Going Out (of Town): New Geographies of Cinema-Going in the UK

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Cinema is now the fastest-growing leisure sector in Britain, with expenditure on cinema-going having increased threefold over the course of the 1990s (Mintel Reports, 2002). Yet it was as recently as 1984 that cinema attendance reached its all-time low, with the availability of video recorders apparently transforming the viewing habits of the British public and signalling the "death" of cinema (see especially Docherty et al, 1987). In this year, the proportion of the British public who visited the cinema was approximately 49%; by 1999 this had risen to 75%. In the same period, the proportion of the British population who claimed to visit the cinema at least once a month jumped from 5% to 25% (Cinema Advertising Association, 2000). Accordingly, 2001 witnessed the highest level of cinema going for thirty years, with a record thirteen films grossing over £15 million (compared with six in 1998). Coupled with higher ticket prices (an average of £3.96 in the last quarter of 2001), this resulted in a 47% increase in gross box office takings between 1997 and 2001 (Mintel Reports, 2002). In short, the film exhibition sector appears more buoyant at the beginning of the twenty-first century than at any time since the 1960s.

Proposed explanations for this revival of film-going are many and varied. One focuses on the apparent revival of "blockbuster" films that appeal to a variety of demographic groups (e.g. *Shakespeare in Love*, *Titanic*, *Lord of The Rings*). Another related explanation suggests that the appetite for film product is being stimulated by an increasingly cynical marketing machine that exploits synergies between film, video, computer games and the music industry (Anon, 1998). While these explanations cannot be dismissed lightly, in this paper I explore another contention; namely, that the changing marketing and design strategies of cinema chains in Britain has played a pivotal role in reawakening enthusiasm for cinema-going among many factions of the British public. Central to this argument is the fact that the resurgence in cinema-going has been accompanied by the development of new types of cinema -- most notably, the multiplex. By definition, multiplexes are purpose-built cinemas offering a wide choice of viewing across at least five screens (and typically ten to fifteen -- megaplexes having more than twenty). Most feature Surround-Sound systems (360º digital sound experience), wide screens, a range of food and confectionery, more leg space, air conditioning, and free/easy parking. The fact that many incorporate themed restaurants, cafes, shops and amusement arcades has led some commentators to suggest that a process of *quasification* is fast blurring the distinction between cinema-going and other forms of urban leisure (Hannigan, 1998). This means that the five major cinema circuits in Britain (i.e. Odeon, Warner Village, National Amusements/Showcase, UGC and UCI) can now claim to offer a "family entertainment" experience that does not stop when the film does.

This transformation of British cinemas into "Family Entertainment Centres" is well illustrated with reference to Star City in Birmingham, opened in July 2000. Anchored by a thirty-screen Warner Village cinema (the biggest in Europe), this Richardson's development also contains amusement arcades, a Burger King, Baskin Robins cookie shop, a Megabowl, a New Orleans night-spot, Nando's Mexican restaurant, a bookshop, a video shop, an ice cream parlour and a health club -- the perfect night (or day) out, in fact, for those weaned on multiplex cinemas. Yet given its number of screens, Star City claims to be able to cater for the entire spectrum of cultural tastes, devoting screens to Asian "Bollywood" and art house films alongside the Hollywood blockbusters which have become the stock in trade of the multiplex. The developers predict over 1.5 million visitors per year, the location of the development alongside "spaghetti junction" on the M6 having been selected to maximise regional accessibility (to cater for the 4,000 or so expected visitors, the car park has spaces for 2,700 cars). Early indications suggest that Star City is meeting its targets and that cinema-goers across the West Midlands are abandoning their "local" cinemas in favour of this new leisure experience.

Star City may be somewhat exceptional among the new breed of British cinemas, yet its success underlines that film exhibition in Britain is currently dominated by those circuits that are investing heavily in multiplex and megaplex developments. This is reflected in the contemporary geography of film exhibition in Britain, with most new cinemas being located in out-of-town and Greenfield locations (where land is generally cheaper). Hence, while the majority of Britain's 630 cinemas remain in "traditional" high street locations, there are now over 230 multiplexes in peripheral and off-centre locations, with at least a hundred of these of these anchoring free-standing "Multi-Leisure Parks" on the outskirts of British towns and cities. Additionally, several Regional Shopping Centres now incorporate multiplex cinemas as the circuits seek to exploit synergies between shopping and leisure by locating in spectacular consumption spaces like Bluewater (Dartford) and Meadowhall (Sheffield). Collectively, this move "out of town" has fundamentally changed patterns of cinema-going in Britain: 70% of cinema screens (and nearly 90% of admissions) are now in out-of-town locations (Mintel Reports, 2002). In this sense, it appears that any explanation of the resurgence in cinema attendance needs to pay careful attention not just to the *geography* of film exhibition, with the "spatial switching" of cinema from city centres to out-of-town sites seemingly encouraging more and more people to leave the comfort of their home to watch films at the cinema rather than on satellite TV, video or DVD.

