

From National Policy to Local Practices: Developments in Art Cinema Policy, Models and Exhibition Practices

From the production of the first projection equipment in the 1890s exhibition has formed a major aspect of what gradually became known as the film industry. Later classified into the tripartite formation of production, distribution and exhibition, the three were barely distinguishable when the Lumière brothers first brought their *actualities* to Britain in 1896. As noted on numerous occasions, most recently by Stuart Hanson in his history of cinema exhibition in Britain, one of the most significant developments with regard film exhibition was the establishment of fairground bioscopes.¹ Ideally suited to the new medium, fairgrounds provided a cheap and accessible way to screen projected images that can legitimately be claimed as amongst the first instances of ‘foreign film’ exhibition in Britain.

In their in-depth study of the history of film consumption in Nottingham, Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire note how ‘from 1897 [...] one of the prime sites of film consumption was Goose Fair’.² A travelling fair that operated in the city for three days in early October, Goose Fair was an ideal opportunity to introduce film to paying audiences. Dating back to the 13th century and taking place the week after the Goose Fair, Hull Fair presented a similar chance to present to the population of Hull examples of the same ‘films’.³ In the move from music halls to fairgrounds to permanent cinemas,

¹ Stuart Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

² Mark Jancovich, and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003) p.54.

³ Both Goose Fair and Hull Fair accommodated showmen who exhibited ‘actualities’ as fairground bioscopes. One such showman, Randall Williams, was the first to offer such

it should be noted that there was a plethora of disparate exhibition venues for cinema. Consequently, there was never a total absence of films from other countries being exhibited in Britain. However, it is only recently that work on alternative forms of cinema has begun to compensate for the neglect such exhibition has received in academic research.

This neglect of the history of the exhibition sector in Britain explains why existing work is largely limited to only a single model of specialist, minority-oriented film exhibition. Both Jen Samson and Jamie Sexton address the origin of The Film Society in London, established by a number of high-profile journalists, critics and actors, which inaugurated a template for the exhibition of art cinema in Britain.⁴ Yet serious consideration of the operation of film societies and the screening of art cinema outside London remains scarce. The emphasis placed upon the state provision of art cinemas throughout Britain, inaugurated by the regional film theatre initiative in 1966, means that the years between the creation of the BFI in 1933 and the opening of the first regional film theatre in 1966 appears as a period with an absence of policy and provision. There was never simply an absence of provision, however.

With this in mind, this chapter seeks to establish the extent of cultural provision in the city of Hull in relation to art cinema, and to examine how the specific geographical opening, operation and closure of many of the city's mainstream cinemas affected the provision of art films in the region. It will be argued that, far from being neglected in terms of art cinema provision, Hull offered a number of opportunities to experience art cinema but was, at the same time, never overly committed to such exhibition. Both of these factors make the establishment of a regional film theatre in the

a show at Hull Fair in October 1896. Robert Curry, *Last Complete Performance: In Memory of Hull's Cinemas* (Hull: Hutton Press, 1992), p.6.

⁴ Jen Samson, 'The Film Society, 1925-1939' in Charles Barr, ed. *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986); Jamie Sexton, 'The Emergence of an Alternative Film Culture in Inter-War Britain' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2002).

city in 1969 interesting in terms of how national and local government perceived the roles of art cinema.

Whilst the BFI early remit incorporated an educational agenda designed to inculcate an appreciation of film into the nation's youth, the film society movement offered an example of cultural provision in towns and cities that the BFI would later emulate to a large degree with the regional film theatres. Paradoxically, this often led to the collapse of the film society in the host town or city. This replacement of local exhibition with a metropolitan template can be seen as symptomatic of a change in attitude towards the use and value of cultural provision during the period, one that created a number of tensions in its application.

The period between the end of the Second World War (1945) and the opening of the Hull Film Theatre (1969) stands as one in which various socio-economic factors led to the gradual decline in cinema attendance in the city, resulting in the closure of twenty-three of the city's cinemas. Simultaneous with such atrophy, however, there appeared enough interest in the exhibition of art cinema in the city to warrant the building of Hull Film Theatre in 1968, the first new cinema built in the city for twelve years. The historical antecedents leading up to this decision can be approached from a number of perspectives that combined to shape the future provision of art cinema in a city that, like the majority of cities in Britain, has no overwhelming claim to a cultural cinematic heritage.

In order to properly situate the thesis with regard to its geographical location, the chapter will firstly present an introduction to Hull as a city whose development significantly affected its provision of art cinema exhibition in the 20th century. To claim that this provision was absent before the flowering of the film society movement, internationally, nationally and locally, would be wrong. Just as the little theatre movement in America in general, the Museum of Modern Art in New York in particular

and the Film Society in London and numerous other examples attest, the provision of exhibition outlets for non-mainstream film was beginning to flourish well before the birth of the British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS) in September 1945 heralded an acknowledgement of the interest in such exhibition. In this regard Hull was no exception.

In order to place this provision in context the chapter will next move to consider the origins of art cinema exhibition in Hull and present a cinema history of the city up until the opening of the Hull Film Theatre in 1969. By providing a history of the commercial cinemas in Hull, a picture of how the city developed its exhibition sector will be placed in the context of its geographical location. This history will be linked to Hull's cinema chains and the local responses to declining cinema admissions. Running parallel to the commercial cinemas in the city, the Hull and District Film Society (HDFS) offered an alternative exhibition experience based upon the film society movement that spread throughout the country in the 1940s. Before considering this crucial aspect of provision in the city, the origins of the film society movement also need to be discussed in order to fully appreciate the extent to which such an exhibition practice was moulded by its origin. To this end the chapter will next address the establishment of The Film Society in London in the 1920s so as to document how much this template of art cinema exhibition set the register for both the film society movement and the regional film theatres.

Discussing the Film Society, it will be seen that, alongside notions of exclusivity and access to previously unseen cinema, policy played a significant role in art cinema provision. It was policy decisions made by government that led to Sunday openings, prohibitive trade practices and the focus upon film production at the expense of exhibition. These decisions had a noticeable effect upon both national and local

provision of art cinema in Britain and to place both in context the third part of this chapter will discuss these policy decisions and their effect.

Having placed policy as a crucial factor in the provision of both commercial and art cinema exhibition the chapter will return to Hull as its subject and chart the establishment and struggle for survival of the HDFS in light of the topics previously discussed. The chapter will also come full circle to address how the commercial cinemas of Hull responded to the film society mode of exhibition when they adopted similar strategies in the form of commercial continental cinemas. Competing with commercial cinema, influenced by the model of the London Film Society and impacted upon by governmental policies, the regional specialist cinema of Humberside will be shown to have developed, therefore, not in isolation, but as part of a much more complex, ambivalent picture. By emphasising such matters it will be shown that, far from being an attempt to generate a more cine-literate public, art cinema exhibition in the city developed from a complex negotiation of space, place and policy.

The Birth of Hull

Situated on the east coast of England on the confluence of the Humber estuary and the River Hull, the development of the modern city of Hull was significantly determined by its location. Due to its geographical position, the estuarial location of the medieval town of Wyke gave rise to the growth of the city of Hull as a major British port.⁵ Dating from the time of Domesday in 1086, through the medieval to the modern period, Hull's identity has been linked to its economy, which in the case of a city so dependent upon

⁵ The origins of modern Hull can be traced through the names used to describe the area from a medieval settlement called Myton (*lit.* farm at the confluence of rivers) through Wyke (*lit.* creek) to the free borough of Kingston-upon-Hull (King's-town upon Hull) granted by royal charter in 1299.

the storage and passage of goods through its ports, resolved into one of insularity and partial self-segregation.

Building its economy on its links with the fishing industry and its trade with European and Baltic ports, Hull's geographical boundaries were shaped by this access to the sea as both a boon and a threat. Situated as it is on the north bank of the Humber estuary, a natural fortification was partly in place and was further emphasised when protective walls were built between the 13th and 17th centuries to avoid invasion and protect the city. Whilst necessary to provide a measure of security in uncertain times, this protectionism played a large role in defining the subsequent character of the city, so much so that, as J. North observes 'the lasting impression [of the city] is still one of a hitherto underdeveloped estuarine region on the edge of a national space'.⁶

During the years in which Hull sought to both protect itself from aggressive invasion from the land, and to expand its influence over the sea, an identity arose in which Hull became a city defined by the manufacture, storage and transport of goods destined for use elsewhere. The growth of Hull during the 19th and 20th centuries was as a city isolated from much of the rest of the country due to poor road and rail communication, and therefore heavily reliant upon its port and manufacture economy. The physical spread of the city was restricted to development north and west from the 'old town' area, where much of the city's industry and cultural institutions were located, because the city sits on the north bank of the Humber estuary and land east of the city was limited by poor quality and availability. These factors coalesce to present a city that, while not unique or especially representative, is significant in highlighting how cultural forces often conflict with political, social and economic factors to determine the course of cultural provision.

⁶ J. North, 'Development of the Humber Region during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Humber Perspectives: A Region Through the Ages* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1990), p.435.

Between the end of First World War in 1918 and the start of the Second World War in 1939 Hull became known as 'Britain's third port' for its easy access to the North Sea and its trade in wool, refined petrol, wheat, oil-seeds, dairy produce, wood import and cotton and coal export.⁷ These light industries gave rise to a number of companies that sought to exploit the location of the city as a major port. Reckitt and Coleman (pharmaceuticals), Smith and Nephew (surgical goods), Rank Corporation (flour production), Blundell and Spencer (paint manufacture) and the Ellerman Wilson Line (shipping) all developed their respective interests based upon the position of Hull as a port city through the importation of raw materials and the export of finished products. Because of the transitory nature of the city's industries there was a noticeable lack of heavy industry in Hull, which was reflected in steady employment during the depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

This relatively stable economy of the inter-war years meant that there was an increase in population which was met by extensive municipal house-building in the city. The 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act (the 'Addison' act) had provided the framework for a significant house-building project that saw over 10,000 new Corporation homes built between 1919 and 1939.⁸ As the geographical location of the city restricted growth to two directions '96% [of new houses] were built as municipal suburbia on six new estates situated around the periphery of the city'.⁹

⁷ Hull was known as an 'overside dock', meaning cargo could be discharged over the side of ships onto 'lighters' hence avoiding dock duties and therefore becoming a cheap and convenient port.

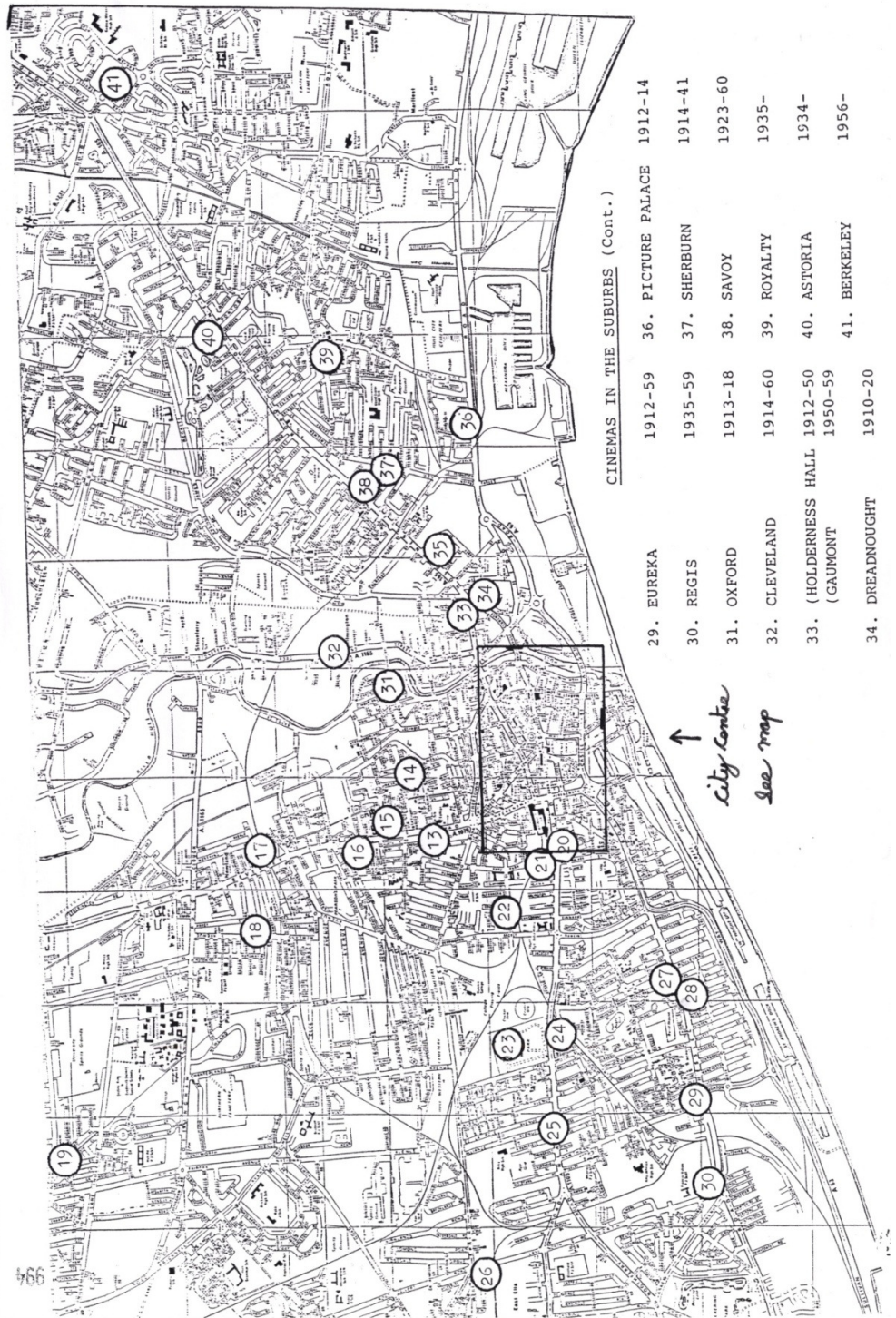
⁸ M. T. Wild, 'The Geographical Shaping of Hull from Pre-industrial to Modern Times', *Humber Perspectives: A Region Through the Ages*, p.262. Before the 'Addison Act' the corporation had built only 181 dwellings.

⁹ Ibid. The six new estates, in order of size, were: East Hull estate (3019 houses), North Hull estate (2336), Orchard Park (1741), Gipsyville (1380), Greatfield (823) and Derringham Bank (572). Later local authority housing projects developed between 1945-64 included Bilton Grange (2839), Longhill (2088) and Boothferry (1694). The most controversial estate built during this period was the 'satellite' community of Bransholme (9240 houses) which was the largest council-funded housing development in Europe. Ibid., 267.

Often identified nationally with its fishing and port industry, the image of Hull suffered with the decline in income imposed by North Sea fishing restrictions, which resulted in an economic downturn in the region in the mid-20th century. The growth of the city (and the decline that followed) can usefully be traced through the city's cinema landscape and offers an insight into how cultural provision was positioned (both geographically and figuratively) in relation to the perceived needs of the city and its population.

Any Old Port in a Storm: Cinema Exhibition in Hull

In 1938, at the height of cinema provision in the city, thirty-six cinemas were available to a population of approximately 220,000 [for an illustration of the geographical spread and concentration of cinemas in Hull see 'Map 1. Hull commercial cinemas (city)' and 'Map 2. Hull commercial cinemas (city centre), on pages 113 and 114].



Map 1. Hull commercial cinemas (city).



Map 2. Hull commercial cinemas (city centre).

1. REGAL (NOW ABC) 1934-
2. THEATRE DE LUXE (CECIL (OLD)) 1911-24
1925-41
3. TOWER 1914-78
4. (KINEMA COLOUR PALACE (REGENT))
5. (HIPPODROME (PICTURE PLAY HOUSE)) 1913
1913-41
6. ST. GEORGE'S HALL 1912-14
7. (GRAND CINEMA (DORCHESTER)) 1930-35
1935-79
8. (MAJESTIC (CRITERION)) 1915-35
1935-74
9. (PRINCES HALL (CURZON)) 1910-55
1955-60
10. CENTRAL 1915-41
11. GAIETY 1913-15
12. CECIL 1956-

A-Hull Edmo Docks

T-Tivoli

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|---------|---|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 13. STRAND | 1914-60 | 17. MAYFAIR | 1929-64 | 22. (KINEMATOGRAPH HALL (DREADNAUGHT (LONDESBOROUGH)) | 1912-13
1913-22
1926-59 | 26. PRIORITY | 1938-59 |
| 14. WATERLOO | 1920-59 | 18. MONICA | 1914-61 | 23. GARDEN | 1912-14
1914-33 | 27. WEST HULL HALL BOULEVARD | |
| 15. NATIONAL | 1915-41 | 19. REX | 1935-59 | 24. WEST PARADE PALACE | 1912-13 | 28. (ELECTRIC PICTURE THEATRE (MAGNET (PICTURE PALACE (-COMBINED INTO 'LANGHAM')) | 1910-12
1912-30
1912-30
1924-61 |
| 16. (COLISEUM (RIALTO (NATIONAL)) | 1912-20
1920-42
1942-61 | 20. CIRCUS | 1910-18 | 25. CARLTON | 1914-59 | | |
| | | 21. PAVILION | 1915-17 | | 1928 | | |

CINEMAS IN THE SUBURBS

City-centre and suburban cinemas constructed during the inter-war years catered to the increase in demand created by the population increase described above, and to the associated changes in patterns of leisure and consumption.¹⁰ The particular character of many of these cinemas was directly attributable to their location in the expanding landscape of the city. Doreen Massey has noted with regard to localities that ‘identities/entities, the relations “between” them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive’.¹¹ The spatiality of Hull’s cinema landscape and its effect upon the provision of art cinema are testaments to this.

With over thirty cinemas operating in Hull during the inter-war years (1918 – 1939), the city had substantial provision for mainstream films. The screening of non-mainstream films, those that had yet to attach to a label inferring their content or site of exhibition, found an outlet in two distinct exhibition contexts: the local film society, and commercial cinemas that moved to the screening of foreign-language films, the so-called ‘commercial continentals’ (mainstream cinemas that occasionally screened foreign films). In the latter category the Central cinema (colloquially known as the ‘Cosy’ due to a coal fire in the foyer was one of the city’s oldest and most centrally-located cinemas) had a history of innovative operation due to a subscription scheme that operated from its opening in 1916. The Central was known as ‘the virtual “home” of the horror pictures’ throughout the thirties and developed a policy of screening ‘continental’ cinema long before the establishment of a film society in the city.¹² Built in 1916 and bought by Hull Cinemas Ltd in 1927, the Central played a significant role in the screening of foreign films in the city. The notoriety attached to specific cinemas, like

¹⁰ For a consideration of changing patterns of leisure and consumption see: Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman, *The Leisure Shock* (Eyre Methuen: London, 1981); R. Fisherman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic, 1987); Peter J. Taylor, ‘What’s Modern About the Modern World-System? Introducing Ordinary Modernity through World Hegemony’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 3:2 (1996), pp. 260-286.

¹¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p.10.

¹² *Hull Times*, 21 June 1968, p.13.

the Central, regarding the exhibition of specific genres enabled associations to be made by both audiences and programmers.

With such associations an audience could discriminate between specific theatres and their programmes while the theatres gained a regular clientele based upon this connection. These associations could prove restrictive, however, in that a steady stream of films could not always be guaranteed. With this in mind, coupled with the similarities between the Universal cycle of horror films in the 1930s and German Expressionism, the Central often programmed foreign films, by the 1930s known as ‘Continental cinema,’ to the trade and public. Alongside a regular local clientele there was also significant patronage from the many trawlers that docked in Hull, often from the continent, whose crews attended for the warmth of the Central and perhaps found a familiar type of cinema on the screen.

Managed by Hull Cinemas Ltd, this policy, whilst no doubt enlightening many, can be classed as having at least three basic impetuses. Firstly, the lack of ‘cinema specific’ films, those films that had over time come to be associated with a particular theatre, meant that similar product was desirable. Secondly, the style of much ‘continental’ cinema at the time meant that a link between the horror films emerging from Hollywood and those originating from Europe could reasonably be formed. Thirdly, the desire to differentiate products from one cinema to the next, whereby a certain type of film became associated with a specific theatre, was an astute business policy in what amounted to a cinema circuit. This limited and rare example of the programming of art cinema in Hull offers one instance of cultural provision in the city that met a need brought about by specific local circumstances.

The consolidation of cinema ownership in pre- and post-war Hull saw five companies emerge as the main exhibitors within the city. Comparable with other provincial circuits around the country, Hull Cinemas Ltd, Associated Hull Cinemas Ltd,

Hull City and Suburban Cinemas Ltd, Hull Picture Playhouses Ltd and Morton's Pictures Ltd all competed for patronage by Hull's quarter of a million inhabitants.¹³ Hull Cinemas Ltd pursued an aggressive acquisition policy up until the late 1960s. Alongside Hull City and Suburban Cinemas Ltd, which had consolidated its position in 1935 by purchasing 'Hull's five new luxury cinemas' and Associated Hull Cinemas Ltd, they operated what amounted to an oligopoly with control of three quarters of the city's cinemas between them.¹⁴ Resisting decline, Hull Cinemas Ltd took particular pride in the cinematic heritage of Hull.

The decline was not helped during the Second World War, when Hull suffered severe damage due to its coastal location. Easily accessible across the channel 'its position near the coast and on the River Hull made it easy to find, and it was therefore often used by the Luftwaffe for operational training'.¹⁵ Hull's position as an entry-point to the north of England therefore greatly affected its pre and post-war identity. Gillet and MacMahon further note that during the war

over 5000 houses were destroyed, with half the shopping area, 3,000,000 sq. ft. of factory space, including two or three flour mills and several oil and cake mills, twenty-seven churches and fourteen school and hospital buildings.¹⁶

¹³ The size of Hull's two leading exhibition circuits, Hull Cinemas Ltd and Associated Hull Cinemas Ltd, with eleven cinemas each at their peak, is comparable with other provincial circuits around the country such as Evington (Leicester), W J Speakman (Liverpool), S Graham (Nottingham), Buxton (Manchester), H Bancroft (Wisbech), E C Clayton (Sheffield) and Eagle Picturedromes (Wigan). Alongside Hull City and Suburban Cinemas Ltd, Hull Picture Playhouses Ltd and Morton's Pictures Ltd, other smaller exhibitors were Savoy (Hull) Ltd, Strand (Hull) Picture Theatre Ltd, Kingston Varieties Co Ltd, Hull Hippodrome Ltd and Haltemprice Cinemas Ltd. Curry, *Last Complete Performance*.

¹⁴ Hull's 'Five New Luxury Cinemas', bought by Hull City and Suburban Cinemas Ltd, were the Astoria, Regal, Regis, Rex and Royalty (with the Regal in the nearby town of Beverley also included in the deal). *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 November 1935, p.14.

¹⁵ E. Gillett and K.A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), p. 458.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 455.

Calculated at adjusted prices for 1952, approximately £20,000,000 worth of damage was inflicted upon Hull during the war. Wartime civilian advice, whilst always in the best interest, was not always prescient. One such notice, declaring ‘remember, you are safer in the cinema than in the street’ proved fatal when, during heavy bombardment on 7th and 8th May 1941, six Hull cinemas were destroyed (five others being severely damaged) with a huge loss of life.¹⁷ The Cecil, owned by Hull Cinemas Ltd, was one such cinema and housed the offices of eleven of the company’s other cinemas. Due to the bombing all records were lost, leaving an incomplete record of the city’s cinematic heritage. Due to this devastation, Hull survived the war with only twenty-five cinemas from a 1938 high of thirty-six. The pattern of decline seen throughout the country in the following period was therefore pre-empted by the loss of these cinemas, which post-war austerity could ill afford to remedy [to gauge the rate of construction and decline of Hull’s commercial cinemas see ‘Table 2. Significant opening and closing dates in chronological order (Hull commercial cinemas)’ on page 119].

This did not prevent an attempt at rebuilding the fortunes for cinema in Hull, however. Known as Hull’s ‘Mr Cinema’, Brinley Evans, the managing director of Hull Cinemas Ltd, was a major force in the exhibition network that catered for Hull’s cinema-going population and the man responsible for the only two new cinemas to be built in Hull between 1945 and 1969.

¹⁷ The worst bombing as far as Hull’s cinemas were concerned occurred on the nights of 5th May and 17th July 1941 when 378 German planes dropped 316 tons of high-explosive bombs on the city. Six cinemas were completely destroyed (the Cecil, Central, National, Picture Playhouse, Ritz and Sherburn) with five others partially damaged (the Carlton, Cleveland, Palace Theatre, Savoy and Tivoli). Ironically four of the destroyed cinemas were showing, or had just shown, Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* and, ‘there was great trepidation when the staff [of the Savoy] found they were to show Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* as it seemed every cinema to show that film in Hull ended up being bombed’. The Savoy did subsequently receive bomb damage but managed to survive. The shell of the National cinema destroyed during these bombings still stands and has recently received listed status. Curry, *Last Complete Performance*, p.68.

<u>Hull Cinema</u>	<u>Opening Date</u>	<u>Closing Date</u>
Mayfair	07 th October 1929	
Grand Theatre Cinema	1 st September 1930	
Boulevard Electric Picture Palace		1933
Regal	26 th January 1934	
Astoria	30 th July 1934	
Rex	03 rd August 1935	
Royalty	17 th August 1935	
Regis	05 th September 1935	
Priory	13 th October 1938	
Cecil (Theatre de Luxe) *		07 th May 1941**
National Picture Theatre		07 th May 1941**
Picture Playhouse		07 th May 1941**
Sherburn		07 th May 1941**
Central		17 th July 1941**
Ritz (East Hull Picturedrome)		17 th July 1941**
Tivoli Continental Cinema (Tivoli Music Hall)		September 1954
Cecil	28 th November 1955	
Berkeley	12 th November 1956	
West Park Palace		4 th January 1959
Londesborough (Dreadnought / Kinematograph Hall)		17 th January 1959
Priory		1 st February 1959
Eureka Picture Palace		14 th February 1959
Waterloo		24 th October 1959
Rex		24 th October 1959
Gaumont (Holderness Hall)		21 st November 1959
Curzon (Princes Hall)		09 th January 1960
Cleveland Picture House		30 th January 1960
Savoy		10 th July 1960
Strand		25 th October 1960
National (Rialto / Coliseum)		22 nd July 1961
Monica		21 st October 1961
Langham (Hessle Road Picture Palace / Magnet Picture Palace / Electric Picture Palace)		28 th October 1961
Astoria		07 th June 1963
Mayfair		29 th November 1964
Hull Continental Palace (Palace Theatre)		24 th July 1965
Royalty		2 nd April 1966
Carlton		8 th April 1967
Berkeley		30 th September 1967
Criterion (Majestic)		14 th June 1969
Dorchester (Grand Theatre Cinema)		25 th June 1977
Regent (Kinemacolour Palace)		16 th September 1978
Tower		16 th September 1978

*Previous names for cinemas are given in parenthesis

**Destroyed by heavy bombing

Table 2. Significant opening and closing dates in chronological order (Hull commercial cinemas).

After ‘twelve years bargaining with the [Hull] Corporation, Mr Evans obtained another site for the new Cecil’, which happened to be directly opposite the old Cecil cinema which was one of the cinemas destroyed during the war.¹⁸ With the original Cecil dating from 1914, the city centre location of the new Cecil, opened in November 1955, was significant to the population of Hull. Not only was it seen as a sign of economic upturn for the city as a whole but also, with lineage of name and location, as a message that the population could not be cowed for long.

Attendant to this sense of national and local pride, a forthright promotion of local achievement is evident in the building of these cinemas and by association, Hull, relative to the country as a whole, and London in particular. This sense of local pride and national status was reflected in the frequent recourse to discourses of ‘firsts’ in relation to the state of national exhibition. The new Cecil was not only ‘the first [cinema] to be built on a new site since the war anywhere in England’, but it also possessed ‘the largest CinemaScope screen in the country’.¹⁹ This sense of the city’s status as unique, not so much in relation to other cities, but stemming from a desire for self-promotion, can also be seen in the claim that

[The Regal] became a provincial venue for British film premieres for those films receiving their first showing outside London, such as H.G. Wells’ *The Shape of Things to Come*, shown in the presence of its star, Margareta Scott.²⁰

Hull’s continuing associations with notions of national prestige, and the claim that, ‘technologically, Hull was a national leader’, were fully explored in the 1930s when the Majestic (later the Criterion) held ‘the first ever broadcast of music from a cinema [in which] the whole of the music accompanying Lon Chaney’s *The Hunchback*

¹⁸ *Flashback* (65), 2 January 1999, p.13.

¹⁹ *Flashback* (115), 22 February 2003, p.8.

²⁰ *Hull Times*, 18 November 1961, p.9.

of *Notre Dame* was relayed by the BBC'.²¹ Continuing the emphasis upon innovation and achievement, Brinley Evans, who had built the 2,800 seat Langham 'one of the biggest as well as one of the most opulent cinemas *anywhere* in the provinces' and 'quite equal to anything in the North of England' in the early thirties, followed the (re)building of the Cecil with the only other new cinema to be built in Hull after the war, the Berkeley.²²

Built on the Bilton Grange Estate, part of the post-war suburbanisation programme familiar country-wide, the 1,200 seat Berkeley was designed to replicate the success of the new Cecil, yet on the outskirts of the city. Unfortunately this optimism was unfounded. After the Berkeley was opened in November 1956 it was announced only just over two years later that in January 1959 it was to close, with Evans blaming a number of factors for its demise. Alongside 'the impact of television, especially ITV, which came to Hull at the time the cinema opened and the continued high level of entertainments tax', he also blamed the 'lack of support from the people on the East Hull estates [which had] killed the cinema'.²³ With increasing recourse to 'hire-purchase debts', Evans claimed that people 'have no money left for cinema visits. We just can't believe it. We are absolutely stunned. Everyone thought it was a certain winner' and that 'the only reason the cinema is closing is that people in the district do not support it'.²⁴

Although a wide range of socio-economic factors and shifts in leisure patterns are routinely cited in the decline of the film exhibition sector in Britain, an area not so well understood is the measures implemented to arrest such decline. The steady decline of cinema audiences in the 1950s led exhibitors to consider the economic feasibility of cinema exhibition as a business and caused many to adopt strategies designed to stem

²¹ *Hull Times*, 19 April 1967, p.5.

²² Curry, *Last Complete Performance*, p.37.

²³ *Flashback* (115), 22 February 2003, p.8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

such a trend. Illustrating this process The Berkeley cinema reopened eighteen months after its closure with a concession to an increasingly popular leisure-time pursuit, Sunday bingo sessions. Mr Evans was again aghast at the situation and regretted the decision because, with not a little self-denial, he claimed that in Hull ‘we are cinema people’.²⁵ As a mirror to the expansion of cinema into the suburbs in the thirties, the contraction of the city centre for leisure purposes resulted in the seeming systematic shrinkage of theatre numbers. As priorities changed for families, city amenities responded and whilst personal transport allowed greater mobility for the individual, collective means of transport suffered with both train and bus schedules adjusted to minimise waste and maximise profit. One of the factors in the decline of the Berkeley, for instance, was reported as being that ‘The Berkeley is not on a bus route and people don’t seem to want to walk’.²⁶ However, during the latter stages of decline, after the take-up of television and the novelty of newer leisure alternatives had levelled off, there still appeared a place for cinema, and this was the city centre.

Rising from the economic downturn for cinemas in the late 1950s and early 1960s, one Hull newspaper claimed that ‘there is now more demand for films, but people wanting a night out tend to make for the city centre for their entertainment’.²⁷ While the shift back to the centre is part of a complex web of social and economic circumstances, the perceived ‘demand for films’ in the city centre must surely, in some regard, be attributable to the closure of so many of the suburban cinemas in the first instance. Whilst a mini boom was assumed, this was in some small way a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The gradual decline in cinema attendance throughout the 1950s and 1960s continued to contribute to the closure of many of the city’s cinemas. One small measure

²⁵ *Hull Times*, 18 November 1961, p.9.

²⁶ *Hull Times*, 19 April 1967, p.5.

²⁷ *Hull Times*, 28 March 1967, p.11.

to arrest such decline was successfully won in 1967 when the Hull and District Branch of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association petitioned the local Watch Committee to abolish the farthing levy on seats for Sunday performances where it was noted that between £600 and £700 a year was collected, depending upon the amount of cinemas open. As many local authorities had already abandoned the charge at their own discretion, it was argued that a further reduction of the five existing cinemas in the city would be inevitable if the charge was to continue. This plea was heard by Hull Corporation's Watch Committee and it was subsequently decided that a nominal sum of £1 per annum for each cinema would fall within the law and permit the theatres to remain open on Sundays. Sadly this small victory on behalf of the exhibitors was of little consequence as Hull continued to lose cinemas throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, a time when the Hull Film Theatre was being planned, built and opened.

The Origins of Art Cinema Exhibition

The creation of alternative outlets to mainstream cinemas for the exhibition of specialist kinds of cinema appears to stem from a desire for more intellectual and demanding cinema. Yet the creation of such venues is as much grounded in notions of exclusivity as of enlightenment. Various social, economic, political and cultural factors prevented the cinema industries of many counties from developing in the early 20th century.²⁸ This

²⁸ For a thorough history of these factors (war, language, manufacture, politics etc.) see: David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (London: W.W.Norton, 1996); Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen*; Charles Barr, ed. *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986); Catherine Fowler, ed. *The European Cinema Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Andrew Higson, ed. *Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002); John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, eds. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert Murphy, ed. *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997); Anne Jäckel, *European Film Industries* (London: BFI, 2003).

situation, coupled with the ideological and industrial influence of American cinema, meant that the cinematic output of non-Anglophone territories had limited exposure on British cinema screens in the early part of the century. As distribution networks had yet to fully exploit the cultural output of foreign language cinema (accepting in this usage ‘foreign’ to mean non-English language cinema and that national perspectives vary from location to location), it was the interests of individuals and not business that led to the creation of the first ‘specialist’ organisation for the exhibition of cultural cinema in Britain, with ‘interest’ here being the operative word.

Formed in 1925, the Film Society was a London based non-profit company which had as its core a desire to exhibit films ‘which were in some degree interesting and which represent the work which has been done, or is being done experimentally in various parts of the world’.²⁹ The significance of the constituent members of the Film Society to the subsequent organisation of, not only itself, but the ‘creation of a minority film culture in Britain’, cannot be overlooked.³⁰ *Times* journalist Ivor Montagu, the actor Hugh Miller and the film critic for the *Spectator* and *Daily Mail*, Iris Barry, founded the society when their various roles in cultural pursuits led them to experience cinema unavailable in Britain. As Montagu himself admitted in the early 1930s, the inclusion of prestigious names such as Lord Ashfield, H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw on the society’s board originated because ‘guarantees of support were canvassed [...] to lend an air of respectability to the whole scheme’.³¹ Significantly, therefore, the (lack of) availability of films appears and catering to an elite audience appears to have been more of a spur for the creation of the society than the enlightenment of audience willing to experience non-English cinema.

²⁹ Lotte Reiniger quoted in Samson, ‘The Film Society, 1925-1939’, p.307.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

³¹ Ivor Montagu, ‘The Film Society, London’, *Cinema Quarterly*, 1:2 (Autumn 1932), p.44.

The Film Society believed that due to the distinctive aesthetic of much foreign cinema ‘it is in the nature of such films that they are commercially unsuitable for this country; and that is why they become the especial province of the Film Society’.³² Through connections with Lord Ashfield, and Montagu’s father Lord Swaythling, the society initially exhibited films at the New Gallery Kinema in Regent Street without charging for use of the premises. Notions of exclusivity and access from the (London Film Society) centre, therefore, shaped much of the subsequent debate about the lack of commitment on the part of distributors (renters) and exhibitors (cinemas) in obtaining and exhibiting specialist types of cinema.

The Film Society’s policy of deliberately programming films that had no formal distribution via recognised networks meant that, as a non-profit organisation, the society had to rely on the free loan of prints often procured by visits abroad by members of the society itself. Whilst selection was made by committee, the members of that committee and the nature of print acquisition can be seen to be such that individual taste, happenstance and convenience, rather than public education, became the structuring principle. Thus

films were chosen not on a basis of profitability or audience potential, but because the Film Society was founded ‘in order that works of interest in the study of cinematography, and not yet easily accessible, might be made available to its members’.³³

In pursuing this desire for access to such cinema the Society found itself in frequent battles with trade and press over its programming policy.

With the import of films by Pudovkin, Vertov, and Eisenstein, which had failed to receive certification by the British Board of Film Censors (later the British Board of Film Classification), the press claimed that, as Jen Samson notes ‘the Society had been

³² Samson, ‘The Film Society, 1925-1939’, p.307.

³³ Film Society document quoted in Samson, ‘The Film Society, 1925-1939’, p.308.

formed to “communise the country”³⁴ Equally incredulous was the industry itself, which ‘found it hard to understand why anyone would want to show *only* films that distributors were not interested in buying themselves’.³⁵ With such origins and organisation it is hardly surprising that, as Jamie Sexton highlights in his research on the emergence of an alternative British film culture, ‘as a members-only, class demarcated organization, the Society’s adversaries often charged it with elitism’.³⁶ In one sense mistrustful of the Society’s encroachment upon a potential audience, the industry was also mindful of the inherent censure of its own rental policy implied by the acquisition of foreign prints by the Film Society. Nevertheless the Film Society proved extremely popular with an opening audience on 25th October 1925 of 1,400.

