styles of dress and leisure conferred delinquency, mentioned how boredom gave rise to bad behaviour, and asserted that their parents' generation were jealous of their freedom and economic opportunities. Later in the 1960s other ways of describing a generational divide came to the foreground in reporting on *Easy Rider* (1969). *The Guardian*'s review reported upon the crowd at a Piccadilly Circus showing and their responses almost as much as the picture. It then interviewed Paul Williams, a 25 year-old filmmaker.[37] John Crosby wrote, in a way that resembled the New Journalism's stylistic innovations,

> The audience, in fact, looks as if it had stepped right out of the picture, which is a hippy odyssey, as so many of these films are. You can almost taste their appreciation, their connoisseurship, of the meandering dialogue and action, much of it adlibbed, some of it breathtakingly good, some painfully amateur. This is the generation gap audience which doesn't go to the flicks to kill time, but which takes a film (the ones it digs) to its hearts, sees it five times and quotes it like scripture.[38]

Crosby considered the sample of young people as a singular group representative of a discrete type of changing social values and behaviour, and expected that the film affected people in a uncomplicated way. Surely the gender-mixed audience, in a period when 1960s feminist ideas were at the foreground of debate, must have been aware that, as Bill Osgerby had noted, 'the sexual politics of 1960s biker flicks were hardly radical but were rooted in notions of masculine individualism, aggression, independence, and control.'[39] Despite some lack of nuance when considering audience reception, Crosby was observing a highly invested group of young people whom he perceived as actively deviating from the previous generation's

ways – he was, however, isolating a specific urban metropolitan scene with particular opportunities. The general idea that there was a profound break between generations is presented as common sense in both Proops and Crosby's articles.

Most oral history narratives, even from those involved in metropolitan scenes or countercultural ideas, however, develop from locations often associated with family or community ties. 1960s youth was marked out from their parents by the latter's experiences of the Second World War. In memories the war is used as a narrative device to distinguish between the generations, but it is also used as a point of common interest and story-sharing. Of course, some used film and the war to illustrate a generation gap. Arnold for instance, said,

> We all felt that the world was becoming ours, rather than our parents. Many films carried the anti-authority spirit which we all liked and our parents, who had endured hardships during the war, did not. This was in tune with our view, or perhaps just a wish, that power was transferring from authority to us.[40]

There were a number of people who enjoyed the nostalgia and patriotism associated with the war generation, particularly boys and young men. Watching war films, a popular genre, at the cinema was perceived by some as a way to understand the prior generation. Another respondent mentioned that 'War films were good too, as we'd heard from our parents etcetera, much about it and it was still only in the recent past and acted as a fictionalised documentary.'[41]

Similar frictions arise when people talk about standing during the national anthem. A number of oral history respondents mentioned that fewer people remained in the cinema or stood for the national anthem. Despite considering himself patriotic Joseph said:

> The boring bit when the national anthem got played and to begin with as a small, well sort of a younger child, I would stand up because that was what you did. But, as the decade wore on, certainly there was a lot of tipping up of seats of people leaving, you know, and my parents began by sort of disapproving, but of course as the decade wore on I would be going to the cinema by myself and although I wouldn't be one of those people who would be bolting out and ignored it, I sort of felt uncomfortable about it.[42]

In major cities, it is notable however, that people left regardless of their age. A respondent from London, who went to the cinema with his mother throughout his teenage years recalled:

> It was a total mix, you know in the '60s you're just twenty years after the war I suppose, and there was a generation who had fought in the war and they would have probably wanted to show their respect and stuff, whereas my mum was bombed to bits in Deptford and her memory of the war wasn't quite so patriotic. So no, we saw the national anthem as time to leave, but not for any particular reason, just a practical thing. We never stayed.[43]

While the media trope of youth diverging from prior generations which found its expression in film choices, both in matters of taste and cinema-going practices does clashes with the majority of memories.