This paper, therefore, explores how changing geographies of film exhibition have shaped cinema-going in Britain, considering recent trends in the light of more general debates about urban consumption. In so doing, this paper elucidates the ongoing relationship between cinema and the city, drawing on geographical literature that considers the ways that consumption practices -- of which cinema-going is just one example -- shape, and are shaped by, the landscapes of Western cities. To explore the complexities of these socio-spatial relations, and to situate cinema-going within the broader literature on the cultural life of cities, the remainder of the paper is organised into two main sections. The first of these examines the shifting location of cinema in the city, describing how new cinema spaces have transformed successive landscapes of urban leisure (most recently through the decentring of film exhibition). Secondly, drawing on research on contemporary geographies of cinema-going, the paper examines the way these new cinemas are being consumed by urban populations (Hubbard, 2002). The paper concludes that multiplex cinemas are implicated in the resurgence of cinema-going in Britain, albeit that they are increasing cinema-going among certain consumer groups, but not others. In passing, the paper notes that other sites of film exhibition -- art house and Bollywood cinemas in particular -- offer very different experiences of film, being located within different social-spatial networks of film exhibition and consumption. Noting this tendency towards fragmentation, the paper concludes that there is a need for further explorations of cinema-going in the city, given that cinema-going is as much about the consumption of the city as it is about the consumption of film.

The Changing Locations of Film Exhibition

In the first half of the twentieth century, cinemas arguably served as the focal point of a range of rituals of urban consumption, being located in city centers that were increasingly becoming spaces devoted to leisure and recreation rather than trade and production (Donald, 1999). The rising importance of city centers as spaces of leisure is certainly evident in the emergence of "super-cinemas" in the 1930s, a new form of cinema which represented the culmination of innovations in methods of visual display, building techniques and transport technologies. Located in accessible locations at the intersection of expanding networks of urban transport, Odeon, Gaumont and Granada super-cinemas offered a programme of entertainment that offered distraction and edification in equal measure. Moreover, these city centre cinemas served to keep an increasingly suburban population in touch with the life of the city. Freidberg accordingly alerts the importance of super-cinemas as sites of *mass consumption*, suggesting they bought individuals together in a social space where everybody -- singles, couples, groups, families -- could experience the communal pleasures of commodity consumption (Freidberg, 1993). Certainly, unlike the company-sponsored recreations that served to distract the working classes, or municipal sites of edification like pleasure gardens, museums and art galleries, cinema was a ritual that evidently involved all classes and social types (even if the cinemas themselves were spaces striated by class and income, something emphasized in the "circle" and "stalls" design typical of the super-cinema).

However, from a highpoint of 1,635 million admissions per year in 1946, audiences declined to just fifty-four million in 1984 (Cinema Advertising Association, 2000). According to some, this was because of the challenge of new media (particularly television) which shifted the primary location of mass entertainment from cinema to the home despite successive innovations in cinema presentation (e.g. technicolour, Cinerama, surround sound etc). This gradual decline in cinema-going was matched by a reduction in the number of screens from over four thousand in the 1940s to an estimated 1,270 in the mid-1980s (Heathcote, 2000). The net result of this pattern of closure was that Britain came to possess the lowest density of screens and cinemas of any country in Europe (Dodona, 2000). By the mid-1980s, the majority of screens were in super-cinemas owned by the major circuits (ABC and Odeon), most of which had been multi-screened in an attempt to maintain attendance. The majority of these "miniplex" cinemas were in larger town and city centres, leaving the majority of communities of 50,000 and fewer with no cinema.

Although at the time commentators were pessimistic about the long term prospects for British cinema-going, the 1990s witnessed a sustained resurgence in audience numbers, associated with a new wave of investment in cinemas (Docherty et al., 1987). Characteristic of this "third wave" was the establishment of purpose-built multiplex cinemas, a trend beginning in the 1980s with the development of "The Point" at Milton Keynes (1985), but gathering pace in the 1990s. Current figures suggest that there are some 175 multiplexes in the UK today, with another 68 sites scheduled to open by the end of 2002. The outcome of these patterns of capital investment in cinema exhibition facilities has been a dramatic growth in screen numbers at the same time as the number of sites remained more or less constant. King Sturge estimate there were 631 cinemas with 2,664 screens and 643,000 cinema seats in December 1999 (excluding the hundred or so venues which show films on an occasional basis) (King Sturge, 2000). This represents a rise of 120% on the number of screens in 1984, though the number of cinemas increased by only 15% in the same period. Of course, with the majority of screens now in multiplex cinemas, the number of admissions per screen is now much lower than in 1984 (the average multiplex auditorium seats just 212). In effect, this suggests that operators are not building new screens to cope with rising numbers, but that providing more screens and more screenings per site is the key strategy for increasing admissions per seat over the course of a year. Dodona suggest that a multiplex cinema can be expected to generate up to 360 admissions per seat each year, or about one a day (Dodona, 2000). By contrast, cinemas of one, two or three screens average half that number or fewer. Providing a choice of viewing, and offering the audience flexibility in terms of viewing times, the multiplex has thus been read as representing the triumph of post-Fordist flexibilism over the Fordist logic of mass consumption embodied in the super-cinemas (Ravenscroft et al., 2001).