Such was the success of the Film Society that others were bound to take notice. Capitalising upon a year-long tenure at a central London cinema, Elsie Cohen instigated the Academy cinema in Oxford Street in 1931, dedicated to the exhibition of European cinema. With an audience for alternative films now located (be it created or not), the industry responded. In 1934 the Curzon was built in Mayfair to compete in this increasingly specialised area (meaning both London and the exhibition of art cinema), with metropolitan areas such as Leeds and Manchester also considered as possible locations in which such cinemas might thrive. It was not until 1939, however, that another city was considered cosmopolitan enough to sustain a newly formed art-house cinema with the appropriately named Cosmo opening in Glasgow. This same year the Film Society itself ceased operation due to the outbreak of the war. Whilst the Film Society was the original organisation in Britain that sought an alternative space for the exhibition of non-mainstream film, it was no longer alone. Nevertheless it is misleading

³⁴ Ibid., 310.

³⁵ Ivan Butler, *To Encourage the Art of Film: the Story of the British Film Institute* (London: Robert Hale, 1971), p.17; original emphasis.

³⁶ Jamie Sexton, ‘The Film Society and the Creation of an Alternative Film Culture in Britain in the 1920s’, *Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930*, ed. Andrew Higson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p.294.

to suggest that the origin of the Film Society and its imitators, and the template they established, was one solely borne of a desire to exhibit underrepresented and unavailable films. The particular policy circumstances in which such venues had to operate also significantly shaped the provision of an alternative exhibition strategy and subsequently cemented the identity of what came to be called art-houses.

A number of national measures intended to regulate the operation of venues offering entertainment had a lasting effect upon the future of not only art cinema exhibition, but also the whole of the cinema exhibition sector. The 1909 Cinematograph Act was established to regulate the building and use of premises for the screening of films which, as a highly flammable substance, had caused some venues to be destroyed. Part of the scope of the act was the permitting of Sunday performances subject to safety requirements and the regulation of employment. Whilst this was often fiercely opposed on religious grounds in many regions, the 'temptation' to open was often too great. Whilst the 1909 act made the exhibition of films a commercial possibility, it also laid the grounds for the eventual development of the film society movement. The requirement of the act was that all premises dedicated to the exhibition of film be sufficiently safeguarded against combustion from the flammable nitrate used for film stock and be registered with the local authority. Any infrequent meeting comprised of a constituent body of members was exempt from such regulation, however, as it was not deemed to be a dedicated exhibitor. With such a gap in legislation, coupled with exhibitors' reluctance to open on Sundays due to the reduced audience and employment problems, the film society movement's desire to create an alternative and exclusive experience had its gestation in policy oversights and commercial expedience. Thus the effect of state policy on all sections of the film industry was sedimentary, building up

over the years with one act directly leading to another, often leaving the industry to follow in their wake.³⁷

Resisting Decline: National Policy and Local Entrenchment

The creation of the Sunday Entertainments Act 1932 consolidated the previous provisions on the 1909 Act and established a Cinematograph Fund whereby a percentage of the profits from Sunday screenings (no more than 5% of takings nor more than the Sunday profit) was to be used for ‘encouraging the use and development of the cinematograph as a means of entertainment and instruction’.³⁸ The money gathered by the fund subsequently funded the British Film Institute which was inaugurated the following year. The decision to open on a Sunday was contested by many, however, as demonstrated by one such letter of protest in the *Hull Daily Mail*, stating that ‘there is enough temptation in the world to drag people off the right path. Why make more?’³⁹

Although the result was the same, morality lost out to industrial relations when cinema

³⁷ Whereas the 1909 Cinematograph Act, with requirements for fire protection and registration of premises, had brought about a new era in cinema construction and profit, the introduction in December 1916 of the Entertainments Tax had lasting, detrimental, effects upon exhibitors. Introduced in wartime to supplement the ailing industry, the tax took the form of a percentage of admission profits based upon a sliding scale of seat prices. With a slight remission of tax at various periods the burden was too much for many cinemas whose owners blamed the tax as a significant contributory factor leading to the eventual decline of cinemas in the 1950s. When the tax was finally abolished in 1960 it was too late for many exhibitors. Allen Eyles, ‘The Spread of the Cinema in the 1930s’, *screenonline.org.uk* <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/cinemas/sect5.html>> [accessed 19 February 2007].

³⁸ The Sunday Entertainments Act 1932, HMSO (London: Public Records Office, 1932).

³⁹ *Hull Daily Mail*, 12 November 1938, p.8. Whilst not dissimilar to many other letters of the period, the signature ‘A Methodist’ and the coincidence of staunch Methodist J Arthur Rank’s birth in the city are worth mentioning, if only in passing. When the Odeon circuit came under control of Rank in 1941 a total of 303 Gaumont, 255 Odeon and 296 ABC cinemas, representing a fifth of the 4,700 screens in Britain, gave Rank a disproportionate power base due to their vertical integration. Allen Eyles, ‘The Spread of the Cinema in the 1930s’.

employees in Hull voted against Sunday opening in 1938. The fall in cinema admissions after 1946 took its toll nevertheless and many cinemas in Hull acquiesced to the inevitable and began Sunday openings. With this fall in admissions, coupled with disproportionate deals in favour of the distributor, exhibitors found it hard to justify their economic survival.

With the consolidation of British International Pictures (production), Wardour Films (rental) and Associated British Cinemas (exhibition) as the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), vertical integration of British film interests was achieved in the late 1920s. Nevertheless with competition being the key to market growth, there was room enough in Britain for others to share the stage. With the horizontal integration of the rental firms Gaumont, Ideal and W & F Film Services, with the Biocolour, General Theatres Corporation and Provincial Cinematograph Theatres exhibition circuits along with the subsequent countersignature of Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Pictures (production), the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation (GBPC) emerged as the other half of Britain's inter-war duopoly. The influence these organisations had upon the path that British film production and appreciation was to take cannot be overestimated. The influence (or *lack of* influence, in the case of Hull), of one man in particular is also crucial to understanding this path.

Born in Hull, J. Arthur Rank had a huge influence on the British film industry in the three crucial areas of production, distribution and exhibition, yet his impact upon his hometown was perhaps surprisingly negligible. From the start of film exhibition in Hull in the late 1890s, through to the late 1970s, the various cinemas of the city were operated by independent exhibitors. The major exhibition combines were therefore notable by their absence in the city. Due to the size and power of the main combines they could dictate not only the type of film that was made available, but the areas that this product would penetrate. By a variety of distribution practices they effectively

relegated first-run theatres to second-run status by withholding key films from the cinema screens of the city until these titles were exploited in other areas. This led in many instances to a bias in favour of certain metropolitan areas and a neglect of others, one of which was Hull.⁴⁰

Through exhibition outlets for their own productions, both Rank (who by the end of the 1930s owned the Gaumont and Odeon circuits) and ABC had guaranteed exposure, further consolidated by distribution deals with the major Hollywood studios. Due to expansionist policies, which at one point included the subsidiary Rank Film Distributors of America, Rank had negotiated with Twentieth Century-Fox, Disney, Universal, Columbia, Paramount and United Artists for distribution rights to their product, with ABC having similar ties with MGM and Warner Bros.⁴¹ The duopolistic nature of the exhibition sector from the war onwards subsequently met with many attempts to curtail its distribution and exhibition bias, with the government caught between notions of anti-monopoly and creating a sustainable indigenous industry.

One response to claims of increasing duopolistic control over the film industry stresses falling attendances and the need to guarantee revenue. From the boom year of 1946 which saw 1,635,000,000 nation-wide cinema admissions, the decline in yearly attendances was a steady one. Cinema attendance nation-wide did not fall below pre-war numbers (990,000,000 in 1939) until 1957 (915,000,000). Whilst Hull was no exception to the rule of decline, the particular composition of the exhibition circuits in Hull meant that a pride in autonomous provinciality created by the lack of representation by the two main exhibition combines caused the owners of the local

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Due to the legacy of both Gaumont and Odeon chains, Rank had ties with more Hollywood majors than ABC, a position that changed in the early 1960s when both Paramount and Universal moved distribution allegiance to ABC (adding to MGM and Warner Bros.) leaving Rank with deals with United Artists, 20th Century-Fox, Disney and Columbia. Bill Baillieu and John Goodchild, *The British Film Business* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2002) and David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (London: W.W. Norton, 1996).

circuits to respond to the needs of the community by offering increased accessibility and choice.

Charting the origins of specific institutional, industrial and independent organisations such as the Film Society, the BFI, individual film societies and the commercial cinema chains in Hull, the interdependency of each to the other(s) becomes clear. Whereas geography dictated the scope, ambition and success of such ventures as Hull Cinemas Ltd and the Film Society, and socio-cultural factors of demography shaped notions of programming and access, by far the most significant directive was the influence of each organisation upon its neighbour. Such was the often antagonistic nature of these relations that intervention, both pre- and proscriptive, formed the background to the history of film in Britain in the form of government legislation. Whilst the self-sufficient economic scale of American cinema has primarily led to federal and state legislature in the areas of exhibition and monopoly, British intervention has straddled all three aspects of film: production, distribution and exhibition.

One adjunct to American legislation that divested the major studios of their exhibition outlets in the post-war period was the light cast upon various practices designed to favour distributors over exhibitors. Unlike the manufacturing industry, whereby initial research and development expenses are recouped in subsequent retail, the film industry is in constant need of new films and requires significant investment for each new 'product'. A large part of such investment is provided in the form of 'guarantees' by distributors, and in order to maximize return on investment the distributor/exhibitor relationship is usually weighted in favour of the former. With the through-line from production to distribution deal (whether vertically integrated, subsidiary deal or bespoke arrangement) to aligned exhibition guaranteeing the screens, if not the performance, of a film, the combines effectively emaciated the competition.

With the power to control the exhibition industry via distribution practices, the availability of films in any one locale was therefore determined by the renters.

In an industry so much in thrall to a more powerful model as the British film industry was and is with Hollywood, certain distribution practices are bound to be mimicked. Runs, zones, clearances and barring were all exhibition measures designed to maximise product life and minimise competition, whilst block booking, four-walling, and blind bidding practices were determined to guarantee exhibition on terms advantageous to the distributor.⁴² The only significant counter-measure at the exhibitor's disposal was the tentative arrangement of product splitting.⁴³

In terms of access to product in Hull, firstly for the independent exhibitor (Hull Cinemas Ltd, Associated Hull Cinemas Ltd, Hull City and Suburban Cinemas Ltd, Hull Picture Playhouses Ltd and Morton's Pictures Ltd) and secondly for the public, such practices of the controlling duopoly (ABPC and GBPC) as described above were decisive, if not divisive. Hull became a city that struggled to receive new films as they

⁴² The various prescriptive distribution practices can be explained thus: Runs: A film would be released to certain '*First run*' theatres, large city-centre exhibitors, until business waned when a set Clearance period would elapse before being released to '*Second run*' theatres of lesser appeal and access and then '*Third run*' theatres. Zones refers to the geographical division of regions into autonomous areas that would exhaust a film's potential in that locale much like regionalisation. Barring is the practice of forbidding a rival, often independent, exhibitor from exhibiting the same film within a specified radius and clearance period of a combine's cinema. Block booking occurred when a distributor insisted that an exhibitor take another film(s), usually B movies or films with little first-run potential, when booking a main feature. This guaranteed an outlet for product but also impacted upon exhibitor's potential screening time for its more prestigious films. Four-walling, a rare occurrence usually reserved for trade and premiere screenings, is the practice whereby a distributor hires a theatre from an exhibitor for a period, thus 'four-walling' against losses. Relationships, as seen most prominently in Britain between the combines and the Hollywood majors, occur when an exhibitor enters into a deal with a distributor to screen their product on terms (theoretically) mutually beneficial. Blind bidding is the practice of asking an exhibitor to bid for a film without having seen the finished product usually based upon the high expectations of potential performance related to the films cast. For more detail on this topic see: Jason E. Squire, ed. *The Movie Business Book* (New York: Fireside, 2004).

⁴³ Product splitting is an ad hoc arrangement between independent exhibitors whereby certain agreed theatres bid for a film thereby reducing competition and hence reducing the distributor's power to dictate prices and terms.

were released. In the absence of the main combines, the independent exhibitors in the city regularly screened films that were new to the city but were many months old in relation to the rest of the country. This was a situation repeated later with the opening of the Hull Film Theatre and the dialogue it had with its audience concerning the position of the theatre in relation to the rest of the country.

Hull: The Film Society and its Influence

With the creation of the British Film Institute (BFI) on 30th September 1933, a desire to ‘promote the various uses of film as a contribution to national well-being’ was expressed with an interest in enlightening the public as to the educational possibilities of film.⁴⁴ Yet this emphasis upon *national* well-being was very much in the guise of centralized policy. As film societies, starting in such metropolitan areas as Leicester, Swansea, Merseyside, Oxford, Bradford and Norwich, began to emulate the character of the Film Society, and the BFI played a key role in forming their policies. In 1939, the year of the (London) Film Society’s cessation, there were eighteen societies relying upon the distribution of art cinema supplied through the BFI, increasing to forty-eight by 1946. As the BFI began to consolidate its position as the national body for the appreciation of film, it also went some way towards the appropriation of the provinces into a centralised network.

With the inauguration of the Scottish Film Council in late 1934 as a semi-autonomous section of the BFI, the annexation of *Sight and Sound* (created by the British Institute of Adult Education), the formation of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and the staging of promotional lectures, the BFI fast became a central voice of ‘national’ policy

⁴⁴ *Hull Times*, 3 December 1945, p.2.

in relation to film culture. Alongside such consolidation the BFI created provincial branches to which many existing film societies affiliated themselves.⁴⁵ With subsidy, in the form of grants, available to societies, affiliation became desirable; so much so that the BFI helped organise a meeting of secretaries from numerous film societies, resulting in the formation of the British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS) in September 1945. The collective of film societies now had its own body, with the greater bargaining power that came with aggregation. It was in this climate that the Hull and District Film Society (HDFS) was formed. The formation of the HDFS, however, originated from the application of a national template of a film society movement whose origins were dictated as much by national policy initiatives as by a perceived need on behalf of certain sections of the local audience.

Whilst, as previously mentioned, the Central cinema was unique in its provision of continental films in Hull, it was unfortunately also one of the six cinemas to be destroyed by bombing in 1941. As such, and due to the far more pressing concerns of the war, there was no longer a dedicated forum for the presentation of art cinema in Hull, a situation acknowledged at the birth of the HDFS on 2nd December 1945:

For many months past there has been a real need in Hull for an organisation to present films which miss the main cinemas simply because, in not conforming to mass public appeal through their artistic qualities, they could not possibly become a box-office attraction.⁴⁶

Here the notion of an alternative space for the exhibition of non-mainstream cinema is expressed in terms that assume that a separate organisation is needed for the screening of films lacking box-office appeal. The desire to be part of a national organisation such as the BFFS, with the attendant status provided for Hull by such an association, had to balance with the equally strong desire to be unique and isolated from the mainstream.

⁴⁵ Hull and District Film Society (HDFS), Winter 1946/47 programme.

⁴⁶ *Hull Times*, 3 December 1945, p.2.

Akin to the majority of film societies, the HDFS commenced with a 'policy of showing the best *obtainable* British and Foreign films which cannot be seen at the commercial cinema'.⁴⁷ Much like the policy of the (London) Film Society, the HDFS primarily sought a type of cinema unavailable elsewhere that it could also claim were instances of high culture. The opening film of the first HDFS programme nevertheless highlights the inherent contradiction in this position. Screening *Un Carnet de Bal* (1937) to over 400 people, *The Hull Times* noted that 'many people had seen the famous French production on previous occasions, but found once more that they could not help but be captured by its essentially Continental mood'.⁴⁸ Having screened in Hull before the war, the success of the inaugural film was not due to a new, previously unseen, choice being screened in the city, but perhaps rather more to the conditions in which it was screened.

The screening of German expressionist films at the Central cinema in Hull in the 1920s and 1930s had been a rare but significant example of a type of exhibition that was later taken up by the HDFS from 1945 onwards. The reasons both organisations had for screening such films were markedly different nonetheless. Whilst the exception rather than the rule, this early (albeit primarily economic) appeal to a niche audience by the Central, is significant for the manner in which it resurfaced in the period of decline some fourteen years after the destruction of the Central in 1941. In 1955, the same year that the new Cecil was built, it was reported that

Hull's fourth oldest cinema, the Princess Hall [built in 1910], will change its name to the Curzon in the new year when it will specialise in the presentation of Continental films. The cinema has been taken over from the Morton family who have owned it since 1911.⁴⁹

This change in both ownership and name was of great significance to exhibition practice in Hull in that the new owners were again Hull Cinemas Ltd, whose almost

⁴⁷ HDFS, Spring 1949 programme; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ *Hull Times*, 3 December 1945, p.2.

⁴⁹ *Hull Times*, 29 October 1955, p.6.

monopolistic practices threatened the diversity that competition engenders. Although the name change, with its associations of George Nathaniel Curzon, viceroy of India at the turn of the century and linked to notions of colonialism and empire, was significant in terms of branding and product differentiation, there seems to have been resentment at the lack of respect for Hull's heritage.

Informally known as the 'Dockers' Rest' for its proximity to the junction of the two rivers, and the clientele most often frequenting it, the Princess Hall had many supporters. However, the decline of the fishing industry had changed the whole city in many irrecoverable ways and memories of the heritage of a city, whilst well intended, did not amount to profit. This shift to a new management of the Princess Hall appears to have been fundamental to its subsequent history. Nevertheless factors contributing to the Curzon's closure in 1960 came from the competition for audience numbers in a field increasingly crowded with continental cinema.

The Palace Theatre, a mile from the city centre, attempted to overcome the gradual decline in attendance by stripping the seating and orchestra pit from the auditorium in 1957 and replacing these with tables, chairs and catering equipment.⁵⁰ This change in the mode of consumption was further altered by the change in name to the Hull Continental Palace in 1958, from which it competed for business with the Curzon before itself closing in 1965. With the closure of twenty-three cinemas between 1955 and 1969, the year that the Hull Film Theatre opened, one attempt at transformation, and hence survival, to a more specialist mode of exhibition played a significant role in filling the apparent need in Hull for a space for art cinema.⁵¹

Hull's New Amphitheatre had opened in 1846 as a music hall and continued as such, despite a name change in 1912 to the Tivoli, until the Second World War. As one

⁵⁰ Curry, *Last Complete Performance*, p.48.

⁵¹ The twenty-three cinema closures between 1955 and 1969 can be tabled thus: 1955 – 1; 1958 – 1; 1959 – 8; 1960 – 4; 1961 – 3; 1963 – 1; 1964 – 1; 1966 – 1; 1967 – 2 and 1969 – 1. Ibid.

of the buildings suffering extensive war damage, the Tivoli underwent a major refurbishment in 1943:

With its spartan interior the building lacked the atmosphere of the old Victorian music hall, which could have been partly due to the fact that it now had a dual-licence, running as a Continental Cinema during the day-time and on Sundays.⁵²

The significance of this 'dual-licence' to run as both music hall and 'alternative' cinema meant that certain sections of Hull could utilise the theatre for their own cultural purposes. This stratification of identity between two competing cultural pursuits mirrors the later negotiation of identity between cultural amenity and art cinema experienced by the Hull Film Theatre and also the differentiation of audience strands adopted by the theatre.

The debate over the economic and moral implications of the Sunday opening of cinemas, as previously mentioned, masks the importance of such a policy for the establishment and operation of the film society movement and the provision of art cinema in Hull. The nature of the weekly screenings of film society meetings, when coupled with the need to pre-schedule a season's films and secure suitable exhibition premises, meant that over time the results of expediency and necessity became the hallmarks of exclusivity and prestige that have become associated with art cinema exhibition.

Due to the voluntary nature by which the HDFS was organised and run, finances were scarce and therefore, along the lines of other societies, membership was required for a season of eight films to be screened once per month. This guaranteed income for the season and made possible negotiation for film prints, exhibition space and advertising. The exclusiveness that a membership scheme creates was as much a

⁵² Ibid., 76.

contributory factor to the success of such endeavours as the stated goal of provision. Negotiation is the key to the success of any endeavour of this kind, however, and it in these concessions to necessity that the contradictions of the stated agenda become apparent.

Because of the matter of location, clientele, economic necessity and availability of prints, the Central, Tivoli, Palace Theatre and (re-branded) Curzon cinemas in Hull all had reason to exhibit continental films at some point in their history and all were involved in the success and failure of the HDFS in some fashion. As the destruction of the Central had created 'a real need in Hull' for the presentation of continental cinema and this lack had in part led to the formation of the HDFS, the choice of location for the exhibition of their films was crucial. Balancing the need to be distinctive with the desire to be accepted, the society formed a deal with the management of the Tivoli, Kingston Varieties Co. Ltd, to have their screenings in the evenings of the second Sunday of every month.⁵³ This association helped both the HDFS and the Tivoli as the latter was already screening continental films during the daytime and on Sundays.

From the point of view of the HDFS, the fact that many of its prospective members already regularly attend the Tivoli for their distinctive programming meant that a sense of continuity and familiarity with the building and the atmosphere this attained was maintained. From the management perspective, the use of the Tivoli by the society had the possible beneficial repercussion of increased attendance for non-society screenings. Therefore, the desire to create an alternative space within Hull for the exhibition of a wider selection of films clashed with the necessity to provide this space, a provision that to some extent was already catered for. This clash of ideals and reality is further exemplified by the nature of the society itself and the intercession of economic

⁵³ HDFS, Spring 1949 programme.

realities that over the years led to the intermittent demise and eventual resurrection of the film society movement in Hull.

Calling the monthly screenings ‘meetings’, the society set out to distinguish their exhibitory practice from that of the commercial theatres with the determined aim to ‘promote the *study* and *appreciation* of films by exhibiting to members British and foreign films of artistic merit’.⁵⁴ With the aims of the society couched in language chosen for its implied educational value, the HDFS struggled with the uneasy compromise born of affiliation to an organisation such as the BFFS and the vagaries of mainstream theatre management. While the society’s early success raised hopes that ‘Hull can, with continued support, have an equivalent to “Studio 1”, London’s noted art cinema’, the reality of economics meant otherwise.⁵⁵ In a veiled attempt at defending criticism for the varied programming, linked to an implicit attack on BFFS distribution policy, the society printed a number of reasons for the unavailability of various film prints. Stating that films ‘have to be booked many months in advance’, and that ‘there are many film societies and relatively few suitable films’, the society further claimed that ‘all too frequently it is found that a film we clamour for has ended its life and has been withdrawn’.⁵⁶ From distribution companies through the BFI and the BFFS, to the theatre owners who provided facilities and projection equipment, the HDFS was often at the mercy of others whose policies frequently conflicted with those of the society itself.

Despite recording membership numbers of 685 in 1949, the temporary demise of the society was sealed when the Tivoli management withdrew permission for them to hold their meetings at the theatre in 1951, in favour of extending the cinema’s own commitment to continental films. Without an exhibitor willing to undertake the commitment required by the society, and with the society itself unwilling to

⁵⁴ HDFS, Spring 1949 programme; emphasis added.

⁵⁵ *Hull Times*, 3 December 1945, p.2.

⁵⁶ HDFS, Spring 1949 programme.

compromise on quality and seek alternative, non-theatrical exhibition on 16mm, the HDFS ceased to exist until a similar arrangement could be found. It can therefore be claimed that the success of the 'meetings' held by the HDFS for the appreciation of art cinema became the society's (temporary) downfall. Whereas a mainstream exhibition outlet had provided access to an alternative experience, its success had caused the incorporation of this alternative into the cinema's business model. Yet it was the overestimation of the potential of this model and the policy of a champion of 'continental' cinema that brought about the resurrection of the HDFS.

Due to poor performances, the Tivoli, having closed as a music hall in July 1954 and after trying to survive as a full-time cinema, finally ceased operation in September 1954. The provision of art cinema in Hull therefore ceased until Hull Cinemas Ltd bought the Princess Hall cinema and changed its name to the Curzon in early 1955. Along with the change in ownership and name, a change of policy meant that 'the Hull and District Film Society, who used to meet at the Tivoli until 1951, when they could no longer be accommodated, hope to start activities again next January at the new Curzon Cinema'.⁵⁷ With 'meetings' altered to Sunday afternoons, so as not to conflict with the screening of the Curzon's own continental programme in the evening, the society used this opportunity as a 'valuable test as to whether there is still a demand for a film society in spite of the availability of more foreign films in the commercial cinema'.⁵⁸ With a newly formed membership of 300, the society again had to shift location due to the closure of the Curzon in 1960, with the Dorchester cinema providing facilities in 1961.

With the closure of both the Tivoli and Curzon cinemas only the Hull Continental Palace existed as a dedicated site for the exhibition of art cinema, yet the location on the outskirts of the city centre meant that the associations of a cultural centre

⁵⁷ *Hull Times*, 28 December 1955, p.3.

⁵⁸ *Hull Times*, 16 January 1956, p.3.

were lost and so the Dorchester proved a more feasible alternative. The lack of a connection between the cinema and the exhibition of the type of films the society screened unfortunately worked against the society and the management could only guarantee 'certain' Sundays throughout the season.⁵⁹ This lack of natural fit with its host exhibitor led the society to include a caveat in its programme, announcing that 'any unavoidable change in the place or time of performance will be announced in the *Hull Daily Mail* on the Thursday preceding the date of performance'.⁶⁰ This change in location happened on more than one occasion with the Criterion cinema providing facilities for the society. It was in this period of the early 1960s that, due in part to the popularity of the film society with those seeking some form of alternative and exclusive activity, another film society was established in Hull.

With the city's college receiving its university charter in 1954 to become Hull University, a sense of nationwide recognition for the position of Hull as a seat of innovation and education was realised. Hull was finally being placed 'on the map'.⁶¹ It was in this atmosphere of 'higher' learning that the University Film Society was formed in 1961. Significantly this date corresponds with the slight hiatus experienced in the exhibition of films by the HDFS with the closure of the Curzon and before the move to the Dorchester cinema. Screening films on a Thursday evening in the lecture hall of the Social Sciences and Law building, the society had access to a regular facility with costs limited due to the reliance upon 16mm prints of films. As any university is an insular microcosm of a wider society, and those that attend the university are to a large extent new to the area, the two film societies had little interaction, with the HDFS seen as a community venture and the University Film Society an educational one. While both

⁵⁹ HDFS, Winter 1961/62 programme.

⁶⁰ HDFS, Winter 1962/63 programme.

⁶¹ *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 August 1954, p.2.

film societies were founded in order to cater for the underrepresented (both in terms of audience and film), the ethos of each was also parochial and self-selective.

This state of mutual exclusiveness continued throughout the 1960s until policy decisions made outside the control of the film societies by the BFI saw the BFI deciding to develop its role outside of the capital, as result of which the regional film theatre initiative came to Hull. The narrative of the HDFS and its development and decline therefore should not be viewed in isolation, and the context of such a cultural endeavour and its manifestation played a significant role in the landscape of cinema provision in the city. Situated within such a context, the peculiarities of Hull's cinema exhibition history cast a light upon how art cinema provision in the city grew within an atmosphere of city-specific business operations. The specifics of these conditions of exhibition were not lost on the commercial cinemas in Hull who capitalised upon the increased interest in this type of exhibition as either a profitable product in its own right or as a label that could attract favourable connotations for the cinema as a venue.

Conclusion

Whilst an audience for art cinema in Hull can be seen to be catered for through the various exhibition policies of the Central, Curzon, Hull Continental Palace and Tivoli cinemas from the 1920s through the 1960s, the provision of such cinema was the outcome of the economic and industrial imperatives of profit. While the policies of government, industry, local council and even self-interested business often suggest otherwise, they simultaneously conspire to produce conflicting patterns of provision and consumption, so as to form a less than ideal, but economically beneficial, situations whereby audiences were not necessarily the first concern.

The space created for the exhibition of art cinema, both literal and figurative, also designates a mode of reception. A film consumed in the Princess Hall, with its history as Hull's oldest cinema and owned by the Morton family, offers a different experience to a seeing a film in the same cinema with a changed name and ownership. In seeking to attract specific clientele, other audiences were necessarily alienated. Whilst often a by-product of necessity, this estrangement was also be manufactured by those wishing to appeal to a certain audiences, and the parallel existence of mainstream and specialist exhibition outlets is testament to the creation of markets for the consumption of divergent products.

As the exhibition history of cinema in Hull is only one example of a worldwide industry with varying idiosyncrasies influenced by national and local perspectives, a danger lies in focusing too closely upon the minutiae of such an instance. There is much, however, that can be extrapolated from and applied to similar locales nationwide, and structural relations in the particular instance of art cinema exhibition and Hull have broader implications for local exhibition practices potentially even globally. Whilst policy decisions enabled the creation of the HDFS and the ability for it not only to exist without restriction by law, but to be able to exhibit films on a Sunday at the discretion of obliging theatre owners, the creation of such a society is as much an effect of policy as a reaction against it. While the programming of Hull's mainstream theatres was dictated by the lack of major chain exhibitors in the city, and the policies of their management, the programming of the film society was in turn dictated by the art cinema already exhibited in Hull. This emphasis upon national policy and local repercussions finds consort in the strategies of those operating Hull's cinemas and the particular responses to changing and challenging times.

Despite existing in the same medium, the antipathy between mainstream and art film is more often than not created by an industry intent upon differentiation for the

sake of profit rather than status. The need for the 'other' in this relation is often elided in favour of creating a market for one's own product. Yet, as Janet Harbord states, the defining attribute of any endeavour is that 'positions are both carved out in relation to the other and also in a dynamic structural play'.⁶² It is possible therefore to see that the location of a city such as Hull determines to a large degree the possibilities available to the area, which in turn limits and directs the course of any subsequent development. Not only does this render the city, in the case of cinema exhibition, unattractive to such enterprises as the main film combines, but it also leaves it prone to the prescriptive practices of distributors, which in turn causes local exhibitors to seek alternative exhibition practices. These practices, while primarily economic in origin, help the creation of an alternative exhibition venture such as the film society by supporting a collective that is in no small way intended as a counter to such mainstream outlets. This contradictory position, whereby a claim to alternative exhibition is indebted to the machinery of the mainstream, is one that persists throughout the period discussed here, a period that saw the spread of the British Film Institute's regional film theatres across the country in the 1960s and, in early 1969, to Hull. National policies, centrally commissioned models of alternative practice, local history and local audiences have all been shown here to play significant roles in the tensions inherent within 'art cinema' as a specialist kind of cinemagoing practice. The next section therefore advances the chronology of the thesis to incorporate the circumstances surrounding the opening and operation of Hull Film Theatre brought about through the specific histories described above.

⁶² Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), p.40.

Part Two

1969-1974

Hull and Happenstance: The Origin of Hull Film

Theatre and the Search for Identity

Tracing the history of both the British Film Institute and art cinema exhibition in Hull from the perspective of shifting policy initiatives demonstrates that the nature of art cinema exhibition in Britain was dictated to a large extent by factors independent of acknowledged need. Addressing the issue of policy Justin Lewis and Toby Miller highlight the role that policy plays in cultural provision and its goal to ‘find, serve, and nurture a sense of belonging, through educational institutions and cultural industries’.¹ Conforming to the paternalistic attitude prevalent in much cultural policy during the 20th century, the operation of the BFI is an example of ‘regimens [...] predicated on the insufficiency of the individual (for whom culture offers possibilities of a more complete self) alongside the generally benevolent sovereign-state’.² This conception of policy as the capital of large institutions and government does, however, obscure what Jim McGuigan, discussing museum policy, calls ‘the micro-political level, that is [...] the specific “regional” properties of the museum [...] the social agents who are actually in a position to do something about museum policies’.³ Transposing the example of the BFI’s regional film theatre initiative for that of the museum and replacing the figurative notion of the ‘regional’ with the ‘region’ as a geographical entity, this chapter will address how policy initiated by the BFI found fault and favour with the hosts of the Hull

¹ Justin Lewis and Toby Miller, ‘Introduction’, *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*, ed. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.5.

² Ibid.

³ Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.9.

Film Theatre and how it sought both an identity and an audience. In detailing this the chapter will show how the notion of ‘identity’ can be viewed as a complex negotiation of national and local policies that played a significant role in the operation of the regional film theatres. The chapter will therefore begin by addressing the creation of the Hull Film Theatre in 1969, highlighting the disparities between how the local corporation envisioned the theatre and the role of central (London) policy as directed by the BFI in marshalling interest in the possibility, and viability, of a regional film theatre in the city.

In a historical analysis such as this thesis attention should always be paid to not only the form and content of that which is under scrutiny, but also the manner in which information, apparent or latent, is communicated. The task of those wishing to conduct historical analysis is therefore complicated by the necessity to consider not only the artefact under investigation but also the way in which that artefact communicates its existence. Related to this, Sarah Street’s research on British cinema as recorded in a variety of documents helps explain the need to avoid relying wholly upon the film text for all meaning, a process which can often lead to a skewed, ahistorical analysis.⁴ Street suggests that the potential for a ‘hierarchy of discourse’ in relation to ephemera surrounding a particular film can ‘contribute to our understanding of film in its cultural and historical context’ and therefore provide a much richer view of the text itself. To this end, Street proposes a seven-point methodological checklist that can be utilized to analyse any, and all, documents in order to better understand the position held within the hierarchy of discourses and place the object of inquiry in a suitably contextual surrounding.⁵ In relation to the study of the regional film theatres and the focus of this

⁴ Sarah Street, *British Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.3.

⁵ The seven ‘methodological issues’ Street identifies are: 1) Type: what sort of document is it?; 2) Authorship: who has written the document?; 3) Agency: why was it written?; 4) Context: when was it written?; 5) Impact: what circulation did the

chapter, the programme leaflets produced by the HFT are of particular importance in this respect. Whereas Street's focus is on ancillary texts that can contribute to the knowledge gathered on particular films, the chapter will adopt the same principles and apply them to the editorial statements in the programmes printed by the HFT. As the primary contact between the HFT and its potential audience, the official programmes represent a substantial discourse intended to serve the purpose of promotion but also contain an uncertainty as to the theatre's identity and its audience. Addressing the potential audience through such editorials the HFT will be shown to channel its own perception of exactly what type of amenity it struggled to be and implicitly communicate the type of audience it desired.

In its attempts to create a regional film theatre network the BFI itself made assumptions as to the nature of this potential audience. Often regarded in terms of an opposition to commercial, Hollywood films, the preferences of this audience are to a large extent assumed and as a result policy is created to meet these assumptions. In order to highlight such prescriptive policy the last section of the chapter will address how the film industry, the BFI and the HFT all conceived of and approached the conception of an art cinema audience differently. In considering the assumed nature of art cinema audiences, and the manner in which HFT (and by extension Hull Corporation) conceived and addressed such audiences, the directive character of public policy will be shown to be a significant factor in developing a long-held, and seemingly taste-driven, conception of a particular section of a larger 'potential' audience and the identity that HFT sought to communicate to that audience.

document have?; 6) Archival Scheme: what place does it have in relation to other papers from the collection or other collections of documents?; 7) Interpretative Significance: what place does the document have in the historian's argument? Ibid., 6-9.

London Policy versus Local Polity

As already documented, during the mid-1960s the BFI encountered severe criticism for its lack of representation in areas outside London. Seen as an organisation whose remit, to 'encourage the art of the film', was being undermined by its metropolitan bias in the country's capital, there emerged a need for more progressive thinking.⁶ Resulting in the institute's 'regional film theatre initiative', this call for greater representation of a national institution in a local context forms a branch of the post-war desire to legitimate areas seemingly neglected in a climate when economic, cultural and social control was often directed, if not dictated, from a London, metropolitan base. Seen by Arthur Marwick as treating 'culture as a form of social welfare', this desire to spread outwards from a metropolitan bias to a more representative, if not rural, coverage resulted in a government White Paper in 1965 setting out the case for Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) throughout the country following the successful establishment of the first RAA in the South West in 1956.⁷ In 1967 the existing RAAs formed a Standing Conference of Regional Arts Associations, a sign that regional cultural activity could work away from the control of London, a pattern mirrored in the spread of the regional film theatre initiative. From the opening of the first BFI regional film theatre in Nottingham in September 1966, the initiative continued through the late 1960s with Hull becoming the twenty-fifth regional film theatre when it opened on 9th January 1969.

Yet the notion that regional autonomy promotes policy tailored specifically to the region is undermined by the case of the HFT. Whilst the stated practice of the BFI towards the establishment of regional film theatres was that 'a local body invites the Institute to explore the possibilities of providing a greater opportunity to see worthwhile films', the expansionist policy of the BFI pre-empted such an inquiry in the case of Hull

⁶ 'BFI Outlook 1967' (London: BFI, 1967), p.2.

⁷ Marwick, *Culture in Britain Since 1945* (London: Blackwell, 1991), p.70.

Corporation. In early 1968, the BFI contacted the corporation to ask whether it would favourably consider the construction of a regional film theatre in the city.⁸ The direction from which this impetus for a 'Hull Film Theatre' came is crucial as regards the concept of local identity and the place of the city within the broader context of a national network of economic stability. Compounded by changing social patterns whereby consumer demand and the expanding reliance upon markets outside the UK led to a shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, the period from the late 1950s to the early 1980s saw a definite transformation in the nature of 'the city'. As Doreen Massey notes regarding the 'uneven development' of places in relation to other locations 'the functional (and social) characteristics of some areas define the functional (and social) characteristics of other areas'.⁹ Whilst this observation is particularly germane when considering the location of Hull as segregated from the rest of Britain, the point also holds when considering the policy of the regional film theatre initiative.

Having inaugurated a determined policy for the expansion of a London institution to the regions, the roll-out of the regional film theatres can be seen as evidence of a privileging of solipsistic policy over actual need. Commissioning no public consultation or feasibility study into the desire for any such network of exhibition outlets, the BFI proceeded in such a manner that the uptake of the initiative was almost guaranteed. Whilst the operation of any such regional film theatre would be the responsibility of the local authority, the offer of financial assistance and programming help can be considered incentives to such consideration. All of this points towards the haphazard way in which art cinema exhibition in the guise of a regional film theatre came to Hull. Had some form of consultation taken place, whether it be with the public, the Hull and District Film Society, existing cinema management or even the corporation

⁸ 'BFI Outlook 1968' (London: BFI, 1968), pp.17-18.