Despite generational differences in life experiences or cinema-going practices due to particular cultural and social norms, young people went to the cinema with older adults. This was sometimes family but reminiscences also include the wider community. Some films appealed to a younger audience, and when young people visited the cinema they gained formative experiences of independence (in a well-regiment setting). As Selina Todd and Hilary Young noted, parents and children cooperated and children were, in particular those with working-class parents who had gained economically, encouraged children to live more daring lives.[44] But the press's 'generation gap' was less profound than memories give credit. Sensationalist reporting revealed newspapers' selection criteria and how they constructed moral panic rather than the nuances of intergenerational cinema-going.

Teen Age Riot: Deviance/Criminality

Newspapers used the cinema as a site of youthful deviance and criminality that in the light of subsequent reminiscences reflect more general processes of press selection, that expose the less responsible characteristics of mass-market journalism than present a credible impression of 1960s cinema-going.[45] Newspapers sometimes used the cinema as a space to situate adolescent criminality and define elements of youth as folk devils. Returning to Stevenage, in 1961, before the council's efforts to address teenage leisure, reporters used a controversy at the cinema to evaluate unruly youth. *The Daily Mirror* published three articles. The first

reported the Astoria cinema's ban on teenagers for fighting and breaking seats.[46] The second solicited opinions with regard to the ban as it was the 'big talking point of the week.'[47] The word 'hooligan' was prevalent throughout this report and one teenager who wrote in was cited as being afraid that 'that rowdy lot from Stevenage might come to Hitchen.' Another letter-writer noted that in the 1920s, during his own adolescence, policemen had patrolled the back of most cinemas. This type of story contributed to a moral panic in the early 1960s. *The Guardian* reported a nearly identical story in Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside: the Curzon cinema instigated a 'good conduct pass' for some people under-21 and banned the rest after £800 of damage was caused by teenagers throwing lit matches.[48] *The Daily Express* noted that the following week most teens were given a pass.[49] A year later in nearby Sandbach, Cheshire, teenagers were banned after 'seats had been damaged and complaints about noise.'[50] These instances of vandalism or over-exuberance, however, were not the most troubling reports. The cinema was presented as the setting for teenagers, often described as being members of 'gangs,' who committed violent crimes, including murders, that newspapers, particularly tabloids, reported. In 1961 and 1962, for instance, almost every mass market newspaper reported how Neil Kane, 16, stabbed Keith Muncey, 17, to death after seeing *Shane* (1952), a Western staring Alan Ladd, in Balham.[51] *The Guardian* also reported on a police dog being stabbed in 1964 outside the 'Dreamland' cinema in Rochester in front of 'a gang of 50 teenagers.'[52]

Oral history participants and questionnaire respondents tell another story for considerably different ends. Some participants give quite distressing accounts, perhaps even newsworthy. One woman from Manchester was, as a teenager, assaulted walking home from her local cinema which, she claimed, had prevented her from going out alone again.[53] Her account of cinema-going referred to trips with her family and she typically preferred films that adhered to or reinforced her understanding of Christian morality. A number of other respondents, particularly women, echoing concerns that had existed since the cinema's beginnings, perceived cinemas as a place where they might be subject to unwanted attention. Some even recounted a story about a faceless urban deviant: Edina, for instance, said: 'I do remember as a teenager sitting in a central Bristol cinema with a school friend and having an unfortunate experience with the archetypal "man in a dirty mac." But I assume this was my bad luck and not general audience behaviour!'[54]