In the context of this paper, it is important to realise that aggregate figures about cinema development hide important trends in the spatial switching of investment in film exhibition. Crucial here has been the movement "out-of-town"; despite Planning Policy Guidance notes six and thirteen having discouraged development in out-of-town and Greenfield locations, the vast majority of multiplexes in the UK anchor free-standing leisure parks, with a smaller percentage being located in brown-field off-centre sites (Mintel Reports, 2000). In contrast, the majority of single screen operations remain in town and city centres. It is the latter that have generally suffered from the arrival of the multiplex, with the numbers of single screen operations having declined from 327 in 1997 to just 274 in 1999 (King Sturge, 2000). Overall, the number of city centre screens has fallen from 1280 (in 1995) to 1141 (in 1999). Though these were mainly non-circuit cinemas, in 1998-99 both Odeon and ABC made wholesale closures of their high street cinemas, closing twenty-one sites and sixty-six screens. Only a tiny proportion of new cinemas are located in city centres themselves, often as part of new Urban Entertainment Complexes which have restaurants, pubs, night-clubs and a cinema under one roof (e.g. Coventry's SkyDome, Manchester's Printworks or the Arcadian, Birmingham). Given the higher cost of land in such locations, such city centre multiplexes are often very different from their out-out-town counterparts, typically being more compact and almost always lacking the free parking found at out-of-town sites.

This spatial switching has had important impacts on the share of the market taken by each of the 200 or so exhibitors in the UK market, particularly the division of the market between the circuits and independent operations. While the latter are still significant (with many small towns remaining dominated by a single independent exhibitor), the 1990s was characterised by the increasing influence of circuits. These include the Odeon circuit, which, prior to taking control of ABC (through the Cinven takeover) had 78% of its screens in multiplexes (King Sturge, 2000) and those foreign-based chains which exclusively operate multiplexes (i.e. National Amusements/ Showcase, Cineworld, Warner Villages, Hoyts, UGC and UCI). In essence, the most successful circuits are those that have concentrated their operation in multiplex sites. At the same time, few independent circuits (e.g. Caledonian, Robins, Picture House) made significant investments in out-of-town facilities, and even Apollo (the largest of the privately-owned circuits) closed more screens than it opened in the 1990s despite developing a handful of multiplex cinemas. Hence, although 68% of existing UK full-time cinemas are not multiplexes, these account for only 34% of admission income in 32% of the screens. On average, therefore, non-multiplex cinema operators have to find the running costs for twice as many screens than multiplex operators, but on half the audience. Many of these non-multiplex cinemas are situated in town centres, and fail to provide the free parking, secure environment and mix of attractions that customers have come to expect from multiplexes. This appears to be creating a polarisation between the circuits and those independent operators; many of the latter have been forced to close down because they cannot afford to improve their accommodation.

In many senses, this decentralisation of film exhibition can be related to wider changes in the nature of urban living in the latter years of the twentieth century. Sudjic claims that the 1980s and 1990s saw the Western industrial city finally shake off the last traces of its nineteenth century self and mutate into a completely new species which geographers have subsequently termed the "post-modern" city (Sudjic, 1996; Dear and Flusty, 1998). Though most theorisations of post-modernism in the urban landscape have emanated from US scholars working on Los Angeles (hence, the identification of a putative "LA School" based around the work of Mike Davis, Ed Soja, Allen Scott and others), urban geographers have identified key similarities between LA and cities throughout the contemporary West, stressing that LA is paradigmatic of a new form of urbanism that has become widespread. This is a form of urbanism shaped by post-industrialism, with many previously industrial sites having been transformed, commodified and aestheticised as manufacturing spaces gave way to nouvelle cuisine restaurants, heritage centres, coffee shops, shopping malls and, of course, multiplex cinemas (Zukin, 1998). Shaping new patterns of leisure, travel and culture, these sites of new urban leisure cater to diverse tastes, including (in some instances) the lifestyles of previously marginal groups (e.g. lesbians, gays, ethnic minorities etc). Accordingly, previously rigid structures and class divides in the city have been revised as diverse consumer identities become inscribed in the landscape, bequeathing a city that is complex, fragmented and restless. Hence, post-modern cities are seen to be characterised by the types of polarisation, flexibilism, uncertainty and risk that are writ large in the landscape of Los Angeles.