⁹ Doreen Massey, 'Uneven Development: Social Change and Spatial Divisions of Labour', *Uneven Re-Development: Cities and Regions in Transition, A Reader*, eds. Doreen Massey and John Allen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p.252.

itself, a more rounded idea of local need would have emerged. The manner in which Hull gained a regional film theatre meant that the opening and operation of the HFT became part of a larger remit, that of the BFI, that sacrificed any chance to tailor to a specifically local need. This is not to say that the HFT did not succeed in its remit and provide a valuable opportunity to view art cinema to many but that a generalised notion of art cinema exhibition, and art-house film, became normalised at the expense of more localised need. Whilst Hull Corporation made the understandable decision to open a regional film theatre in the city, the BFI had by this point committed three years to successful regional expansion. Therefore by the time that Hull became part of the initiative the template had been set and specific local needs were routinely set aside in favour of expedient application of policy.

With the essential ingredients to the successful opening (not to be confused with successful operation) of a regional film theatre being, in the opinion of the BFI itself ‘enthusiasm, money (usually from the local authority) and a suitable hall’, the fortuitous timing and nature of the construction of the HFT seems borne out of more mundane matters than cultural provision.¹⁰ Concerned by ‘the heavy demand upon accommodation available at the central library’ in mid-1964, Hull Corporation went to tender for phase two of an extension programme that had seen phase one open in May 1962.¹¹ Included in the specification for the second phase was a proposed venue for the performance of live theatre. With ‘commencement on the Central Library Extensions in the early part of financial year 1966/67’ and ‘the global cost of the project expected to be approximately £88,000 for building works’ the expected completion date for the extensions (to include music and local studies sections as well as the planned live theatre) was October 1968.¹² Tempted by an offer from the BFI of £6112 capital cost

¹⁰ ‘BFI Outlook 1968’, p.21.

¹¹ Hull Corporation Minutes (HCM), 8 June 1964.

¹² Ibid.

towards the building of a regional film theatre, assistance in programming and the promise of an annual grant towards the operation of the theatre, the corporation decided to convert the proposed live theatre it was in the process of building into a film theatre through the inclusion of a screen and projection booth. Akin to the circumstances that inaugurated the regional film theatre initiative, this decision was reached with no public consultation, no audience analysis and no industry collaboration other than with the BFI itself. Highlighting the policy-driven nature of both national and local government, the establishment of the HFT appears to have been born more from centralised political expediency than any sense of local need.

One contributory factor concerning the decision to build the HFT was the nature of the local exhibition sector at the time of approach by the BFI. Commensurate with the rest of the country the steady decline of cinema attendance had caused the number of cinemas in Hull to fall from a high of thirty-six cinemas in 1938 to five at the time of the BFI's approach. Only the ABC, Cecil, Dorchester, Regent and Tower cinemas still existed and all were operating on a schedule of what could be called mainstream film exhibition (as distinct from the 'labelled' cinema of 'art-house films', 'avant-garde', 'experimental', 'world', 'independent', 'classic' or 'art cinema'). Both the Regent and Tower cinemas were owned and operated by the Freeman family and were located directly across the street from each other. The Tower cinema had by this period begun to screen 'continental' cinema but of the kind deliberately chosen to titillate, a reputation that continued until its closure in 1978.¹³ Not more than two hundred yards away from the Tower cinema the Cecil cinema operated on a schedule of popular films of the period as did both the ABC and Dorchester cinemas. Screening primarily Hollywood films all five cinemas operated within a one-square mile section of the city centre. As

¹³ The five cinemas extant at the opening of HFT all eventually closed (Dorchester - 25 June 1977; Regent - 16 September 1978; Tower - 16 September 1978; ABC - 29 June 1989 and Cecil 26 March 1992) Curry, *Last Complete Performance*.

far as catering to the local population of Hull was concerned the remaining five cinemas all competed for the same clientele whose only option to see such films was now in the city centre, Hull having seen all its suburban cinemas close over the previous decade.

With art cinema programming in the city still being provided by the Hull and District Film Society and no programming of such films at any of the city's commercial cinema (apart from the selective programming of 'continental' cinema at the Tower cinema) the opportunity to operate a regional film theatre was based not so much upon need as a chance to present product neglected in the wider local context, with the financial aid of an established institution such as the BFI. As the HDFS already catered to a section of the local (middle-class) population by screening art cinema, the creation of the HFT went some way towards shoring up such exhibition in the city. One difference between a venue such as the HFT and the HDFS, however, is the fact that the film society movement was to a large extent motivated by a desire to exhibit films that both organisers and members put time and effort into acquiring and consuming. This last fact should not be underestimated as a highly attractive incentive to such an organisation is being part of a collective minority often at odds with the majority. The creation of HFT therefore threatened the stability of the HDFS (so much so that it ceased operation in January 1972). From the perspective of Hull Corporation the HDFS was not seen as a threat to the opening of a regional film theatre in Hull whilst at the same time it was seen as evidence that an interested audience existed for the exhibition of art cinema. Recognising this disparity between opportunity and need raises fundamental issues concerning the operation of an amenity such as the HFT, caught in the gap whereby national policy as decided by a centralised institution forces the hand of local cultural practice as decided by local policy.

Highlighting the somewhat arbitrary nature the genesis of the HFT took, the decision to make the Chief Librarian of the library to which the film theatre was

attached responsible for the booking of films and the organisation of the operation of the film theatre goes some way towards explaining the lack of specialism inherent in its opening. Opening on 9th January 1969, the HFT brought films previously associated with film societies and the National Film Theatre in London (and all that these establishments connote) to a city with a population of 280,000 in a region geographically isolated from access to more metropolitan conurbations. With the operation of the film theatre under the auspice of the corporation's Public Libraries Committee, decisions were taken in an environment based on the desire to fulfil a public service remit yet underscored by local government frugality.

To gauge the viability of the venture, and what can be interpreted as canvassing opinion after the fact, the corporation established an annual subscription service. Marketed at 'those desirous of giving additional support and receiving brochures etc', at rates ranging from 'ordinary membership', 'individual members of Film Societies', 'Full-time students and senior citizens' and 'Block affiliation by a Film Society or a Youth Organisation' the aim was to encourage interest, attendance and loyalty.¹⁴ In order to best facilitate the operation of the film theatre for the city, and those wishing to take up the subscription, the committee proposed that

a provisional advisory committee for initial programming be formed consisting of three members of the public libraries committee [Alderman Buckle and Councillors Buen and Rosen], the chief librarian and two Members from each of the following associations viz. – the BFI and the Hull and District Film Society and one Member from the Hull University Film Society and one Member from the Arts Centre Group.¹⁵

This ten strong advisory committee met three times per year to arrange programming, pricing, policy and administrative matters for the Spring, Autumn and Winter seasons of the theatre. The decision to offer subscription to gauge feasibility was justified when, by

¹⁴ HCM 16 December 1968.

¹⁵ HCM 11 November 1968.

the end of January 1969 (just three weeks after opening), total membership was reported as 1,197 with the film theatre averaging 248 admissions over a total of eight screenings (the film theatre having 250 seats). By the end of March 1969 membership had reached a high of 1,639. Yet the original proposed use of the building as a live theatre was echoed in the decision that ‘the charges for film shows be the same as those already agreed for stage plays and that the heading “stage plays” on the scale of charges be changed to “stage productions, plays, concerts, film shows &c”’.¹⁶ The constitution of the advisory committee further compounded the compromised nature of the theatre with the competing interests represented on the committee. Whilst the three councillors and the chief librarian can be thought of as representative of the HFT as a cultural institution and amenity, the remainder can perhaps best be considered impartial only against their nature.

In his study of city politics in post-war Nottingham, Nick Hayes addresses the role political consensus played in a local context with regard to the establishment of the Nottingham Playhouse. Noting the function of central government in support of the arts and that ‘state-subsidised cultural provision received war and post-war bi-partisan parliamentary support, and attained an important, integral place within Britain’s new welfare state’, he addresses the discord between the Arts Council’s expectations of local cultural provision and ‘the realities of local authority sponsorship’.¹⁷ Hayes states that according to 1964 journal records the repeated criticism of local authority expenditure on the arts was characterised in terms of onerous choice on the part of local authorities ‘who have to decide how far they are justified in spending on the ratepayers’ behalf, in such a way as to *help create* as well as follow public taste’.¹⁸ This attitude towards the funding of local cultural provision by local government is, according to Hayes, typical

¹⁶ HCM 18 November 1968.

¹⁷ Nick Hayes, *Consensus and Controversy: City Politics in Nottingham 1945-66* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), p.163.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

of 'a patronising metropolitan-based Arts Council, which in defining cultural values in its own elitist setting, devalued traditional local authority contributions in the fields of library, museum, gallery and amateur provision as not being part of the 'real' arts'.¹⁹ With representation on the HFT advisory committee split between those with an interest in the arts and those with an interest in council matters, the counter to such Art Council patronage can be seen to take root, yet with subtle nods to the Arts Council's conception of cultural provision.

The incorporation on the advisory committee of members from both the HDFS and the Hull University Film Society (HUFS) does go some way towards highlighting the seriousness with which Hull Corporation approached the operation of the HFT. The fortunes of both film societies were dramatically altered by the establishment of the HFT, however. The nature of both the HDFS and the HUFS (akin to the majority of film societies across the country) was based upon a 'membership' system in which those wishing to attend films otherwise unavailable to the public paid a subscription and could watch films in the company of other like-minded individuals. Unfortunately for these film societies, the operation of a similar scheme at the HFT (to be discussed below) meant the eventual closure of both societies due to the competition offered from a better equipped, better positioned and regular exhibition outlet. The inclusion of two members from the HDFS and one from the HUFS on the advisory committee of the film theatre therefore presented problems. The insistence by the corporation on a membership scheme, in which films provided exclusively for these members acted as both a promotional tool for the theatre and a reward for loyalty, undermined the operation of both film societies. In such circumstances, where a chance to programme esoteric films and bring such underrepresented cinema to a wider audience contrasted with the exclusive nature of the film society operation, the best that could be expected

¹⁹ Ibid.

was an uneasy compromise between the two parties and interests. Within two seasons of the opening of the HFT arrangements had been made to exhibit the HDFS screenings as part of the HFT membership-only evenings. With the HDFS struggling to find accommodation for their screenings the move to the HFT suited their desire to screen art cinema in a suitable environment. The problem with this arose in the loss of a distinct identity for the film society. While art cinema had a permanent home at the HFT it was one that also had responsibilities as a civic amenity. As such the particular atmosphere established in the HDFS became diluted by the expansion of interest shown in the membership scheme offered by the HFT. As the figures above attest not all members could physically fit into the HFT for members-only screenings whereas the limited numbers belonging to the HDFS could previously be almost guaranteed a seat. Offering membership to HDFS members at no additional cost on top of their HDFS membership, the HFT effectively lured them away from the society. This ultimately led to the demise of the HDFS who could no longer warrant operation if their role had been subsumed by the HFT.

This dichotomy of provision, between public amenity available and accessible to all (befitting a rate-funded operation) and a regional film theatre mandated to provide cinema unavailable elsewhere, runs throughout the history of the HFT. The underlying implications form the basis upon which art cinema came to be regarded nationwide and subsequently often became termed as 'art-house cinema'. In other words exhibition venues that provide access to films that various policy decisions had decided such institutions could, should and would offer rather than films chosen because they afford more than mere 'entertainment'.

Returning to museum policy as discussed by Tony Bennett, the conflicts inherent in the conception and operation of such places can be discerned in the proposal for the regional film theatres in relation to the discord between 'the democratic rhetoric

governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education and [...] their actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners'.²⁰ This discord in purpose can be seen in negotiations centred around the HFT as, on the one hand, a civic amenity and, on the other, a regional *film* theatre. Operated by the local corporation the HFT embodies the concept of a civic amenity intended to serve the local population. Negotiating a balance between providing popular amenities for rate payers and providing specialised amenities for a local market ill-served by commercial interests can nevertheless prove complicated. The regional film theatres were just such specialist amenities and were prone to this hybrid identity. Embedded in this tension is the desire to provide a minority experience for all, as Bennett notes:

While the former [popular amenities] requires that they should address an undifferentiated public made up of free and formal equals, the latter [specialist amenities], in giving rise to the development of various technologies for regulating or screening out the forms of behavior associated with popular assemblies, has meant that they have functioned as a powerful means for differentiating populations.²¹

Being a civic amenity the HFT therefore falls into the former category in that as an exhibition venue it should be available to all. The policy of pre-programming a three month run of films, offering a membership option, various appeals to differentiated audience strands, a no food or drink policy, a limited option of films and screening nights and a location attached to the city's public library were all factors contributing to this control of public interest, attendance and behaviour conducted by the HFT. Having established itself in the city in 1969 the HFT had originated out of policy that came from outside the city but that now had to find a way of creating an identity for itself and its potential audience.

²⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.27.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Editorialised Bias

As a business primarily concerned with the exhibition of film, Hull Film Theatre was not dissimilar from the vast majority of cinemas in relying upon the regular promotion of its upcoming slate of films through a printed programme. As the document most likely to develop an audience for the cinema, the programme is also the official communication in the discourse between institution and its audience, a document that explicitly and, more importantly, implicitly signals the relationship between these two parties. As such, the programme as text is forever changing in a number of ways. Firstly, the actual brochure can undergo many transformations in format, design and focus, which are predominantly situationally dependent. Circumstances such as council policy, budget restrictions, innovations in the design industry, availability of certain print facilities and paper, trends in the social climate of the period and shifts in the cultural value of certain information such as directorial influence, legitimisation by secondary text and the promotion of ‘art’ over ‘commerce’, can all lead to such changes in the printed programme. In this respect, the programmes produced and distributed by the Hull Film Theatre between 1969 and the mid-1980s underwent a number of changes in format with each innovation bringing with it its own overt and covert meanings.²² Secondly, changes in the tone, emphasis, weight and register of the dialogue between institution and audience, often within the same format of programme, can be found, often indicative of wider policy issues and signalling the directive nature of such discourse. As Bennett and Woollacott attest, it is in the act of the combination of text (taken here to mean the theatre programmes themselves) and reader that any intention or interpretation is formed. They further argue that ‘texts are able to exert an appreciable

²² The various formats of the Hull Film Theatre programme under discussion can be listed thus: First format Jan-Mar 1969 to Jan-Mar 1975; Second format Apr-Jun 1975 to Jan-Mar 1980; Third format Apr-Jun 1980 to Sep-Oct 1984.

social and cultural influence only once a meaning has been imputed to them through the operation of a system of interpretation, be it implicit or explicitly formulated' and through the printed programmes of the HFT this position becomes clear.²³ Together these instances of both fluid and abrupt change in programme as product and discourse yield much about the way that cultural cinema is conceived, discussed and presented to a potential audience. One of the most explicit examples of such can be found in the editorial statements that appear at certain key junctures in the history of the HFT.

From its opening in January 1969 until the first change in programme format with the April-June 1975 programme, the HFT communicated directly with its potential audience through an editorial statement. Closed in the months of July and August, the HFT ran three seasons covering the months January-March (J/F/M), April-June (A/M/J) and September-December (S/O/N/D), resulting in nineteen editorials in the initial format of the programme. Printed on the reverse of the cover, the editorial statement was not heralded as such yet formed the first contact any reader had with the purpose of the programme (and hence the film theatre itself). Beneath the logotype of the theatre, text of varying length initiated contact between the HFT and its potential audience, with the inaugural programme stating:

This is a new and attractive addition to the City's amenities, sponsored by the Kingston upon Hull Corporation and the British Film Institute. Its home is the recently-opened and most comfortably fitted Library Theatre.

Films will include the best of the world cinema and will be shown on Thursday and Friday evenings – one performance on each evening commencing at 7.30 p.m. The programme for the months of January, February and March is set out in this brochure.²⁴

²³ Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (London: Palgrave, 1987), p.61.

²⁴ Hull Film Theatre (HFT) Programme, J-M 1969.

Here the brevity of the text itself can be seen to be indicative of a number of concerns. From the two paragraphs above, it is possible to detect hesitancy over the new 'amenity', with a lack of hyperbole signalling a sense that this new 'addition' to the city is perhaps seen as a natural fit with the other amenities provided by the corporation. The lack of fanfare that frames the first programme also belies an uncertainty as to the direction and potential success that the theatre may have. Also inherent in these two paragraphs is a sense that the amenity is already recognised as (imminently) existing as part of the city's cultural structure in that the low-key introduction to the theatre assumes a familiarity with its place and forthcoming opening. Yet the hesitancy and brevity of the opening statement does not prevent a reading of the prescriptive nature of the discourse.

By associating the new theatre with the city's other amenities, Kingston upon Hull Corporation, the British Film Institute and the library, various connotations are invoked. The use of the local, in the form of the corporation, the library and the city's other amenities, places the theatre very much in the public sphere of Hull, an amenity that belongs to the 'City' in that it is owned and operated by the corporation and is instantly part of the other amenities provided by the corporation. Added to this is the notion of a 'home', always a designator of entrenchment and stability (a home, as well as being a place associated with comfort, familiarity and stability is also a place to return to), and the focal point for much of any city's cultural pursuits, which is here redefined as the library. Alongside the use of the local to promote a sense of community endeavour and pride can be found a sense of legitimisation from outside the city and its parochial concerns in the form of endorsement by the BFI. By highlighting the sponsorship of the BFI the statement not only fulfils what is obviously an obligatory acknowledgement but also aims to gain from this association. By naming the BFI, the HFT draws upon a strand of high art association that stretches back to the formation of

the Institute in 1933 and its remit concerning enlightenment and education. With legitimisation by not only a recognised institution, but also a 'national' institution, an osmosis effect cements the HFT as a serious endeavour.

To this representation of the new facility as both local amenity within a parameter of cultural expectation *and* an instance of national investment and belief in the local, the issue of mode and origin of address reinforces the desired reception and audience. Within the initial manifestation of the programme (J/F/M 1969 - J/F/M 1975) editorial statements appear unauthored. Whereas later incarnations attribute the editorial to specific individuals, the statements of the first format go unattributed, meaning that an interpretation of intent and identity can yield valuable insights into the desired reception of the programme (in the sense of films presented, the language of the literature itself and the consumption of the notion of 'culture'). By not being attributed to anyone or anything specific, there is a tendency to read authorship as stemming from the institution itself, whose programme is currently being read. If the editorial statement is unattributed, the text still speaks from a certain position, and that position is relatively inflexible in that it continually represents a fixed mode of address. This means that the origin of that address has to be attributed to something in order for it to be interpreted. By dint of a lack of alternatives, this attribution must lie with the origin of the statement, in this case the 'Hull Film Theatre'. Once identified as the voice of authorial address, the reader of the programme is faced with the further concern of how the HFT should be perceived as this voice. One possibility is to equate the HFT with its own organisational *raison d'être*.

Existing for the screening of art cinema at the invitation of the BFI, the HFT has the exhibition of cinema not necessarily available elsewhere in the locale as its primary purpose. In this conception the editorial can be assumed to stem from an institution originated to promote that which is normally neglected and is hence situated within the

sphere of self-interest in that its existence is primarily concerned with fulfilling the criteria of BFI sponsored 'enlightenment'. If the discourse is read this way the needs of the public fall secondary to the needs of both institutions (Hull Corporation and the BFI) dedicated to filling a self-selected void.

Another way of reading the editorial through the lens of the collective voice is to view the statement in terms of the local. By addressing the potential audience as members of a community within the catchment area of Hull in the manner the initial editorial does, the statement makes a number of assumptions. With the logotype for the 'Hull Film Theatre' above the editorial statement, the reference to 'the City's amenities' and its home in 'the recently-opened and most comfortably fitted Library Theatre' places the theatre in the context of the local area. In this formation, the link with the city's amenities and the library (aside from the citation of Kingston upon Hull Corporation) place the locus of author(ity) in the domain of the city council. As the link with Hull Corporation's other amenities makes clear, the new theatre is part of the corporation-owned and operated institutions that constitute its commitment to cultural pursuits. Interpreted in this way the editorial statement emanates from a collective (the corporation) with a much broader, and hence more diluted, commitment to the city's cultural life. Whereas the previously posited institutional voice favours marginalized cinema exhibition over the needs of community, the corporation voice privileges the need to be seen to offer the provision of cultural pursuits over the actual need to do so. Yet in each conception, there appears an acceptance of a need in the community for the HFT, justified in terms of, on the one hand, middlebrow pretensions, and on the other, political expediency. Whichever of the proposed interpretations of the editorial statement is supported (there may be more), the fact remains that the unattributed discourse comes from a single source that speaks for the HFT as an agent of cultural provision. This in turn has consequences as to how this voice is received by the

potential audience and how the HFT sees itself and the service it provides is to be interpreted. In the second programme produced by the theatre, the following paragraph appears:

A new feature of the spring programme is the provision of “member only” performances once a month. It is hoped that members will support this new facility which will enable us to present the more unusual and experimental films.²⁵

Here a new policy is presented to the potential audience that offers a way to approach the HFT as a conflicted organisation. Membership of any organisation serves as both a guarantee of income (in the form of a membership fee) and an increased probability of attendance (with members capitalising on an initial outlay) for the host organisation. It also serves to bracket members as an exclusive audience, one in benefit of the prestige and privilege that such membership bestows. In the case of the HFT, the only *relative* privilege (as distinct from *status* privilege) over non-members was the ability to book seats two weeks prior to screenings as opposed to the one week available to the general public.²⁶ While the statement is again unattributed and hence from an ‘institutional’ voice, the conception of the audience as a dual entity, constituted as both ‘members’ and its implied opposite, ‘non-members’, leads to a stratifying of the potential audience. As seen in the opening editorial reproduced above, the audience is already demarcated with its appeal to notions of institutional affiliation and ‘the best of the world cinema’.²⁷ In respect of a potential audience, therefore, there appears to be a division in who the HFT

²⁵ HFT Programme, A-J 1969.

²⁶ Aside from receiving a copy of the film programme direct to member’s homes, being offered concession-rates to *Sight and Sound* and *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, and being able to attend the National Film Theatre and other regional film theatres, the most significant benefit of membership was being able to attend ‘members-only’ screenings and being able to book performances two week prior to screenings as opposed to the one week available to the general public.

²⁷ As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of the term ‘world cinema’ by the film theatre had different connotations from more modern academic usage.

seeks to address. How the potential audience interpret this communication has a great deal to do with the type of audience the HFT attracts and the resulting success of such an endeavour.

Reading the editorial statements above, the potential audience member is faced with the choice of interpreting the text on a scale ranging from simply taking the text as essential information to the more complex readings outlined. Whilst the assumptions inherent in the opening editorial concerning knowledge of local amenities, the corporation and the BFI, speak of an institution seeking a particular demographic, the potential for any member of the local catchment area to read the programme makes the problem of audience interpretation of the text particularly relevant. Encountering the collective voice of the editorials the potential audience member is immediately placed at a disadvantage in that the anonymous voice is inscribed with an authority of either cultural propagation or local political provision. Either way the reader is in an unequal relationship in which they are committed to a position whereby they must be in the possession of various interpretive strategies in order to gain access to the 'world' on offer. In this conception, the reader has to be imbued with a minimal level of cultural knowledge to be able to make use of the HFT and as such is presumed to belong to a certain section of the potential audience and therefore 'worthy'. A valid question would be how does the collective voice of the editorial conceive of the potential audience, as a unitary whole or as individuals? As Bennett and Woollacott acknowledge, the problem is exasperated by dint of the academic tendency to treat no part in this process as imbued with autonomy, in a situation whereby 'text and reader are conceived as being co-produced within a reading formation, gridded on to one another in a determinate compact unity'.²⁸ As no society acts as a whole but is constituted of a collection of individuals the danger lies in reading such editorials in light of these concerns.

²⁸ Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, p.61.

Nevertheless there are hints that the editorials speak, not to a collective of potential audience members or indeed to a conception of lone individuals, but to select groups that have access to differing levels of cultural cache. As echoed in the establishment of the HFT, the editorials of the printed programmes offer a way to interpret just how the film theatre saw itself and its potential audience. Despite routine generalisations regarding the particular characteristics of an audience for art cinema a consensus of opinion has never been reached.

An Audience Apart

In his survey of cinema exhibition in America, Douglas Gomery notes that

audience studies found that art theatres attracted persons of above-average education, more men than women, and many solitary moviegoers. This was the crowd who attended the opera, theatre, lectures, and ballet. They continued to listen to radio for its classical music, while not even purchasing a television set. They read the *New Yorker*, *Harpers*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Reporter* as well as many newspapers and publications devoted to fine arts and literature. [...] These were professionals, managers, or aspiring “eggheads”.²⁹

While a direct comparison of American and British exhibition strategies is impossible because of the differences between the two countries, extrapolation of the fundamental idea that art cinemas attract an audience of middle-to-upper class patrons either supplementing or, more tellingly, *seeking* other cultural pursuits leads to problems when taken out of the context of American exhibition. Whereas in Gomery’s survey ‘no other cities could approach the size and diversity that rivalled New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Milwaukee’, only London and perhaps a few smaller

²⁹ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Exhibition in America*, p.189.

conurbations (Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh) could feasibly equate to such cities in a British context.³⁰ Why then the systematic spread of regional film theatres around the country in the mid to late 1960s if an exclusive and educated population known to be the staple of art cinemas could not be guaranteed in the same concentration as that of the larger cities? Part of the answer to this question lies in the perception around the mid-1960s of a discrepancy in the exhibition policy of the BFI (with its flagship cinema the National Film Theatre) and the lack of nation-wide representation that the ‘British’ and ‘National’ of their titles promised. An equally important factor in making the feasibility of regional expansion a valid concept was the success of the film society movement. Taken together, these two factors - the existence of film societies run by local enthusiasts and the lack of representation in locales outside London by a supposedly ‘national’ organisation – led to the 1965 BFI report ‘Outside London’. Yet whilst ‘Outside London’ called for a determined policy of regional expansion of a previously centralised film culture, the assumed need for such was often at odds with actual practice.

As previously noted, in seeking to expand its specific exhibition policy in the regions, the BFI claimed that ‘three things are essential: enthusiasm, money (usually from the local authority) and a suitable hall’.³¹ Admitting that these three aspects represent the bare minimum required in order to open a regional film theatre, and were surely intended to increase acceptance and uptake on the part of local councils, the absence of consideration of a potential audience in terms of the practical sustainability of such theatres hints more at a concern with appearing to support the regions than a definite examination of how this would be practically possible. Having inaugurated the

³⁰ Ibid., 179.

³¹ ‘BFI Outlook 1968’, p.21.

initiative with the opening of the Nottingham regional film theatre in 1966, by 1968 the Institute noted that:

The genesis of a regional film theatre tends to follow a set pattern – whether full-time centres in large cities, one-week-a-month operations, or aided film societies and modest ventures serving smaller communities. In each case a local body invites the Institute to explore the possibilities of providing a greater opportunity to see worthwhile films.³²

Here again the emphasis is placed upon the local authority or body to contact the BFI with the attendant presumption that they will have considered the pros and cons of operating a regional film theatre in their particular area which the Institute would hopefully be more than willing to support. In this conception the place, and existence, of the audience seems to be of paramount concern in deciding to commence with such an endeavour. Interestingly the exact circumstances surrounding the opening of Hull Film Theatre appear to contradict this pattern. It was the BFI itself that contacted Hull Corporation to ascertain if there was any interest on the part of the council in operating a regional film theatre in the city. If the audience was missing from the three necessities of ‘enthusiasm, money and a suitable hall’ mentioned above then coincidence and incentive seem to have driven at least two of the remainder. Whereas happenstance and serendipity seem to have brought about the creation of the HFT, certain key strategies came into play in the creation of an audience for the theatre.

Whilst audiences for art cinema have been classified variously as possessing: ‘more mature and sophisticated film interests’ (Twomey), as ‘high income, well-educated’ (Gomery), ‘mature people’ (Frank), the ‘established middle class [who] rejected Hollywood and espoused European “quality films”’ (Harper and Porter) and generally ‘a more sophisticated film public’ (McLane), it is only in the creation of an

³² Ibid., 20.

alternative, an 'other' if you will, that the taste for such films could be fostered.³³ Long accepted as the standard, in terms of both production and reception, Hollywood has come to represent that which every type of cinema that falls outside of its characteristics is defined against. The problem with such labelling goes beyond the 'art/commerce' dichotomy often claimed as the major difference between Hollywood and various cinemas that have come to be known as 'art', 'independent', 'avant-garde', 'world', 'cult', 'post-colonial' etc (this list being far from exhaustive). Even taking into account the two-way process whereby Hollywood cinema is defined as much by these 'labelled' cinemas as they are by Hollywood cinema, there still remains a concern as to who attaches these labels and how much this process effects the production process itself in which key personnel (directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers etc.) consciously adapt their methods and/or material to fit into these predefined 'cinemas'. What is certain in the case of the announcement and promotion of the HFT is that a definite idea as to an alternative to mainstream cinema, and therefore the exhibition outlets associated with it, was considered to exist and be viable. The theatre itself was opened by Stanley Reed, then director of the BFI, who offered a conciliatory yet explicit role to the theatre, and its aim 'to show films not likely to be shown in ordinary cinemas', when he stated:³⁴

I do not mean to imply that they will be better films. The longer I am acquainted with films the more I am convinced that it is a popular art. But there is a tremendous range of films which cannot expect to attract more than a minority audience.³⁵

³³ J E Twomey, 'Some Considerations on the Rise of the Art-Film Theatre', Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, p.261; Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, p.180; S Frank, 'Sure-Seaters Discover an Audience', in Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, p.257; Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, 'Cinema Audience Tastes in 1950s Britain', in Annette Kuhn and Sarah Street, eds. 'Audiences and Reception in Britain' *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 2, 1999; Brian McLane, 'Domestic Theatrical and Semi-Theatrical Distribution and Exhibition of American Independent Feature Films: A Survey in 1983', Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, p.265.

³⁴ *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 January 1969, p.3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Although by 1969 only five cinemas were extant in Hull, the chance to open a regional film theatre in the area with a programming policy distinct from these meant that an audience for what the opening programme called ‘the best of the world cinema’ had to be found.³⁶ Through an appeal to an audience that would set themselves apart from the mainstream, some would say ‘lowbrow’, audience a dialogue emerged that aimed to cater for a potential audience from *within* the total audience who held an interest in film and already attended cinemas. As one local paper reported ‘though cinemas may be closing in Hull, the film addict is still being catered for with foreign or unusual films which do not normally reach the national cinema circuits’.³⁷ Whilst newspaper accounts of this type sought to report upon a trend that was spreading country-wide and bring some measure of legitimacy to Hull as a neglected area in terms of cultural pursuits, the promotion of Hull Film Theatre to a potential audience by the theatre itself echoed Stanley Reed’s note of inclusivity:

It will show the best films available – new films, and outstanding revivals and rare classics. Programmes will range from early classics of the screen to some of the latest productions including the work of directors like Renoir, Visconti, Bunuel, Godard, Brook and Olivier, and will be drawn from many different countries, some in colour or wide screen, but all will be films of quality, whether serious or comic, *chosen for their entertainment value*.³⁸

This dual strategy of seeking an audience willing to explore cinemas other than mainstream offerings, while reassuring them as to the ‘entertainment value’ still to be found in such cinema, goes some way to explaining the uncertainty behind the opening of the HFT mentioned previously. By situating itself as an alternative to mainstream consumption with the programming of ‘films that do not normally reach the national cinema circuits’, the theatre took a further step in differentiating its audience from that

³⁶ Hull Film Theatre (HFT) programme, January-March 1969.

³⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 August 1969, p.4.

³⁸ HFT promotional leaflet, November/December 1968; emphasis added.

of the other cinemas in Hull by offering a ‘membership’ option.³⁹ Already distinguishing its potential audience by the programming of ‘the best of the world cinema’ the membership scheme played upon the notions of exclusivity and privilege inherent in the film society movement that in many ways form the precursor to the regional film theatres. Although the membership system used by film societies to a large extent came about due to the 1909 Cinematograph Act, the adoption of such a scheme by the HFT was for significantly different reasons. As a ‘new and exciting addition to the city’s amenities’, the benefits of becoming a member were couched in notions of civic pride as well as ‘belonging’.⁴⁰ As advance publicity stated:

You can also support this exciting venture by becoming a “Member”. For a small annual subscription, in addition to supporting this amenity, you will (a) receive regularly a well-illustrated programme brochure, (b) be able to attend members’ film evenings when films not available to the general public will be shown, (c) be able to take advantage of concession-rate subscriptions to *Sight & Sound* and *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, (d) be able to attend the National Film Theatre and other regional Film Theatres in different parts of the country, and (e) be able to book seats in advance of normal booking.⁴¹

Although four of these concessions afforded ‘members’ can be seen as standard padding intended to make subscription seem more appealing, it is in the chance to attend screenings not available to the ‘general public’ that a desire to appeal to a particular audience can be observed. Without such an enticement towards a certain audience the operation of the regional film theatre, and the meanings that became associated with it, would have been less like the film society and NFT model that was such an attractive proposition for those involved, and more akin to the commercial continental cinemas that presented a dual identity to its audience as both commercial and non-commercial exhibitors. It is in the strategy of offering benefits to the committed film enthusiast that

³⁹ *Hull Times*, 16 April 1969, p.3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ HFT promotional leaflet, November/December 1968.

the beginnings of a conflict between exclusive art cinema and commercial art cinema exhibition can be detected. Or to state it another way, notions of an assumed audience can be said to actually precipitate that audience.

As Christine Geraghty highlights in her survey of cinema-going in Britain between 1947-63, the way in which audiences experience a film can be as important to an understanding of the film and the film-going experience as the film itself and the institutions that support their manufacture and dissemination. Here Geraghty's interest lies in 'what cinema meant as a social space, how it was constructed not so much through audiences numbers or bricks and mortar and capital but through the physical experience of being part of a mass audience in a space specifically designed for watching films'.⁴² Such an approach can provide a valuable counter to claims for textual authority or industry hegemony and prove even more revealing when applied to such minority audiences as those sought by the regional film theatres. Bound by what Bourdieu refers to as their *habitus*, the audience perceived as the natural customer for art cinema directs the content, operation and marketing of such exhibition venues and in turn become habituated to the very process it helps dictate and sustain. Highlighting such processes is one way of determining the effect that operational policy has upon both audience demographic and meaning construction. Given the nature and requirement of the 'membership' option of the HFT, whereby additional material was offered to those willing to join, the decision to offer the opportunity to attend special screenings only available to members was taken in order to reward those committed to the theatre. In offering a 'members only' option the theatre paved the way for a number of audience strands that both broadened and narrowed the possible social spaces

⁴² Christine Geraghty, 'Cinema as a Social Space: Understanding Cinema-going in Britain 1947-1963', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 42 (Summer 2000) <<http://www.frameworkonline.com/42index.htm>> [accessed 11 November 2006].

associated with cinema, a process which has consequences for determining the identity of not only the audience but art cinema itself.

Conclusion

Addressing the issue of local government involvement in the construction (in both the actual and figurative senses) and maintenance of a regional film theatre offers an antidote to the oft-cited cultural hegemony dictated and directed from the metropolitan base of London. By accessing local accounts of cultural provision a picture emerges of local idiosyncrasy in an atmosphere bound by negation and compromise. Instigating national policies becomes a matter of implementation and organisation based upon specific local and regional pressures, not all of which are amenable, recognisable, or even reconcilable, with the original intent of the national policy. In the compromised conditions that led to the establishment of HFT, whereby the promise of financial and operating assistance from the BFI ‘persuaded’ the corporation to proceed with plans for a regional film theatre, there is evidence of divergent views as to what constitutes cultural policy and how best it should be administered. That the HFT was established in this way goes a long way to explaining the manner in which it operated. Taking its lead from an arts institution the HFT sought to position itself in the cultural landscape of the city somewhere between the film society movement and the type of cultural amenity it would have become had not the BFI’s approach put a halt to the proposed live theatre it was in the process of constructing. This sense of limbo can be discerned in the theatre’s hesitancy over its own identity and its potential audience.

Addressing this issue it can be argued that a printed film programme, such as those distributed by the HFT, represented an intervention between those producing the

programmes and the potential audience it sought to address. It can also be claimed that such an intervention acts as a form of cultural intermediary in so much as a directive and contextual agenda is visible. Applying a number of Sarah Street's schema to such analysis it can be seen that 'authorship', 'agency', 'context', 'impact' and 'interpretive significance' all have much to communicate in relation to the programmes under discussion.⁴³ The notion of the film programmes being merely an intervention between institution and potential audience, no matter how densely ingrained with ideological and prescriptive readings, is complicated when considering the uncertainty as to exactly *who* constitutes the institutional voice.

Viewing the editorial voice as stemming from any of a number of positions, be they the HFT, Hull Corporation, a civic amenity or one of a number of BFI-sponsored regional film theatres, opens up a variety of reading positions that subtly shift not only the identity of the film theatre but also the inferences to be drawn from the dialogue with the potential audience. Added to these possible positions is the uncertainty as to who exactly the editorial voice is addressing. This uncertainty as to whether the editorials address an individual, a collective, a local audience or a wider audience adds to the notion that the regional film theatres had not completely come to terms with their own identity, or their audience.

The association of certain films with certain audiences stretches back to the birth of cinema where first middle-class then lower-class audiences were addressed by the new medium. Such associations that exist between art cinema and its assumed audience are no different. Yet the mere existence of art films does not create an audience for such cinema. A complex system of factors influence how art cinema audiences are perceived, addressed and even constructed. Fundamental to this process is the programming of

⁴³ Street, *British Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.6-9.

films that over time come to form what has become accepted as art cinema or art-house films. Established during a period when the British cinema industry was in a steady rate of decline (a decline that steepened throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s) the regional film theatres sought to programme films that provided for an alternative experience based upon a number of factors. Whilst emulating the programming policy of the film society movement, in terms of the types of films programmed, the regional film theatres had an already extant audience in mind. Nevertheless in furthering the reach of the BFI and the NFT, the provision of a cultural service based upon a metropolitan template was envisioned as bringing culture to the regions, a service associated much more with the progressive modernity of London and its programming policy than the seemingly parochial ambitions of the film societies. Caught between these two positions HFT began its life with good intentions but with little direction.