In keeping with associations between the cinema and sexuality, newspaper used the cinema to situate titillating stories that illustrate broader debates about sexual mores that were occurring at the time. In 1960 *The Daily Mirror* reported that 'Three teenage girls from an

approved school [for young people who had committed crimes or could not be controlled by their parents] told a court yesterday that they smoked cigarettes and "snogged" with boys in a cinema during an outing supervised *by a* mistress.'[55] The Headmistress, referring to Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955), while side-stepped any personal admonishment, said, "My school isn't full of Lolitas. My girls are as good as many others. This happened when I was on holiday—now everything is settled.' Usually reporting about courting at the cinema was light-hearted as the 1969 ban on single men at the Ipswich Odeon demonstrated. *The Daily Mirror* noted, tongue in cheek, that 'young men wanting to see a cinema's late-night show will have to have more than a ticket.'[56]

Dates at the cinema were a well-established part of life. Celeste from Glasgow explained a commonly-held notion: 'many people had no place to go to develop their relationship, so the back row of the cinema was just the place.'[57] One woman from Northamptonshire, who professed to enjoying spending time with boys more than the films themselves, remembered the first time that a young man approached her romantically: 'I think it was his friend that had come with the message "could [his name], could he put his arm round me" and I think I just giggled and said yes.'[58] During the interview I had misinterpreted her previous comments and assumed that the 'boy' who put his arm around her was a 'man.' She was quick to correct me. More depersonalised accounts usually refer to racier behaviour in the back rows. Melody from West Yorkshire said:

> Sometimes as kids it was more entertaining to watch the courting couples than the film! My parents used to make me go to matinees so there was less chance of there being courting couples there.[59]

The back row was perceived as a place that had a degree of privacy, unlike the front rows. As one responded suggested that public intimacy was seen as inappropriate in other parts of the auditorium:

> One boyfriend took me to the cinema because of course at the back of the cinema, as people have told you this, there were double seats so you went to the cinema sometimes you'd just snog all the time … But then we sat in about the third row at the Haymarket and he snogged me and I thought, 'not down here.' [60]

If formative romantic encounters, with occasional heavy petting, were sanctioned at some times and in some places, the majority of oral respondents denied that there was, bar whispering which was quickly curtailed by ushers and usherettes, much troublesome behaviour, certainly no gangs or seat slashing (or murder). Unruly behaviour was usually remembered within the context of children's weekend matinees or adolescent males visiting the cinema together. This behaviour was policed by ushers and usherettes. A woman from Luton remembered that 'For us kids the usherettes were like teachers, we had to queue nicely, we were only allowed to fill seats from the front so no back seat lingering.'[61] Another account revealed how behaviour at matinees was, rather than being located in a heterotopia which evaded the everyday, was laden with local ties, in a distinct place rather than a space:

> We had a song we sang at the beginning of Saturday morning pictures. There was rivalry between us and the Odeon members. When it was your birthday you got a free pass for the next week and the children sang Happy Birthday to you. They had usherettes and they made sure the children behaved themselves and if they didn't they got chucked out.[62]

This narrative is revealing on a number of levels: the minors have a collective identity that has communal rituals (singing shared songs, for instance). The usherettes' authority is based on observing and disciplining the children but they also gave birthday treats, which creates an almost familial relationship. Cinema-going was an experience where the first public steps in the move from maternal protection to adulthood were mediated, but it was done so under surveillance by adult authority and within a community of peers. In most interviews respondents saw cinemas through the lens of locality, community and family. It is unsurprising that these nostalgic connotations resulted in frequent comments about how behaviour was better in the 1960s than today.

Instances of naughty, high-spirited or illegal behaviour by respondents are presented by survey respondents as essentially harmless. Some gendered this behaviour – boys will be boys. One respondent from Rugby even got into a fight but, 'enjoyed the whole thing[, it] was an experience, throw things at people in front of you, swear at screen with other kids. Was a kids event, predominately boys.'[63] Other accounts locate misbehaviour within sibling bonding, Ciara from Cornwall remembered that: 'on one occasion, my elder brother and I bought some new stuff we'd heard about called yogurt from a dairy a couple of doors down. We didn't know what flavours to buy so bought the plain, in our seats we took a couple of

mouthfuls (ugh sour milk!) & threw the tubs under our seats!! Very naughty!'[64] The stories are generally describing collective, rather than individual misbehaviour, and while mischievous, the intention is rarely narrated as mean-spirited, criminal or deviant, Tony from Wiltshire remembered:

