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Novelties, Fairgrounds and the Exoticisation of Place

The first moving pictures shown in Nottingham do not seem to have been mentioned in the papers at the time, although it has clearly become a topic of considerable local interest since then. For example, while there is no contemporary evidence that Edison's Kinetograph was exhibited in Nottingham in 1895, a letter to the *Express Local Notes and Queries*, published 5 March 1920, described the event. It claimed that, in 1895–96, the Kinetograph was brought to an empty shop in Long Row that was tenanted by the printers Allen and Sons. The accuracy of this source is questionable, however, as it then goes on to make the erroneous claim that the first cinematograph was exhibited in January 1897 in Mr Caldwell's photographic gallery in Long Row. Alternatively, another letter to a paper in 1937 from an 'older timer' claimed that the first moving pictures were shown at Goose Fair and that 'vitagraphs' and Edison's moving pictures were shown in shops around the market.¹ As early as 1920, speculation about the history of film consumption within Nottingham was sufficient to justify a *Weekly Guardian Special*, 'How Did Pictures Get to Nottingham?', which claims that in 1897 a flick book, made up of eighty pictures from a fight, introduced moving pictures to Nottingham. The same pictures were also supposed to have been used in 'mutoscopes' that were exhibited in a Long Row shop.² Similarly, while Iliffe and Baguley, who printed the newspaper reports for most of the early showings, do not reproduce any report on the 1895 showing, they do mention the event.³

The first showing of the 'cinematographe' in Nottingham was reputedly July 1896. If it was, then it had taken about four months to reach Nottingham after the first showing in London in late February of the same year⁴ or about six months after its first public showings in Paris.⁵ This date puts Nottingham far ahead of most other towns in the East Midlands, as one might expect from a city that was concerned to present itself as the cultural centre of the region. Derby, for example, supposedly had its first showing on Monday 21 September 1896, while Leicester had to wait until November 1896.⁶

In Nottingham, however, there were adverts in the papers for 'living pictures' even before 13 July. In 1895, there was an advert for the Louis Tussaud's Exhibition at the Albert Hall which claimed that the exhibition also included 'Magnificent Tableaux Vivants or Living Pictures',⁷ but even more interesting is an advert in 1896 for the Berlin Industrial Exhibition which supposedly had a 'living picture' of the history and development of Berlin.⁸ This was obviously not at a local event, but an international exhibition, and the presence of such an advert within a provincial paper could not have

been simply due to the large amounts of regional, national and international news that the Nottingham papers carried at the time. For an advert such as this to have been placed, it must have been expected that the film show would be a big enough draw to entice people to travel to Germany, although only the very wealthy would have been able to afford it.⁹

Film did, however, still continue to be shown in Nottingham after these first events, and these later screenings included the 'Lifeograph' at the Palace of Varieties in September and the 'Theatograph' which was also shown at the Palace around the end of September and the start of October.¹⁰ Bostock and Wombwell also referred to 'Lions as living pictures' in their advert for Goose Fair of 1896, although none of the papers mention a film showing in their reviews of the menagerie. In addition, the Grand had a production in November in which dogs and ponies appeared in a series of 'Living Pictures' between two acts¹¹ and, in January 1897, the 'cinematograph' appeared both in the Grand's pantomime and at Caldwell's.

However, reports in the papers during this period need to be treated with some caution. As Audrey Field points out, while the London *Times* printed a report of the first film showings in London, it followed this with an eight-year silence, which was not due to the absence of film showings, but rather the paper's assumption that these showings were beneath its interest.¹² The first showing had featured an important new piece of technology, but later showings were not seen as being relevant to the paper's readership. Many film showings were therefore not reported in *The Times*. Similarly, while the local papers did carry far more coverage of film exhibitions than this national daily, there would still have been many film showings that would have passed beneath their notice.¹³ For example, the 'penny gaff' was the name given to some of the earliest venues for the exhibition of moving pictures, which began to show single-reel films, but these venues were often little more than storefront amusements that received little or no coverage in the press.