The Place of Exhibition: Programmes, Image and Address at Hull Film Theatre

Nothing highlights the specific nature of a cinema more than the films on offer. As much as location, décor, price, ambiance and service determine the experience of visiting a cinema, the overwhelming draw for most audiences are the films being screened. As Barbara Stones notes in her survey of one hundred years of film exhibition ‘an art house is defined by its programming’.¹ Whilst seemingly obvious when stated in this way, the lack of academic focus upon the policy behind the programming of cinemas is indicative of the neglect the industrial side of film has suffered while more historical, textual, theoretical and empirical considerations of the contexts of exhibition have found favour. This neglect is in some way attributable to the manner in which film studies entered the academy, yet to dismiss the actual practice of the selection of films for screening misses an opportunity to address the process by which those films become available for discussion in the first instance. Therefore, the first section of this chapter concerns the selection of films for Hull’s art house cinemas.

The programming of cinemas has many points at which choice is both enlarged and circumscribed, especially where the potential profitability of films acts upon decision-making. Ranging from the unified and central programming policy of the film combines (ABC and Rank) to the bespoke programming of independent cinemas, no programming policy is entirely uniform and without compromise. Nevertheless, no

¹ Barbara Stones, *America Goes to the Movies: 100 Years of Motions Picture Exhibition* (North Hollywood: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993), p.200.

programming policy dictated the identity of a cinema more than the regional film theatres did from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.

As discussed previously, the origin of the regional film theatre movement and its subsequent operation came from a number of sources. These factors ranged from the educational remit of the BFI, the nature and aims of the film society movement, the rise of interest in film as a serious art form and the targeting of differentiated audiences as part of this expansionist policy. Once established, however, it was the programming of the regional film theatres that solidified their identities in the minds of the public. The work of Janna Jones concerning the Tampa Theater in Florida acknowledges that the programming of a cinema such as the Hull Film Theatre creates more than just a programme of films for consumption. According to Jones it enables a much neglected, and prescriptive, practice to be addressed:

The films that the Tampa Theater exhibits, along with the distinctions that the film society members make about themselves and the films they most enjoy, help identify the movie palace as a highbrow social space.²

The regional film theatres can also be described as such 'highbrow social spaces' given their programming policies and how they perceived their own identity. Whilst the organisation and administration of the regional film theatres was at the local level (be that the council, art collective or film society), the Hull Film Theatre exemplifies the contradictory nature of 'regional' film theatres offering films selected from 'the best in world cinema' that took much of their identity and programming policy from outside the 'region'.³

² Janna Jones, 'Finding a Place at the Downtown Picture Palace: The Tampa Theater, Florida', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, eds. Mark Sheil and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.127.

³ Hull Film Theatre programme Jan-Mar 1969.

Beginning with the question of who controls film culture, the chapter will address the question of exactly who programmed the HFT and to what end(s). Comparisons with similar and nearby regional film theatres (primarily Leeds, Sheffield and York) highlight exactly how the local was perceived with regard to the provision of film. Differences will be shown to exist between the programming of a commercial cinema, a commercial continental cinema, a film society and a regional film theatre that range from merely providing product for an established cinema to creating an identity for a particular exhibition outlet. With regard to programming a regional film theatre, the relationship between audience, institution and programmer will be shown to be a crucial one that is as much formative of filmic trends as in thrall to them.

The programming of the HFT in its first five years is therefore important not only in the way that it fulfilled its remit as a regional film theatre, but also in the way that it addressed the perceived needs of the city [for a representative sample of the format of the programme and types of films programmed at the HFT in its first five years see ‘Sample Programme Content 1. Hull Film Theatre (Jan-Mar 1974)’ and ‘Sample Programme Content 2. Hull Film Theatre (Sept-Dec 1974)’ on pages 179 and 180]. Forming a unique perspective on how the HFT imagined this perceived need, the printed programmes of the theatre offer a way to gauge how the theatre imagined its own position in the cultural landscape of the city. Moving on to consider the emphasis placed in the programmes on Hull itself as a city distinct from the rest of the country, the chapter will investigate the place of both the film theatre and Hull as symptomatic of a continuing insecurity espoused by a city defined in large part by its isolation and insularity. As a specific city attempting to exhibit a particular type of film, the manner in which the HFT communicated to the public is particularly illuminating with regard to the cultural geography of the city and its cultural amenities, especially in the positioning of the city in relation to the national.

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**THURS-FRI
JANUARY 3-4
7.15 p.m.**

**THE
OUT-OF-
TOWNERS**
(U)

Also
**THEY MIGHT
BE GIANTS**
(U)

**TUES
JANUARY 8
M**
(A)

**THURS-FRI
JANUARY 10-11
MACBETH**
(AA)

**THURS-FRI
JANUARY 17-18
THE
SALAMANDER**
(AA)

**TUES
JANUARY 22
METELLO**
(A)

**THURS-FRI
JANUARY 24-25
PLOT**
(L'ATTENTAT)
(A)

**THURS-FRI
JAN 31-FEB 1
LOVE IN THE
AFTERNOON**
(L'AMOUR
L'APRES-MIDI)
(AA)

Two writer friends are given the assignment of preparing a television script based on a news story about a young girl who is accused of deliberately shooting her uncle, something she denies. Both men are forced to call into question their ideas about the working class and their own class, and the Rosemonde, the girl—like the mythical salamander which fed the flames and was not consumed by them, she emerges triumphant.

Switzerland, 1971. Directed by Alain Tanner. With Bulle Ogier, Jean-Luc Bideau, Jacques Denis. 125 mins. Subtitles. (Also, Muscle Beach).

A deeply caring film about what appears to have been a crucial strike in Florence in 1902 and the young worker behind it whose father had fought and died for the cause. As in Bo Widerberg's *Adalen 37*, the film appears to be at odds with the lyrical beauty of its setting, but in the end the theme emerges so strongly that the pictorial grace of Florence acts as an ironic counterpart to the harshness of the social tragedy.

Italy, 1970. Directed by Mauro Bolognini. With Massimo Ranieri, Lucia Bosa, Colucci. 112 mins. Subtitles. (Also, Mr. Rossi cartoon).

This film caused much furor in France because of the suggested police, government and press corruption in the Ben Barka affair of October 1965, on which it is closely based. The script adaptation is by Jorge Semprun, who also wrote the Costa-Gavras film, *Z*, and the film is packed with good performances, notably from Jean-Louis Trintignant, Michel Piccoli, Jean Seberg, and Gian-Maria Volonté.

France/Italy/Germany, 1972. Directed by Yves Boisset. Cast also includes Michel Bouquet, Philippe Noiret and Françoise Fabian. Colour. 123 mins. Subtitles. (Also, The Potter).

The sixth and last of Eric Rohmer's 'contes mœux', a series of intelligent, literary films which make an effort not to show characters behaving in certain ways, but what goes on in their minds to make them act as they do. (Previous films in this series have included *La Collectionneuse*, *My Night with Mauric* and *Clair's Knee*.) The dilemma is always the same: a man faced with the choice of two women and, after flirting with the idea of infidelity, finding the strength to adhere to his moral rules and rejecting temptation.

France, 1972. Directed by Eric Rohmer. With Bernard Verley, Zouzou, Françoise Fabian. Colour. 97 mins. Subtitles. (Also, The Wardrobe).

NO FILMS WEEK FEBRUARY 3-9

Once again, the setting is the great plain; once again, the screen is inhabited by peasants, soldiers, horses, naked girls. The film contains only 26 shots, choreographed in stunningly elaborate and nervous patterns of movement, with horses repeatedly cross-crossing between the camera and the main focus of attention. *Witte Aiguis* did succeed a closed and troubled film, however, *Red Psalm* has recovered the dynamism which is an essential element in this perilous style.

Hungary, 1971. Directed by Miklos Jancso. With Andrea Drahota, Lajos Balazsovits, Andras Balint. Colour. 95 mins. Subtitles. (Also, The Overdone Steak).

Jancso's unique style is worth both watching and discussing. Accordingly, as an experiment in itself, a discussion has been arranged by the Department of Adult Education to take place on Friday 15th February at 7.15 p.m. The film will be introduced by Brian Birch, M.A., and after the performance, he will lead a discussion on the film and the director. Both of these events will take place in a Meeting Room adjacent to the Theatre. The fee is 50 pence, inclusive of a ticket for the performance. Application forms are available from the Department of Adult Education, University of Hull, 195 Cottingham Road, Hull HU5 2ED. It is hoped that members of the Hull Film Theatre will support this venture, which may be repeated in future seasons.

**THURS-FRI
FEBRUARY 14-15
RED PSALM**
(AA)

**THURS-FRI
FEBRUARY 21-22
7.30 p.m.
IMAGES**
(X)

Images begins like a tense psychological thriller on *Gaslight* lines, in which someone is trying to drive the heroine mad. Alone in her flat a young wife is tormented by mysterious phone calls and later catches sight of a lover who has been dead for years. It soon becomes clear that Cathryn's torment is primarily an inner one, yet the power and suspense of this remarkable film are continually nourished by the dark world of the thriller that underlies it.

Ire, 1972. Directed by Robert Altman. With Susannah York, Fred Audoynon, Marcel Bozzuffi, Penetration. Colour. 101 mins.

Also
THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
(A)

Made over 12 years ago but not shown in Britain until recently, this is a thoroughly entertaining and, in the circumstances (shoe-string budget, shot in 24 hours), very well made little horror comic about a man-eating plant which refuses normal plant food and insatiably demands (in a voice borrowed from *Alphafile*) a diet of human flesh and blood! Not exactly a masterpiece, then, but well worth seeing, and for Cornan adds it is, of course, a 'must'.

U.S.A., 1960. Directed by Roger Corman. With Jonathan Haze, Jackie Joseph, Mel Welles. 70 mins.

PLEASE NOTE EARLY STARTING TIME.

**THURS-FRI
FEB 28-MARCH 1
LA RUPTURE**
(X)

Chabrol observes the power of love to conquer whatever wards human minds and feelings—drugs, power money, greed—through a chilling yet compassionate tale of a divorcing mother's fight to retain custody of her young son and her sanity. Not quite up to the high standard set by *Le Foucher*, perhaps, but still an example of Chabrol's fine workmanship and command over his material.

France/Italy/Belgium, 1970. Directed by Claude Chabrol. With Stéphane Audran, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Annie Cordy, Michel Bouquet, Michel Duchaussoy. Colour. 125 mins. Subtitles. (Also, The Line No. 5).

**THURS-FRI
MARCH 14-15
THE CLOWNS**
(U)

Fellini's affectionate tribute to the world of the circus is a brilliant, inventive personal documentary about the meanings of clowns, beginning with childhood memories and ending with a spectacular mass clown funeral. Fellini interviews great clowns of the past, visits an active circus and explores the contemporary relevance of the clown figure (with whom he identifies). The circus scenes are visual fireworks, the autobiographic elements fascinating and the entertainment delightful.

Italy/France/W. Germany, 1970. Directed by Federico Fellini. Colour. 92 mins. Subtitles. (Also, The Clown Prince of Hollywood).

**TUES
MARCH 19
THE
ADVERSARY**
(A)

This, the second in a new urban trilogy by Satyajit Ray (the first was *Days and Nights in the Forest*) is a long and leisurely but consistently enthralling story of a young man, who, when his father dies, has to leave medical school and seek a job, eventually having to compromise and reluctantly accept work which takes him away from Calcutta. As delicately observed as ever, this illuminating glimpse of middle-class Indian town life is supplemented by fantasy and flashback which underline the hero's retreat from the city's complex corruption.

India, 1970. Directed by Satyajit Ray. With Dhritiman Chatterjee. 110 mins. Subtitles. (Also, Satyajit Ray—Creative Artist of India).

**THURS-FRI
MARCH 21-22
TCHAIKOVSKY**
(U)

Though it glosses over certain aspects of his life (his acknowledged—and accepted—homosexuality, for instance), for most of its length *Tchaikovsky* is a compassionate, moving and exhilarating film. Its accuracy, authority and sense of affection without adulation set it in welcome opposition to the crude melodramatics and sensationalism of Ken Russell's *The Music Lovers*. Here, it is the musician and the music that counts, though most of the well-known incidents of his life are depicted, and the film is ravishly beautiful to look at throughout.

U.S.S.R. 1970. Directed by Igor Talankin. With Innokenti Smoktunovskiy, Antonina Shuranova, Evgeni Leonov, Maya Plisetskaya, Alla Demidova, Witold Sobociński. Colour. 109 mins. Subtitles and English narration by Laurence Harvey. (Also, The Nail Clippers).

**THURS-FRI
MARCH 28-29
THEMROC**
(X)

The mysterious title (pronounced 'lem-rock') turns out to be the name of a frustrated factory worker who suddenly decides to opt out of living and goes home, seals up a room from the rest of the flat, than knocks out the outer wall and proceeds to live an incestuous, cave-man kind of life with his nubile sister. Original and diverting, *Themroc* is directed and written with unforced black humour and superbly subversive panache by a 37-year-old French anarchist called Claude Faraldo.

France, 1972. With Michel Piccoli, Beatrice Romand. Colour. 110 mins. Invented language, some subtitles. (Also, Les Joies).

TUESDAY, APRIL 2 I AM CURIOUS—BLUE (Members only)

THURSDAY-FRIDAY, APRIL 4-5 (BLANCHE (AA), SWEET GAMES OF LAST SUMMER (X))

Further details of these films will be included in the APRIL-JUNE programme.

NO FILMS WEEK MARCH 3-9

Sample Programme Content 1. Hull Film Theatre (Jan-Mar 1974).

The public that the film theatre addressed was never a uniform one, however. The chapter will conclude by examining the manner in which the HFT appeared to offer a range of choices for its potential audience by providing opportunities for the audience to select an ‘appropriate’ viewing experience for their level of taste, aptitude and commitment. By offering screenings for such differentiated audiences as ‘members-only’, ‘children’, ‘senior citizen’ and ‘director/star’ seasons, there appears a complication and contradiction of the generally assumed nature of what an art cinema does and should exhibit. Not only does this raise issues concerning the role cultural institutions play in creating an alternative film culture, it also has implications for the notion that audiences are the barometer by which film production is gauged. The chapter as a whole will therefore advance the argument that the identity of an art cinema audience is just as complex as the identity of an art cinema venue. Neither are as black and white as generally supposed.

Programming and Precedents

Administering policy and provision comes with a variety of responsibilities more often than not weighed as much against the practicalities of setting a new endeavour in motion as the desire to enlighten and educate those they address. As previously noted, the BFI, in its capacity as the custodian of film education in Britain, sought to fulfil this role with regard to, firstly, the use of film as an educational tool and, secondly the creation of the National Film Theatre, by attempting to elevate the taste of those willing to be elevated through the screening of films unavailable elsewhere. It was in this mould that the regional film theatres were not only envisioned but constituted, with the screening of the same films as programmed at the NFT transposed onto the very

different exhibition context of the regional theatres. As the nature of this expansion was to all intents and purposes an *ad hoc*, expedient and rapid implementation of policy over feasibility, the amount that the BFI itself was to be involved in the initial operation of each new theatre was a matter of great concern.

Considering the fortuitous nature of the creation of HFT, whereby a proposed live theatre rapidly became a regional film theatre, the help provided by the BFI in respect of programming was crucial to a local council with no history of film programming and little time to learn. When considering the nature of the construction of the network of regional film theatres, the BFI could hardly expect programming initiatives to come primarily from the host authority (be that council, art organisation or film society involvement). To this end the Regional Film Theatres Unit (together with the Distribution Library and the Central Booking Agency, all under the rubric of the Film Services Division of the BFI) played an advisory role suggesting films based on availability, suitability and trade negotiation in liaison with whatever programming system the host theatre had established.

As Hull Corporation had constituted 'a provisional advisory committee for initial programming' in November 1968 (two months before the theatre offered its opening programme) with representation divided between council members and those with a specific film interest, the advice given by the BFI to the new organisation was understandably welcomed.⁴ Yet rather than tailor individual programmes to specific locations, a stated ambition in the early discussions of the regional film theatre initiative, the advice given to the HFT programming committee was generic. By the time it opened in 1969, the HFT was the twenty-fifth regional film theatre to open and a particular pattern to the programming of the RFTs had been established during the intervening period. Film selection was therefore based upon the model of the NFT with

⁴ Hull Corporation Minutes (HCM) 11 November 1968.

BFI seeking to expand, not only the work of the Institute outside London, but also to raise the standard of film appreciation to the level of those in the capital via its educational remit.

Taking into account the specificities of regional film theatre operation as opposed to commercial cinema operation, it becomes apparent that the RFT programming strategy was not only necessarily unique, but adversely constrained. Whereas the commercial circuit cinemas operated by the combines offered greater incentive to the distributors with their need for a larger number of film prints, with the distributors offering greater publicity drives due to this demand, those cinemas programming films perceived as having a 'minority interest' had to adopt a different strategy.⁵ As distributors aim to maximise their profit from any single film print, and as the share of profit from the hire of a film print is calculated as a percentage of box office receipts, the longer a film print can be guaranteed to run the better for the distributor.

One crucial difference between commercial exhibition and RFT exhibition, and one which determines the programming strategy above all is market demand. In the case of commercial, first-run, cinemas, the turnover of product is determined by the audience's desire to see new films as they are released. Later, second and third-run cinemas operated on a concentric format whereby the more prestigious cinemas, usually located in city centres until suburbanisation, charged greater admission prices and

⁵ For more on the distribution sector of the film industry see: Bill Baillieu and John Goodchild, *The British Film Business* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2002); Betz, 'Art, Exploitation, Underground'; R. K. Neilson Baxter, 'The Structure of the British Film Industry', *The Penguin Film Review*, 7 (September 1948); Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985); Allen Eyles, *ABC: The First Name in Entertainment* (London: Cinema Theatres Association and BFI, 1993); Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas - 1: Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation* (London: Cinema Theatres Association and BFI, 2002); Eyles, 'Exhibition and the Cinemagoing Experience', *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI, 1997); Barry Edson, 'Commercial Film Distribution and Exhibition in the UK', *Screen*, 21:3 (1980); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader* and Jason E. Squire, ed. *The Movie Business Book* (New York: Fireside, 2004).

cinemas further from these centres charged less and subsequently received the product after its 'first-run'. Such was the operation of the commercial sector that a film could 'hold-over' depending upon the demand in any particular week and be retained for a further week. Thus the programme for any given week at the cinema was decided on a week-by-week basis and primarily determined by market demand.

Programming a regional film theatre on the other hand raises a number of different issues that highlight the extent to which expectation and 'high art' consumption practices play a role in the policy of programming. Stemming from the days of the original (London) Film Society, and the prescriptions of the 1909 and 1927 Cinematograph Acts and the Sunday Entertainment Act of 1932, the practice of 'seasonal' programming became the norm for a variety of reasons. Owing to the requirement that money not be exchanged on the day of performance, a subscription system was adopted whereby dues were paid before a screening. Contributing to the need to plan ahead was the prohibitive operation of the film distributors who, as mentioned, sought longer playing times and larger potential audiences than could be guaranteed by film societies. Due to such restrictions, film societies had to plan ahead in order to guarantee availability and negotiate the best terms for desired films. All of these considerations meant that if an audience was to be created for the product on offer the product had to be guaranteed ahead of time. The 'seasonal' approach meant that three-month spans (Winter, Spring and Autumn, roughly corresponding to the months January-March, April-June and September-December respectively) became the optimal packaging for a collection of films. By the time the NFT opened and adopted a similar policy this programming style had become established as an international norm due in part to the rise of film archives and their policies for screening and loaning film prints.

The success of such a strategy made its transportation to the RFT model all the easier to justify but with differing consequences. In creating 'local schemes, modelled

on the NFT and programmed from London, but administered and publicised by a local manager and committee' the opportunity to create unique, individual film theatres tailored to a specific location and need, was lost.⁶ In its place grew a generic policy designed to ease the move into the regions and to transfer a successful model from a metropolitan centre to apparently neglected locations. This adoption of a 'national' policy in the regions negated any need to seriously consider local desire whilst hopefully raising the level of interest in, if not acceptance of, 'the best of the world cinema' by a wider but still minority audience. With the adoption of the film society template for programming, the regional film theatre movement essentially began as a second-run network for films the commercial continentals (including the 'art-houses' established in major cities) and the distributors had reason for privileging. When the distributors had exhausted the potential of a film in the commercial continental or major art-house cinemas that could guarantee a certain length of booking and possibly 'hold-over' a film to maximise audience interest they would offer the film to the regional film theatre network. Leading to the necessity of 'seasonal' pre-booking with no opportunity to 'hold-over' product, this strategy further distanced the film product, and thereby the experience, from that of the mass-orientated commercial market and set the RFTs apart as culturally and socially distinct. Not only did this policy engender difference, it also gave rise to a self-fulfilling prophesy whereby minority interest was both promoted as a standard and pilloried as an unfortunate reality. The haste with which the RFTs spread throughout the country also added to the establishment of a unified policy, with the (perceived) success with a particular programme at one RFT translating into the same programme being recycled at another RFT.

Such was the case with the opening programme of the HFT. Taking advisory assistance from the BFI, the opening programme of the theatre consisted of 'films yet to

⁶ *The National Film Theatre Outside London: Suggestions for Local Authorities* (BFI: London: 1966), p.2.

be shown in Hull' but not the RFT network.⁷ The opening film on 9th January 1969 at the HFT, *Hugs and Kisses* (1966), had been the opening film of both the Tyneside Film Theatre on the 23rd March 1968 and the Dartington Film Theatre in May 1968 as well as screening from the 9-11th May 1968 at the Sheffield Film Theatre (also a library-housed RFT) and from 1-2 December 1968 at the opening of the York Film Theatre.⁸ Having previously secured *Hugs and Kisses* as the inaugural film at a number of RFTs and having been programmed as part of the 'standard' and 'accepted' programme at a number of other film theatres, the film was seen as a safe choice that would serve the remit of the new theatre in Hull well and (hopefully) reflect the success it had seen elsewhere. This cautious programming of the HFT is further highlighted by comparison with neighbouring RFTs whose role in dictating the character of the HFT mirrored the role other cities of a similar size played in creating the character of Hull itself. The opening of regional film theatres in Sheffield (10th October 1967), York (20th October 1968), Leeds (September 1970) and, to a lesser extent (due to its distance from the city), Nottingham (22nd September 1966) and Manchester (13th October 1967) all played a significant role in the programming, and hence, the identity of HFT, a role born more from expediency than any sense of regional specificity.

Alongside *Hugs and Kisses* in the opening programme, and forming a strategy to be repeated throughout the ensuing years, was the programming of films that had played in other RFTs before they appeared in Hull. Both *The Leopard* (1963) and *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) from the inaugural HFT programme had played at the Sheffield Film Theatre the previous year as well as many other films that had come to characterise the RFT brand of exhibition established since 1966. Based on equal measures of assumption, availability and financial outlay, the programming of film prints that were

⁷ Hull Film Theatre programme, Jan-Mar 1970.

⁸ The screening of *Hugs and Kisses* at the Tyneside Film Theatre was attended by the film's director, Jonas Cornell and its star, Agneta Ekmanner.

deemed suitable for the RFT network became a balancing act between Hull Corporation and the BFI whereby the expertise of the BFI was weighed against the inexperience of the local programming committee, even despite representation from the film society sector on the theatre committee.

As reported in the BFI publication *The BFI and the Regions* (1970) ‘most of the RFTs operate on a one-week per month basis’, and therefore the commitment to film by the host organisation lay in an overall policy of providing alternative cultural pursuits (usually live theatre or community projects) within the purview of a cultural and civic amenity.⁹ Yet the decision to operate HFT solely as a film theatre, running for nine months per year on a two-night per week policy, despite its original planned purpose as a live theatre, indicates a privileging of art cinema within national cultural policy, over and above regional cultural predispositions.

As has been noted, the circumstances surrounding the creation of the HFT, with timing and the pro-active stance of the BFI taking the lead rather than local demand, created a situation in which ‘art cinema’ was brought to, rather than sought by the city. This was a situation borne out by the programming strategy, influenced as it was by the choices of neighbouring RFTs. Demonstrating the inconsistent approach adopted by regional and central interests towards a potential local audience is the fact that *Les Enfants du Paradis* was programmed as a ‘members only’ film in Sheffield, but by the time it appeared in the opening programme of the HFT, it was available to the ‘general public’. This discrepancy could be explained as local idiosyncrasy and a desire to bolster the profile of a newly opened film theatre but the developing dialogue with the potential audience of the film theatre conducted through the printed programmes complicates the issues by representing how the HFT saw itself and its role as stemming from its programming.

⁹ ‘*The BFI and the Regions*’ (London: BFI, 1970).

‘Brand’-new revivals

If the anonymous editorials of the initial format of the HFT programme previously discussed constructed a complex system of communication between institution and a potential audience, the relationship between the HFT and the city of Hull can be seen as complicating this relation still further. Whereas the dialogue with the people of Hull situated them as members of a select audience, grafting onto them the interpretive intellect of a discerning public, the discourse with, and about, the city further partitioned the audience, this time in relation to the nation. As the stated aim of the HFT, consistent with other regional film theatres, was to screen ‘the best of the world cinema’, the opportunity for the promotion of films appearing for the first time at the theatre and in the city was not to be missed.¹⁰

From the third programme onwards the increasing promotion of films new to Hull becomes evident. Beginning with an emphasis upon films that are new to the country as a whole, the programmes gradually narrow this focus to concentrate upon the promotion of films new to Hull. Continuing the institutional dialogue, the September-December 1969 programme pronounces ‘films new to this country include Pasolini’s *Theorem* and Bergman’s *The Shame*, while each season we hope to include films which for some reason have been unjustly neglected’.¹¹ Moving on from this concern with the import of new and neglected films, the following programme (January- March 1970) recasts this tenor in more local terms:

Other films **fairly** new to this country are *Once There Was A War*, a masterful evocation of life in war-time Denmark; *Stolen Kisses*, Truffaut’s delightful sequel to ‘Les Quatres Cent Coups’; and Chabrol’s latest, *La Femme Infidele*. Three films which were made some time ago but have **yet to be shown in Hull** are *Kwaidan*, Kobayashi’s splendid

¹⁰ HFT Programme, J-M 1969.

¹¹ HFT Programme, S-D 1969.

collection of ghost stories, Fred Coe's first feature, *A Thousand Clowns*, starring Jason Robards Jr; and Alain Jessua's second film, *Jeu De Massacre* (Comic-strip Hero). Well worth **reviving** is Arthur Penn's highly under-rated *The Chase*, a violent portrayal of modern America.¹²

This shift in emphasis concerning the promotion of films between the two editorials highlights a change in strategy as to the way the HFT conceived of its potential audience and the associated reasons for attendance. Foregrounding films 'new to this country' imagines an audience eager, not so much for the best in art cinema as for foreign films that a national audience can experience at the first opportunity in an unacknowledged chain of distribution that eventually filters through to Britain. At the same time, indeed in the same sentence, as this recourse to the new, there appears a move that can be interpreted as a further appeal to exclusivity. In their desire to, 'include films which for some reason have been unjustly neglected', the HFT provokes the question: neglected by whom?

If programming policy actively seeks out films that have had minimal representation in UK exhibition (akin to the Film Society's remit) then the dialogue with the audience is altered again, adding yet another level of exclusivity (and exclusion) to those already promoted.¹³ Through appeals to the audience concerning 'neglected' films, the HFT sets its agenda as one of innovation, privilege, egalitarianism and (re)discovery, exactly those attributes associated with progressive liberalism. In this conception, the HFT champions that which has been marginalized, neglected and written out of history. In so doing, the audience conceived is one attuned to such practices and accepting of the need to appreciate cinema that has gone unacknowledged for one reason or another. It is this uncertainty as to why such cinema is neglected and the attendant reason for programming it that threatens to undermine the conception of

¹² HFT Programme, J-M 1970; emphasis added.

¹³ Jen Samson, 'The Film Society, 1925-1939' in Charles Barr, ed. *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), p.307.

the HFT as champion of art cinema and replace this with one that conceives of the theatre as merely an outlet for films that placates the remit of one of many BFI-funded regional film theatres. Indeed, it is this reading, one born of institutional and political affiliation that speaks most fervently of a regional theatre in service of a wider organisation and national policy.

Redress to this imbalance comes in part with the next programme. With the inclusion of the adjective *fairly*, a doubled apology is evident in the discourse with the potential audience. Curtailing any possible criticism pertaining to the screening of films ‘new’ to the country, the editorial can also be read as an apology for the position of Hull within the strategic distribution of film prints. With a limited number of prints struck for a particular run of a film that the distributor may deem of limited appeal, the print(s) then ‘roll-out’ across the country in a designated pattern. The degree to which this affects the subsequent exhibition and reception of cultural cinema is dependent upon many factors, yet the reaction of the local outlet can often be discerned in the dialogue with the potential audience. Here the HFT mounts a gradually escalating dialogue with, and about, Hull and its position as a provider of cultural cinema, beginning with ‘three films which were made some time ago but have yet to be shown in Hull’ (January-April 1970) and culminating in the January-March 1974 editorial:¹⁴

The backlog of films unseen in Hull continues to grow, and our Winter programme reflects this by being almost entirely comprised of features new to the city, including films by such established directors as Claude Chabrol, Federico Fellini, Miklós Jancsó, Satyajit Ray, and Eric Rohmer.¹⁵

Contained within this escalating rhetoric of provincialism is the realisation that the HFT increasingly sees itself, and perhaps more saliently *promotes* itself, as an institution dedicated to the enlightenment of a local community, not through the provision of ‘the

¹⁴ HFT Programme, J-M 1970.

¹⁵ HFT Programme, J-M 1974.

best of the world cinema' as promised in the opening programme but through serving the (presumed) needs of an often neglected region. It is this continual promotion of the city as neglected in terms of a national exhibition network, and the concomitant inverse that uses this neglect as a champion of the HFT's commitment to cultural provision, that results in the following dialogue with, and concerning, the city:

The Hull Film Theatre continues its third year with a varied and interesting selection of films, including three new to Hull. (J-M 1971)

For the first time in Hull, and showing for two nights, *Danish Blue*. (J-M 1971)

The Spring Season combines a fairly equal proportion of films new to Hull, and others seen before but well worth reviving. (A-J 1971)

The Autumn 1971 Season consists mainly of film not previously shown in Hull. (S-D 1971)

The Hull Film Theatre enters its fourth year with the most ambitious season yet. New films and revivals are mixed in equal proportions. The accent in January is on value-for-money double-bills; in February we feature films new to Hull; and March is for the most part made up of welcome revivals. (J-M 1972)

The Spring 1972 Season contains an equal number of revivals worth seeing again (these so well known as to need no introduction) and films new to Hull. (A-J 1972)

Among those showing for the first time in the city are[...]. (A-J 1972)

Once again the Hull Film Theatre offers a wide variety of films, including some which are being screened in Hull *for the first time*, and which would probably never see the light of day (or, rather, the light of an arc lamp!) if it were not for the Hull Film Theatre. (S-D 1972)

Films receiving their HULL PREMIERE showing include[...]. (J-M 1973)

The highlight of the Spring 1973 Season is undoubtedly the first screening in Hull of Milos Forman's hilarious comedy, *Taking Off*. At least six other films are also being screened for the first time in the city. (A-J 1973)

The Autumn 1973 Season includes more than a dozen films receiving their first screening in Hull, notable among these being

three long-awaited French films directed by Truffaut, Malle and Rohmer. (S-D 1973)¹⁶

What is evident about the above selection is the extent to which the HFT went to create a niche for itself in relation to both national and inter-regional exhibition. During the five-year span between January 1969 and April 1974 the HFT was the only cinema in the region dedicated to the exhibition of art cinema yet the continual emphasis upon films receiving their first screening in the city suggests otherwise. Rather than presenting the film theatre as a champion of art cinema for the people of Hull, the editorial statements present the HFT as champion of films neglected elsewhere in the city. With only five other cinemas operating within the city boundary between these dates, and none of these exhibiting anything other than mainstream films, the fact was that there was no cinema to see this type of film other than the HFT. As such this makes the implicit claims concerning being the first in Hull to exhibit such cinema moot. In conceding this, the tenor of the discourse can be said to change from one of congratulatory self-promotion to one of apologetic regional identity. Whereas claiming the exhibitory rights to films 'new to Hull' from within a climate of competition would serve to promote the prestige of the HFT as provider of cultural pursuits, the absence of such competition combined with the continual reference to films 'new to Hull' creates a dialogue concerning the place of Hull within the national chain of provision. Ending in a 'backlog of films unseen in Hull' (itself suggestive of a lack of an outlet; in turn suggestive of a lack of demand), the HFT positions itself as the bridge between a lack of cultural cinema provision and the lack of national identity, exemplified in the September-December 1972 editorial reproduced above.¹⁷ Proclaiming itself as the city's saviour in terms of cultural provision, the HFT promotes the idea that aims of a higher

¹⁶ HFT Programmes; Jan-Mar 1971, Apr-Jun 1971, Sep-Dec 1971, Jan-Mar 1972, Apr-Jun 1972, Sep-Dec 1972, Jan-Mar 1973, Apr-Jun 1973, Sep-Dec 1973; original emphasis.

¹⁷ HFT Programme, Jan-Mar 1974.

historic significance are at stake. In this they distance themselves from mere economic imperatives and hint that the exhibition of specific films neglected by others is the sole preserve and justification for the interest shown in them by the HFT. What is not so blatant is the process that pertains to specific policies the HFT implemented in order to operate a regional film theatre.

In the dialogue concerning Hull and its film theatre's position regarding screenings of local 'premieres', issues of distribution and institutional affiliation with the BFI are deliberately omitted. While the local selection board debated which films should screen at the HFT, their range of possibilities was defined and managed by liaison with the BFI's Programming Unit.¹⁸ It is within this policy framework that the seemingly mundane operations of practical expedience morph into a discourse of local cultural saviour.

Equally significant in terms of the 'regional' and 'local' as opposed to the 'national' is the cessation of an editorial from the April-June 1974 programme onwards. Surviving from the inaugural 1969 format until the April-June 1975 programme, the subsequent loss of the editorial, containing both the institutional and geographical content previously discussed, has as much to communicate concerning these issues as it has policy decisions underpinning them. With the January-March 1974, 'backlog of films unseen in Hull' programme representing the last of the direct dialogue with the potential audience, the timing of this change is highly relevant. As the new county of Humberside was officially recognised from April 1974, one of the consequences of this regional change was the addition of the two regional film theatres of Grimsby and Scunthorpe to the new council's roster of cultural amenities. With printing contracts, lead time and continuity to consider, the change in programme format took another year

¹⁸ The Programming Unit of the BFI underwent a number of name changes and shifts in departmental responsibility over the years under discussion, with the level of support offered to regional film theatres varying according to these circumstances.

to materialise. Yet with the submission of an editorial statement to the printer one of the last tasks to complete in the preparation process of a programme, this particular aspect was the first to suffer under the new auspice. Whether treated as the voice of the HFT, one of many regional film theatres, a civic amenity or an agent of cultural enlightenment, the editorial represented a direct address between a provider and a potential audience and can be said to contain a guide to how both the film experience and the film theatre itself could (if not should) be consumed. The emphasis upon both of these facets of cinemagoing (the experience and the theatre) is further enhanced by the continual promotion of these factors as sited in a particular locale (Hull) as both privileged and marginalised. Nevertheless the loss of this address with the cessation of direct editorial address did not end the influence the programmes had upon the experience of visiting the HFT.

Self Segregation

Partly due to the advance planning required to programme a regional film theatre and partly due to an uncertainty as to how well this initiative would work, the original Hull Film Theatre season (January-March 1969) only offered films two evenings per week (Thursday and Friday). All performances were open to members of the general public. Only once subscription take-up was seen to be sufficient to warrant 'members only' screenings was it decided to proceed with irregular fortnightly films.¹⁹ Within two months of opening, the theatre was reporting the 'provision of members-only

¹⁹ By the end of the first season in March 1969, membership was noted as 1,639, with an average attendance of 198 (out of a possible 250), and it was suggested that 'members-only' screenings be introduced for the months of April, May and June with prices set at the same as present charges for public screenings': Hull Corporation Public Libraries Committee minutes, 31 March 1969.

performances which enables the more experimental or specialised films to be shown which could not be shown to a general audience'.²⁰ While initially appealing to an audience segment from within those who go to the cinema in general and who were willing to watch non-mainstream exhibition, the creation of 'members only' screenings made further appeals to a yet more selective potential audience from within this segment. As Barbara Wilinsky has observed in relation to the creation of art cinemas in the United States 'modelling their theatres after places of highbrow, intellectual culture, exhibitors appealed to the public's attempt to differentiate themselves from mass audiences and supposedly passive viewers'.²¹ What can be observed from the HFT instance is not so much a desire to replicate the trappings of 'highbrow, intellectual culture' as to adopt the practices used by such as shorthand to creating an environment whereby the potential audience would feel special. The practice of 'membership' associated with the film society movement offered a way to create a link with the highbrow status of this type of film exhibition without having to create new ways in which to appeal to a certain section of the potential audience. Programming 'Jean Luc Godard's horrifying "Weekend", the experimental "Herostratus", Marlene Dietrich in her famous role in "Blue Angel", and the athletic spectacle of "Berlin Olympiade"' as 'members only' screenings, the aim was to appeal to a selective part of the potential audience from amongst a wider selective part.²² Yet a consideration of the films on offer to the 'general public' in the same programme highlights how slight the distinction between these two audiences was. Alongside the above films exclusively available to those willing to subscribe to the theatre were Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet*, Joseph Losey's *Accident*, Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar*, Milos Forman's *Fireman's Ball* and Peter

²⁰ HFT programme, April-June 1969.