Elaborating these ideas in the context of British urban cultures, Clarke and Bradford characterise the post-modern city as one where the class logic of mass consumption has been undermined to be replaced by a series of niche markets (Clarke and Bradford, 1998). One spatial corollary of this is the emergence of new spaces of consumption, especially, but not exclusively, on the periphery of cities. This tallies with Soja's argument that the post-modern city is punctuated by new clusters of leisure and retail, often alongside science parks and media centres:

> Some have called these amorphous implosions 'Outer Cities' or 'Edge Cities'; others dub them technopoles, technoburbs, silicon landscapes, postsuburbia, metroplex. I will name them, collectively, *exopolis,* the city without, to stress their oxymoronic ambiguity, their city-full non-cityness. These are not only exo-cities, orbiting outside, they are ex-cities as well, no longer what the city used to be… the exopolis spins new whorls of its own, turning the city inside out and outside in at the same time, unravelling in its paths the memories of more familiar urban fabrics. (Soja, 1996: 239)

Describing these *exopolitan* phenomena, Soja suggests that the city centre is no longer the primary focus of urban life and leisure, but has been joined by a multiplicity of new "centres" that are, conversely, distanced from the traditional city centre (Soja, 1989). As the city turns inside out, rituals of urban recreation also become de-centred; urban dwellers increasingly seek distraction in spectacular, peripheral landscapes located away from the "inner city" (Hannigan, 1998).

Though many town and city centres have also undergone something of a make-over, the success of de-centred leisure is evident in Britain as the development of peripheral Multi Leisure Parks, Family Entertainment Centres and Regional Shopping Centres continues apace (a trend encouraged by the rent gap that continues to exist between city centre and peripheral locations). For many, the prevalence of consumption in a wide range of de-centred spaces is indicative of the centrality of consumption in the contemporary city (Zukin, 1998). However, granting consumers with an endless capacity to use this range of spaces in a creative, reflexive manner glosses over the material constraints within which consumers operate. Accordingly, some researchers have identified a darker side to the consumer society in the continued exclusion of a significant faction of society from these new spaces of consumption. Described as those who exist outside "the expanding enclaves of post-modern existence where people are consumers first and workers a very distant second", these are consumers who are marginalised within contemporary landscapes of leisure (Bauman, 1997: 24). In some cases, this exclusion may be forced, as when "undesirables" are removed from private urban malls because they disturb what Sibley terms "the white middle-class family ambience associated with international consumption style." (Sibley, 1995: xi) In other cases, certain attractions may be too expensive or simply inaccessible for some individuals. Commenting on this social and spatial exclusion, Bauman alludes to the creation of the "disadvantaged consumer." (Bauman, 1997) For these disadvantaged consumers, the choice is often no choice at all; reliance on a dwindling range of leisure spaces that cannot compete with the quality of experience offered elsewhere (Williams et al., 2001).

Hence, while Harbord identifies film as an multiple, and perhaps infinite, media, involving a huge diversity of sites of film consumption, the rise of the out-of-town multiplex as the most numerous and popular type of cinema in Britain suggests a neat homology between the emergence of a particular space of film exhibition (i.e. the out-of-town multiplex) and a new type of city (i.e. the "post-modern" city) (Harbord, 2002). Spatially removed from the city centre, multiplexes thus appear to be characteristic of a new form of collective consumption that offers some city dwellers an escape from the "urban" and, as Harbord suggests, a very different viewing experience than that associated with "the centred, modernist, historical narrative of the arthouse and gallery film culture." (Harbord, 2002: 55) Although she acknowledges the idea of a polarisation in cinema audiences, Harbord goes on to suggest that this break with traditional spaces of film exhibition may in fact be widening participation in cinema-going, with ethnic minorities, for example, feeling more "at home" in multiplex cinemas than city centre cinemas rooted in narratives of the national past. Rather than being exclusive spaces, Harbord suggests that both the multiplex and the type of films exhibited in multiplexes (i.e. primarily Hollywood blockbusters) combine to create a more democratic and inclusive cinema culture.