> Film going wasn't just about the films, as a teenager it was the event, going out somewhere. You could be not very interested in the film and fool about. I remember a friend and I taking drinking straws and a box of matches in. We used the straws as blow pipes to project matches (unlit). Watching Cleopatra we'd try to hit Liz Taylor's breasts. Also we'd hit the backs of the neck of people sitting a few rows in front. This had to be done very surreptitiously. Not very good behaviour![65]

Oral history narratives disrupt the media's combination of youth and deviance in scandalous reporting. People remember secrets shared and kept from adults or instances of risky fun that built friendships or romantic liaisons, rather than a space disembodied from the community and under the threat of deviant or criminal behaviour from anonymous adolescents.

Eric's Trip: Influence of Films

When *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), a stylish mix of romance, crime and violence, was released, for instance, it was successful beyond most reasonable expectations. *The Daily Express* reported, in an article that was split over two daily issues, that the film had commanded record box-office takings, helped Britain's ailing hosiery industry (as women sought to dress like Faye Dunaway's Bonnie) and that Pop Art prints of Dunaway and Warren Beattie, who played the leading roles, were outselling prints of Bob Dylan and Marlon Brando. [66] Dylan and Brando were symbols of youthful rebellion and social change incarnate to many teenagers. When, two years after the film's release, five young men and a young woman were apprehended after stealing around £91,000 in armed robberies, some newspapers made a connection between the robberies and the film. *The Guardian* reported how the robbers were described as 'a "Bonnie and Clyde" gang' and blamed film and television.[67] The article concluded,

Mr Leonard Caplan, QC, for Farren [a member of the 'gang'], said that this was a horrifying series of offences which had been equated to Bonnie and Clyde in the film. He could not better Farren's own graphic description of what was happening: 'It was like being on a train going at 80 miles an hour and from which one wanted to get off.'

Farren's imagery, evoking speed, makes a distinction between the modern – the influence of film, the fantastic, American-style crime and fashion – and the slower pace of everyday law-abiding life. In newspaper's reports films were described as having the capacity to inform violently criminal behaviour. *The Daily Mirror* in April 1969 reported how Sandra Shelton (Bonnie), on parole, was seeking to marry Christopher Hague (Clyde), serving a six-year sentence, in prison. In the article Shelton, unlike Bonnie Parker, came across as a repentant ingénue. Her mother supported the pair but the sentencing judge through 'some germ of madness had gotten into them.'[68] The article reported the story as scandalous but romantic while reinforcing the idea that film could sway youthful passions into pathological behaviour. This was a press cliché that appeared throughout the decade.[69]

In oral history interviews, *Bonnie and Clyde* resonated with people differently. As might be expected, many respondents remember seeing the film and enjoying it. A friend of one respondent purportedly saw it six times in one week, while another respondent described it as 'curiously amoral' and a third wrote, 'the first film to really shock me was *Bonnie and Clyde*. The violence was new and not welcome!'[70] Others enjoyed it enough to emulate the film in a legal way: 'After watching Bonnie and Clyde with my boyfriend, we went out into the countryside the following day, in his car, and pretended to be them, driving across country and picking out our next targets.'[71] Mostly, however, young women affected Faye Dunaway's chic style rather than her skill in executing heists. Leah, who was 19 at the time, 'bought a beret immediately after seeing *Bonnie and Clyde*.'[72] Borrowing fashion choices had precedents in previous decades and remained one of the most frequently-articulated comments by cinema-goers surveyed. Jeanie from Liverpool made a typical comment,

Interviewer: So you'd go out and try to affect the fashions?