²¹ Barbara Wilinsky, 'Discourses on Art Houses in the 1950s' in Waller, *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, p.75.

²² HFT programme, April-June 1969.

Watkins' *The War Game*, all open to the 'general public'.²³ It could certainly be claimed that the films presented for 'members only' represent those that had attracted some notoriety and/or controversy (some having failed to gain a British Board of Film Censorship certificate, as it was then known, so that they could only be shown under the conditions of 'members only' organisations anyway). The remaining films could hardly be classed as viewing devoid of artistic and aesthetic merit, however. This is especially true of Watkins' *The War Game*, commissioned and then banned by the BBC for its harrowing depiction of nuclear fallout. The circumvention of restrictive censorship in the 'members only' screenings could rightly be seen as a way to legitimately exhibit films that programmers felt were unnecessarily maligned. In this conception the programming of such screenings made an implicit critique of an establishment that sought in one way or another to 'protect' or at least monitor public access to such films. A legitimate question that can be asked of a 'members only' strand therefore is how much such a policy served promotional, financial, cultural and institutional aims. All of these factors were important but it is the opportunity to use such a strand as a differentiating strategy that should not be underestimated. It is in the divide between members and non-members that a strategy for constructing an audience can be seen.

In offering what amounts to the opportunity for a segregated community to exist within an already selective sub-section of the whole, Hull Film Theatre relied upon what can be called 'self-selective promotion', namely the avoidance of promotional strategies associated with the mass market economy. By addressing the potential audience as those who would seek out their own enlightenment, the aim of this style of 'micro-marketing' is to make it appear that the audience is in control of their own cultural pursuits and associated social mobility. In giving the audience a choice of films to attend but then limiting the chance to see certain of them, the effect is to create a

²³ Ibid.

desire to participate in that which is only available to those who consider themselves worthy of inclusion, effectively a group of like-minded individuals who share similar values, aspirations and interests. What is less certain however is to what extent the provision of films matches the desire to be a 'member'. As Douglas Gomery identifies in relation to the architecture and location of American art cinemas 'the motto seemed to be: sell films to the rich and well educated and a sizable group of the middle class might follow'.²⁴ What is uncertain in such an observation is not the aspirations of the public seeking cultural class-based recognition but how the institutions involved in this process *created* this desire. Illustrating the point that the circumstances surrounding an activity such as membership of a regional film theatre are perhaps more important than the activity itself is the following instance of the creation of audience expectation from the period under review:

A few years ago members of the [licensing] committee saw a picture called "Hollywood Nude Report". It had been refused a certificate by the board of film censors [BBFC] and local authorities were given the task of making up their own minds. The Hull committee awarded it certificate U – and the result was that the film was never screened in a local cinema, presumably because the owners thought it would not attract business without the X classification.²⁵

What this highlights is the role assumption plays in the interaction between audience and product and the significant place that policy has in the connection between the two. In a similar way that audiences expecting erotic content in *Hollywood Nude Report* would be dissuaded by the U certification, audiences seeking distinction from the 'general public' may be persuaded to join by the 'members only' caveat. This essentially creates a spiralling situation whereby in offering the choice of membership, the theatre effectively creates a desire which in turn creates a situation whereby further

²⁴ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, p.185.

²⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 November 1971, p.17.

differentiation is required in order to placate the need for exclusivity. Pertaining to such concerns Janet Harbord describes marketing as ‘mediation between two pre-constituted and distinct parties [that] produces a concept of individualism as the exercising of free will, and brings film into being as an experiential culture of pure “choice”’.²⁶ In the same way, the illusion of audiences being offered something exclusive is inherent in the concept of ‘members only’ screenings. Nevertheless this ‘experiential culture of pure choice’ threatens to undermine the belief in film exhibition for the initiated. Whilst members-only screenings at the HFT were part of a strategy designed to consolidate the position of the regional film theatre as distinct from the commercial cinemas in the city, the existence of these screenings is wholly dependent upon the films available to the general public. It is therefore not possible to be a member of the theatre independent of its existence as a regional film theatre, an existence that is based not on the provision of specialist screenings for the enthusiast but upon the expansionist policy of the BFI and the expedience of Hull Corporation. If further proof were needed that the impetus behind the exhibition of art cinema in Hull was prompted more by fulfilling provision than any sense of privilege, the introduction of a number of strategies designed to appeal to different demographics goes some way towards providing this proof.

After three successful seasons in 1969, with average attendances of 167 out of a possible 250 for the year and membership at over 1600, the theatre responded to a number of requests with a strategy designed to reward the ‘general public’ and its taste, a taste formed by continued exposure to art cinema and the dialogue conducted around such in the general area of film appreciation.²⁷ In stating that ‘in response to a number

²⁶ Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), p.76.

²⁷ Sections of the potential audience(s) were becoming increasingly cine-literate at this point in history with the adoption of aspects of film appreciation into university courses, the escalating screening of films on television, the growth of film-related publications and the spread of *auteur* theories from France and America. Newspaper reviews of upcoming films at London and regional cinemas were also a contributing factor to the

of requests we are presenting a small season of the work of one director, an innovation we hope to continue in the future', the theatre can be seen to be addressing a perceived need from its audience, one that it felt ideally placed to fill.²⁸ Beginning with an Ingmar Bergman 'season' (actually four films) in the January-March 1970 programme and continuing with, 'The Spring [1970] Season's featured director, Alfred Hitchcock' (*Dial 'M' for Murder, Marnie and Torn Curtain!*), these focused 'director seasons' appealed to a section of the potential audience that sought connections in the programming of the theatre that went beyond the loose rubric of an alternative to Hollywood and whose taste for the complexities of 'auteur' theories could be satiated.²⁹ Seemingly at odds with mass, publicity-driven, cinema exhibition, the promotion of 'director/star seasons' (not all were focused on the director as an early Buster Keaton strand demonstrates) are significant in so far as they assume a familiarity with the films in question by an assumed audience knowledgeable in the defining characteristics of art cinema.³⁰ In her study of cinema epiphenomena and the film industry's reluctance to provide interpretations of film Barbara Klinger states that 'the goal of promotion [is] to produce multiple avenues of access to the text that will make the film resonate as extensively as possible in the social sphere, to maximize its audience'.³¹ In contrast to this claim the *raison d'être* of art cinema exhibition and its promotional strategies could be claimed to be the reification of the concept of a minority audience.

As previously discussed this minority audience was never treated as a collective audience. With differentiated audience strands the HFT addressed a number of minority audiences who all possessed different tastes, desires and interpretative skills.

increasing cine-literacy of the audience as was the continued availability of *Sight and Sound* to members of the film theatres.

²⁸ HFT programme, January-March 1970.

²⁹ Ibid. & HFT programme, April-June 1970.

³⁰ HFT programme, January-March 1972.

³¹ Barbara Klinger, 'Digressions at the Cinema: Commodification and Reception in Mass Culture' *Cinema Journal*, 28:4 (1989), p.12.

Nevertheless this strategy was far from a new approach and a correlation between these practices and those conducted in the early 20th century concerning building audiences for the new medium of cinema can be drawn. As Miriam Hansen has noted, the establishment of cinema as a social and cultural experience for a paying audience provided contrasting experiences for many social groups. In terms of class, gender, age, race and geography, the social experience of moviegoing varied enormously and cannot be assumed to be concrete and uniform across all variables. Attempts by early entrepreneurs and businesses to standardise the reception of film have led many to present evidence of ‘alternative’ consumption, defined as reception that runs counter to the perceived and prescribed ‘norm’. As Hansen has rightly noted, such research should be reframed from a consideration of ‘alternative to what’ to ‘alternative *for whom* and at which historical juncture, in relation to which configurations of experience?’.³² Here we can find a corollary with the experience of art cinema audiences and the question ‘which social groups were likely to benefit from the type of public sphere that opened up with the cinema and, by the same token, became the occasion for its containment and transformation?’³³ The role of a ‘potential’ audience here cedes to the consideration of ‘differentiated’ audiences, a strategy enabling ‘alternative’ cinema to be discussed, not as in opposition to a more dominant cinema, but as the natural province of a certain, middle-class, intelligent and aspirational section of the population. This shift in the essence of cinema from the film text to the audience, for which it is, if not made, then at least marketed, is complicated somewhat by the competing identities faced in the regional film theatres. The potential audience the HFT addressed was therefore targeted not as a different audience to those who frequented mainstream commercial cinemas, but as an audience who would have a different ‘experience’ at the film theatre.

³² Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.91; original emphasis.

³³ *Ibid.*

While strategies such as ‘members only’ and ‘director/star seasons’ appear to play out a desire to create a differentiated audience the next strategy adopted by the HFT seems motivated by an altogether different agenda. Perhaps recognising the contradiction inherent in seeking to make a success of a venture that targeted a minority audience, the HFT sought to weigh its provision of art films with its public service remit as a subsidised civic amenity. Announcing ‘an exciting new development – the opening of the Children’s Film Theatre’ in the April-June 1970 programme, the theatre purposefully sought to cater for another minority whose interests were neglected in the atrophied state of the local exhibition market, with appropriate screenings during Easter and Whitsuntide and on alternate Saturday afternoons.³⁴ Reported as a seasonal experiment to ‘see if the idea attracts sufficiently big audiences’, the ‘Children’s Film Theatre’, along with its connotations of ownership, exclusivity and unique identity, failed to raise more than an average attendance of 50 patrons per screening (out of a possible 250) and the experiment ceased after this one season.³⁵ Many factors could be attributed to this poor performance of the Children’s Film Theatre, ranging from poor selection of films and lack of promotion through to the location of the theatre as part of the central library with its obvious connotations as a site of learning. What is clear is that yet another audience was targeted, one already familiar from the existing operation of the commercial cinemas in the city and perhaps one not comfortable in the surroundings of an ‘art cinema’. With the core demographic for the theatre primarily students from the city’s two universities and middle-aged, middle-class professionals, the experiment of targeting a younger audience had its correlative in an older section of the potential audience.

³⁴ HFT programme, April-June 1970.

³⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 February 1970, p.2; Hull Corporation Public Library Committee minutes, 13 July 1970.

While concessionary rates had existed for students and senior citizens since its inception, in the September-December 1972 programme HFT announced that ‘one extra special feature this season is the introduction of afternoon films for *senior citizens*, commencing with *Broken Blossoms*, accompanied at the piano by Miss Cora Acum. Admission is 10 pence’.³⁶ Programming predominantly films from the ‘golden age’ of Hollywood designed to appeal to a certain audience, the theatre operated these ‘senior citizen’ screenings on a Tuesday afternoon, the same day that intermittent ‘members only’ screenings were held and separate from its Thursday and Friday ‘general public’ operation. Sectioning a box on the programme itself with the reassurance that ‘All pensioners welcome’ and that there was ‘No membership involved’, these screenings addressed yet another section of the audience whose cinema-going habits were defined far more by factors such as public transport, changing inner-city usage and fears for personal safety than by cultural and social uplift.³⁷ These ‘senior citizen’ films were not repeated in either the ‘general public’ or ‘members only’ screenings and therefore another segment of the audience separated from the concerns of the ‘general public’, ‘members only’, ‘director/star seasons’ and ‘Children’s Film Theatre’ screenings was added, one whose associations with a civic amenity was perhaps of higher priority than its associations with an art cinema remit. This conscious separation of an art cinema policy and civic identity further highlights the complexities involved in labelling forms of cinema that to a large extent direct the reception of the films themselves.

³⁶ HFT programme, September-December 1972; original emphasis.

³⁷ HFT programmes, January-March 1973 onwards.

Conclusion

In concentrating upon a subject such as art cinema programming and its relation to its potential audience(s) there lies a danger in privileging an autonomous audience over any consideration of the processes that initially lead to such audiences. In advancing the national policy of the BFI, the Hull Film Theatre can be seen as an instance of a local council responding to a perceived need to replicate the success of one, centralised, cultural endeavour in the geographically and culturally specific instance of the regions. With attempts at providing for a number of 'audiences' such as those outlined above, the film theatre adopted strategies designed, not so much to cater for, as create this need. In stratifying its potential audience, the effect is ultimately to undermine the position promoted by art cinemas as an alternative to mainstream exhibition by creating differentiated responses to films that are primarily defined by the labels imposed upon them by the critical establishment *and* the site of exhibition. Essentially, operation as an art cinema advances the claim that a film programmed at such a venue could be considered an art film. The division of the audience into a reception hierarchy, however, effectively segregates this audience into sections that works against the often stated goal of art cinema exhibition as increasing access to a cinema that is often neglected. While a claim could be made that such stratification leads to the democratisation of art cinema for all, the counter-claim that art-houses (in particular the regional film theatres of the late 1960s to mid-1970s) are explicitly defined as sites of exhibition for non-mainstream cinema predominates. In line with this observation, films that were initially known as instances of 'world cinema' are increasingly termed 'art-house films', not only guaranteeing their high cultural status but also pejoratively securing their minor box-office performance.

As with the ever-growing number of theories that inform the investigation of audiences, the concern with policy and the construction of exhibition hierarchies must take as its starting point a premise that further study may or may not confirm. In highlighting the complexities of first imagining and then addressing a potential audience, the study of exhibition strategies designed to construct an audience must initially concentrate upon the way such industry sectors conceive of an audience independent of any actual audience. Further work as to how such audiences conform or deviate from these categorisations and to what extent they may negotiate a viewing platform from which they create their own categories will no doubt prove highly enlightening, if equally complex. This intricate network of possible audience positions and responses stems from many facets of policy as initiated by those organising such cultural pursuits as the regional film theatres. When taken as a whole, the difficulties faced in establishing various RFTs around the country, coupled with the peremptory programming policy advocated by the BFI, especially in the case of the HFT, coalesced to further ingrain the concept of 'art cinema' in Britain as associated with not only specific exhibition venues but also specific exhibition outcomes.

One way of directing these outcomes was evidenced in the dialogue with the potential audience in Hull as conducted through the printed programmes. The complexity of this dialogue is evidenced when the HFT presented itself as the provider of a certain level of cultural value to the population of the city, but also as an apologist for the perceived geographical and cultural isolation of Hull. These two parallel approaches to the local can be seen as inherently contradictory. They attempt to nullify any sense of cultural privation with a self-congratulatory promotion of the film theatre as a beacon of cultural enlightenment in an otherwise sparse local cultural landscape. This is conducted with constant reference to the position of the film theatre (geographically, socially and culturally) in the wider context of national cultural

provision. This often contradictory dialogue serves to complicate the identity of the film theatre insomuch as the position from which it speaks is placed in flux. Thereby, the notion of screening a particular type of film becomes inextricably fused with that of the many, competing, voices claiming some aspect of the film theatre as *the* crucial, defining aspect.

Part Three

1974-1985

Cinema Adrift: The Shifting Nexus of Regional and Local Governance

The period from the end of the Second World War until the 1980s was one in which the the national was very much the focus of investigations of ‘identity’. Until the field of study was widened in recent years to include notions of global identity and identity politics, the ‘local’ and ‘regional’ were considered merely atoms of what made the nation. It is in the study of local and regional interactions that much valuable work relating to the construction of identities has yet to be considered.

Key to debate surrounding identity construction is the work of Benedict Anderson, whose concept of ‘imagined communities’ provides a way to view issues of regional and local identity construction.¹ Contemplating the policy decisions of institutions, organisations and governments, and how these decisions affect identity formations and cultural practice, is one way of beginning to understand the highly complex system of factors that form the environment in which cultural pursuits are experienced in a local context. Considering ‘art cinema audiences’ on one hand and local and regional audiences on the other can lead to a fuller understanding of how these ‘communities’ were ‘imagined’ and addressed. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the discourse between HFT and its potential audience was predicated upon the notion that Hull was at a disadvantage with regard to access to art cinema due to its location, and that the film theatre was best placed to mediate the exhibition of art films. They

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). In Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ he offers the following definition of the nation: ‘it is an imagined community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’, resulting in a more complex view of the nation, boundaries and identity than previously proposed. *Ibid.*, P.6-7.

achieved this by a dialogue with an audience that was assumed to be like-minded, knowledgeable and parochial. As Anderson says ‘communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined’.² Imagined as a ‘community’ the audience addressed by the HFT was one it needed in order to both fulfil its remit and survive as a venue.

The audience addressed by the HFT is only one imagined community relevant during this period. This community expanded significantly in 1974 with the implementation of the 1972 Local Government Act that sought to re-define and re-form geographical boundaries for the ostensible purpose of more efficient local government administration. In relation to the concept of regional audiences, how the act affected the provision of art cinema in Hull and its environs is of great importance. The creation of the ‘new county’ of Humberside in April 1974 had serious implications for both the operation of the HFT and the provision of art cinema in the region. A new council was created to administer the new county and under its auspice the regional film theatres of Grimsby and Scunthorpe joined that of Hull to form a trio of film theatres in the region.

The chapter will therefore begin by addressing the creation of Humberside county and what this meant for the provision of art cinema at the regional and local level. The impact of this change will be discussed by looking at how the new Humberside County Council sought to unite separate regional film theatres through an egalitarian policy of cultural provision designed to assuage all. This policy assumed that parity of product (via a shared programming policy) would foster a notion of equality wherever that product was consumed in the region. This attempt to bring what Doreen Massey might call a shared ‘sense of place’ to the new county through cultural linkages will be shown to have been enacted at the expense of historical linkages through the dissolution of the informal region of Yorkshire. In a new county with a population of

² Ibid.

over 880,000 any attempt to speak uniformly to the whole population was bound to meet with disapproval, especially when it involved the erosion of old identities. The administration of the regional film theatres in Humberside, and the way they approached this enlarged 'community', will be argued as evidence of a shift in policy towards the provision of art cinema in the county.

The lack of consideration afforded actual audiences when forming policy (or perhaps more tellingly in the case of the genesis of policy, 'potential' audiences) is symptomatic of the historically determined process whereby an 'elite' few voice the 'needs' of many. Such paternalism can be seen in the attitude of both the BFI and Hull Corporation/Humberside County Council towards the notion of audiences. In this respect the former directed their attention towards an 'audience' consisting mainly of local authorities in their attempt to persuade of the benefits of operating a regional film theatre and the latter towards unifying a vastly increased and acrimonious regional population when the new county was created. The chapter will therefore go on to argue that the role played by varying conceptions of what an art cinema audience is, exactly, and more importantly what it should be, can be seen to have played out in the form of calls from the regional film theatres for greater commitment from its members.

In the process of implementing policy designed to bring a measure of parity to the region's film theatre operation the audience appears to have been neglected once again. The response of members whose own conception of their role as art cinema audience members often conflicted with that of both the management of the film theatres offers an opportunity to reassess the impact policy had upon the identity of art cinema in the region. Part of the strategy employed to both curtail the criticism brought by these geographical alterations and promote unity, was the building of the Humber Bridge to link the two halves of the county, and therefore the chapter will end with an analysis of how this ambitious policy of unification promoted significant changes to the

provision of art cinema in Humberside. These changes not only altered available identities for the population of the region but also the identity and meaning of art cinema as a mode of exhibition.

Politics, Provision and Parity

The consideration of local government power, boundaries and responsibilities has a lineage that finds its more modern dialogue in the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894. As Cross and Mallen note both these acts aimed ‘to do two things: separate town from country and, in country areas, to create two levels of Authority’.³ The original proposal of granting ‘county borough’ status (urban authorities with equal status to that of counties) to ten cities with populations over 150,000 (these were to be Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield) was amended, due to considerable lobbying from local MPs for such status to apply to their own urban constituencies, to areas with a population over 50,000. The effect of this concession created seventy-nine county boroughs to sit alongside forty-five counties (divided into rural districts, urban districts and non-county boroughs). In the ensuing years changing social, economic and legislative conditions throughout the early and mid-19th century raised a number of issues regarding local government, ranging from ‘local government areas no longer correspond[ing] to the pattern of life and work in England’ and ‘too much central control [robbing] local authorities of their rightful autonomy’, to

³ Martin Cross and David Mallen, *Local Government and Politics* (London: Longman, 1978), pp.1-2.

too many authorities, whether county, county borough or county district councils, [being] seen as too small in terms of area, population and resources to be efficient in the discharge of their mounting responsibilities.⁴

This inefficiency in the distribution of administrative boundaries for a changing nation was subsequently addressed in a report commissioned by the 1964 Labour government into the condition, status and future of local government in England. The resulting 'Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England 1966-69' conducted by Lord Redcliffe-Maud (colloquially known as 'The Maud Report'), made recommendations that eventually led to the Local Government Act 1972 (implemented by the Conservative government that had won the 1970 election). This led to the radical revision of local boundaries in England. Effectively turning 1,400 'old' administrative areas into 422 'new' metropolitan and county councils, the act also 'created' three new counties redrawn from previous boundaries. Immediately from the creation of the new counties of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside in April 1974, however, there began a campaign for their abolition from an ever-growing number of people, which eventually saw the reversal of the decision and the abolition of the counties twenty-two years later in 1996. Not without its vocal opponents at the time of consultation, the proposed new county of Humberside owed its creation to a single decision concerning the local-regional nexus made by one political party based upon the recommendation of another. The effect that this reorganisation of administrative boundaries had upon leisure policy in the region, and particularly the regional film theatres of Humberside, is notable in the way that 'local' provision was altered and the effect this had upon art cinema exhibition.

Increased port and rail traffic during the Industrial Revolution had seen the use of Hull rise by 130%, eventually putting severe pressure upon the ferry system used to cross the mile-wide River Humber between Hull and New Holland (the most

⁴ John Dearlove, *The Reorganisation of British Local Government: Old Orthodoxies and a Political Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.58-59.

economical route from the north to the south banks of the river).⁵ With a bridge spanning the Humber first considered in 1865, it was not until finance, technology and materials had developed significantly that the Humber Bridge Act 1959 was passed through parliament with a further wait until a sympathetic Labour government announced in 1969 that it would progress with the scheme. Contradicting the 1969 Maud Report that suggested any action regarding a newly formed county encompassing both north and south banks of the Humber should wait until the completion of the bridge, the newly elected Conservative government decided to seriously consider adding 'Humberside' as a county to the upcoming 1972 Local Government Act. As Michael Bradford explains 'as late as the beginning of November, 1971, only eight months before the passing of the Local Government Act itself, the proposal was for two counties, one each side of the river'; the late change to a single county of Humberside meant that more than mere boundaries changed.⁶ Annexing North Lincolnshire (including Grimsby and Scunthorpe and their respective regional film theatres) to what was then the East Riding of Yorkshire, many felt their heritage was being stripped away and centuries old identities eroded. As stated at the time 'the decision to unite Humberside – with its Yorkshire-Lincolnshire rivalries of centuries' was a contentious issue exacerbated by the serious question as to which city would be the administrative centre of the new county.⁷

Opinions from local MPs regarding the new county ranged from those of Kevin McNamara and John Prescott (both with Hull constituencies) claiming the county 'was a logical conclusion of the decision to build the bridge' which 'set the stage for the economic and political development of Humberside' of which 'Hull is the obvious

⁵ Kingston-upon-Hull City Council, *Industry on Humberside: Growth and Potential – An Initial Report Prepared by Anthony Gross and Associates for the Kingston-upon-Hull City Council on the Instructions of its Regional Department (Special) Committee* (Hull: KUHCC, 1987), p.7.

⁶ Michael Bradford, *The Fight for Yorkshire* (Hull: Hutton Press, 1988), p.78.

⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 November 1971, p.1.

centre’, to those from areas annexed by the new council claiming that ‘Goole [a town thirty miles from Hull] does not belong to Hull!’⁸ With the change in status of Hull from that of a county borough to a district authority within the new Humberside County Council, came a change in the services allocated at district and county council levels. Responsibility for leisure services now resided at the county level. This effectively made the new Leisure Services department responsible for overseeing the provision of libraries and amenities to the whole of the 880,000 population of Humberside. As a result the leisure services department gained control over operation of the Hull Film Theatre, Whitgift Film Theatre in Grimsby (opened in September 1972) and the Scunthorpe Film Theatre (to open in July 1974). In order to facilitate a smooth transition of function from the old corporation to the new council and its relevant departments, the most efficient way to avoid creating problems was to continue ‘as normal’ as far as possible with leisure provision for the area.

Nevertheless the issue of the highly contested new county can be seen as another way in which the function of the film theatre(s) was altered. Similar to the dichotomy experienced under the Hull Corporation where the theatre’s role as a public amenity was undermined somewhat by its status as an exhibitor of films that by definition attract a minority audience, the desire to maintain continuity of provision was offset by a need to present a united appearance for all three regional film theatres. The concepts of Benedict Anderson and ‘imagined communities’ are particularly relevant here in relation to the creation of Humberside and the difficulty inherent in attempting to unify the populations of historically antagonistic regions with long-established boundaries. Presenting the notion of ‘nation-ness’ and ‘nationalism’ as ‘cultural artefacts of a particular kind’, Anderson seeks to highlight the culturally constructed nature of identities that do not pre-exist the imagining of them; “nationalism” is not the

⁸ Ibid.

awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist'.⁹ Echoed in the creation of the county of Humberside, the tensions embedded in the construction of identities on a national level can be seen to operate on a regional scale and find consort in the struggle for common ground. As much as it was believed that 'Hull, as the urban centre of the region, would become its headquarters' it was also acknowledged that 'the proposal made it imperative that people on both banks work towards creating an atmosphere of unity'.¹⁰ To this end the new council considered it necessary to create three new Management Committees to oversee programming, operation and administration of the region's film theatres in order to streamline provision and approach a measure of parity. It was also agreed that

the constitution of the Hull Library Film Theatre Committee be six Members appointed by Humberside County Council, six Members representing District Council interests and three co-opted Members from the area representing local film society interests [and] that the constitution of the Scunthorpe Library Film Theatre Committee be five Members appointed by Humberside County Council, five Members representing District Council interests and three co-opted Members from the area representing local film society interests.¹¹

With the constitution of the standing committees for both Hull and Scunthorpe film theatres agreed, the balance between public amenity and 'art cinema' representation became decidedly skewed. With the representation on the Hull Film Theatre committee growing from three councillors and the chief librarian, to the new Committees' combination of twelve councillors and three 'film' representatives, the interests of the theatre as a 'regional film theatre' as opposed to a civic service appear decidedly ill served. This 12/3 split in favour of council representatives was offset slightly by an 'authorisation to attend' extended to a 'British Film Institute Officer, [the] Director of

⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.6; original emphasis.

¹⁰ *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 November 1971, p.1.

¹¹ Humberside County Council Minutes (HCCM), 10 June 1974.

Leisure Services, [the] Appropriate Divisional Librarian, and [the] County Entertainments Officer'.¹² Not statutorily obliged to attend committee meetings, the concession nevertheless allowed for the interests of film and the provision of 'minority interest' product to be represented. With the Hull Film Theatre Management Committee eventually 'co-opting' members from the Hull University Film Society, the Hull University Department of Drama and the Hull Film Society (the latter formed in September 1977 to fill the void left by the demise of the Hull and District Film Society in January 1972), the operation of the film theatre was placed in a situation whereby film interest became a minority. With the addition of Scunthorpe Film Theatre, and the impending transfer of Whitgift Film Theatre from the Education Department to the Leisure Services Department in September 1975, the county was in a unique position of operating a mini chain of regional film theatres, but with representation on the three management committees skewed in favour of use as a cultural amenity.

The Whitgift Film Theatre, so named due to its location as part of Grimsby's Whitgift Comprehensive School, was the first regional film theatre to open in such surroundings (it was the forty-third regional film theatre to open, in September 1972) and as such had the connotation of education added to its role as a regional film theatre (it could also be argued that both Hull and Scunthorpe Film Theatre's physical connection to libraries held similar connotations - and they were often referred to as the Hull or Scunthorpe 'library theatres'). Due to the location of Whitgift Film Theatre the council custodian from the beginning of the creation of Humberside was the council's Education Department. Addressing this disparity, one of the first acts of the new Leisure Service Committee was the consolidation of the county's three film theatres under one banner.

¹² HCCM, 10 June 1974.

With the official handover in September 1975, the constitution of the Whitgift Management Committee consisted of five councillors from Humberside County Council, three from Grimsby Borough Council, two from Cleethorpes District Council (a nearby coastal town), three representatives of local film society interests and one senior citizen representative (appointed for the intention of expanding the theatre's accessibility and provision for senior citizens). Unlike Scunthorpe Film Theatre, whose establishment coincided with the creation of the new council, the history of the Whitgift Film Theatre meant that representation from the existing advisory committee was fought for on the new committee. This directly led to the addition of four further appointees to the committee in the form of one representative from each of: The Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre (the self-established collective of 'members'), the Whitgift School Governors, Grimsby Educational Film Committee and the Theatre Licensing body. With the number of representatives on the committee now standing at eighteen, interests ranged from those that saw the theatre as a council service or as a facility to cater for the elderly through to those championing film as either an art form or an educational tool.

Highlighting the changing geographical boundaries, regional associations and perceptual loyalties wrought by the creation of Humberside, it was further noted that 'the only interest not included [on the committee] was the previously included representative of the East Midlands Federation of Film Societies' because the Director of Leisure Services 'concluded this body's representation was not necessary'.¹³ The boundary changes implemented by the establishment of the new county had therefore not only created new, and often contested, identities and loyalties but also severed others. Whilst never seen as part of the East Midlands (whose amorphous boundaries have never been firmly established) the combination of the historical and physical

¹³ HCCM, 10 December 1975.

boundary the river Humber imposed upon the north and south banks had led North Lincolnshire council previously to symbolically annex themselves to a more affluent and prominent region.

Noting that ‘a number of anomalies were found to exist between the charges and policy of the Whitgift and our other two film theatres’, the main being the lack of provision for senior citizens at the Whitgift Film Theatre, the trio of theatres were restructured as in-house establishments operated with a policy increasingly aimed towards parity.¹⁴ Unfortunately the increased burden of operating three regional film theatres and the immense scale of the new county unduly affected the future operation of the theatres, a situation that was due more to political expediency than thoughts of cultural provision.

Having amended the pricing structure of all three film theatres to a uniform level in September 1976 (an increase rather than reduction), the three committees, centred around thoughts of the responsible expenditure of rated income, sought further ways to save money, often at the expense of provision. Raising the admission price by 5p again in April 1977 in response ‘to the proposals providing for a reduction in the 1977/78 Budget submitted to the Leisure Services Committee on 4th January 1977’, the committee introduced a much graver measure a few months later (in February 1977 the committee changed its name to the Libraries and Amenities Committee giving some indication as to how the council regarded the film theatres at this juncture).¹⁵ Informed of the remote chance that a rise in admission price would cover the reduction in budget for the financial year, the committee sought to further reduce expenditure across all of its activities, of which the three film theatres were only one consideration. Under the guise of achieving further parity across the region’s film theatres it was suggested that

¹⁴ HCC Leisure Services Committee annual report, 1975/6.

¹⁵ HCCM, 16 February 1977.

by shortening the length of the film seasons from the present 36 weeks per annum (42 weeks in the case of Scunthorpe) to a uniform 30 weeks per annum, savings could be made in the operating costs of the film theatres. The spare capacity released could be used to attract outside hirings [sic] of the facilities.¹⁶

With projected savings of £5,000 per annum, the first steps were taken towards the operation of three previously distinct regional film theatres as one entity. The consequences of such included the loss of the diversity that each separate theatre had engendered in its own location, catering, as one conception of a 'regional' film theatre would claim, to a specific population in a specific location. At this period in their history all three film theatres were opening three nights per week (whilst the majority of regional film theatres operated on a one-week-in-four basis). This scheduling plan meant that both Hull and Whitgift film theatres held ninety screenings per year with Scunthorpe film theatre one-hundred and twenty six. Taking into account double features and daytime screenings this number represents a minimum amount of screenings. Due to the reduction in operational weeks imposed across the three film theatres by the council, both Hull and Whitgift lost a minimum of eighteen screenings per year and Scunthorpe thirty-six. The council therefore set in motion a process of streamlining the operation of the region's film theatres under the guise of parity and lost-saving. As attendances had slowly fallen throughout the previous eight years, the cuts were implemented with savings in operational costs and overheads in mind rather than with a wish to increase revenue. At the same time the council considered that 'it might be an appropriate time to re-negotiate the level of deficit guarantee with the British Film Institute'.¹⁷ With annual income from the three film theatres lower than expenditure, the deficit grant from the BFI was crucial to the continued operation of the theatres and was renegotiated in 1978 for each theatre to the sum of: £900 for the Hull

¹⁶ HCCM, 13 June 1977.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Film Theatre, £900 for the Scunthorpe Film Theatre (both to increase by £50 the following year) and £1000 for the Whitgift Film Theatre.¹⁸

In concert with both the decrease in expenditure and the increase in deficit grant came a much more decisive blow to the provision of art cinema to an interested minority in the form of an attack on membership. Inaugurated during the second season of programming at Hull Film Theatre (and adopted with varying degrees of success at both Scunthorpe and Whitgift), the ‘members only’ screenings were an important aspect of the identity of the operation of a regional film theatre dedicated to the provision of films unavailable elsewhere. Any threat to the provision of members-only screenings was therefore a threat to one aspect of art cinema exhibition, that of exclusivity.

Following a simple cost to benefit ratio report, the Director of the Leisure Services Department ‘suggested that the cost of members evenings was now at a stage where this Sub-Committee might wish to consider the viability of the evenings’.¹⁹ Reporting that ‘a saving of approximately £1000 per annum would be made by not providing members evenings’, while reassuring committee members that ‘such action would not affect the British Film Institute’s grant to the County’, the effect was to again alter the operation and identity of the region’s three film theatres.²⁰

Amending the motion to abolish ‘members only’ films by commuting the measure to a scaling down of the number of screenings, the committee reached a compromise whereby revenue from membership was still guaranteed whilst expenditure was considerably reduced. As ‘members only’ films had averaged fortnightly screenings in the past, totalling eighteen over the course of three seasons (nine months per year), the agreed upon reduction to one screening per season was particularly noticeable. Now with only three ‘members only’ films per year, the erosion of one of the founding

¹⁸ HCCM, 10 October 1978.

¹⁹ HCCM, 21 June 1977.

²⁰ Ibid.

principles of art cinema exhibition had begun the decline in art cinema provision in the county.

Shared Provision and Divided Audiences

As addressed previously the differentiating of the potential audience at the Hull Film Theatre through the presentation of a number of film strands prevents any fixed sense of identity accruing around this particular regional film theatre. With the addition of two more regional film theatres in the new county of Humberside and the development of shared administrative practices the opportunity to create individual identities for the theatres was placed at a further remove. The following example holds testament to this. Traditionally programming films in three seasons from September to June, the HFT closed during the months of July and August until 1975 when during these two months the theatre programmed a 'themed' run of films. 'Presenting a season of films around the theme of crime and corruption', the objective of this season was not so much to appeal to the 'general public', 'members only' or 'senior citizen' sections of its audience as to provide an opportunity to use the theatre in a way befitting its remit and make use of a usually dormant amenity.²¹ Screening a 'Crime and Corruption' season including modern films such as *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Electra Glide in Blue* (1973) and *The Detective* (1968) alongside accepted classics of the genre such as *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932), *Public Enemy* (1931) and *Little Caesar* (1931), with *Some Like it Hot* (1959) providing light relief, the aim seems to have been to synopsis a genre for the initiated whilst also appealing to the notion of a genre audience associated with

²¹ HFT, 'Crime and Corruption' season programme, July-August 1975.

more mainstream exhibition.²² By collating a group of films, the effect was to legitimise the selection and induct films that could be claimed as being mainstream films into the realm of art cinema in much the same way as the age of certain films designate them as ‘classics’. This process of adding certain films to the art cinema repertoire goes a long way towards explaining the need to create an audience for such films. Nevertheless the desire to limit the knowledge of this process is highlighted in the dialogue with the public as a need to appear neutral and egalitarian and can be seen in the last sentences of the editorial statements that appeared in the programmes for the ‘Crime and Corruption’ and ‘Western’ season that followed in 1976. Calling on the audience to ‘put on your bullet-proof vest and prepare to duck as you enter the world of violence and terror’ and ‘come on pardner! Grab your shotgun, your stetson and your spurs and mosey on down to the Film Theatre – and as you come through the doors, watch out for the arrows’, the jovial tone is one designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience, albeit an audience discerning enough to recognise and appreciate genre programming.²³ This situation of addressing a knowledgeable audience whilst also segmenting and simultaneously constructing audiences not so much in thrall to product as to the status it provided was not planned at, or restricted to, the local level. The two ‘themed seasons’ also played at the Whitgift and Scunthorpe Film Theatres illustrating a preference for regional assumption over local specificity with regards to audience profile and need.

Having opened in September 1972, Whitgift Film Theatre’s aim, like that of Hull before it, was ‘to show films either neglected by the big circuits or in need of further showing, run seasons of films featuring a star or theme and cater for a minority taste’ (although the opening programme, consisting of *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Great White Hope*, and *Oh, What a Lovely War*, seems to stretch these categories

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

somewhat).²⁴ Yet, while membership of the Whitgift Film Theatre entitled its subscribers to the same benefits as those in Hull, its organisation was somewhat different, with consequences for the meaning and value of ‘membership’. Organised along the lines of a film society, the ‘Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre’ prided themselves upon the involvement they took in situating themselves as a collective both *within* and *separate* from the film theatre. ‘The Friends’ advised their membership that ‘now it remains to you, to come regularly if you are able and give these films your full support so that we may make this particular venture of Grimsby’s exciting new acquisition, the Whitgift Theatre, the complete success it deserves to be’.²⁵ Alongside standard membership benefits, ‘Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre’ received a copy of the ‘constitution’, a document outlining the working practice of the membership scheme, whose ‘objects’ were:

- (a) To provide each year a programme of films designed to stimulate interest in and understanding of serious cinema of all periods, nations and types.
- (b) To establish and maintain a membership of discriminating cinema-goers with a genuine sense of participation in the chosen programme of films.
- (c) To promote any further activities and amenities which will secure the better enjoyment and understanding of cinema.²⁶

Known as ‘Friends’ screenings rather than ‘members’ screenings, the group took an active part in the suggestion of films for the evenings given over to them (similar to Hull and Scunthorpe, Whitgift initially opened two nights per week to the general public). In this regard they operated much like a film society yet were acutely aware of

²⁴ *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, 29 May 1972, p.4.