The literature on post-modern urbanism and the emergence of a "consumer society" thus throws up two intriguing ideas about multiplex cinemas. The first -- exemplified in Harbord's account of the multiplex as rooted in post-modern spatial narratives and networks -- is that the de-centralisation of film exhibition is part and parcel of the general move towards a form of "exopolitan" living (Harbord, 2002). Here, the movement out-of-town can be interpreted as a response to changing consumer demands and the general desire for new forms of collective entertainment that are more inclusive and democratic than those associated with modern, centred spaces of film exhibition. The second is that the re-location of cinemas to off-centre locations has been an attempt to target particular audiences, simultaneously distancing cinema from those "less desirable" consumers who might disturb the ambience of "family" consumption which the circuits seek to create (Sibley, 1995; Bauman, 1997). In many ways, this contradicts the idea that multiplexes have simply responded to audience demands for new collective experiences and spaces, suggesting a more *fractured* geography of film consumption. Seeking to explore these broad hypotheses, Harbord draws on aggregate statistics, particularly those compiled by the British film industry (Harbord, 2002). Such statistics sketch out broad patterns of cinema-going in Britain, and begin to shed some light on the changing composition of cinema audiences as multiplex development continues apace. For example, they suggest that a disproportionate number of the 140 million admissions in 1999 were accounted for by a small number of frequent cinema-goers, with around 65% of admissions being from 23% of the population (King Sturge, 2000). They also show that it is the sixteen to twenty-four year old group that includes the most frequent film-goers (with around 58% going once a month or more). Against this, one-third of the over thirty five age group never to go to the cinema, with Mintel suggesting this rises to 65% among those of retirement age (Mintel Reports, 2002).

While age *per se* is an important predictor of cinema-going, the fact that it is rarely a solitary habit means that cinema-going also varies according to household composition. The Cinema Advertising Association (2000) suggests the average party size for cinema visits is three, showing it is a shared experience (Cinema Advertising Association, 2000). As such, the likelihood of a person aged thirty-five and upwards to visit the cinema increases massively with the presence of children in the household. Patterns of cinema-going may also be inflected by class and income. The majority of sources suggest a strong bias in cinema-going towards the ABC1s who are the target audience for most advertisers. Similarly, breaking down the population by income decile, the Family Expenditure Survey reports weekly family spending on theatre and cinema rises from twenty pence for the poorest decile to £2.50 for the most wealthy. This suggests the affluent spend more on cinema and theatre as a form of leisure, although this does obscure the fact that those in the C1 bracket tend to go most frequently to cinemas but rarely to live theatre. An interesting finding reported in Docherty et al. was that 43% of ABs claimed that their preferred medium for watching a film was the cinema, as opposed to just 20% of DEs (who expressed a preference for TV and video) (Docherty et al., 1987).

Changing Geographies, Changing Audiences?

While recent surveys of cinema-going reveal something of the overall audience for film, they say little about how this audience is spread across different sites of film exhibition. For example, while the Cinema Advertising Association collects data on the audience composition for the various circuits, there is little consideration of the audience travelling particular distances, using certain modes of transport or opting to use an out-of-town cinema where there is an alternative available in-town. Similarly, there is little data on the ethnic composition of cinema audiences at different locations, perhaps surprisingly given the growing market for Bollywood films in the UK. The fact that some multiplexes now dedicate a screen to Asian film means they may be in competition with inner city or town centre facilities such as "Bollywood" cinemas. Again, the influence of mobility on Asian populations' decision to visit one or other of the cinemas has not been adequately explored to date. Nonetheless, in many accounts, it is the availability of car parking facilities and the general security of out-of-town locations that is hypothesised as crucial in determining the success of multiplexes (Gray, 1996). Clearly, this suggests that multiplex cinemas may be more popular among car-owning consumers and those groups put off visiting city centres because of fears of violence and sexual harassment perpetuated by "lager louts", though the evidence to support this claim is patchy (Thomas and Bromley, 2000).

Given the lack of data describing the way multiplex cinemas are used by different consumer factions, it is clearly difficult to reject or accept the idea that multiplex cinemas are widening access to film by tapping into a diversity of socio-spatial networks (Harbord, 2002). To these ends, an extensive survey was completed in Leicester. Though Leicester represents a distinctive locale in which to explore cinema-going, the location of film exhibition in the city is arguably symptomatic of that found more generally in British cities, with the recent movement "out of town" resulting in the abandonment of several city centre cinemas (including the Cannon and ABC). Today, there are just two cinemas in the city centre -- a part-time arts cinema (The Phoenix) and a two-screen "Asian" cinema -- though a twelve-screen Odeon opened in 1997 on a site adjacent to the city-centre. Beyond this, the suburban cinemas that sprung up in the 1930s have long since been demolished or converted into bingo halls, residential homes and supermarkets, with the sole exception of a two-screen Capital "Bollywood" cinema in the Belgrave Road area. Out-of-town, and neighbouring the Fosse Park retail centre, there is a twelve-screen Warner Village cinema at the Meridian Leisure Park. In contrast to the Odeon, this is poorly-served by public transport, and is inaccessible on foot, being located on the busy dual carriageway that doubles as Leicester's western by-pass.