Nor do the papers give much indication of who was going to see these film showings, and this is best gauged from the place of entertainment and the price of admission.¹⁴ Between 1895 and 1897, films were mainly being shown in theatres or music halls, though the travelling bioscopes started at Goose Fair in 1897. The Theatre Royal seems to have been the most important theatre in Nottingham. In the press, it was usually at the top of lists of amusements and its productions generally appeared as the first reviews. However, it did not show films at all during this period, and this situation may have due to the fact that the theatre did not need to attract audiences and that it was nervous about the cultural status of films. Alternatively, the Grand nearly always followed the Theatre Royal in both the adverts and the reviews, but it had to make more effort to attract people. Its ticket prices also suggest that a wide variety of social classes attended its performances, although the way in which the theatre was designed ensured that these classes did not meet. For example, the pit had its own entrance to ensure that different classes of patron were not only spatially segregated within the theatre, but also that they did not mingle while they were queuing to enter.¹⁵

Only two music halls are recorded in *Kelly's Directory*, a directory of businesses, firms and many householders for 1895. The first, the Palace of Varieties, only had adverts in

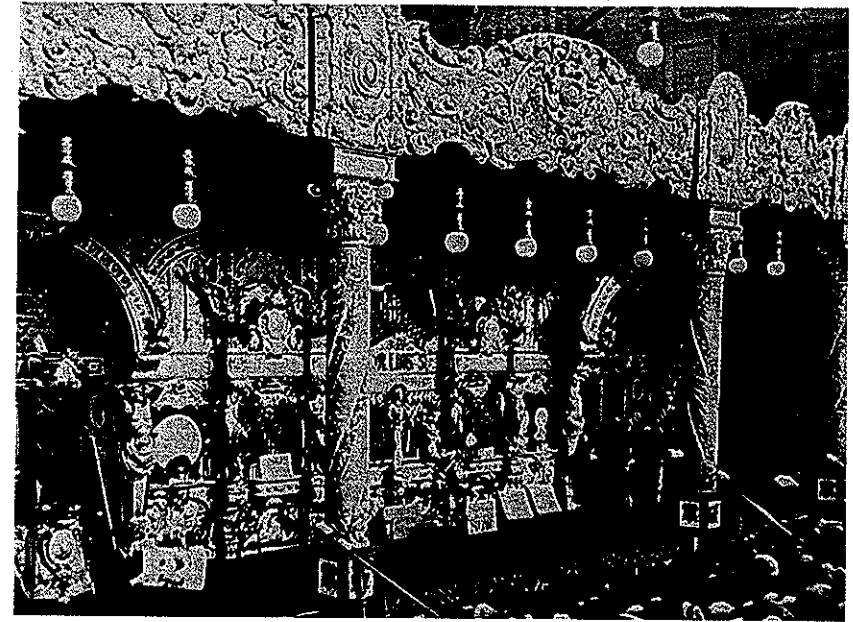
the evening papers and the NDG did not review its performances. The Palace's seat prices were less wide-ranging than the Grand's, although the latter's cheapest seats were less than the Palace's. The second, Coleno's Varieties Music Hall, is not mentioned in any of the papers either in reviews or advertisements. Music halls had been viewed with suspicion by many sections of the upper classes, who assumed that these places were frequented by prostitutes, thieves and those with the lowest occupations such as rag-and-bone men. This suspicion was further encouraged by the reports of a local newspaper columnist who visited working-class places of entertainment in the 1860s.¹⁶ However, Caroline Knight and Anne Cockburn claim that by the end of the century music-hall-style entertainment was more acceptable, and that both the Empire (1898) and the Hippodrome (1908) were visited by the gentry. They do not mention the clientele of the Palace, but contend that it had been 'a centre of social entertainment' for many years.¹⁷ Also, its status as a temperance musical hall made it more respectable than Coleno's, which was attached to the Crown and Cushion pub, and this may account for the adverts for the former that appeared in the evening papers.¹⁸

The Goose Fair Bioscopes

From 1897, however, one of the prime sites of film consumption was Goose Fair.¹⁹ As we have seen, it is the association of early film with fairs that is often used as evidence of its anti-bourgeois character. However, Goose Fair was anything but a riotous place of popular subversion. It may have continued to have associations of the carnivalesque and heterotopic, but these fairs had been carefully redefined throughout the 19th century into relatively respectable places of entertainment.²⁰

While there had been concerns with fairs at the beginning of the 19th century, when they were seen as places of drunken and riotous behaviour, which could also become sites of political agitation and even insurrection, this image had largely gone by the time of the bioscopes. During the 19th century, reformers had tried to 'wean the industrial operatives away from their customary pursuits – particularly animal sports – and the public house',²¹ but the fair itself had not been subject to the same pressures. As Cunningham has argued, there were distinct financial benefits that fairs brought to local areas, which meant that they often had considerable support from elements of the respectable classes. Furthermore, the fairs were also reforming themselves during this period. For example, the showmen successfully distinguished themselves from the figure of the gypsy, and gained a relatively respectable image as economic entrepreneurs. They were no longer 'classed by magistrates as rogues and vagabonds and had become recipients of Royal patronage'.²² This was also connected to changes in the nature of the fairs themselves, as market forces and the arrival of new forms of mechanised amusements encouraged the showmen to control the fairs and appeal to middle-class consumers. These changes, along with the introduction of the police force, who could provide better surveillance and crowd control, made it more trouble for the authorities to ban fairs than to leave them to die the natural death that most thought would be inevitable.²³