²⁵ Correspondence to ‘Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre’ from Chairman Brian Birch (undated - c. early 1973: Grimsby Local Studies Library).

²⁶ ‘Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre Constitution’ (c. late 1972 onwards: Grimsby Local Studies Library).

the precariousness of their privilege: 'living as we do in an age when so much is dictated to us, this privilege of choosing twelve films each year entirely to suit ourselves is one we should strive to justify right to the hilt. There is one sure way to do that. To fill the theatre for every showing'.²⁷ The case of Whitgift Film Theatre illustrates the difference between two concepts of an art cinema audience. In contriving a 'members only' strand, Hull Film Theatre effectively created a sub-section within a sub-section based primarily upon notions of cultural enlightenment yet devoid of any real public need. In adopting a strategy whereby 'Friends' of the Grimsby regional film theatre were sought, Whitgift Film Theatre placed the cultural enlightenment of the area in the hands of those willing to participate in the endeavour and who would continue with or without such a facility (as the local film society had done previously). This difference between such conceptions of an art-house audience is due to a number of factors, one of which was that the Whitgift policy was instigated before the creation of Humberside and its Leisure Services remit.

In the case of Scunthorpe Film Theatre, opened in July 1974, four months after the creation of Humberside, there appeared an opportunity to create mutually beneficial strategies for both the community and the council. Again conducting no public consultation as to the viability of a regional film theatre in the area 'curiously low attendances' during the first season led to an acknowledgement that 'perhaps the theatre's opening wasn't given enough public airing'.²⁸ This highlighted the lack of any conception of a potential audience in the area and the need to create rather than cater for such. Beginning a series of letters in a local paper, the manager of the theatre made an appeal to the public in mid-1975 concerning the lack of support for the theatre. Arguing that, 'we're not getting the patronage. We need all the help we can get to get it off the

²⁷ Correspondence to 'Friends of Whitgift Film Theatre' from Chairman Brian Birch (c. mid-1973: Grimsby Local Studies Library).

²⁸ *Scunthorpe Star*, 23 August 1974, p.6.

ground', Mr Gordon claimed that 'the theatre has the best facilities on the South Bank, but they [are] not being used to the full'.²⁹ Continuing with 'we have the cheapest seats in town and show the best of world cinema', he conceded that 'I'm sure half the people of Scunthorpe don't know this'.³⁰ Within this call for greater patronage comes a call for more loyalty *from* the community *for* the community. Seen as a part of Scunthorpe's aim for cultural enlightenment to justify the belief in the area shown by both the BFI and Humberside County Council, a call for greater involvement by a potential audience is weighed against a desire to broaden the horizons of this audience within a specific conception of highbrow pursuits:

The theatre is not a commercial concern [and] its duty was to show films that appealed to certain sections of the community. Ballet, opera, pop and special foreign films had been shown and although the audiences were not great, they enjoyed what they saw. "We are here to cater for all interests. If we had more patronage we could open seven nights a week and show a wider variety of films." He said that the lack of patronage could possibly be linked with the type of films being shown. But it was too early to say whether this was true.³¹

Alongside this apparent bewilderment as to the needs and commitment of the local community expressed to a local paper, the manager took the step of personally writing to 'members' and expressing his incredulity at the situation. One of these members felt aggrieved enough to respond to a local paper complaining about receiving a letter "begging" me to go to the theatre [...] saying that he was a little disappointed at the attendances at the members-only performances and [saying] that if we are to keep the members-only potent and vibrant, enthusiasm and interest are a vital ingredient'.³²

²⁹ *Scunthorpe Star*, 29 January 1975, p.5. On numerous occasions in press and promotional material the arts facilities in Grimsby and Scunthorpe are referred to as 'South Bank' amenities highlighting the continuing animosity between both banks of the Humber within the county of Humberside.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Scunthorpe Star*, 23 August 1974, p.6.

³² *Scunthorpe Star*, 30 June 1975, p.3.

Prompted by this series of letters in the paper from various members who objected to their tastes and commitment being questioned by the management, the situation even forced the head of Humberside Leisure Services to reply personally to members. Reiterating that a regional film theatre, 'is not a commercial cinema but one which has been deliberately established to make available for public showing those films which the public would not normally have the opportunity of seeing', there appears a defensive air about the response.³³ This can be seen as echoing the dual desire of the Hull Film Theatre to address a national deficiency of provincial cultural centres as well as a lack of a pre-existing audience for such. Those responding to the call from the manager had a different notion of what a publicly subsidised regional film theatre should offer, however, and appear to have resented being told what to watch and how to spend their time:

One would expect from three responsible men, two of whom hold extremely well-paid positions, a little sense would come. But no-one tells us to be vibrant and enthusiastic after boring us silly with dull and unintelligible films put on, in my opinion, for his own pleasure. And nags us into further boredom, whilst his boss bleats on about lack of Publicity. [Something should be done that] stops Mr. Roberts from throwing more public money away on a problem that can be summed up in one short sentence. "Not lack of publicity, but lack of entertainment".³⁴

Rather than catering to a need, the Scunthorpe Film Theatre had obviously highlighted the difficulty in operating an art cinema in an area where the potential audience had a differing conception of what was expected from what was, for them, a public amenity. One member of Scunthorpe Film Theatre even offered to collate opinion as to the best way to advance and appease both sides and 'throw some light on what we, the film fans,

³³ *Scunthorpe Star*, 13 June 1975, p.6.

³⁴ *Scunthorpe Star*, 30 June 1975, p.3. This particular letter is simply signed "Nagged Member".

want. After all, we have to pay to be members, and pay to see the films'.³⁵ Whereas Hull Film Theatre went to lengths to create a segregated, partisan audience and Whitgift Film Theatre's 'Friends' actively separated themselves from the 'general public', Scunthorpe Film Theatre held a middle ground whereby attempts to create a stratified audience were met with opposition from an audience demanding culture on its own terms. This differing attitude towards a potential audience, brought about through equally differing notions of an art cinema audience, caused all three film theatres to experiment with addressing diverse audience strands in the years 1969-1976. From this date onwards an uneasy equilibrium was reached whereby declining admissions led to the gradual abandonment of art cinema programming and changing local political imperatives brought all three film theatres to a more even parity with a turn towards more mainstream exhibition.

Bridging the Divide

Enacting a centralised policy of cultural provision across the newly enlarged region of Humberside, the attempt at a uniform film theatre policy was made all the more palatable due to the imminent completion of the Humber Bridge. The building of the Humber Bridge was seen as, not only a vital communication link between the north and south banks of the river Humber, but as a symbol of the (desired) unity between two previously disparate communities (the colloquial designations each bank gave the other of 'Yorkshire Tykes' and 'Lincolnshire Yellow-bellies' pays testament to the animosity

³⁵ *Scunthorpe Star*, 7 July 1975, p.7.

between the sides).³⁶ Scheduled for completion in 1976, two years after the creation of the new county, the projected bridge was a major issue from the start, with questions asked as to ‘how can the new county, which will begin operating in April 1974, operate without the two banks of the Humber being linked?’³⁷

As far back as 1971, three years prior to the creation of the county, the bridge was being discussed in terms of unification, although it was also noted that ‘it will be over two years after the *marriage* before the Humber Bridge will be in service’.³⁸ From the creation of the new county in 1974 the sense that an *impending* unity created by the building of the bridge was already a reality was expressed when a local councillor stated ‘I personally feel that Humberside is already a living thing and the bridge will only reinforce that community identity which has come amazingly quickly’.³⁹ Not surprisingly, not all were as optimistic about the prospects for the county before the completion of the bridge, with the chief executive of Humberside County Council, Haydon Glen, admitting that ‘the bridge is of vital importance to the new county’ and that ‘the management of the new Humberside County will be extremely difficult in the years 1974-76’.⁴⁰ With the national press expressing interest in developments, Glen again expressed concern over the divide between the two banks, claiming that ‘the Humber divides people from north to south more than the English Channel divides England from France’.⁴¹ The bridge, therefore, was the principal arbitrator of the desire for a unified county identity, with a recognition that, in reality, ‘for Humberside County Council the bridge is its “raison d’être”’.⁴² Nevertheless, the period between

³⁶ The pejorative terms ‘Yorkshire Tyke’ and ‘Lincolnshire Yellow-bellies’ respectively refer to perceptions of a rough, ill-mannered and frugal Yorkshire population and the sash worn by Lincolnshire cavalrymen during the civil war.

³⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 November 1971, p.1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

³⁹ *Hull Daily Mail*, 1 April 1974, p.1.

⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Postal History*, 5:10, November 1972, p.175.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 7 April 1975, p.6.

⁴² *Spanning the Humber* (Hull: Cherryprint, 1981), p.15.

commencement and completion of construction did not mean that certain areas of the new county's administration could not be unified in the interim.

With the 'delay in completion of the Humber Bridge [having] militated, more than most people realise, against a happy Humberside', the task of all departments of the council was to cater to the whole population rather than privilege certain sections.⁴³ Recognising that the Leisure Services Department was no less crucial in this matter than any other, the Director of Leisure Services observed that aside from the priority to 'merge nine separate authorities into one [...] another challenge for the department was to create a county identity'.⁴⁴ Without underestimating the power of the department in this area it was long felt that

since the re-organisation of local government brought Humberside into existence, plans have slowly been maturing to develop a wider sense of community between north and south banks of the river through participation in the arts.⁴⁵

While the purview of the Leisure Services Department was obviously much wider than the three regional film theatres under its care, the high profile of the theatres meant that any changes made would be widely felt and reflect the policy of the county as a whole. One of the many consequences that the completion of the bridge would have was to ease travel between the two banks, which would in turn create an opportunity to establish a single film selection panel across all three film theatres thereby significantly changing the programming policy of those theatres.⁴⁶ With the projected completion

⁴³ *Yorkshire Post*, 16 January 1978, p.3.

⁴⁴ *Hull Times*, 24 September 1982, p.17.

⁴⁵ *The Arts in Humberside* (Hull: Northern Labs, 1976); Official Guide to Humberside 1976, p.83.

⁴⁶ In Autumn 1977 a travel subsidy scheme was initiated whereby 'The Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts Association will pay 50% of the coach/mini coach costs for a party of ten or more people travelling to screenings at [Hull, Scunthorpe or Whitgift] Film Theatre'. Intended to offer some compensation for the delay in the completion of

date for the construction of the bridge having been altered from its original 1976 date a number of times the reality of greater communication between the north and south banks meant that the possibility of one single panel was emerging as a definite proposal.

With road communication to and from the region notoriously bad, the building of the bridge brought about a parallel commitment from central government to improve road communication to and from the area. Designed to be completed at the same time as the original bridge completion date, the 'motorway box' of the M62, M18 and M180, serving the areas north and south of the Humber, meant greater potential access to the region. This in turn meant that 'extensions to the M18 and M62 motorways will link Hull with the 15 million population of the central Northern industrial belt and provide their outlet to Europe'.⁴⁷

It was from within this feeling of optimism and unity that the first suggestion for a collective 'Film Theatres Sub-Committee be established' emerged, consisting of

10 Members of the Libraries and Amenities sub-committee, 1 Member each of the 9 District Councils and 1 Member each from the Hull, Scunthorpe and Whitgift Film Theatre Membership Clubs.⁴⁸

Further reducing the representation of film interests on the committee, the proposal was felt untenable due to the incomplete status of the bridge and the impracticality of committee members meeting in one location (before completion of the bridge and improved motorway network, travelling from Hull to Grimsby, or vice versa, involved a 150 mile return trip via the town of Goole). Raising the possibility of a single film selection panel once more in September 1979, the committee again considered this too

the Humber Bridge, the scheme continued after the opening of the bridge in 1981. Hull Film Theatre programme, January-March, 1978.

⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, 21 May 1973, p.16.

⁴⁸ HCCM, 8 June 1977.

cumbersome an idea to sanction at the time and referred the matter for later consideration.⁴⁹

This later consideration came not through any local/regional impulse but by way of an external influence. Noticing the manner in which the three film theatres were operated, coupled with falling admissions and the inevitable privileging of one film theatre over the others regarding the order in which they took possession of film prints from distributors, the BFI took a greater interest in the operation of the region's film theatres.⁵⁰ With the BFI requiring that 'the Authority should review and state the policies under which the film theatres operated', the committee took this as a further opportunity to reconsider the future of the theatres and their operation as distinct representatives of now centralised policy.⁵¹ Considering the role of the film theatres as both civic amenities and sites for the exhibition of art cinema, the committee submitted a policy statement outlining exactly the role and function of the region's film theatres:

1. To provide the best examples of film as an art form;
2. To provide a balanced programme to satisfy all tastes;
3. Provision for the needs of ethnic minorities;
4. Provision of specific thematic seasons;
5. Encouragement of interest of schools in the best of film;
6. The encouragement of creative film making by holding a Biennial Film Makers Festival;
7. Establishment of film appreciation centres;
8. Collaboration with the British Film Institute for the provision of:-
 - (a) Films to satisfy the above criteria through the British Film Institute Film Availability Services Department;
 - (b) Lectures on films and filming; and
9. Provision for Community Film Theatres as a service to the public and also to draw in audiences not yet in the habit of accepting film

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Hull, as the larger of the three cities (Hull, Scunthorpe and Grimsby), and with two universities, invariably took possession of films first, with road communication to the remaining theatres meaning Scunthorpe would screen the same film after Hull, after which the print would continue to Grimsby. Based on existing road links, natural geographical features and the delay in completion of the bridge, this necessary privileging of one location over another implies much in the way of location, identity and loyalty.

⁵¹ HCCM, 22 January 1980.

as a forum for artistic expression and to develop this interest and commitment to film as an art form in its truest sense.⁵²

Whilst it could be argued that a number of these policy points commit to the serious consideration of film as an art form, there also appears a concomitant commitment to gaining art cinema a wider (general) public (interpreted as either a desire for wider access or greater enlightenment). Whichever way this new policy approach is considered, it remains a definite attempt to enshrine a set of guidelines for the three regional film theatres that would greatly affect the experience of attending the theatres. With a final deadline for the completion of the Humber Bridge set for July 1981 (five years late and with an increase in cost from the estimated £25 million to a final total of £98 million), and with the BFI considering the new policy statement requested from the committee, the Leisure Services Committee took definite action concerning the future role the film theatres would play in the region by commissioning a report titled, "A New Direction".⁵³ With deficit grants from the BFI originally paid individually to the council for each of the three film theatres, the report stated that

this year, the British Film Institute had offered a total deficit grant of £3,300 towards the three film theatres (the film theatres having previously been considered independent and grant-aided on a separate basis) and was of the opinion that, in the future, film programming should be centralised and the three film theatres regarded as a single integrated unit to facilitate greater efficiency and flexibility in the allocation of resources, and effect administrative savings, while at the same time enhancing the development of common themes in film programming through the interaction of the three film selection panels.⁵⁴

The recommendations of the BFI caused the Leisure Services Department to finally capitulate and take the first steps to amalgamate the three separate film selection committees into one single entity. It was therefore suggested that 'one of the three film

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Humberside County Council, *A New Direction*, 1980.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

selection cycles be carried out at a joint meeting when consideration could be given to the potential of a single programming meeting for the three theatres as a regular feature'.⁵⁵ The committee eventually decided to meet at the Scunthorpe Library in January 1981 to begin what was thereafter adopted as the future practice of the film selection committee's meetings. Taken together, the opening of the Humber Bridge, five years late and seven years into the creation of Humberside, the BFI seeing this as an opportunistic time to re-evaluate the operation of the region's film theatres, and the Leisure Services Committee finally committing to the operation of the film theatres as one entity with three outlets, all ensured that the role of the theatres shifted fundamentally from their origins in the Hull Film Theatre in 1969. With the single film selection committee comprising twelve councillors and six co-opted members, the interests of each locality were ultimately diluted, with the resultant loss in diversity affecting the films, which were now programmed to meet not any specific locale, but the whole of the potential audience of Humberside, in excess of 880,000 people. With such measures, the gradual eradication of the essence of the original Hull Film Theatre remit and promise to show 'the best in world cinema' was implemented with a move towards a more mainstream programming policy, a reduction in screenings for 'members' and the increasing use of the film theatres as community amenities.⁵⁶ [For representative samples of how the programming of art cinema altered at the Humberside RFTs from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s see 'Sample Programme Content 3. Hull Film Theatre (Apr-Jun 1977)', 'Sample Programme Content 4. Scunthorpe Film Theatre (Oct-Dec 1978)', 'Sample Programme Content 5. Hull Film Theatre (Apr-Jun 1980)' and 'Sample Programme Content 6. Whitgift Film Theatre (Sept-Dec 1983)' on pages 233-236].

⁵⁵ HCCM, 24 May 1980.

⁵⁶ Hull Film Theatre programme, January-March 1969.

HFT

Hull Film Theatre
Central Library, Hull
Box Office: 25017

April/June

Mon 14 to Sat 19 June
NO FILMS THIS WEEK
Hull Amateur Dramatic Society present a play
THE CRUEL LULLABY from the Library
Box Office: 25017

Wed 19 June
Programme ends 10:10 pm **8 pm**

WIVES
12 mins. Cert. U

"A deeply charming bourgeois French play... Roy Cheeverly presents his latest... Wives... a play about a woman who..."

FRANCE/PAIN 1977 100 mins. Colour Cert. X

PACIFIC 231
11 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 7 and Fri 8 June
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

MADAME DE...

"Refraining the artistic frame of La Ronde with a..."

FRANCITALLY 193 102 mins. Cert. A

JARIS REDISCOVERED
21 mins. Cert. U

old men's imagination as he becomes...
FRANCE/SWITZERLAND 1977 80 mins. Colour Cert. X

and
OHRO EXPRESS
12 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 28 and Fri 29 June
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

LOLA MONTES

The notorious Lola Montes has had affairs with many men...
FRANCE/WEST GERMANY 1955 110 mins. Cert. X

and
THE WARDROBE
13 mins. Cert. A

SENIOR CITIZENS' FILMS
Fri 4 Sat 5
Programme ends 4:15 pm **2:30 pm**

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

Every Peer has the right to sit in the House of Lords...
GREAT BRITAIN 1949 105 mins. Cert. U

Fri 20 April
Programme ends 4:15 pm **2:30 pm**

LOVE IS A MANY SPLENDOR'D THING

The romantic story of a love affair between an American correspondent and a beautiful Eurasian doctor in Hong Kong...
U.S.A. 1955 102 mins. Cert. A

Fri 4 May
Programme ends 4:10 pm **2:00 pm**

THE JOHNSON STORY

The story, largely fictionalized, of one of America's greatest entertainers, Al Johnson...
U.S.A. 1946 129 mins. Colour Cert. U

HFT

Hull Film Theatre
Central Library, Hull
Box Office: 25017

April/June

Thurs 9 and Fri 10 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **7:45 pm**

THE LAST WALTZ

"The Last Waltz has been acclaimed in Britain..."
GREAT BRITAIN 1971 111 mins. Colour Cert. X

and
RIPTURE
11 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 19 and Fri 20 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

ROSELAND

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1978 110 mins. Cert. U

and
SKATERDATER
10 mins. Cert. U

Two 30 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

THE DEVILS

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1977 104 mins. Colour Cert. A

and
LE HARCOT
17 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 9 and Fri 10 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **7:45 pm**

THE LAST WALTZ

"The Last Waltz has been acclaimed in Britain..."
GREAT BRITAIN 1971 111 mins. Colour Cert. X

and
RIPTURE
11 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 19 and Fri 20 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

ROSELAND

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1978 110 mins. Cert. U

and
SKATERDATER
10 mins. Cert. U

Two 30 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

THE DEVILS

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1977 104 mins. Colour Cert. A

and
LE HARCOT
17 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 9 and Fri 10 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **7:45 pm**

THE LAST WALTZ

"The Last Waltz has been acclaimed in Britain..."
GREAT BRITAIN 1971 111 mins. Colour Cert. X

and
RIPTURE
11 mins. Cert. U

Thurs 19 and Fri 20 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

ROSELAND

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1978 110 mins. Cert. U

and
SKATERDATER
10 mins. Cert. U

Two 30 April
Programme ends 10:05 pm **8 pm**

THE DEVILS

These women all live in New York's famous...
U.S.A. 1977 104 mins. Colour Cert. A

and
LE HARCOT
17 mins. Cert. U

Sample Programme Content 3. Hull Film Theatre (Apr-Jun 1977).

7.15 pm
Thur 6th and Fri 7th October
 Programme finishes 10.25 pm
'HOLLYWOOD COWBOY'



Jeff Bridges is an aspiring writer who takes a stab at stunt work in the silent westerns. This is a running tale, greatly sustained by Bridges as the put-upon but resilient Lewis, who takes to stalling the huddles car which just happens to contain bank notes, and the chase is on. Directed by Howard Zief. Starring Jeff Bridges, Andy Griffith and Donald Passmore.

American 1975 103 minutes Cert A

also

'TUMBLEWEEDS'

American 1925 77 minutes Cert U

7.30 pm
Thurs 13th and Fri 14th October
 Programme finishes 10.05 pm
'THE GREAT GATSBY'



For its strong cinematic quality "The Great Gatsby" stands alone in the string of 1920's nostalgia films. Jack Clayton's direction faithfully recreates the 1922 of Long Island, and the Gatsby of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel. Directed by Jack Clayton, starring Robert Redford, Mia Farrow, Bruce Dern and Karen Black.

Anglo American 1974 140 minutes Cert A

also

'RAINBOW BEAR'

5 minutes Cert U

7.30 pm
Thurs 20th and Fri 21st October
 Programme finishes 10.10 pm
'LITTLE BIG MAN'

An adaptation of Thomas Berger's hilarious reconstruction of the old West, seen through the eyes of an 111 year old survivor of the Little Big Horn. Directed by Arthur Penn in his richest film to date. He adds several levels making it tall story, parody, and document all at once. Starring Dustin Hoffman and Faye Dunaway.

American 1970 139 minutes Cert AA

also

'K9000 A SPACE ODDITY'

10 minutes Cert U

2.30 pm
Fri 21st October
 Programme finishes 4.10 pm
SENIOR CITIZENS' PRESENTATION
'HINDLE WAKES'

Based on the stage play of the Lancashire musical, episode with the mill-owners son during "Wakes Week". There is a strong portrayal of the notorious pleasure seekers of the north and all the gaiety of a seaside resort during their big week - and its tragic outcome. Directed by Arthur Crabtree, starring Lisa Daniely, Brian Worth and Bill Travers.

British 1952 90 minutes Cert A

7.30 pm
Thur 27th and Fri 28th October
 Programme finishes 9.30 pm
'LOVE, PAIN AND THE WHOLE DAMN THING'

Alan Pakula himself described the subject of Love, Pain and the Whole Damn Thing as being about the "most unlikely pair to reach the screen since Laurel and Hardy". Here, he threads his characters through alternating layers of slapstick and pathos. He steadily cuts the ground from under his lovers' credibility, leaving us a party to their embarrassment. Directed by Alan Pakula, starring Maggie Smith and Timothy Bottoms.

American 1972 110 minutes Cert A

7.30 pm
Thur 3rd and Fri 4th November
 Programme finishes 10.10 pm
'THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN'

When two technicians die mysteriously while trying to recover an American space satellite which has fallen to earth in a remote desert village in New Mexico, their description of bodies littering the main street is monitored by mission control and an investigation team sets out. A violent organom-dubbed the Andromeda Strain - has congealed the victims' blood to powder. Directed by Robert Wise and starring Arthur Hill.


American 1970 131 minutes Cert AA

also

'MOON '69'

20 minutes Cert U

2.30 pm
Fri 4th November
 Programme finishes 4.40 pm
SENIOR CITIZENS' PRESENTATION
'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'



Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson together in the film version of Jane Austen's classic novel. The story concerns two rich and distinguished bachelors, who although in love with two daughters of the Bennett family cannot contemplate marriage into such a common family. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard, starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson.

American 118 minutes Cert U

7.30 pm
Wed 9th November
 Programme finishes 9.15 pm
MEMBERS' CHOICE
'LA FEMME NIFIÉE'

Charles, a prosperous insurance broker, suspicious of his wife's frequent trips to Paris, suspects she has a lover. A private investigator reports that she spends her time with a divorced writer, Victor. Charles calls on Victor - One of Chabrol's best films. Directed by Claude Chabrol, starring Stéphane Audran and Michel Bouquet.

French-Italian 1968 98 minutes Cert AA

7.30 pm
Thur 10th and Fri 11th November
 Programme finishes 9.55 pm
'FREEBIE AND THE BEAN'

The way American cops have been behaving in films of late, especially when mistaken, it was only a matter of time before they reverted to the 1970's variation upon the 1912 precepts of the Keystone Kops success. Freebie and the Bean are a couple of San Francisco plain clothes cops tracking down a big nose crook. Their marital laces are, of course, plausible, as are the tactics of T.V.'s Starsky and Hutch. Directed by Robert Ross, starring James Caan.

American 1974 113 minutes Cert X

also

7.30 pm
Thur 24th and Fri 25th November
 Programme finishes 9.55 pm
'THE TENANT'

A humble filing-clerk moves into a vacant flat. His personality is gradually taken over by that of the former occupant—a girl who died in a hospital from gruesome injuries following a suicide attempt. Polanski himself takes the lead role in this psychological thriller which also features Shelley Winters. Directed by Roman Polanski.

French 1976 126 minutes Cert X

also

'STEPPING OUT'

12 minutes

7.30 pm
Thur 1st and Fri 2nd December
 Programme finishes 10.20 pm
'SOVLNET GREEN'

The film is set in 2022. It seems that we are going to revert back to the times of Caesar population. Charlton Heston plays a slap-happy detective investigating the murder of a director of a synthetic food company. Directed by Richard Fleischer, starring Charlton Heston, and Leigh Taylor-Young.

American 1973 97 minutes Cert AA

also

'COLLEGE'

65 minutes Cert U

2.30 pm
Fri 2nd December
 Programme finishes 4.30 pm
SENIOR CITIZENS' PRESENTATION
'PYGMALION'

The brilliantly amusing story by George Bernard Shaw, about Eliza the Cockney flower girl taken under the wing of Henry Higgins a professor of phonetics, and his attempts to turn her into a lady. The high spot of the film being the leap-frog at which Eliza utters the shattering statement "Walk! Not bloody likely!" Directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, starring Leslie Howard, Wendy Hiller and Wilfred Lawson.

British 1938 95 minutes Cert U

7.30 pm
Thur 17th and Fri 18th November
 Programme finishes 9.35 pm
'THE TAKING OF PELHAM 123'



The title refers to the destination and departure time of a New York subway train, the subject of an underground hi-jack, with one passenger to be executed for every minute of delay in supplying the ransom money. The script is full of tension, and gritty wisecracking dialogue.

American 1974 104 minutes Cert AA

also

'THIRD AVENUE EL'

11 minutes Cert U

2.30 pm
Fri 18th November
 Programme finishes 4.40 pm
SENIOR CITIZENS' PRESENTATION
'ARSENIC AND OLD LACE'

A comedy-thriller about a pair of kindly, eccentric old ladies with a passion for murder. The pace is fast and furious when the innocent policeman finds his honeymoon becoming a hilarious nightmare of complications, misunderstandings and mayhem. Directed by Frank Capra, starring Cary Grant and Raymond Massey.

Sample Programme Content 4. Scunthorpe Film Theatre (Oct-Dec 1978).

SPORTING SEASON
 Thurs 5 and Fri 6 June
 Programme ends 10.30 p.m.

The Mean Machine X
 8.00 p.m.
 When an professional football star (BURT REYNOLDS) has a fight with the Palm Beach tennis who has been leaving him in a hole, he is sentenced to one year in Cross State Prison. He escapes with Robert Adolph.
 U.S.A. 1974 122 mins.

Thurs 10 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty A
 8.00 p.m.
 Josef Bloch, cast his prime as a goalkeeper lets in an easy goal during a match in Vienna and spends off his pocket after a show, the checks into a hotel, kills time in the cinema, picks up a girl and later gets nudged by strangers. Recovering, he returns to the cinema.
 West Germany/Austria 1971 96 mins.

Thurs 12 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Kansas City Bomber AA
 8.00 p.m.
 In this film about roller skating, RAQUEL WELCH plays K.C. Carr. In the comedy she plays a divorcee of two children in a broken marriage, one, a boy with whom she has lost all love of communication, and a girl, whom she is attempting to develop in her own image, as a roller skater.
 On the whole "Kansas City Bomber" is an absorbing glimpse of unfamiliar territory, well edited, with some stunning visuals.
 Director James Freedman.
 U.S.A. 1973 96 mins.

Fri 13 June
 Programme ends 10.10 p.m.

Bobby Deerfield A
 8.00 p.m.
 Obsessive and withdrawn, Formula 1 racing champion Bobby Deerfield (AL PACINO) is disturbed by the mysterious crash which kills a fellow driver. In the Formula 1 racing sequence used in the film, drivers include James Hunt and Mario Andretti.
 Director Sydney Pollack.
 U.S.A. 1977 123 mins.

Tue 17 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

This Sporting Life AA
 7.45 p.m.
 Adapted from David Storey's novel, this much praised film is concerned with Frank Martin (RICHARD HAYDEN), a Liverpool commoner who becomes a rigger star, and Margaret (JACQUELINE ROBERTS), a young widow forced by bourgeois respectability into sexual flight. Yet neither is able to break through the defensive barriers of their environment, to communicate.
 Directed by Lindsay Anderson.
 Great Britain 1969 134 mins.

Thurs 18 and Fri 20 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Semi-Tough AA
 8.00 p.m.
 A comedy about Pro football as played by the Miami football team is a satire dealing with the American efforts to relieve psychological hang-ups, we observe the effort of B.E.T. (Burt Reynolds), Ernie Anich (Young) upon their football careers and a girl, BURT REYNOLDS, KIRK KRISTOFFERSON and JILL CLAYBURGH, giving performance of unadorned design.
 Director Michael Ritchie.
 U.S.A. 1977 107 mins.

Tue 24 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Pumping Iron A
 7.45 p.m.
 A ballet dancer instructs a group of hulking body builders in grace and mobility; alongside the film credits appear scenes from earlier body building contests. Arnold Schwarzenegger is defending the Mr. Olympia contest in South Africa for the fifth and final time. "Pumping Iron" is the generic name for the sport (a sport) in the north, it should be noted, and is a metaphorical title to the film.
 Directed by George Butler and Robert Fosse.
 U.S.A. 1976 96 mins.

Thurs 26 and Fri 27 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner U
 8.00 p.m.
 After a ski jump by Walter Steiner is shown in slow motion, Steiner explains his conception of one of his own wooden sculptures.
 Directed by Werner Herzog.
 West Germany 1975 47 mins.

Thurs 26 and Fri 27 June
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

The Greatest A
 8.00 p.m.
 Based on Muhammad Ali's book "The Greatest: My Own Story" in 1960, Bruce Cashin (Ali) 18 year old winner of the Light Heavyweight title fights the former champion, Muhammad Ali, who returns home to a hero's welcome in Louisville, Kentucky. Two years later,
 U.S.A. 1974 132 mins.

Following 10 straight wins in the ring, Clay is almost stopped when he is beaten by a former of Muhammad Ali's victory. Through Muhammad's help by the strength of Muhammad Ali's victory. Through work publicity device as the judge he compares predicting the winner and he is required to let Ali win. He is not to have Ali playing himself, and he is never less than entertaining.
 Directed by Tom Cruise.
 U.S.A./Great Britain 1977 101 mins.

SENIOR CITIZEN'S FILMS
 Fri 18 April
 Programme ends 4.15 p.m.

International Velvet A
 2.00 p.m.
 Sarah Brown, an orphaned American girl, is sent to England as a ward of her aunt (NINETTE TREVANION). Sarah reveals of her own past, who is a child as a result of a riding accident and only too anxious to become a mother to her. Sarah eventually builds a reputation as a rider and is invited to the Champs Elysees to join a young group of riders in a grooming.
 Director Brian Forbes.
 Great Britain 1938 132 mins.

Fri 2 May
 Programme ends 4.10 p.m.

Rebecca A
 2.00 p.m.
 Adapted from Daphne de Maurier's strange love story, and turned into a satisfying and haunting thriller by Alfred Hitchcock. JANE FONDA is memorable as the moody second wife, and OLIVER ROSS as the moody, aristocratic husband.
 U.S.A. 1940 131 mins.

Fri 30 May
 Programme ends 4.20 p.m.

Ring of Bright Water U
 2.30 p.m.
 Filmed on the west coast of Scotland, the story of M.S. the title is full of atmospheric moodiness involving the vixen and her human friend (BILL TRAVERS and VIRGINIA MCKENNA). A great treat for animal lovers.
 Directed by Jack Cardiff.
 Great Britain 1969 107 mins.

Fri 13 June
 Programme ends 4.15 p.m.

That's Entertainment U
 2.00 p.m.
 With the whole of M.G.M. musicals to choose from, this film contains extracts to suit everyone's taste. There's NELSON EDDY (LARRY FORD), JERRY LEE LEWIS (ALAN BATES), and many more. A great treat for animal lovers.
 Directed by Jack Harty, Jr.
 U.S.A. 1974 132 mins.

Hull Film Theatre
 Central Office, Abbot Street, Hull.
 Box Office 2617
 Member Price: 10.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m.
 in association with the British Film Institute

ADVANCE BOOKINGS
 Advance bookings may be made one week prior to screenings two weeks to members at the Central Office. Monday, Friday, 10.00 a.m. to 5.15 p.m., or at the theatre box office on performance nights.

TELEPHONE BOOKINGS
 Should be placed not later than 30 minutes before the performance, otherwise they may be lost.

POSTAL BOOKINGS
 Should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

PRICES OF ADMISSION
 Adults £1.00, Children Under 16, Senior Citizens and the Registered Disabled 50p.
 Senior Citizen Matinee / Senior Citizens 25p.

CAR PARKING
 There are parking facilities in Abbot Street and Baker Street (behind the theatre).

WHEELCHAIRS
 Wheelchair-bound patrons who are unable to transfer to a theatre seat are asked to contact the Entertainment Office before booking a seat.

MEMBERSHIP
 Members receive vouchers for cash on "Members' Choice" evenings. Members may reserve seats two weeks prior to performances. Membership includes joint membership of the National Film Theatre and British Film Institute Regional Theatres. Subscriptions: Adults £1.50 and Senior Citizens 75p.

TRAVEL SUBSIDY SCHEME
 The Innovative and Miscellaneous Arts Association will pay 50% of the rail/metro coach costs for parties to screenings at the Hull Film Theatre. For further details of this scheme please contact the Entertainment Office (Hull).

GOING TO LONDON
 Tickets may be booked at the Box Office (personal bookings only) for London Theatres, York, Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford and also some areas in Wembley and Earl Court.

Please note that this programme is compiled well in advance of screenings and may be subject to change for various reasons. It is always best to check near the date of showing that no amendments have been made.

Tue 1 April
 Programme ends 10.10 p.m.

The Cars That Ate Paris X
 7.45 p.m.
 Peter White is perhaps the most important of the new Australian directors. Cars is a black comedy about seemingly ordinary people being ordinary lives in the Australian township of Australia.
 Australia 1973 90 mins.

Thurs 3rd April
 Programme ends 10.05 p.m.

My Childhood X
 7.15 p.m.
 Part I of the highly acclaimed Bill Douglas Trilogy. Set in 1946 is tells of the story of eight year old Jamie and his grandmother and brother Tommy aged twelve, as a back to back cottage in a mining village just south of Edinburgh.
 Great Britain 1972 48 mins.

Thurs 15 April
 Programme ends 10.10 p.m.

Some Like It Hot A
 8.00 p.m.
 Two jazz musicians inadvertently witness the St. Valentine's massacre and have to disguise themselves as members of a girl's band to escape. TONY CURTIS offers an immortal performance of Cary Grant. MARTIN MONROE exudes innocence and wit; and JACK LEMMON brings his way through to a sublime drag performance.
 U.S.A. 1959 121 mins.

Thurs 17 and Fri 18 April
 Programme ends 10.15 p.m.

Autumn Sonata AA
 7.30 p.m.
 Living with her husband Victor in a remote Norwegian paragon, still grieving over the death by drowning of their four year old son, the LIV ULLMANN impulsively writes to her mother Charlotte. INGRI BERGMAN a concert pianist, inviting her to stay.
 Norway/West Germany 1978 92 mins.

Thurs 22 April
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

My Ain Folk AA
 7.45 p.m.
 Part I of the Bill Douglas Trilogy. When Jamie's maternal grandmother dies, he and his brother Tommy have to confront the evener together inside of the outside world.
 N.B. We hope to show part II of the Trilogy (My Way Home) early next season.
 55 mins.

Tue 22 April
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

The Gypsy Camp Vanishes Into The Blue AA
 8.00 p.m.
 Winner of the Grand Prix at the 1976 San Sebastian Film Festival. Horse thieves, a beautiful gypsy with magical powers, a head of the police, a beautiful girl, a friend and lovers united in a room, admirably sound like key ingredients. Lolita's Lolita.
 USSR 1976 103 mins.

Thurs 24 and Fri 25 April
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

That Obscure Object of Desire X
 8.00 p.m.
 "A discreetly charming bourgeois (Fernando Rey) obsessively pursues his former maid (Cecilia) ingeniously by two different actresses with two different temperaments, but and could different actresses with two different temperaments, but and could who have fun on but never shows sexual satisfaction. Directed by Luis Bunuel.
 France/Spain 1977 103 mins. Subtitled.