The survey completed in Leicester was designed to compare the cinema-going habits of different social groups, defined in terms of class, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and place of residence. The aim was to explore how cinema-going varied across social and spatial divides, relating this to people's occupation and use of urban space. This survey targeted three neighbourhoods (Enumeration Districts) located to the north, east and south of the city centre respectively, chosen from 634 Enumeration Districts in Leicester. The three areas were thus carefully chosen so as to generate a representative sample of Leicester's population (based on 1991 census data), being a multi-ethnic inner city area, an outer suburb of mixed local authority/privately-owned housing and a gentrified suburb. Every household in each neighbourhood received a questionnaire, with 190 of 590 being returned. This questionnaire contained seventeen closed questions about recent evening leisure behaviour, frequency of cinema-going, location of last cinema visit, mode of travel, spending patterns and choice of films. The questionnaire also contained a number of attitude statements about cinemas which respondents were asked to agree or disagree with, adapted from those used in Mintel's UK Cinema-going reports (Mintel Reports, 1999; Mintel Reports 2002). Statistical analysis of the 190 returns facilitated the identification of general patterns of cinema attendance, with statistical analysis via SPSS allowing differences between specific class, gender, age, ethnic and "lifestyle" groups to emerge. Following analysis of the survey returns, five representative households were selected from each area to participate in unstructured interviews (of between forty minutes to two hours duration). Here, the specific aim was to probe how cinema-going routines were shaped by urban anxieties and perceptions of the city at night. All fifteen interviews were taped and transcribed.

Overall, the survey suggested that cinema-going was the third most popular night-time leisure activity for respondents after eating out and visiting pubs. 22.5% suggested they went to the cinema at least once a month (see Figure One). While this is slightly lower than the national average (which Mintel, 2002, suggest is 24%), the proportion claiming to ever go was much higher than the national average. Interestingly, the most frequent cinema-goers were also those most likely to own satellite television and/or rent videos on a regular basis. Ordinal regression analysis with key social indicators (Cox and Snell r2 = 0.252) suggested the most important factor predicting frequency of cinema-going was age (see Figure Two), with gender and ethnicity proving least predictive, with both men and women, and white/non-white groups appearing equally likely to go to the cinema). Indeed, different age groups exhibited significantly different night-time leisure routines (at a 95% level of confidence), with the likelihood of going to the cinema rather than going to the pub, for a meal or shopping varying significantly depending on a person's age.

Frequency of cinema going	Percentage
Once a month or more	22.5%
Once every couple of months	27%
Once every six months	19.5%
Once a year or less	18%
Never	14%

Figure One: Frequency of cinema-going (n=183)

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Never	3.7%	7.5%	6.3%	3.0%	20.0%	59.1%
Once a year or less	11.1%	10.0%	25.0%	33.3%	20.0%	-
Once every six months	11.1%	20.0%	21.9%	24.2%	15.0%	22.7%
Once every two months	25.9%	30.0%	31.3%	21.2%	40.0%	13.6%
Once a month or more	48.1%	32.5%	15.6%	18.2%	5.0%	4.5%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure Two: Frequency of cinema-going by age (chi-square = 0.00)

The results also suggested that the most frequent cinema-goers were those who visited multiplexes, whereas the Phoenix arts cinema attracted the least frequent cinema-goers (and had the oldest audience profile). The average party size was largest for the multiplexes, with those going to the Warner Village were most likely to participate in another activity on their night out at the cinema, suggesting those visiting a multiplex in a leisure park are the most likely to go for a drink or meal before or afterwards. These results suggested that the twenty-two screens owned by the major circuits in Leicester accounted for 88% of admissions in the city, with the other six screens accounting for 12% (which accords with the suggestion that modern multiplexes generate twice as many admissions per screen than other cinemas). But a key finding was that proportions going to cinema from different areas did not match predictions, with inner city residents going to the cinema more frequently than expected, and those in the outer suburb much less frequently than predicted (see Figure Three). While some of this variation could be explained by variations in age across these three study areas, this implies that where someone lives is profoundly important in shaping cinema-going habits. This was not simply due to proximity to cinemas or car ownership rates in the three study areas -- far from it -- but appeared to be connected to the nature of the "journey to cinema" (specifically, whether it was seen as being a straightforward or pleasurable journey to the cinema or whether it involved negotiating unknown or "dangerous" areas). Given this, residents in each area exhibited significantly different social routines, the likelihood of going to the cinema rather than going to the pub, for a meal or to a club varied according to someone's place of residence (see Figure Four). For instance, those in the outer suburban areas were more likely to go out in the evening to a "local" pub (for most, something that involved a short drive or walk) than to drive to a cinema.