Respondent: Yes, I always wanted to do my hair like Doris Day … girls' fashions changed to what was on at the cinema because obviously we didn't have television …

and I can't remember magazines only old fashioned you know *Women's Own* or something like that so it was always from the cinema.[73]

Her interview responses drew from her own recollections of post-war working-class Liverpool's close-knit communities, in particular her immediate and extended family, friends and her future husband. While retaining these tight bonds, Jeannie found a way combine her sense of belonging in her community and wanting to emulate film stars through her dress. Changing fashion illustrates how people took symbols and messages from films but these choices were often negotiated with social conventions and everyday life in mind.

Some people used cinema-going and film as tools to explain their understanding of how their formative ideas and world views gestated. This was often paired with certain encounters with metropolitan subcultures, countercultural or foreign films. As a child, Wilko from a working-class background in Walthamstow was taken to the cinema by his bohemian uncle, who was at art school. Inevitably, his partner dressed like Faye Dunaway. His uncle and trips to 'art cinemas' had an influence:

Interviewer: You said that you enjoyed French films and you did mention *Les Diaboliques…*

Respondent: Yeah, my uncle took me to a few art cinemas and I can't remember where they were [he later recalled the Scala in London]. He was a bit of a bohemian if you like … He was an artist, he went to art school and then went to RADA and he got kicked out of RADA I think. But he was different and he would look after me and I used to find him incredibly funny and I mimicked him in many ways.[74]

Oscar from Manchester, who had been an avid cinema-goer with his parents as a child and grew-up around the corner from Paul Rotha, the filmmaker, fell in with a counter-cultural crowd during his late teens.[75] The cinema, particularly late night showings and university cinema society events, became a location for him and like-minded people to experience films, often cult and avant-garde films, while under the influence of LSD and/or cannabis – 'I [would] drop two tabs and go in and watch this horror movie and there were a bunch of us hedonists who just thought that it was the perfect accompaniment to a late night horror film.' The university film society gave this group

a chance to see films like *Häxan* (which featured a William S. Burroughs voiceover) and Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. He described 'swinging London' films such as *Blow Up* and *Alfie* as 'roadmaps for the soul.' Oscar found a community of like-minded young people who could decode ideas about social change and find an alternative source of education:

> I didn't go to university until I was 35 – the world of film provided my university. It introduced *Mondo Carne* – I've seen the world! – there were bare-breasted ladies, I'm learning, I'm there, I'm at Rorke's Drift, you know, I'm fighting back the Zulu hordes, I'm… I have seen battle stars ablaze adrift of the shoulder of Orion, I have been in the Vietnam jungle – and now I have been in the Vietnam jungle! [Laughs] Glad I wasn't there with anyone firing guns at me. So yeah, so cinema, huh, what good is it for?[76]

This was echoed by others with less countercultural predilections. Even those from large cities, however, could find life stifling: Arthur from London, for instance, saw the world as 'a narrow place. It was the people in your street and your immediate community and the people you met at school … so to think of the wider world, you were pretty much absorbing that through Hollywood films.'[77] Oscar was an extreme example of the opportunities for some to find social change in the 1960s – he went on to play in Manchester freak-folk and proto-punk bands, one of whom visited Andy Warhol at the Factory, and met a number of the transatlantic counter-culture's notables. The chance to indulge in accelerated instances of social change are central to his understandings of his cinematic experience. Oscar's narrative could be seen as part of a cultural revolution, but it was enabled by a number of factors related to his class, educational opportunities (Manchester High School for the Arts), race, location and age. Arthur, on the other hand, while perceiving new things through the cinema, had more experience of close community and family which he associated with traditional ideas of working-class culture rather than the nearby metropolitan and countercultural scenes that destabilised preconceptions about class, life and society.