Tue 29 April
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Ivan the Terrible U
 8.00 p.m.
 "IVAN THE TERRIBLE" is a superb ballet film, with a brilliant score by Sergei Prokofiev, that makes a fascinating contrast to the historical epic. Director Yevgeny Gerasimov and Yuri Gagarinov.
 USSR 1977 81 mins.

Thurs 1 and Fri 2 May
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

The Shout AA
 8.00 p.m.
 Robert Graves, acting as scorekeeper at a cricket match between the patients and staff at the Royal West County Asylum, is involved in his opposite number Charles Crowley, who tells him he has learned from the Aborigines the technique of a death rousing shout. Cast includes ALAN BATES, SUZANNAH YORK, JOHN HURT and ROBERT STEPHENS. Director Jerry Schatzman.
 Great Britain 1978 86 mins.

Tue 13 May
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Iphigenia A
 7.45 p.m.
 Iphigenia, the first of Euripides' plays in sequence, was the last to be filmed. At Cannes 1970, it was the first film in competition and a masterpiece. "Already the Festival has unveiled Repetitions, the 12 year old girl who plays Iphigenia. Director Michael Cacoyannis.
 Greece 1976 129 mins.

Thurs 15 and Fri 16 May
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

Dark Star A
 7.15 p.m. (Double Bill)
 The much discussed but little seen film is probably the most sophisticated science fiction film ever made, and it is technically brilliant. Starring BRIAN MARLEY. Directed by John Carpenter.
 U.S.A. 1974 83 mins.

Thurs 23 and Fri 24 May
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

It Came From Outer Space A
 7.45 p.m.
 The 3-D version of the film based on a story by Ray Bradbury tells of a Martian spaceship that lands in the Arizona desert. Directed by Jack Arnold. Starring RICHARD CARLSON and BARBARA RUSS.
 U.S.A. 1953 82 mins.
 N.B. 3-D Spectacles will be on sale on the night for a small extra cost.

Thurs 23 and Fri 24 May
 Programme ends 10.00 p.m.

A Wedding AA
 7.45 p.m.
 A day in the life of a wedding between the daughter of a "bohemian" Southern family and the son of an old money and moneyed family, a union of tradition and modernity. The cast includes GERALDINE CHAPLIN, as the wedding co-ordinator, and LILLIAN GISH as the groom's grandmother and MA FALLOW as the bride. Director Robert Altman.
 U.S.A. 1978 128 mins.

Tue 2 June
 Programme ends 10.10 p.m.

Man of Marble U
 7.30 p.m.
 Agnes, a determined 24 year old student, obtains reluctant permission to make, as her graduating project, from the film industry, a documentary on the trial of Wladimir Bratukin, a former Stakhanovite hero of the 50's, who interviews several people who knew BRATUKIN and went close (some suggested) from members and propaganda films. Directed by Andrei Wajda.
 Poland 1976 161 mins.

Sample Programme Content 5. Hull Film Theatre (Apr-Jun 1980).

<p>Div An off-beat story about a Parisian postal messenger's obsession with a black American opera star and his involvement with the French Mafia and the world of genre recordings. The most acclaimed French film in years and full of "divine madness, comedy, romance, opera - and murder". Starring Frédéric André Directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix France 1982</p>	<p>15 (A) 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>That's Entertainment Part 1 Fascinating, amusing and entertaining compilation of sequences from Hollywood musicals. Featuring numerous stars. U.S.A. 1974</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 132 mins</p>
<p>Not A Love Story A film about pornography and a expose of the multi-billion dollar industry. Starting with glossy girls magazines, it moves through sex emporia, strip clubs and peep shows, investigating en route the rapidly expanding video market. Directed by Bonnie Sherr Klein Canada 1981</p>	<p>18 (X) 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Walt Disney's Pinocchio Two sailors on leave go on a girl hunting spree in Hollywood. Musical numbers include Gene Kelly's tango through a dream castle, and the Oscar-winning encounter with cartoon character Jerry Mouse, who dances in a tour-de-force of animation and special effects. Starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Kathryn Grayson Directed by George Sidney U.S.A. 1946</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 139 mins</p>
<p>Jury Of Her Peers An interesting short film set in rural America at the turn of the century. A farmer is found to have been strangled in his bed and his wife claims to have been asleep at the time. Directed by Sally Heckel U.S.A. 1980</p>	<p>PG (A) 23 mins</p>	<p>Pride and Prejudice Glittering cast in Aldous Huxley's adaptation from the Jane Austen classic, set in provincial 18th century England. Five husband-hunting sisters, their scheming mother and their cautious father, are thrown into a dither at the approach of the elegant, arrogant, rich and eligible Mr. Darcy. Starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson Directed by Robert Z. Leonard U.S.A. 1940</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 119 mins</p>
<p>Whose Life Is It Anyway? Based on the successful stage play, the story of a sculptor injured in a car crash who is left totally paralysed. He rejects the Valium shot necessary to keep his condition stable, refusing to have his consciousness paralysed along with the rest of him. Starring Richard Dreyfuss, John Cassavetes and Christine Lahti Directed by John Badham U.S.A. 1981</p>	<p>15 (AA) 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Sing As We Go Gracie Fields as an unemployed millgirl who gets various holiday jobs in Blackpool. Great fun. Starring Gracie Fields Directed by Basil Dean G.B. 1934</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 80 mins</p>
<p>Monterey Pop Filmed at the Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967. The Festival was a remarkable composite of the musical talents of that time, including Otis Redding, Ray Charles, The Who, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and the Jefferson Airplane. Directed by D. A. Pennebaker U.S.A. 1966</p>	<p>PG (A) 72 mins</p>	<p>Oliver A splendid film musical based on Dickens' "Oliver Twist". Starring Ron Moody, Oliver Reed and Mark Lester Directed by Carol Reed. G.B. 1968</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 146 mins</p>
<p>Gandhi Ben Kingsley portrays the Mahatma in this epic venture based on his life from his stand against racial oppression in South Africa at the turn of the century through to his campaign of non-violence against the occupation of India by British troops. Starring Ben Kingsley and Martin Sheen Directed by Richard Attenborough G.B. 1982</p>	<p>PG (A) 189 mins</p>	<p>Bringing Up Baby A zany girl causes a zoology professor to lose a dinosaur bone and pet leopard in the same evening. Outstanding crazy comedy which barely pauses for a moment and ends up with the whole splendid cast in jail. Starring Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn</p>	<p>1.45 p.m. 100 mins</p>
<p>Best Friends The plot is about a pair of talented screenwriters who work, play, live and love together. Then they get married... and wreck a beautiful relationship. Starring Goldie Hawn and Burt Reynolds</p>	<p>PG (A) 7.30 p.m.</p>		

<p>Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid A private eye melodrama composed by interprising clips from old movies into new material. The story features a classic 1940's private eye, Rhye Hardon, meeting such "golden oldies" as Alan Ladd, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart and Fred MacMurray and many others. Starring Steve Martin (and guests) Directed by Carl Reiner U.S.A. 1982</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. PG (A) 89 mins</p>	<p>Missing During September 1973, following a coup in Chile, an American disappeared from his home in Santiago. This film is based on this true incident and tells the gripping story of the search for him by his wife and father who go to Santiago only to be met by indifference, evasion and hostility. Starring Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek Directed by Costa Gavras U.S.A. 1981</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. PG (A) 122 mins</p>
<p>Heavy Metal An adult animated feature based on the fantasy magazine "Heavy Metal". It takes its audience "a step beyond science fiction into a universe of magic, passionate fantasies, awesome good and terrifying evil". Rock background music from Black Sabbath, Blue Oyster Cult, Journey, Trust and many others. Directed by Gerald Potterton U.S.A. 1981</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 15 (AA) 90 mins</p>	<p>The Loveless This story of a motorcycle gang who create havoc when they stop off for repairs in a small repressed Southern town recreates the life style of both "The Wild One" and "Scarlet Rising". It celebrates the 1960's through 1980's eyes. This "blatant revolt into style" concentrates on ritual, images and music bringing to the fore all the latest sexuality of zips, sunglasses, leather, bikes and the inherent eroticism of 50's music. The evocative photography, the excellent soundtrack, the subtle script and William Davoff's performances as the gang's charismatic leader, add up to make this a gem of a movie that is assured cult status. Directed by Kathryn Bigelow/Monty Montgomery U.S.A. 1981</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 18 (X) 82 mins</p>
<p>The Last Metro "The Last Metro" is a moody, poetic, beguiling film. A troupe of actors persevere in German-occupied Paris, while their leading lady keeps her Jewish husband hidden in the cellar. Inspired by Lubitch's "To Be or Not To Be", but also pure Truffaut in its delicate interplay of emotions and very sense of humour. Starring Catherine Deneuve, Gerard Depardieu and Heinz Bennent Directed by Francois Truffaut. France 1980</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. PG (A) 131 mins</p>	<p>Rust Never Sleeps A concert by Neil Young and Crazy Horse filmed in San Francisco. Directed by Bernard Shakey U.S.A. 1979</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 108 mins</p>
<p>The Deer Hunter Robert de Niro, Christopher Walken and John Savage star as close friends who in 1968, enlist and are scheduled for a tour of duty in Vietnam. The horrors of war confront them, and their experiences in the Viet Cong prison camp from which they plan to escape scar them for life. In this, his second film as director Michael Cimino demonstrates his ability to sustain a legendary story on the traumatic effect the Vietnam War has had on the Americans. Starring Robert de Niro, Christopher Walken and John Savage Directed by Michael Cimino U.S.A. 1978</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 18 (X) 183 mins</p>	<p>Taxi Zum Klo Dealing honestly and humourously with the contradictions of homosexual life, the film tells of schoolteacher Frank who scours Berlin's "Kios" (public lavatories) and leather bars for cheap thrills and one-night-stands. His schoolteacher/cruiser double-life-style is shown in explicit though never exploitive detail. Directed by Frank Ripploh W. Germany 1982</p>	<p>No Certificate MEMBERS ONLY 94 mins</p>
<p>Cat People This remake of the classic mystery story of a young girl who turns into a panther when sexually aroused has been described as "one of the most sophisticated horror movies around". Starring Nastassja Kinski and Malcolm McDowell Directed by Paul Schrader U.S.A. 1982</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 18 (X) 118 mins</p>	<p>Victor, Victoria Here we have Julie Andrews in possibly her best role to date, as an English soprano peddling "Cherry Ripe" to unimpressed cabaret club managers. She is befriended by Toddy (Robert Preston), and easily persuaded to pass herself off as an elegant young man, she develops a scintillating drag-act which delights Paris. Starring Julie Andrews and Robert Preston Directed by Blake Edwards G.B. 1982</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 15 (AA) 134 mins</p>
<p>Blade Runner Los Angeles 2019. A world full of losers. Anyone with any sense has left for the stars. Harrison Ford plays an ex-cop (Blade Runner) who is forced out of retirement to find and destroy renegade robots. An atmospheric film with stunning sets and music by Vangelis. Starring Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer and Sean Young Directed by Ridley Scott</p>	<p>7.30 p.m. 15 (AA) 117 mins</p>	<p>Firefox Michell Gant (Clint Eastwood), an ace pilot in semi-retirement, is plucked from his Alaskan retreat to help the Western Intelligence agencies whose weaponry is operated by the KGB (known as "Firefox"). Reports of a new supersonic Soviet fighter, the MiG-21 known as "Firefox", so much interest that it has been decided to steal one. Michell Gant in various disguises, sets about the task. Directed by and starring Clint Eastwood U.S.A. 1982</p>	<p>7.3 p.m. 15 (AA) 136 mins</p>

Sample Programme Content 6. Whitgift Film Theatre (Sept-Dec 1983).

These policy shifts were by no means conducted in a vacuum. The state of commercial cinema exhibition in the region was not dissimilar to the trend spreading country-wide by the late 1970s and early 1980s. The gradual decline in cinema attendance evident in Britain in the period also affected commercial cinema exhibition in Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe. In Hull the Dorchester cinema closed on the 25th June 1977 and both The Regent and The Tower cinemas closed on the 16th September 1978 (both being owned by the same company). Throughout the 1980s only three cinemas served the population of Hull: The ABC, The Cecil and the Hull Film Theatre. By this point both the ABC and Cecil cinemas had undergone the screen splitting process that was prevalent at the time, attracting more custom to the increased number of films exhibited on the new screens (this measure was not enough to save the ABC, however, which closed on the 29th June 1989). Similar atrophy affected both Grimsby and Scunthorpe commercial cinema exhibition which had, due to the size of their town and population, an already reduced mainstream cinema presence in comparison to Hull. Policy decisions regarding programming are therefore usefully placed in the context of declining commercial cinema provision in the region. The three regional film theatres, and their programming policies, were therefore influenced by national cinema attendance patterns but ultimately shaped by regional forces particular to Humberside.

With 'members only' screenings already atrophied due to the reduction from eighteen to three screenings per year, the new policy initiative enacted from January 1980 saw the remaining 'members only' screenings renamed 'members choice' evenings. Rather than a mere cosmetic alteration, the re-branding came as the public face of a more fundamental shift in policy. Coined in order to signal the notion that 'members' had some input into the programming of films (which were in fact programmed in conjunction with the BFI and the co-opted members of the committee, though suggestions may well have originated from individual member), the operation of

these evenings differed from the exclusive nature of the original ‘members only’ template outlined previously. In this new conception ‘members receive vouchers for use on “Members Only” evenings’, while members of the general public were permitted entry at the usual admission price.⁵⁷

With the barrier between membership and general public attendance effectively abolished, the notion that regional film theatres served the needs of a minority audience (whether self-selected or created) must therefore itself be re-evaluated. The gradual reduction in the exhibition of art cinema went from an equal distribution in 1969 between foreign language films and a mixture of ‘classic’, ‘independent’ and ‘avant-garde’ films to the early-to-mid-1980s programming strategy whereby foreign films were relegated to the ‘members choice’ evenings to counteract the mainstream films on offer the remainder of the week. The general condition of the exhibition market country-wide in this period can only be thought part of the explanation. Countering the gradual decline in attendance, the three film theatres in Hull took increasing advantage of the atrophied regional exhibition sector through their reinterpretation of the ‘regional film theatre’ remit. Primarily programming mainstream film, and ‘warning’ the public that certain films were not for the majority of the potential audience, with the caveat “Subtitled” attached in the programmes, the three film theatres bore little resemblance to their identity a decade earlier.

Under constant pressure to reduce expenditure, the Leisure Services Committee decided against a proposal that ‘the opening of the three film theatres be restricted to two evenings per week and [that] half-price matinees be discontinued’ and responded with a renewed commitment to the theatres as civic amenities.⁵⁸ Moving to a yet more mainstream programme of films, the identity of the regional film theatres was further altered. Despite claiming in 1984 that ‘the three county-run cinemas in Grimsby,

⁵⁷ Whitgift Film Theatre (WFT) programme, April-June 1980.

⁵⁸ HCCM, 14 June 1983.

Scunthorpe and Hull are still running at a loss of between £45,000 and £50,000 this year', the Leisure Services Committee fought to keep the film theatres operational by whatever means possible.⁵⁹ By altering the operation and focus of the film theatres it was felt that 'everyone in Humberside will benefit from better marketing and take advantage of the improved service we provide'.⁶⁰ To this end the last remaining provision of the 'regional film theatre' model that distinguished it from mainstream cinemas, the 'members choice' evenings, was abolished in April 1984, leaving three film theatres that operated largely on a policy of self-sufficiency rather than subsidised cultural amenity. Such was the effect of this shift to mainstream exhibition that 'the British Film Institute has been so impressed with the success of the film theatres in defying all national trends towards dwindling cinema audiences that it has more than doubled its grant to Humberside County Council' and 'for the coming year, the film theatres will receive £6,400 from the British Film Institute, compared with a £3,000 grant in 1984/85'.⁶¹ In attempting to circumvent a national trend of dwindling audiences and closure, and despite an acknowledgement that 'those changes had paid off and Humberside was now teaching London a thing or two on how to build audiences', the three Humberside regional film theatres were now operating as mainstream cinemas with a programming policy that paid little heed to the identity of their previous incarnations.⁶² Having served as a conveyor of shared ideals and interest in the attempt to standardise provision the film theatres were now indistinguishable from the small number of mainstream cinemas still operating that their identity was once defined against.

⁵⁹ *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*, 25 October 1984, p.5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*, 25 October 1984, p.8.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Conclusion

As addressed above the creation of the county of Humberside was far from a simple or smooth process. The joining of two previously separate regions created the need to streamline provision of many of the county's services, not the least of which was film theatre provision in the enlarged region. The specific, publicly articulated, intention of the regional film theatres as promoted by the BFI was to 'encourage the development of the art film, to promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners, to foster study and appreciation of it from these points of view'.⁶³ This ethos chimes with Humberside County Council's desire for the

provision for Community Film Theatres as a service to the public and also to draw in audiences not yet in the habit of accepting film as a forum for artistic expression and to develop this interest and commitment to film as an art form in its truest sense.⁶⁴

The implementation of these objectives and measures throws up widely divergent problems and solutions, however, when viewed from either a national or a regional/local perspective. Whilst the notion of identity can usefully be utilized in the case of both the BFI's intentions for the regional film theatres and the local council's own perception of their use and value, the actual creation of 'identity' has much more extensive and fundamental influence upon the population of the region of Humberside than policy directed from the BFI.

Providing further complication to any simplistic conception of identity, where art cinema, its audience and its geographical location are concerned, the creation of the county of Humberside and the amalgamation of three regional film theatres under one

⁶³ James Quinn, 'Outside London: A Report to the Governors of the British Film Institute' (London: BFI, 1965), p.1.

⁶⁴ HCCM, 22 January 1980.

host council created a need for a unified operation for the vastly increased and dispersed population. As Benedict Anderson has shown, the need to create a sense of shared identity, where no historical or actual links exist, necessitated the promotion of a newly 'imagined community', a project in which the regional film theatres of Humberside played their part. The building of the Humber Bridge, or more tellingly, the articulation and anticipation of the projected bridge, highlights the ways in which issues of culture and space are bounded by what Mike Crang identifies as contrasting and often conflicting visions. In the observation that 'identity is defined by a spatially co-extensive culture [that] is imagined as unitary (one culture occupying a space) and bounded by that space' the example of art cinema audiences and the population of Humberside in general can be seen as evidence that such unity is indeed imagined.⁶⁵ As Crang notes, the fact that 'this culture is made into a thing, [and] given a substance above and beyond the practices through which it is experienced', goes some way towards explaining the decisions made by the council.⁶⁶ Crang further states that 'it is no longer the way people behave that gives rise to a label, but instead that label defines appropriate behaviour' and in the measures taken to limit expenditure, and therefore the remit, of the film theatres and hence meet what they set as the parameters of acceptable operation for a regional film theatre, the council confirmed this position.⁶⁷

Further complicating the role identity plays in cultural provision and policy is the concomitant fear of community identity being 'threatened, contaminated, diluted or indeed even "destroyed" by outside forces'.⁶⁸ Altering its provision of art cinema exhibition, and hence the conception of what a regional film theatre is, Humberside County Council represented just such an outside force as seen in the changes to the

⁶⁵ Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.162.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

number of screenings per year, the provision of 'members-only' films and the response from the public to the operation of the theatres. The concept of operating a regional film theatre had altered significantly over the course of the ten years from 1974 to 1984, which in turn altered the concept of what, and who, exactly a regional film theatre was for. Such concerns, however, were not restricted to Humberside.

Shifting Priorities: The Regional Film Theatres and Changing Attitudes

The changes to administrative boundaries in Britain in 1974 resulted from a political campaign conducted nationally but enacted in regional and local areas. The creation of the county of Humberside altered the provision of many services in the region, of which the regional film theatres previously discussed were only one instance. The effect this had upon the screening of art cinema in the region was significant nonetheless. Yet the success of the three Humberside regional film theatres in terms of surviving the decline in admissions and subsequent cinema closures throughout the 1970s and early 1980s pays testament to changing strategies whereby art cinema programming was replaced by more mainstream film programming. In effect this chapter argues that the regional film theatres were still successfully serving the region, but how they served it differed substantially to earlier periods, and that ways the art cinemas in Humberside worked also differed from how centrally produced policies attempted to organise them.

Therefore, intra-regional changes were far from the only factors influencing the operational and programming policy of the Humberside regional film theatres. Subtle and not so subtle shifts in opinion at the BFI concerning the regional film theatre initiative were conducted on a national stage. As the rest of the thesis illustrates, the identity of the Humberside RFTs over the course of the 1960s to the 1980s was shaped by both national and regional forces that wove together to form the identity of art cinema provision in the region. Resulting from the changing conceptions of the regional film theatre initiative at the BFI was a debate centred on the programming policy of art cinema exhibition and its educational agenda. This chapter will firstly investigate these

changes in light of the resignation of six members of the BFI's Education Department, and will examine the wider debate over structured programming in the 1970s.

The programming policy of regional film theatres all over Britain during this period was part of this debate and changes in such policy at individual film theatres was partly a direct result of either an acceptance or denial of the merits of the proposed changes. This was evidenced in the shift away from such changes taken by the Humberside RFTs. Continuing the interlocking histories of national and regional developments concerning art cinema exhibition, it is important that the conception of art cinema and its regional presence, as discussed on a national scale, is balanced with the a discussion here of such debates on a local scale.

The debate over the type of films screened at the regional film theatres and the best way to programme these films led to a renewed consideration of the regional film theatres as a network of art cinema venues. Discussing these debates, the chapter will move on to analyse this important development in the role, function and identity of the regional film theatres. Emerging out of this period of reflection for the BFI, a Regional Consortium of film theatres was formed which sought to establish a more secure footing on which to negotiate with the film trade for better rental conditions and create a more adventurous programming strategy with notions of 'structured', 'targeted', 'thematic' and 'educational' programming. In addressing such shifts in policy, there can be no avoidance of the drift, throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s, away from the programming of art cinema towards a more mainstream and commercial programme of films. Ending with retrenchment in Humberside, the chapter is will engage with the notion of programming policy as a major factor in the decline of a certain type of film exhibition in the county.

Discontent and Structured Programming

As previously discussed, when the county of Humberside was created the existing regional film theatre of Grimsby (Whitgift Film Theatre) and the new film theatre of Scunthorpe (Scunthorpe Film Theatre) joined the Hull Film Theatre under the control of the new Humberside County Council. The programming policies conducted by these three annexed regional film theatres were therefore separate and controlled by individual regional film theatre committees. It will be argued that as the three film theatres were caught between individual autonomy and collective control, the identity of the Humberside theatres was greatly influenced by the programming policy of the council. However, it will also be shown that the availability of films that all three film theatres deemed suitable, let alone available, depended as much on the (continued) decline of cinema audiences and the debates taking place within the BFI, as the dictates of local need. Further, the involvement of academics in the debates about programming during this period will be examined in order to further address the connections between perceptions of central policy and its applications in the regions. A survey of sample programmes from all three Humberside RFTs and those of the neighbouring regional film theatres of York and Sheffield reveal how by the mid-1970s a shift in local programming had occurred towards more American and mainstream films.

Although a one-week-in-four operation, and therefore unable to programme as many films as the Humberside RFTs, the Sheffield Film Theatre continued to programme primarily European art cinema with the likes of *Tout va Bien*, *Wild Strawberries*, *The Face*, *Red Psalm*, *Company Limited* and *Boesman and Lena* in 1974 and *The Theatre of Mr and Mrs Kabul*, *Landscape after Battle*, *A Family Tree*, *Numero*

Deux and *Celine and Julie go Boating* in 1977.¹ With an operating time comparable to the Humberside theatres, York Film Theatre managed the programming of *Un Chien Andalou*, *Millhouse - A White Comedy*, *Mississippi Mermaid*, *The Phantom of Liberté*, *Le Million* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* in 1976.² Compared with the representative programming of *Lenny*, *The Apartment*, *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *Lawrence of Arabia* at the Hull Film Theatre, *Never Give an Inch*, *Badlands*, *Ulzana's Raid* and *Deliverance* at the Scunthorpe Film Theatre (SFT) and *Hello Dolly*, *What's Up Doc?*, *Save the Tiger* and *The Devils* at the Whitgift Film Theatre (WFT), it becomes clear how much the strategy employed by the Humberside Leisure Services committee had altered the programming policy of the county's RFTs.³ As much as this shift in programming policy is attributable to the constitution of the three programming committees of the county, who sought in no small measure to create a unity of provision for such a large potential audience, the role of the BFI in the erosion of the type of art cinema programming it had helped to create cannot be underestimated. Thus, it is in the disparity between the local (and regional) debates in Humberside (concerning parity of provision) and the national debates, to be outlined below (concerning national and regional conceptions of art cinema exhibition), that the new identity of art cinema in Humberside was formed.

Animosity towards the creation of the regional film theatres had formed a minor current of disquiet within the BFI almost from their inception. With uptake of film theatres exceeding initial expectations (for reasons ranging from a genuine desire to host a RFT to the mere availability of financial assistance), John Huntley, head of the Regional branch of the Film Services division within the Institute, reported in 1971 that

¹ Sheffield Film Theatre (ShFT) Programmes, Oct-Nov 1974 and Jan-Feb 1977.

² York Film Theatre (YFT) Programme, Oct-Nov 1976.

³ HFT Programme, April-June 1977, SFT programme, April-June 1976 and WFT programme, Sep-Dec 1976.

the expansion of the Regional Film Theatres was likely to be the main activity [of his department] during 1972/73 since the Governors' Sub-Committee had now advocated going beyond the limit of 40 theatres which was their present target.⁴

This rapid and unexpected development of the RFT network had put severe strain upon the Institute's budget, even though the increase in grant from the government in 1964 had primarily been given for such an expansion. It was in this climate of change, both at the BFI and in the wider world of film education, that more serious focus was placed upon the operation of the BFI itself. Whilst not directly affected by the expansion into the regions, the Education Services department of the BFI nonetheless had its capabilities stretched by the increase in interest in the study of film. Adding to this situation was a report by the Governor's Committee on Educational Services in March 1971 that was highly critical of the operations of the department. Leading to a debate (much of it one-sided) on the operation of the department, the result was the simultaneous resignation of six members of the department and a renewed interest in the remit, agenda and scope of the BFI was conducted in the pages of *Screen*, the journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT).

The changing nature of film education in Britain had led the education department and its progressive-thinking staff to seriously consider the value of the current policy, or more saliently, the lack of policy. Taking up the debate, the editors of *Screen* critiqued the lack of official BFI policy with the observation that 'the Institute seems to have adopted a number of positions, most of which appear contradictory, some mutually exclusive, and all apparently *ad hoc*, of the moment, and never in any case thought out'.⁵ As Alan Lovell stated in his letter setting out his reasons for resignation '[the Institute's] history has [...] followed a pattern of periods of mediocrity punctuated

⁴ BFI Executive Committee minutes, 20 June 1971.

⁵ 'Editorial', *Screen*, 12:3, p.9.

by crisis and inquiries'.⁶ The impetus for the perceived current crisis, it was claimed, came from the changes that occurred in 1964, namely the appointment of a new Director and Chairman and the shift in direction made possible by the influx of money from the new Labour Government. Setting out the problem in terms of good intentions, whereby 'the basic idea was a good and important one: the Institute's work should not be confined to London and [...] one of the most useful ways of extending it outside was by making it possible for a wider range of films to be seen', the implementation of the scheme was seen to be at fault:⁷

The regional scheme took the form of establishing regional theatres wherever some local interest and support revealed itself. Theatres were established in major centres of population like Bristol and Sheffield and in small or remote places like Aldeburgh or Street. The policy behind this particular strategy was never clearly justified; the usual justification offered was that was the way Jenny [sic] Lee and the DES [the Department of Education and Science] wanted it. However, occasional remarks and comments suggested that the strategy was not simply imposed on the Institute but the outcome of a particular view of the state of the cinema.⁸

Here lies the crux of a problem within the Institute concerning 'film appreciation', which found its apotheosis in the creation of the RFTs and their notion of programming 'the best in world cinema'. It is also here also that HFT was created, not out of the 'local interest and support' mentioned, but out of the need to expand the regional film theatre initiative in the absence of an explicit policy. Whilst the lack of a clear policy allowed the HFT to flourish, attempts to manufacture a policy for the RFTs post-1971 had little effect on the Humberside RFTs.

While the resignations of the six members of the education department in 1971 were based on a much more fundamental disagreement with the way the Institute was

⁶ 'Editorial', *Screen*, 12:3, p.19.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 'Editorial', *Screen*, 12:3, p20.

being run and the perceived, discrepancy between the needs of those educating the public about film and the agenda of the BFI itself, the impetus for the recognition of such a situation came from the *laissez faire* attitude of the Institute towards regional expansion. Undermining this strategy of educating the public about, not only the best films to watch but also, via the establishment of the RFT network, the best way to watch films, was the changing attitude towards film programming expressed in the wider world of academia.

Building upon the ‘development of practices of production and distribution in opposition to those associated with mainstream commercial cinema’, Steve Neale pays attention in the early 1980s to the way that ‘various and diverse attempts have been and are being made to develop progressive, oppositional practices of film exhibition’.⁹ Given that mainstream exhibition is operated on a commodity basis, whereby a product is positioned within the marketplace for consumption based primarily upon the successful strategy employed on previous occasions, the temptation to innovate is tempered by the need to maximise profit. This strategy, which Neale calls ‘an appeal to a mass audience constituted in terms of spectacle, identification and entertainment’, works because it sells a film as an individual entity based primarily upon the experience an audience has enjoyed on previous instances.¹⁰ With the regional film theatres establishing a certain mode of address after their creation, exhibiting films ‘unavailable elsewhere’ to a potentially selective audience and thereby creating an identity distinct from that of the mainstream cinemas, it seems strange that an exhibition strategy wholly distinct from that of mainstream exhibition was not formulated until much later in the form of ‘thematic’ or ‘structured’ programming. This style of exhibition consists of what Neale notes as

⁹ Steve Neale, ‘Oppositional Exhibition - Notes and Problems’, *Screen*, 21:3, p.45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

programming films into seasons structured around social, political and/or cinematic issues (the family, racism, feminism, the politics of the avant-garde, genre, the work of specific directors and film-makers, the representation of history, and so on); using documentation: booklets, and programme notes; programming lectures, discussions and courses; juxtaposing, within any one season, different forms and modes of cinema; finally, but crucially, screening on a regular basis independent films from various local, national and international contexts.¹¹

Although this style of programming had played a certain role in the advancement of the serious consideration of film as ‘art’ with its relation to objects of study beyond the cinematic, its use by the newly invigorated RFT network, as will be seen later, had a much more utilitarian impetus.

Whereas mainstream exhibition traditionally *marketed* and then *programmed* films around notions of genres, stars and filmmakers (be they writers or directors), the RFT movement *programmed* and then *marketed* films (the inverse of the mainstream strategy and an extremely important distinction) around notions of country of origin, film ‘movements’ and ‘auteurs’. Acknowledging this observation it becomes clear that besides reduced operating time (either a one-week-in-four or three-nights-per-week operation followed primarily due to financial restraints), the appeal to the potential audience is predicated on the same strategy – individual films targeted as unique experiences. For instance, in the April-June 1979 programme, Hull Film Theatre screened Bunuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977) (with Whitgift Film Theatre screening the film in their September-December 1979 programme and Scunthorpe Film Theatre in their January-March 1980 programme), the film was programmed as simply an isolated example of the type of film screened by the RFTs and one finally available to them after its original 1977 release had been exploited by its distributor on the more profitable metropolitan ‘art-house’ circuit. In the joint operation of three RFTs by Humberside County Council, however, there appeared the opportunity for a different

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

programming strategy in the region. With the decision by the BFI to award its yearly deficit grant to the Humberside RFTs as a single entity rather than three separate regional film theatres the county was able to 'effect administrative savings, while at the same time enhancing the development of common themes in film programming through the interaction of the three film selection panels'.¹² Nevertheless the 'common themes' developed at the Humberside RFTs were not designed to advance an alternative art cinema programming strategy but were primarily designed to make maximum use of a regional infrastructure and maximise the use of film prints.

The characteristics of programming an RFT can be summarised as being based upon difference (from both the type of film programmed in mainstream cinemas and specific locations), availability (due to distributor negotiations and time/location restrictions) and organisation interest (BFI and/or local council or art organisation involvement). The desire of those wishing to alter the programming strategy of non-mainstream film exhibition in the late 1970s (including the RFT's), is characterised by Neale when he observes that 'oppositional practices of exhibition seek in various ways to challenge each of the characteristics, structures and practices marking mainstream cinematic exhibition' therefore marking such practices as deliberately confrontational.¹³ Having established themselves, to a large degree, as 'oppositional' to the mainstream cinema format, the move towards a more structured programming policy by some of the RFT's can be seen as the next logical step in a strategy designed to educate the audience as to the best ways to see 'better' films.

Observing the changes wrought by the shift in policy towards the late 1970s, Ian Christie, writing in the *1979/80 BFI Production Catalogue*, identifies what he terms as the 'phases' the RFT movement progressed through up until that point. Noting that there was 'little doubt on the part of the BFI that RFTs would bring the blessings of

¹² Humberside County Council, *A New Direction*, 1980.

¹³ Neale, 'Oppositional Exhibition', 49.

“world cinema” to the benighted provinces’, he proceeds to acknowledge that ‘the early years of the regional enterprise were marked by an almost studied absence of explicit policy’.¹⁴ Echoing the stance taken by those who had so publicly resigned from the education department in 1971, Christie highlights the ‘tacit policy [that] soon became apparent as their programmes came to resemble each other very closely’ thereby highlighting the lack of local and programming specificity.¹⁵ With the programming of the RFTs based on the NFT template (in terms of films screened if not strategy) he further admonishes the strategy as regressive and self-serving because

the repertoire, not surprisingly, is that of *Sight and Sound*, Penelope Houston’s *The Contemporary Cinema* (Penguin 1963), the Academy Cinemas: it appears virtually untouched by such diverse contemporary positions as *Movie*, Hall and Whannel’s *The Popular Arts*, or the London Film-makers’ Co-Op.¹⁶

The debates around psychoanalytical, ideological and authorial conceptions of both film content and interpretation conducted in *Screen* and its imitators resulted in a much more critical and educationally progressive stance towards film, one which in turn filtered through to the point of contact of film and audience, the exhibition space. It was in this climate that the move away from ‘consensus’ programming, the scheduling of films that would meet the approval of all involved, be they potential audience members, local programmers or BFI policy makers, made way for more ambitious and significantly different styles of programming. As seen however, the Humberside regional film theatres took a different approach to programming than that of other RFTs around the country.

¹⁴ Ian Christie, *BFI Production Catalogue: 1979/80* (London: BFI Library, 1980).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Regional: Separatism and Consortium

As with the coordinated programming eventually practiced by the three regional film theatres in Humberside, the matching programme brochures distributed by the theatres reveal a desire to present a unified appearance. This appearance was markedly different from the other RFTs operating at the same time outside of the county, not only in terms of programme brochures but also in terms of actual films programmed. Reacting to a number of factors, both nationwide and regional, the three Humberside RFTs entered a period of significant change from 1980 onwards. The steady fall in cinema attendance nationwide from 1957 onwards resulted in an 85% decrease in admissions by 1981 leading to the subsequent closure of many of the county's cinemas.¹⁷ This resulted in a situation the county council used to its advantage, taking the opportunity to programme films that were 'unavailable elsewhere' in the city. This still met the film theatre's commitment to its original remit but by the way of changing local circumstances. The Hull Film Theatre was therefore meeting the needs of the city by screening films that would not otherwise be seen but with a shift away from the identity that it, and other regional film theatres, had established in the late 1960s.

As addressed previously, the completion of road communications in the county, most significantly the opening of the Humber Bridge in July 1981, led to the combination of the three previously distinct programming committees. This in turn led to the decision by the BFI to consolidate the deficit grants awarded to the three theatres into one combined award. These inner-regional decisions made by Humberside County Council helped solidify the identity of the three regional film theatres and changes occurring in the regional film theatre movement nationally had little effect on the Humberside theatres. The programming of the three Humberside RFTs moved in the

¹⁷ Eddie Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film and Television Handbook 2004* (London: BFI, 2003), p.17.

opposite direction to that of the ‘thematic’ or ‘structured’ programming style that was entering other regional film theatres in the country and led to a markedly different conception of what a regional film theatre was.

In the battle between the conservative and progressive factions within the BFI Ian Christie notes that “‘Structured programmes” became a slogan in the struggle between those who wished to defend the *status quo*, and the supporters of FAS [Film Availability Services] who argued that RFTs must either evolve or eventually be abandoned to their own parochial ambitions’.¹⁸ In light of the inter-regional governing of the three Humberside RFTs, their operation could conceivably be argued to amount to nothing more than ‘parochial ambitions’ and as such not evolving. Yet this position fails to acknowledge the autonomous ideology inherent in not so much accepting the *status quo* as providing for the (albeit assumed) needs of a region by those charged with its care.

Conceived of as a stance designed to cater for a potential audience in a specific location, the programming policy adopted by the Humberside RFTs can be seen as a positive attempt to cater for the assumed needs of the region. Whereas the according to Christie “‘structured programme” polemic sought to spread the influence of a position on popular cinema that had emerged from the BFI Education Department and the Society for Education in Film and Television in the early seventies’, the strategy employed by the Humberside RFTs simply sought to provide and survive in an increasingly atrophied exhibition market.¹⁹ Leading from this divergence in programming emphasis is the attendant problem as to how to classify and quantify exactly what a ‘Regional Film Theatre’ can claim to be and what custom and audience it represents in such a markedly altered form.