	Outer Suburb	Gentrified Suburb	Inner city area
Never	28.6%	6.7%	11.9%

Once a year or less	14.3%	18.0%	19.0%
Once every six months	26.5%	21.3%	9.5%
Once every couple of months	16.3%	31.5%	26.2%
Once a month or more	14.3%	22.5%	33.3%
	100%	100%	100%

Figure Three: Frequency of cinema going by area (chi-square = 0.08)

	Outer suburb	Gentrified suburb	Inner city area	Total
Restaurant	31.3%	36.4%	20.5%	31.4%
Pub	29.2%	22.7%	25.6%	25.1%
Cinema	10.4%	13.6%	15.4%	13.1%
Concert/live arts	10.4%	10.2%	5.1%	9.1%
Shopping	6.3%	-	23.1%	7.4%
Nightclub	2.1%	3.4%	-	2.3%
Sports	2.1%	4.5%	-	2.9%
Bowling	-	1.1%	5.1%	1.7%
Other	8.3%	6.8%	5.1%	6.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure Four: Principal social activity on last evening out by area (chi-square 0.06)

Exploring these discrepancies, the reasons for selecting a particular cinema were also explored, with the fact that a cinema was showing a specific film being cited most frequently (70%), followed by the (often incorrect) judgement that a cinema was the nearest to a respondent's place of residence, was in a safe location and offered easy parking. As such, journey to the cinema, car parking and safety all appear important factors that may be discouraging people from venturing out, with cost of tickets and concessions much less important. However, cross-tabulations of the last cinema visited with respondents' reasons for visiting suggested significant differences between cinemas. For example, the proportions claiming they visited a cinema because it was their nearest varied from 74% for the Odeon to 4% for the Warner Village. Similarly, multiplex cinemas were more likely to be visited by those claiming that convenient parking was important to them. The only other reason which varied significantly across the different cinemas was friendly atmosphere, which was mentioned by 60% of Phoenix Arts visitors but only 18% of multiplex users.

Overall, this suggests whether a particular film is being shown is the most important factor encouraging people to visit a specific cinema, but when that film is being shown at more than one location (which is often the case) then factors of access, parking, atmosphere and location help consumers decide between one cinema and another. In consequence, the frequency with which an individual goes to the cinema varies according to their normal "cinema of choice", the ease or difficulty which they have reaching it and the ambience they feel it offers (Hubbard, 2002). The net result of this is that cinemas in Leicester tend to have contrasting audience profiles. For example, a higher percentage of the most frequent cinema-goers attend the Warner Village rather than the Odeon, although the latter attracts a higher proportion of more occasional cinema-goers, students and the carless. Those going to the Warner Villages multiplex were most likely to go in a group, and most participate in another activity on their night out at the cinema, suggesting those visiting a multiplex in a peripheral leisure park are the most likely to go for a drink or meal before or afterwards. The Phoenix arts cinema attracted the least frequent cinema-goers (and also had the oldest audience profile). The cinemas specializing in Bollywood films were exclusively frequented by Indian groups, though those who visited these cinemas also tended to visit multiplexes (though not the Phoenix). The fact that non-white groups in Leicester tend to use a fairly diverse range of cinemas is an interesting finding, though overall there was no significant difference in cinema-going frequency between white and non-white consumers.

Further analysis of the survey returns suggested Leicester's multiplex cinemas are frequented by a variety of groups, but mainly members of "family" households. Post-family or non-family households appeared much less likely to frequent multiplexes. Here, it is particularly interesting that multiplexes are sold on the idea that they offer "family" entertainment: the idea that these new spaces offer a safe alternative for parents seeking to amuse their children is one that developers seem keen to exploit through the provision of child-oriented facilities and themed areas. However, the data suggested that families rarely go *en masse* to these cinemas; it is more likely that one parent or guardian takes a child or group of children to a multiplex during the day; in the evening 98% of trips to multiplexes involved a couple or group of adults. As such, references to multiplex cinemas as "family" spaces seems to be a shorthand for the kind of ambience that developers are trying to create; an emphasis on "family values" creates the right place image for attracting certain types of consumers, even if, in practice, relatively few people actually go out as families (and those that do rarely enjoy the experience). As such, multiplex cinemas effectively link the desires and fantasies of "family" life to a specific (and sanitised) leisure space. In the survey, the city centre arts cinema, by way of contrast, appeared more popular with elderly, non-heterosexual and single people (who may feel excluded from the "family" spaces of the multiplex). This, it might be suggested, is both due to the product it offers as well as its location in the city centre. This underlines the fact that it is both the film and the place where it is shown that encourages people to participate (or not) in the collective rituals of cinema-going (a point often overlooked in audience studies -- see Moores, 1997).