To many young people, 1960s films presented examples of alternative ways of living and thinking, yet responses retain ideas of authority, geography and the limited personal opportunities for 'swinging' lifestyles. Instead of breaking out from roles defined by parents, reminiscences locate responses in a broader social situation

and most radical statements are hedged using a number of strategies. Some sough ideas, images and behaviours that defied conventions, but, even then, these points of escape are understood within a context of social norms and lifestyle possibilities. They are therefore much distinct from the 1960s institutional and press perspective of popular culture influencing young cultural dopes. Memories conform more closely to the negotiations of public and private propriety that characterised debates and legal changes in 1960s Britain.

Conclusion: Daydream Nation?

Contrary to the concerns of the NUT and IAH, many teenagers' dreams, even those that had been prompted by cinema-going experiences and opportunities, remained unrealised. The press's tropes of delinquency and bad teenage behaviour are remembered differently, they, instead, emphasise surrounding social and cultural patterns. Respondents remember little delinquency other than children's matinee which were, in fact, tightly regimented and controlled. There was youthful sexual experimentation, occasional instances of misbehaviour by individuals or small friendship groups, but it had much more to do with individual daydreaming than the fantasies of collective unsocial behaviour peddled by the press of the time.

By remembering surrounding social and cultural patterns, oral histories do not simply discount the idea of a cultural revolution. Instead memories of lived experience reflect a variety of lives and understandings of social change that were often shaped by particular class, gender and local identities or communities. Some people could experience a radical 1960s through film: those with the opportunity to do so could emulate ideas of cultural and social revolution in metropolitan or countercultural subcultures with cinema-going as a point of access and social mixing. Newspaper, film and cinema-going while sensationalising, interacted with radical lives. Their messages could, however, be ignored or adpted in light of certain contexts. One way was through increased opportunities for consumption: one might adopt new fashions superficially rather than 'tune in, turn on and drop out' and still live a life that was defined by local and family conventions. It took a certain time and place with distinct opportunities for daydreams to manifest. A vast proportion of young people did not access the 1960s found in films, newspapers on TV or records. For them, film was often an escape from the mundane. The press reports that furnished the category of youth and teenagers with connotations about generation gaps, the

cinema's influence, deviance and criminality seldom represented these nuances and consequently embellish the 1960s' myths. Boredom was not a cause for pathological deviance, but an excuse for most people to sit and bask in a technicolour elsewhere. This might account for the frequency in which respondents mentioned repeat viewings: there was little else to do and a film might offer a seductive alternative to the everyday even after repeat viewings.

These distinctions in experience and the broader contention that the press sensationalised young people's cinema-going practices show that oral history is a powerful empirical counterpoint to evaluate media representations. In terms of Stuart Hall's third step in media text analysis, 'decoding,' this article's method recovers perceptions of film and newspapers remembered within their contexts—audiences in cinemas and sites of everyday life. The contrasting perspectives on cinema-going and ways that films affected young people portray a complex society, perhaps less dramatic than newspapers suggested, where social change took fragmented forms.

Acknowledgements

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[1] NUT, *Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility*. IAH, *The Grammar School*.
[2] IAH, *The Grammar School*, 1.
[3] Jackson, Policing Youth, 88–9.
[4] Dinah Brook, 'Witchcraft Makes Teenagers,' *the Guardian* 1 January 1961, 7. 'Exploiting the Day-dreams of "Teenagers",' *The Guardian*, 2 January 1961, 8.
[5] Jackson, *Policing Youth*, 88-89.
[6] Bingham, 'First Draft of History.'
[7] Marwick, The Sixties; Sandbrook, White Heat.
[8] Mort, Capital Affairs; Hornsey, The Spiv and the Architect; and Walkowitz, Nights Out.
[9] Bingham, *Family Newspapers?* Bingham, *Gender and Modernity*. Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding.'
[10] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 5-7.
[11] Osgerby, Youth Media, 7. Fowler, The First Teenagers.
[12] National Council of Public Morals, *The Cinema*.
[13] Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 92-3.
[14] National Council of Public Morals, *The Cinema*, vi.
[15] Ibid, vii.
[16] Ibid, xxvii.