¹⁸ Ian Christie, *BFI Production Catalogue*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Reflecting upon the current situation of the regional film theatres at the 1980 BFI Regional Conference, the report drawn from its findings summarised the changing priorities regarding the actions of the BFI to the regions. To this end the Governors produced an eight-point agenda stating their official position in this regard.²⁰ Acknowledging that, 'unlike most other arts film requires the marshalling of a national public before it can exist', the report went on to underline its claim that the longevity of an interest in 'serious' cinema comes from a creative construction of, rather than the catering for, an audience. Thus it noted that

the exhibition of films is necessarily the foundation: a new public must be constantly sought which can be encouraged to love and enjoy for its own sake the art of film; but the public has to be, as it were, 'trained' and led towards a lasting commitment. A group which works methodically to bring together young and old in appropriate premises to watch a planned programme of films introduced in a booklet with a talk and discussion to follow is immediately commanding of the Institute's attention (and therefore our help) because its efforts may result in an enduring influence which may in due course help other similar groups to be assembled.²¹

As well as concern over the longevity of an audience's interest in 'the art of film', the passage highlights the Institute's self-interest in the creation and propagation of yet more groups with an interest in such cinema. Alongside such attempts to generate a future role for the BFI in the regions, conducted under the guise of fostering a long-term commitment to 'the art of film' on the part of the audience, can be placed the experiment of the Regional Consortium that formed much of the debate at the 1980 Regional Conference.

Envisioned as eventually autonomous organisations with minimal, yet essential, initial assistance from the BFI in the form of deficit and/or capital grants and

²⁰ 'Independent Cinema and Regional Film Culture; Report of the 1980 British Film Institute Regional Conference' (London: BFI, 1981).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

programming advice, the RFT network was deliberately discussed in terms promoting the individuality of the theatres and as anything but a 'third circuit'.²² Such avoidance of positioning the RFTs as a rival to the Rank and ABC circuits was intended to placate these combines, the Kinematograph Rental Society (KRS) and the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association (CEA) which represented the interests of the independent exhibitor's and who both feared competition from the RFTs. With the CEA being vocal on this matter from the opening of the first RFT, the BFI had capitulated somewhat as early as 1971 when it agreed that

information on film bookings would be exchanged between the Regional Film Theatres and all commercial cinemas in the area showing art films. The Institute agreed that where there was clear evidence of the intention of a commercial cinema to book a film within a six month period, the Institute would withdraw.²³

Given this situation, whereby trade fear and negotiation dictated BFI policy, the avoidance of constituting the regional film theatres as a 'third circuit' seems to stem not from a desire to create independent, locally specific and autonomous film theatres but as a desire to implement the expansion of the NFT model in the most agreeable, and hence non-confrontational way possible. Yet by the mid-1970s, the conflict within the BFI had brought attention to the untenable state of the present RFT model in a context in which declining audiences for cinema nationwide had forced mainstream exhibitors to seek alternative strategies to maintain their profits. As distributors sought to maximise their share of the exhibitor's intake, the limited number of film prints were invariably offered

²² In order to placate the independent exhibition sector (represented by the Cinema Exhibition Association) the regional film theatre network was never fully conceived as a 'third circuit' to compete alongside Rank and ABC. In many articles and correspondence however (some originating from the BFI itself) the regional film theatres are often discussed in terms of a third circuit, if only informally, to refer to a loose network with similar goals and perhaps aspirations of advancement to a genuine circuit some day.

²³ BFI Executive Committee minutes, 22 July 1971.

to those mainstream and independent exhibitors who could guarantee a minimal booking period and possibly 'hold-over' a successful film for a longer period. Due to this increasingly worrying situation the Film Availability Services department of the BFI instigated the idea of a 'Regional Consortium' made up of regional film theatres and 'other exhibitors', 'formed to secure the availability and promote the exhibition within the United Kingdom of films of contemporary and historical significance which further the understanding of the practice of cinema'.²⁴ Eventually formed in 1978, the Regional Consortium had twenty-four confirmed members (with three unconfirmed Scottish regional film theatres) by the time of the 1980 Regional Conference.²⁵ That the Humberside theatres chose not to join the Consortium is significant in a number of regards, not least of which was the manner in which the theatres had strayed from the programming model of the other RFTs.

With the increased bargaining power that aggregation brings, the Regional Consortium arranged to 'negotiate for distribution and exhibition rights on certain films and [...] try to make available one or more "reserved" prints, initially for exclusive Consortium use, together with appropriate publicity and documentation materials'.²⁶ In order to approach film distributors with a better proposition than the single bookings previously associated with the RFT network, the Consortium instituted a system whereby minimum playing times and number of bookings could be guaranteed to the distributor and hence raise the prospect of increased revenue for the film trade. By

²⁴ Regional Film Consortium Constitution: Article 1 (BFI: 1978).

²⁵ The original core members of the Regional Consortium, as confirmed in 1978, were: Queens Film Theatre (Belfast); Birmingham Arts Lab; Bradford Film Theatre; Arnolfini (Bristol); Canterbury Film Theatre; Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff); Sherman Film Theatre (Cardiff); Dartington Film Theatre; Edinburgh Film Theatre; Glasgow Film Theatre; Ipswich Film Theatre; Lancaster Film Theatre; Leeds Film Theatre; Luton Film Theatre; Mold Film Theatre; Cinema City (Norwich); Nottingham Film Theatre; Reading Film Theatre; Sheffield Film Theatre; Stirling Film Theatre; Stoke Film Theatre; Street Film Theatre; Warwick Arts Centre and York Film Theatre. A further three unconfirmed Scottish film theatres were also affiliated by 1980: Dundee, Inverness and Irvine.

²⁶ Regional Film Consortium Constitution: Article 7: (BFI: 1978).

assigning films either 'A', 'B' or 'C' status the Consortium sought to appear as attractive a prospect to the film trade as the major combines and therefore secure product faster and more efficiently than had previously been able. 'A' films were films that all 'full' Consortium members were obliged to give a maximum playing time to within a year of their acquisition by the Consortium. 'B' films had to be screened within a two year period and for at least a minimum playing time agreed on an individual exhibitor basis. 'C' films were films given 'preferential access' to Consortium members with no obligation to screen.²⁷ These rankings, and their adopting by the RFTs indicate the unequal power relationships between the centre and those increasingly dependent upon, but far from, it.

However, in that the Consortium established a measure of trust between the RFT movement and the film trade in its newly-arranged guarantees of minimum print exposure, the BFI could at least claim to have responded to a much debated problem. Admitting that "The Trade" has no particular conception of an identity for individual R.F.T.s, nor for all of them collectively as a circuit',²⁸ FAS began an experiment that followed a natural debate centred around programming initiatives designed to foreground the context of production and consumption, and equally directed the path that appreciation of film as art would subsequently take. With specific location becoming less distinctive and important with regard to regional film theatre identity due to the creation of the Consortium, the role played by the 'regional' became divorced somewhat from that of provision. It is in this regard that the diminished presence and reduced role of the RFT movement can be considered a terminal shift, if not in the aim

²⁷ Examples of the type of films categorised as A,B or C are as follows: A – *L'Age d'Or, Fedora*; B- '*M*', *Radio On*; C- *Greetings, Hi Mom*.

²⁸ Barry Edson, 'The BFI – Policy and Practice', in Susan Feldman, '*The British Film Institute and Regional Film Theatres: Developing a Profile on Subsidised Exhibition in Britain*' (Unpublished Research Project: The City University: Arts Administration Studies: 1980 – BFI Library), p.2; original emphasis.

to foster the ‘appreciation and study of film as art’, then at least in the desire to ‘stimulate action locally or regionally rather than undertake developments itself’.²⁹

As part of the attempt to publicly reflect upon (as well as direct) its past and future performance, the BFI’s ‘Outlook’ series of publications had presented a series of maps of Britain locating either existing or prospective RFTs.³⁰ In what emerged as the last of the series, ‘Outlook 1968’ featured a map highlighting a total of sixty-three RFTs (significantly, neither Scunthorpe nor Grimsby were amongst these theatres). When the Executive Committee of the BFI agreed to break the set barrier of forty film theatres in May 1971 it became clear that ambition far outweighed the practical task of establishing so many regional film so quickly. Nevertheless come the development of the Regional Consortium, due to a variety of reasons (commercial competition, financial instability, shift in patronage etc), the number of regional film theatres had declined steadily throughout the 1970s.

Moreover, the role of these theatres had changed markedly in both ambition and purpose. Surveying the programming policies of the RFTs in 1980, Susan Feldman finds that a significant leaning towards the educational and contextual use of film had become apparent. Gathering data on the various policies of a number of representative RFTs she notes a wide range of stated purposes. Broad, all encompassing, statements expressing a desire to ‘facilitate and encourage the enjoyment, appreciation and study of film as art, entertainment and industry’ are mixed with more specialist, and contemporary, policies of ‘screening seasons of films based on unifying themes such as

²⁹ Programming policy statement from Bradford Film Theatre, *Ibid.*, 8; Quinn, ‘Outside London’, p.33.

³⁰ The maps outlining those regional film theatres that were either already established, or proposed sites for such theatres, appeared in the three ‘Outlook’ booklets of 1966, 1967 and 1968 were updated in the 1970 publication *The BFI and the Regions* and can be tabulated thus: 1966 - 34 film theatres; 1967 – 34 film theatres; 1968 – 63 film theatres & 1970 – 41 film theatres. Not all these film theatres came to fruition and there are marked discrepancies between the maps. They are nevertheless illustrative of attempts to spread a much debated policy around the country. BFI ‘Outlook’ series.

genre, or director, or star, [...] interspersed with examples of good, interesting international (usually subtitled) cinema'.³¹ In this range there is a deliberate attempt to either continue the 'consensus' approach to programming or adopt the newer, 'structured' approaches. Given that the three Humberside RFTs submitted only a sparse account of their operating days and 'membership' commitments with no explicit policy explanation to the project, it becomes clear how much the concept of a 'regional film theatre' had altered in the county. The identity of art cinema in the region had become so significantly distanced from the notion of regional provision of a metropolitan template and more inclined towards inner-regional cultural provision by local amenities that the use of the term itself becomes questionable and a redefinition or expansion of the label becomes necessary.

Conclusion

Changing priorities at the local level during the 1970s and 1980s meant that the Humberside regional film theatres took a different route to that of the majority of regional film theatres who reacted to changing priorities conducted at the national level. The operation of the regional film theatres, specifically their programming policies, was at the heart of these changes. Whilst the NFT had programmed films in thematic seasons from its establishment in 1952, the regional film theatre movement had resisted such a strategy until its promotion in the late 1970s, which had resulted from disagreements within the BFI as to the best policy for exhibiting art and experimental films. Such policy initiatives and programming compromises have formed the defining characteristic of regional film theatre programming, with the Humberside film theatres

³¹ Feldman, *'The British Film Institute and Regional Film Theatres'*, p.8.

particularly susceptible to the vagaries of local and regional tensions. Whilst generally thought representative of art cinemas, the films screened at such venues can be seen to have been categorised as much by the very act of programming as by any intrinsic characteristics shared by them. Additionally, the programming policy of the regional film theatres, and the three Humberside theatres in particular, were shaped as much by a desire to cater for an assumed audience as by the political imperatives dictating policy.

This policy was enacted through multiple agendas including ones attempting to standardise provision for the county, others emulating the programming of nearby film theatres and still others attempting to reanimate a moribund programming strategy through appeals to education. When viewed as a whole, the programming policy of the regional film theatres offers a unique perspective on art cinema that shows it to have been a loosely operating network that was never accessible by all. Localised programming such as that of the Humberside theatres addressed a particular population through specific, tailored means. These means substantially altered the meaning attached to the region's film theatres and in doing so call into question the identity of subsidised regional film theatres designed to exhibit 'the best of the world cinema'.

Conclusion

The origin of this thesis was the recognition that generalisations concerning film exhibition have tended to obscure more complex operations. Whether to promote a film, persuade someone of the worth of a particular film category or to better understand a concept, the many complicated and/or competing factors that feed into film exhibition tend to be filtered out and presented as a uniform whole. This uniformity then tends to become normalised over time so as to appear natural, predestined and uncomplicated. This is the manner in which current film exhibition is viewed by an industry that separates mainstream, commercially viable films from less commercially viable art-house films. This thesis has attempted to document some of the complexity that feeds into these generalisations and uncover how much policy, geography and identity factor into such sweeping categorisations. Rather than developing through formal characteristics, country of origin, narrative content or directorial authority the thesis has claimed that it is the mode of exhibition that has come to define a certain type of film that has over the years come to accrue the name of art cinema. Whilst a term that gained favour in academia from the early 1980s, art cinema has come to refer to a particular type of cinema whose current usage this thesis claims has less to do with the films themselves than the exhibition spaces that screened such films. Rarely programmed as examples of 'art cinema', particular types of film (from 'the best in world cinema' to the avant garde) became associated with a particular type of exhibition venue all the same. In Britain these venues manifested themselves as The (London) Film Society, other local film societies, metropolitan art-houses, commercial continental cinemas and, most significantly, the regional film theatres established by the BFI from the mid-1960s onwards. The assumptions concerning the worth of this particular type of film, its

potential audience and the identity the various exhibition venues developed have formed the core of the thesis in relation to the provision of 'art cinema' exhibition in the city of Hull from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s. Tracing such a history allows for a fuller understanding of the processes that lead to our current conception of art cinema.

The consumption of film by categorisation has long been the norm in the cinema industry. Placing individual films in the context of a wider group of films allows a number of connections to be drawn that can alter the practice of consumption in subtle, and often not so subtle, ways. Whether discussed in terms of genre, star, director, country of origin or movement (Soviet Montage, French *Nouvelle Vague*, New Italian Cinema etc.), there is a tendency to relocate a film from consideration as an individual, ahistorical entity to one which circulates amongst a plethora of films invested with corresponding and historical significance. Long thought the province of the film text and film production, this act of situating the text with similar examples to broaden the understanding (and audience) of the individual film has altered over time to encompass a number of changes wrought by developments in film distribution and exhibition. With Hollywood long situated as the exemplar of film as product, an industry of 'labelled' cinemas has developed either in tandem with or in opposition to this hegemony.

As detailed in this thesis, 'art cinema' is one such example of a category of film defined as much by what it is not as by what it is. Taken as contingent upon the actual process of exhibition and reception, 'art cinema' developed a unique identity through a complex of often competing factors. Highlighting these issues allows for a more detailed investigation into how much these factors influenced the development and course a particular type of film that became known as art cinema took. As has been argued, policy decisions made by individuals and organisations, both within and outside the film industry, significantly affected the identity of what has come to be known as art cinema.

Through a negotiation over many years of, often incompatible, identities art cinema has come to signify much more than a type of film and/or stylistic convention. Claims that cultural provision should be democratic and accessible to all, as espoused by those charged with the dissemination of 'cultural' pursuits, have been shown in this thesis to often conflict with more detailed accounts relating to local geography and local cultural requirements. The example of the BFI's regional film theatre initiative and its manifestation on a local scale in Hull offers evidence that such cultural egalitarianism is transformed through the prism of local policy, need and political expediency. The assumptions of both national and local agencies as to the purpose and role of a particular type of film exhibition shift the meaning of exactly what the role of such exhibition is. Through the regional film theatre initiative and other initiatives such as the film society movement, what came to be called art cinema developed its current association with specific exhibition venues which in turn developed a specific mode of address to the audience.

Precedents to Provision

In addressing the issue of art cinema exhibition and its development not as a category of film but as a category through which certain films are discussed and consumed, it is possible to bring into the debate certain issues that have traditionally been neglected. By introducing the perspective of cultural geography and cultural policy the history of art cinema exhibition in Britain is opened to notions of place and policy on the local and regional levels. Surveying historical research on moviegoing Kathy Fuller-Seeley acknowledges the methodological and ideological diversity that currently infuses much research. According to Fuller-Seeley this research takes place at

intersections of traditional cinema studies with more data-driven research methods such as history, economics, social sciences, and history of readers in literary studies; at intersections of national and international contexts of production with local contexts of consumption; at intersections of modernity and tradition; and at intersections of the culture of the cosmopolitan urban center with the culture experienced by the small-town (and more homogeneous) rural hinterlands.¹

These ‘intersections’ enable a more rounded view of a subject to unfold and the thesis has taken this approach in order to highlight the way that geography and policy play a significant role in cinema provision. Having been shaped by factors often outside of its control this provision in turn shapes the way in which an audience not only come to experience an individual film, but the way in which categories of film are defined in the first place. The example of cultural provision provided by the detailed analysis of the establishment and operation of Hull Film Theatre offers a challenge to the accepted view of the BFI as a positive force in the dissemination of culture in Britain and the regional film theatres as exemplars of this approach. In presenting a micro-history of Hull and its cinema heritage it is possible to delineate what may in retrospect be called a process of art cinema exhibition that pre-dates the arrival of the regional film theatre initiative. The establishment of the Hull and District Film Society (HDFS) in 1945 and examples of innovative programming policy on the part of the city’s commercial cinemas attest to the presence of exhibition venues for the screening of non-mainstream film in the city. Whilst in no way unique in the provision of art cinema before the arrival of the regional film theatres, the example of Hull and its ‘cultural’ provision presents a view that counters the claims that such provision stems from national agendas. Much dictated by its geographical location, cultural provision in the form of art cinema pre-1969 was established not so much by a need to provide for a population

¹ Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, ‘At the Margins of Modernity? Local Moviegoing and Cinema History’, *Beyond the Bowery: The Cinema in Rural America*, ed. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p.3.

in thrall to such cinema or by a location compensating for its isolation but by a complex of factors that sought to mirror provision in more metropolitan areas and a pedestrian need to stimulate a failing business.

The local specificities of art cinema exhibition pre-1969 in Hull therefore attest to the role policy decisions play in the provision of a type of cinema that was programmed and marketed not so much in opposition to Hollywood but as a counter to an industry that routinely ignores certain films in favour of others. Here lies the notion that absence of provision rather than presence of need becomes the *raison d'être* behind the exhibition of art cinema in the city. Taking its lead from The (London) Film Society's policy of screening films that had no representation in Britain, the film society movement operated an exhibition policy designed around presenting neglected films to a wider audience than had previously had access to such cinema. The establishment of the film society movement occurred in such a manner, however, that a deliberately limited potential audience was targeted. This inherent contradiction in the film society movement, whereby a larger but limited audience was sought, points the way towards the intended reception of films that had yet to accrue the stamp of 'art cinema' and 'art-house films'. The inconsistent operation of the HDFS, with difficulties faced in finding regular premises to house its operation, has been shown to be the result of its own success in highlighting the availability of an audience for such cinema. This led to the possibility of the commercial operation of continental programmes at the very cinemas housing the film society. Presenting programmes based around exclusivity rather than inclusivity meant that a very different experience was offered to the potential audience of a film society than those of the commercial continentals. Such cinemas offered art cinema as either an appendix to their regular programme of mainstream cinema or as a strategy designed to halt continuing audience decline. In this respect it is possible to see that audiences were created in the context of a perceived lack of provision for a product

that historically had little representation in the city. This lack of provision was remedied not through the demand from underserved audiences for more of this particular style of film but from a desire to fill a lack of provision through exclusive exhibition or opportunistic business practice. Observing this, it becomes clear that the future role and identity of art cinema weds itself to issues of exhibition space, a space that plays a significant role in shaping the contexts of consumption.

Contingent upon space, the identity of art cinema as envisioned through local exhibition takes its impetus from wider concerns than local provision. Whether film society, commercial continental or regional film theatre exhibition, local idiosyncrasy develops out of national policy. It is the inconsistency and historical specificity of much cultural policy that threatens to undermine any systematic attempt to map its influence upon various cultural practices. Addressing the shifting nature of arts funding and policy, Justin Lewis and Toby Miller state that the state support of high culture is often caught between notions of the ‘the economic and the lofty’.² This results in an incompatibility of interests whereby

the economic approach suggests that community support for culture is evidenced through the mechanics of price. The lofty approach suggests that community support for culture is necessary because the market emphasises desire rather than improvement – pleasure over sophistication.³

The ‘mechanics of price’ mentioned can here be seen to privilege mainstream commercial cinema exhibition whereby a large audience is observed in its willingness to pay for admission on a mass scale. Art cinema is therefore positioned as in need of subsidisation due the lack of willingness by a mass audience to pay for admission. This

² Justin Lewis and Toby Miller, ‘Introduction’, in Lewis, Justin and Toby Miller, eds., *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.4.

³ Ibid.

leads to a paternalistic attitude to cultural provision whereby such provision that can be shown to be, or as in the case of the thesis is assumed to be, the preserve of a minority audience is seen as deserving of subsidy. That the market ‘emphasises desire rather than improvement’ is further evidence that subsidy is the answer to the indifference of a mass audience. This is essentially the attitude brought to the promotion of film as an art form envisaged by the BFI in its desire to ‘promote the various uses of the film as a contribution to national well-being’.⁴

Moving from a policy of using film to educate to one in which the education was about film, the BFI saw its policy decisions shift over the years. This shift was not through a change in social and cultural factors or a progressive stance on such issues but through political changes that wrought internal changes in the Institute itself and its approach to the promotion of film. Divested of its core activities in the mid-1940s, coupled with the censure of the Radcliffe Report in 1948, the move from education to presentation represents a significant factor in the development of art cinema exhibition in Britain, a development that secured the future identity of such exhibition on a national stage. The creation of the National Film Theatre (NFT) and its core remit to screen ‘the best of the world cinema’ cemented the idea that such films need bespoke exhibition outlets in order to be fully appreciated. Rather than incorporation into a commercial marketplace, the creation of a separate sphere within which art cinema could be screened represents a divestment of market forces in the promotion of art cinema in favour of the ‘worthy’ status bestowed by public subsidy. An alternative history of art cinema could easily have been fostered had not the BFI and the NFT directed such cinema in the manner it did.

⁴ The Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, *The Film in National Life: Being the Report of an Enquiry Conducted by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films into the Service which the Cinematograph May Render to Education and Social Progress* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), p.4.

As argued throughout the thesis, identity is fashioned by numerous factors that are significant and insignificant, large and small, intentional and unintentional, and often competing. These factors interweave to form historically contingent identities that subsequently alter later identity formations. Such is the case with art cinema. The NFT programmed a particular style of film, one that was already distinguished from mainstream film in marketing terms, and tied it irrevocably to a specific branch of the exhibition sector of the film industry. It was this conjunction of an already existent style of film with a newly-built *national* exhibition space that enabled the germ of the idea of the regional film theatre to grow from this association of film *and* theatre. Art cinema as it developed as a type of film over the course of the 1960s and 1970s is therefore indistinguishable, even if unconsciously so, from the contexts of its exhibition. Here, in the NFT, lies the blueprint for a kind of exhibition that in the regional film theatre initiative promised idiosyncratic variety based upon local circumstances, yet presented uniform delivery based upon metropolitan needs. The same policy of provision based upon external influences infused the geographical dispersion of the regional film theatres around the country but failed to make allowances for local specificity or need. The codification of art cinema as exhibition therefore took precedence over the exhibition of art cinema.

Until the opening of the first regional film theatre in 1966 the options for art cinema exhibition in the UK consisted of film societies, independent art-houses and commercial continentals. When joined by the NFT together they formed a dominant means of consuming films assumed to appeal to a minority audience and necessitating their own exhibition spaces. By adding the regional film theatres to this list the effect was to inculcate a manner of consumption over and above individual factors (be they films, location of cinema or audience member). As has been observed, however, the circumstances in which the BFI administered this template of art cinema exhibition

were to privilege local input over central control. Mirroring the arms-length approach to cultural provision prevalent in Britain that saw the BFI created to oversee governmental support for one section of the arts, the decision to seek local sponsorship of the regional film theatres from interested parties saw a policy originated in London 'sold' to the regions. The practice of art cinema exhibition had solidified to such a degree by this point, however, that the opportunity to assert local idiosyncrasy was subsumed under the weight of subsidisation of the film theatres by a national organisation and an existing pattern of exhibition. Nevertheless local identity was not completely eradicated, with geographical idiosyncrasy manifesting itself in a number of contrasting ways.

Charting the complex of issues feeding into the construction and consumption of Nottingham's Cornerhouse centre, Mark Jancovich highlights the value a building can symbolise over and above its primary function to deliver a product to an audience. Much more than an exhibition venue, the decision to operate an art cinema in a particular city, moreover in a particular section of that city, articulates a specific attitude to regional and local identity often independent of the operation of the venue:

Like earlier cinemas in Nottingham's history, the building was therefore supposed to emphasise the city's image as a regional centre by presenting it as an affluent and cosmopolitan centre of culture rather than a cultural backwater. Neither its developers, the council nor the press viewed the centre as the product of an invasion by a foreign colonising force, threatening to destroy the city's identity and sense of place. On the contrary, their descriptions emphasised that it was a unique object, only possible because of the city's own special character.⁵

Comparisons with the building of the HFT and the attitude towards the theatre from, firstly, Hull Corporation and secondly Humberside County Council are more than

⁵ Mark Jancovich, 'Cinema Comes to Life at the Cornerhouse, Nottingham: American Exhibition, Local Politics and Global Culture in the Construction of the Urban Entertainment Centre', in Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen, eds., *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p.390.

obvious. Situating the HFT as a cultural amenity intended to signify the city's cultural diversity and modernity, the building and operation of the theatre was similarly never discussed as an invasion or an imposition by what could be seen as a 'colonising force'. Whereas the attitude of the BFI may have been one of opportunistic dissemination of central policy propelled by shifting ideologies, the adoption of such a scheme by Hull Corporation was not viewed as a challenge to local identity or sense of place. The disparity between the role of the theatre as cultural amenity on the one hand and regional film theatre on the other stems from a sense of identity formed not on a national/regional nexus but on a regional/local one. The complex negotiation of identity meant that the city could keep pace with other similar sized cities in term of cultural provision. This lays testament to the varied nature of cultural provision and consumption that saw art cinema in Hull positioned vis-à-vis a number of conflicting factors. Whether seen as a cultural amenity enabled by the local council or an art cinema franchised by the BFI or a conflation of the two, the discord in purpose evident from these negotiations further complicates the notions that art cinema is a category defined by its textual characteristics and that film exhibition is a uniform and universal activity.

The 'imagined communities' proposed by Benedict Anderson find consort here in the attempt to create a unity of provision for the new county of Humberside. Linking the two banks of the river the Humber Bridge was therefore seen as much more than a bridge between two banks and the operation of the three regional film theatres as much more than catering to an immediate, local population. Here the principles upon which the exhibition of art cinema were founded are seen to erode the identity of such cinema through the gradual alteration and abandonment of established art cinema exhibition characteristics by Humberside County Council. The move towards the standardisation of exhibition at all three county film theatres meant the gradual contraction of any local idiosyncrasy (in terms of number of screenings if not films screened), with the pressures

brought by the need to reduce expenditure further altering the identity of 'art cinema' as enacted through a 'regional film theatre'. The reduction in 'members only' screenings to present a unified, and frugal, front meant the principles of differentiation that formed one of the primary draws and markers of art cinema exhibition were altered to such a degree that the almost synonymic connection between the terms 'art cinema' and 'regional film theatre' was severely challenged. The stratified exhibition and consumption practice enacted by the three regional film theatres ('general public', 'members only', 'children's', 'senior citizen', 'director/star' and 'themed' screenings), sought to differentiate not only the audience but the experience of visiting a regional film theatre. These strands tipped the balance away from regional film theatres as exhibitors of challenging, foreign and underrepresented films to that of cultural provision for the (in this instance, extended) community. No longer were the Humberside film theatres examples of BFI-approved art cinemas but instead instances of regional interpretations of national policy for a local population. Admitting this, however, should not imply ministrations to local need more than a re-fashioning of policy to suit the council's interpretation of its own remit. Not without precedent a notable lack of inquiry into the need for arts provision pervades much of the history of British administration of the arts, as Simon Roodhouse has pointed out:

Since the 1970s there has been little or no debate by administrators and policy makers about the purpose, value and nature of the arts, but rather a focus of attention on how the arts and heritage can meet national and local government policy in the areas of the economy, urban regeneration, regionalism, social cohesion, and community development, to name but a few.⁶

The lack of a feasibility study in favour of fulfilling policy targets is demonstrated by the Humberside film theatres and their gradual shift away from the core values

⁶ Simon Roodhouse, *Cultural Quarters: Principles and Practices*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2006), p.18.

attributed to art cinema exhibition in favour of uniformity of provision and increased revenue. The lack of debate, either nationally or locally, concerning the need for cultural provision here results in assumptions as to the needs of the local population inflected more by issues of appearance and self-sufficiency than by actual audience demand. This lack of engagement with the audience is crucial in determining to what extent, and in what configurations, the councils envisioned and approached the issue of actual spectators.

The Meeting Place(s) of Provision

The tastes, aptitude, commitment and status of an audience for art cinema have, over the years, been linked with certain assumptions. These assumptions as to age, class and level of income of an audience for art cinema almost certainly stem from a desire from a section of society to see cinema that challenges, provokes and provides an alternative to the (perceived) banalities of mainstream cinema. By the time the regional film theatres began to take root around the country, however, this assumption as to the constitution of the audience had become so ingrained as to form a shorthand to enable the programming and marketing of an exhibition venue brought into being by the availability of films and an assumed audience. By linking so closely a certain type of film with a certain type of audience, the effect was to eradicate the need to seek data confirming or confounding such a link. As Burton and Chibnall note '[future] research on the construction of meaning by audiences will need to be informed about the role played by studio publicity materials and exhibitor activities' if a fuller understanding of

the relationship between product and consumption is to reflect the many ways that meaning is constructed.⁷

As has been addressed in the thesis, however, the position of the audience in the exhibition of art cinema cannot be considered independent of the conception and approach of audiences by the regional film theatres and their operation. Never guaranteed an audience, no matter how much an assumed section of society is deemed receptive of such programming, the three Humberside film theatres complicated the assumed identity of the audience through differentiated and stratified audience strands.

The reification of the notion of art cinema appealing to a minority audience through the films programmed and the offer of 'members only' screenings was undermined by the further division of that audience based upon assumed notions of taste, aptitude, commitment and status that established a hierarchy of reception. The audience, no matter how conceived or addressed, was only ever a 'potential audience', however. The identity of any single audience strand was negotiated through an appeal to a potentially willing audience from those that might consider frequenting the film theatre(s) in the first instance, as either an art cinema or a civic cultural amenity. This 'potential audience' can therefore be considered at one remove from actual audience members whilst not quite constituting as abstract a concept as both industry and academia have previously presented the issue of audiences. By situating the audience for the film theatre(s) between the actual and the abstract, the discourse surrounding this to a certain degree creates rather than caters for an audience for art cinema. The identity of any potential audience is thus to a large extent fostered by the film theatre that assumes there is a need from the audience for the venue to exist in the first place. The Humberside regional film theatres can therefore be said to determine the role of the

⁷ Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall, 'Promotional Activities and Showmanship in British Film Exhibition', *Journal of British Popular Cinema*, 2 (1999), p.56.

audience indirectly by assuming a role for themselves based upon the principles assumed to be inherent in art cinema exhibition as historically situated by the film society movement and the NFT. The assumed audience becomes an actual audience based upon the policies enacted on behalf of such assumptions. The resulting 'potential audience' then negotiates a viewing platform for themselves based upon the programming strategies planned on their behalf. These programming strategies, whilst widely variable over the course of the period under review, are arguably the defining characteristic of art cinema exhibition.

The changing attitude towards film education, and hence programming, evident throughout the 1960s and 1970s stemmed from changing attitudes towards culture and society on a much wider scale than that evidenced through the BFI and the regional film theatres. Changing political agendas and social expectations in the era meant that attitudes towards art and the dissemination of subsidy took on a more structured and market-led approach that saw old regimes challenged and new policy intended to chime with the new consensus brought to bear on such provision. As a cinema is largely defined by its programming over and above all other considerations, the changing conception of the most appropriate manner in which to programme 'art cinema' brought further changes to the nature of art cinema as a distinct mode of film exhibition.

The dissatisfaction with then current policy articulated by members of the Education Department at the BFI in the early 1970s, led to the gradual shift from the policy of 'consensus' programming practiced by the regional film theatres to the more progressive and educationally orientated policy of 'structured' programming associated with the NFT. Here a significant alteration of the core principles upon which the regional film theatres were founded is evident. Local sponsorship was favoured over group affiliation, with the creation of the Regional Consortium in 1978 assembled to signal this change. The Consortium therefore had the collective power to negotiate with

the distribution sector of the film industry for the films deemed worthy of inclusion in such structured programming. That the Humberside film theatres did not participate in this collective goes some way towards explaining the idiosyncrasies that shaped this local manifestation of 'art cinema' exhibition. Asking what, by this period, a regional film theatre would certainly elicit a different response to the question of what an art cinema was in the region. With the shift to more mainstream exhibition in the early 1980s, the Humberside film theatres reacted to the declining number of local cinemas with the programming of mainly mainstream films. Attempting to raise attendance levels commensurate with the attempt to remain in business, the film theatres remained 'regional film theatres', however, with a significant shift in what such a term implied.

The identity of the Humberside film theatres subsequently became less about their historic significance as exhibitors of 'minority interest' cinema, tied to a loose network of BFI-sponsored and culturally progressive theatres, than about their present function as staples of local civic provision. The success of a strategy that sought to continue functioning even if that meant the abandonment of the supposed remit on which the film theatres were originally founded was rewarded by the BFI with a significant rise in subsidy. At least this change in policy, conducted with no public consultation, was consistent with the opening of the film theatres whereby a similar lack of feasibility, this time with the adoption of an 'art cinema' identity from patterns set by previous exhibitors, was evident. Such a change of policy can therefore be seen to shape the identity of the region's film theatres yet again.

Through a complex combination of all of the factors addressed in the thesis the development of what is currently known as 'art cinema' (incorporating the many synonyms previously and currently in fashion) can be thought of in terms of a history of the discourse of art cinema. Rather than finding its essence in the production, distribution or exhibition sectors of the film industry, the historical development of art

cinema takes its defining characteristics from the way each sector created a dialogue with the industry and a potential audience concerning the place and identity of art cinema within the industry and wider social concerns. The appropriation of certain traits of certain films by certain sections of the exhibition sector only goes to highlight the manner in which art cinema discourse served to shape an unrealistically static identity that was refined over the years to appear in discourse surrounding art cinema (including, crucially, academic dialogue) as a coherent and unified style of film. Defined in opposition to many 'others' (mainly Hollywood cinema but also mainstream exhibition, form and content, language, country of origin, audience involvement etc.) the true identity of art cinema results from a complex negotiation of many complementary and competing forces. Each of these forces is in search of whatever goal the interested parties involved in the discourse pursue (be it monetary reward, prestige or the fulfilling of a cultural remit). The power relations and identity politics that this negotiation involves, however, can threaten to undermine any stability the term art cinema implies. Whether national, regional or local, the specifics of the discourse surrounding what has come to be called art cinema affect the overall value of the term and therefore the available reference points for further use. Such is the deep-seated incorporation of art cinema and art-house as labels in our society that more contemporary labels have failed to displace their position as indicators of all that this thesis covers in terms of meaning. The current labels of 'cultural cinema' and 'specialist cinema' are often used interchangeably to signify everything that art cinema as a term has come to connote and more. Beyond the scope and periodisation of this thesis these new additions to the world of 'labelled cinema' can, and will continue to, speak volumes concerning how a certain type of film is approached by a great many factions of society and will hopefully in turn yield more research into this important area of study.

Ending the thesis in the mid-1980s enabled a narrative of art cinema provision in Hull to conclude at the point where the role of the regional film theatres in Humberside had shifted from the screening of art cinema to that of mainstream film. Although successful in terms of attracting increased audiences they were no longer operating on the remit of 'screening the best of the world cinema'.

As addressed earlier in the thesis, the five commercial cinemas that were still operational in Hull at the opening of the HFT all eventually closed and the new trend of Multiplex cinemas arrived in the city. On the 26th March 1992 the last remaining traditional mainstream city-centre cinema, The Cecil, closed leaving Hull Film Theatre as the only cinema in the centre of the city. The closing of the last city-centre cinemas can be directly attributed to the opening of two multiplexes on the outskirts of the city centre. Both Odeon (6th April 1990) and UCI (6th November 1990) opened multiplexes outside the city centre, attracting audiences away from the Hull Film Theatre. In 1993 the three Humberside regional film theatres were still operational but for reasons beyond the scope of this thesis were no longer affiliated to the BFI and a decision was taken to change the name of the theatres to Hull Screen, Scunthorpe Screen and Grimsby Screen. A gradual return to screening films of 'minority interest' followed. A UGC multiplex (renamed Cineworld) opened on the outskirts of Hull late in 1999 but the UCI multiplex closed on 1st July 2004 leaving just two multiplexes and Hull Screen to serve the city. Due to dwindling audiences and financial constraints, however, Hull City Council moved Hull Screen in 2006 from its home as part of the local library to temporary residence as part of a University of Lincoln building (previously the University of Humberside and Lincolnshire) within the city centre whilst negotiations were taking place for a more permanent solution. In a move back to the city centre as part of a regeneration project both Vue cinemas and Reelcinemas opened multiplexes in the city centre on the site of the old ABC cinema. Art cinema representation in the city

is meanwhile once again under threat. This threat takes place in an age where art cinema has found an outlet on other platforms, however.

To fully understand the scale and scope of the continuing changes in an age where multiple platforms enable art cinema to be repurposed in a variety of ways, further study needs to address how the consumption of 'art cinema' in the home divorced from community consumption, for example, alters the way in which such cinema differs from the reception of mainstream films when both can be rented or bought from the same store. What special connotations, if any, can be associated with such consumption? What is the effect of divorcing art cinema from other instances of its kind (as in the consensus programming of the regional film theatres), when consumed as one film in a home environment? How have 'traditional' film theatres adapted to such current trends as limited platform release followed by a reduced window to rental and retail release? If such trends are the result of new technological innovations brought about by the spread of global capital and an increasingly homogenous world then what effect do such changes have upon the regional and local instances of cultural idiosyncrasy that have been dealt with above, that together offer an example of heterogeneous responses based upon, if not need, at least the address and interpretation of policy? The future of art cinema, like its past, is still very much open to interpretation.

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