These changes were also connected to changing views of the working classes, and in the late 19th century, there was a 'growing belief that the poor could be safely entrusted



The meaning of fairs had been carefully redefined throughout the 19th century into relatively respectable places of entertainment. The Goose Fair

to organise their own entertainment',²⁴ possibly because, as Steadman Jones has argued, the period also saw a remaking of the working class.²⁵ For Steadman Jones, working-class culture became a largely conservative culture that may have bemoaned class inequality but largely viewed it as inevitable. However, it was also a culture that rejected the killjoys who wanted to reform working-class entertainment and to make culture a means of education and spiritual improvement. Instead, its 'attitude was *a little bit of what you fancy does you good*'.²⁶ In the process, rather than a place of anti-bourgeois subversion, the fairground had become 'a relatively routine ingredient in an accepted world of leisure'.²⁷

Even within this context, Goose Fair occupied a relatively privileged place. As a place of trade, it had a respected reputation and commercial significance for the city and, as a result, there was no campaign to move the fair during the 19th century, although other fairs of the period were not so lucky. Indeed, as we shall see in Part Three, the fair was only moved much later, in the 1920s, as part of a more general reconstruction of the city centre.

This perception of the fair can also be seen in the newspaper coverage. Certainly, letters to the papers showed that the shopkeepers or those with 'legitimate business' thoroughly disliked Goose Fair because it disrupted their trade,²⁸ and it was generally seen as a relatively low form of entertainment. There were also concerns about women's presence within it. For example, as a Roman Catholic bishop claimed about the fair in 1897:

it does not appear to me to be a modest or decent thing that young women should voluntarily allow themselves to be crushed up and carried along in a dense crowd of all people, nor can I believe that it can be otherwise than very dangerous to their purity. I fear many a girl owes her first fall into sin, and subsequent ruin, to the crowded rushes of Goose Fair.²⁹

As a result, the NDE doubted whether the word 'superiority' could be associated with Goose Fair or the entertainment on offer there.³⁰

However, other views were both more common and pervasive. For example, the NEP commented that:

The pleasures of the fair may not be elevating, but, on the whole, they are innocent enough, and that being so no one will feel inclined to strongly argue that the boisterous merriment and brazen music should give place to something more refined and elegant. To grudge the people what measure of satisfaction they can extract from a species of gathering, which, according to the predictions of many, should long ago have been a thing of the past, would be niggardly, and the spirit of the house is such that any attempt to abolish a time-honoured event must utterly fail.³¹

As this quote demonstrates, while certain sections may have disapproved of the fair, there was a more general sense that it was neither particularly dangerous nor disruptive. On the contrary, there is an almost affectionate tone here, which gives some sense of middle-class responses to the fair.

Rather than simply a working-class affair, the 'show people's proud boast was that they catered to all classes of the public; the Wadbrooke family would even claim that they had been patronised by no less a personage than Queen Victoria'.³² Certainly there was still a residual sense of the fair as a place of low tastes, but the showmen who ran the bioscopes worked hard to dispel this image through the lavishness of their exhibits. Furthermore, this slightly disreputable image was also part of the fair's appeal for certain sections of the middle class. For example, Beckett notes that while Samuel Collinson complained in 1858 about 'the unusual assemblage of vagabonds of all sorts coming into town preparatory for the fair tomorrow', this complaint 'did not stop him from attending'. Beckett also notes that 'even a strict Methodist like George Harwood could not keep away' from Goose Fair, and that in 1861, 'his lace factory was closed for two days [while] he "went and my wife, children and servant, through the Fair and bought a few articles for amusement and use"'.³³ In other words, it was precisely their status as places of low tastes that made these places both horrifying and fascinating to the middle classes.

However, it would be misleading to see Goose Fair as simply a local amusement: it not only attracted people from the East Midlands but even from as far away as Liverpool. Indeed, in 1910, *World's Fair* claimed that as many as 200 to 300 special trains were laid on by the rail companies during the three days of the fair in order to cater for people travelling to it on excursions.³⁴

The Reception of Film in Nottingham

Audience reactions are difficult to gauge, but none of the papers mention people who went wild at seeing the films, or tried to run away from the trains, or lifted their feet from the waves on screen. Franklin puts this down 'to the stiff, temperate nature of provincial journalism of the time',³⁵ but while the Nottingham papers used standard phrases to describe all entertainments, and so seemed rather stiff and formal, the discussions of the film exhibitions seems to have been extravagant and full of praise rather than 'temperate'. It is possible the papers wanted to ensure that exhibitors would continue to advertise in them, but although one occasionally finds a mediocre review (although not for the cinematograph), most reports described it as 'novel', 'diverting' or a 'success', even if it was not 'astounding'.