Overall, the survey in Leicester provided a more detailed and spatially-specific account of cinema-going than has been offered by any survey in the past. While this article has provided only a brief snapshot of the results, one important conclusion to be drawn is that multiplex cinemas do not appear to be widening participation in cinema-going, and are mainly increasing the frequency of cinema-going among certain social groups. These social groups tend to be the younger, more affluent members of society, particularly those who identify with the Disney-esque family atmosphere of multiplex cinemas (Hannigan, 1998). In effect, these are the consumers who have rejected city living, preferring ex-urban forms of leisure that offer escapism from the diversity of metropolitan ways of life. The survey suggests that these consumers are not drawn uniformly from different areas of the city, with a person's place of residence impacting on their likelihood of frequenting such out-of-town locations. Here, it is not simply distance from these facilities or car ownership *per se* that is significant in shaping rituals of cinema-going. Instead, the survey suggested that the use of particular leisure sites can only be understood in relation to the wider geographies of the city, with it being important to explore the extent to which people from particular parts of the city feel comfortable in different leisure spaces.

Conclusion

Rather than focusing on individual, embodied experiences of cinemas (Hubbard, forthcoming), or, for that matter, the design of new cinemas (Hubbard, 2002), this paper has considered the location of cinemas in the city, suggesting that there are important relationships between the decentring of film exhibition and the resurgence in cinema attendance. The city has always been described as restless in its capacity to act as the setting for new activities and new ways of life. This restlessness is currently manifest in the production of distinctly new landscapes, such as retail parks, themed malls, leisure parks, heritage centres and entertainment complexes. Taking its place among this panoply of consumption spaces, the multiplex cinema is implicated in the processes that both mirror and mould urban life. Writing in the context of Los Angeles, Soja argues that the city is thus responding to changing consumer desires at the same time that it shapes those desires, aestheticising particular cultural tastes and excluding or marginalising others (Soja, 1989). While Leicester is not Los Angeles, and it is clearly dangerous to generalise from the North American metropolis to British towns and cities, the evidence here supports the idea that multiplexes are an important part of a post-modern city that is characterised by a patchwork of different leisure spaces apparently catering to different consumer groups. Hence, while the modernist city was characterised by a multiplicity of cinemas in the city centre that brought together different social factions, the fragmentation of city space and the emergence of multiplex cinemas on the periphery has radically altered the patterns of cinema-going characteristic of different social groups (with some now having few viable options for cinema-going).

Hence, by bringing key post-modern motifs together -- inclusion and exclusion, centrality and decentralisation, flexibilism and massification -- this paper has ultimately suggested that multiplex cinemas are not widening participation in cinema-going, but merely increasing the frequency of cinema-going among particular consumer groups. This arguably perpetuates a key divide in the consumer society between those seduced by the fantasies of post-modern life and those repressed, a divide that Clarke and Bradford argue is now more important than any class divide (Clarke and Bradford, 1998). There are clear parallels to be drawn here between the geographies of cinema and those of retailing as the viability of in-town single-screen or independent cinemas becomes threatened by out-of-town multiplex cinemas which promise a more comfortable, leisured experience. Indeed, geographers have noted that out-of-town shopping is most popular amongst affluent social groups, and the results reported here begins to suggest that this is also the case for cinema-going, leaving older "high street" cinemas reliant on a limited (and often less affluent) customer base (Thomas and Bromley, 2000). However, the suggestion that affluent consumers only frequent multiplex cinemas showing Hollywood product while a less affluent group consumes arthouse and specialist Bollywood film in city centre cinemas appears to seriously exaggerate the socio-economic polarisation evident between different spaces of film exhibition. Indeed, a careful analysis of the Leicester data highlights the contradictory nature of cinema-going, in that many of the most affluent consumers shun out-of-town locations in favour of arthouse venues, underlining that both the film and the place where it is consumed are significant in shaping rituals of cinema-going. Likewise, multiplexes in Leicester often show Bollywood films, and are frequented by non-white ethnic groups for both Hollywood and Bollywood screenings (albeit that the experience of watching a Bollywood film at a multiplex is very different than in a dedicated Bollywood cinema). In the final analysis, this stresses that while the contemporary city is typified by fragmentation and the distanciation of different cultural experiences, it is the ability of post-modern leisure spaces to accommodate difference within sameness that makes contemporary leisure so seductive and, ultimately, profitable.

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