[17] Ibid., xxxvi.

[18] This is particularly marked in the first handful of issues in 1932.

[19] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 82-82.

[20] Browning and Sorrell, 'Cinemas and Cinema-going,' 133-168.

[21] Burgin, *The Remembered Film*, 50-51.

[22] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces.'

[23] Halberstram, *Queer Time and Place*. Taylor, *Playing it Queer.*

[24] John Pilger, *Daily Mirror*, 2 April 1965

[25] Dan O'Neill, 'Volunteers for Kirby,' *The Guardian*, 14 May 1965, 13.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Interview with Frank, Cultural Memory and British Cinema-going of the 1960s (CMBCG), UCL, transcript number 0450.

[28] Interview with Frank, Cultural Memory and British Cinema-going of the 1960s (CMBCG), UCL, transcript number 0450.

[29] Interview with Mervyn, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0014.

[30] PHD DON + AB

[31] Questionnaire by Gawain, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0131.

[32] Questionnaire by Rebecca, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0474.

[33] Questionnaire by Gerry, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0488. Interview with Jacob, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0944.

[34] Interview with Jacob, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0944.

[35] Marjorie Proops, 'It's Dead Funny,' *Daily Mirror*, 21 June 1961, 11.

[36] Ibid.

[37] John Crosby, 'Midnight Cowboys,' *The Guardian*, 14 September 1969, 10.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Osgerby, 'Sleazy Riders,' 106.

[40] Questionnaire by Arnold, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0437.

[41] Questionnaire by Yvonne, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0001.

[42] Interview with Joseph, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0703.

[43] Interview with Colin, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0764.

[44] Todd and Young, "Babyboomers to Beanstalkers."

[45] Cohen and Young, *The Manufacture of News*, 17-18.

[46] 'The Astoria Declares War on Teenagers,' *Daily Mirror*, 4 April 1961, 12-13.

[47] *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1961, 4.

[48] *The Guardian*, 17 June 1961, 14.

[49] *Daily Express*, 2 May 1961, 6.

[50] *The Guardian*, 14 May 1962, 3.

[51] *The Guardian*, 11 January 1961, 10. *Daily Mirror* 11 January 1961, 6.

[52] *The Guardian*, 6 April 1964, 3.

[53] Interview with Patsy, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0966.

[54] Questionnaire by Edina, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0317.

[55] Don Short, '"Snogging" at Cinema by Approved School girls,' *Daily Mirror*, 3 December 1960, 16.

[56] 'Bring Girls or Stay Out says a Cinema Boss,' *Daily Mirror* 11 October 1969, 22.

[57] Questionnaire by Celeste, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0320.

[58] Interview with Gisela, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0945.

[59] Questionnaire by Melody, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0271.

[60] Interview with May, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0713.

[61] Interview with Pedita, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0212.

[62] Interview with Ena, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0050.

[63] Interview with Brian, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0333.

[64] Interview with Ciara, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0198.

[65] Interview with Tony, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0954.

[66] Victor Davis, 'The "Bonnie" Bandwagon,' *Daily Express*, 12 February 1968, 4.

[67] 'Youths Given Total of 22 Years' Prison,' *The Guardian*, 23 April 1969, 4.

[68] David Wright, 'I want to Wed Clyde in Jail, says Bonnie,' *The Guardian*, 23 April 1969.

[69] For instance see 'Psychiatrists disagree about Terry', *The Guardian*, 25 March 1961, 9.

[70] Questionnaire by Jessie, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0042. Questionnaire by Isadora, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0284.

[71] Questionnaire by Olympia, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0411.

[72] Questionnaire by Leah, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0631.

[73] Interview with Jeannie, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0948.

[74] Interview with Wilko, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0961.

[75] Interview with Oscar, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0964.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Interview with Arthur, CMBCG, UCL, transcript number 0765.

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