Indeed, the reviewers were highly impressed by the cinematograph and they discussed it in detail. On 14 July 1896, the NEN dedicated half an article to the cinematograph and, on 29 September 1896, a review in NEN also began with the cinematograph, although the article overall is much shorter. On 17 July 1896, the NDE had the same article as the NEN but then, on 29 September 1896, it spent the majority of a long review describing the films that were shown. On 14 July 1896, the NDG also devoted about half of a reasonably detailed article to the cinematograph, although it did not mention it again, not even when it was at the Grand in January 1897.

One reason that these reports were not as sensational as one might expect was that the Victorian period abounded with inventions and 'wonders of the world', and these reviewers seem to have viewed the cinematograph as yet another example of the 'great' age in which they believed that they lived. This is suggested by a quote in the NDE on the day after the first showing in July 1896. After describing the zoetrope, the article continued:

Since those crude days, electricity and Edison have produced so many marvels that we cease to wonder even at the 'Kinetoscope' and its latest development, the 'cinematographe'.³⁶

Victorians were so accustomed to new inventions that they expected improvement and were quite capable of imagining its possibilities. In the 1920 letter from Mr Race to the *Express Local Notes and Queries*, he commented on the films shown at Caldwell's:

Of course, the elaborate dramas of today were quite unknown then ... Animated photography, twenty-three years ago, was naturally regarded as something wonderful, but no one could have foreseen the development of later years.³⁷

However, he was quite wrong. An article in the NEN on 18 October 1894 – just after Edison came to London – suggests that these developments had been predicted from the start:

In the kinetoscope Mr Edison has ... given the world what may be regarded as a natural corollary to the phonograph, inasmuch as it presents what the latter instrument fails to

convey – viz., looks and actions. For while the phonograph conveys sounds to the ear, the kinetoscope presents action to the eye, and it only requires the combination of the two instruments to reproduce, for instance, a whole play, with actors, acting and word complete.³⁸

This is not to say that people did not find the cinematograph fascinating. They clearly did, and even though the NDE review claimed that people had ceased to be surprised at new inventions, it goes on to describe the cinematograph as 'astounding and delightful'.³⁹ The September showings were also described as a 'decided success' by the NDE, and even by the time of the October showings, the same paper described the Palace as being 'crowded by people anxious to see the fine series of animated pictures'. The following week it also commented that 'one does not wonder that they are such an attraction'.⁴⁰

The naive viewers who fled from images of trains or lifted their feet at the sight of waves were probably largely mythic. As both Hansen and Kirby illustrate, the films themselves addressed sophisticated viewers and flattered them, presenting others as naive bumpkins who could not distinguish the film image from reality.⁴¹ Hansen discusses the American film *Uncle Josh at the Motion Pictures*, which was itself a remake of a British import, Robert Paul's *The Countryman's First Sight of the Animated Pictures* (1901). In the American film, Uncle Josh sees three films and his 'transactions with each film demonstrate particular misconceptions about the nature of cinematic illusion'. For example, 'seeing a Parisian dancer, Uncle Josh jumps onto the stage and attempts to dance with her'.⁴² In this way, Uncle Josh is meant to represent a type of naive viewer that audiences were not only supposed to recognise and laugh at, but also from which they were expected to distinguish themselves.

It is also interesting that this distinction has spatial connotations. Both Uncle Josh and the subject of Paul's original film are figures from the countryside – the rube and the bumpkin – and were distinguished from the sophisticated audiences associated with the urban world. As Hansen argues: 'The country rube was a stock character in vaudeville, comic strips, and other popular media, and early films seized upon the encounter of unsophisticated minds with city life, modern technology, and commercial entertainment as a comic theatre and a way of flaunting the marvels of that new urban world.'⁴³

As a result, it is simply Whig history to assume, as Iliffe and Baguley do, that the reason that Victorian audiences found the cinematograph amazing was that they lacked sophistication.⁴⁴ Furthermore, although there were only a few references to specific films appreciated by audiences, these references demonstrate that the subject matter was important and that it was certainly not the case that as 'long as the picture moved, it hardly mattered what it was'.⁴⁵ For example, one reference to audience preferences notes:

The pictures that found favour with the large and enthusiastic audience last evening were those of everyday scenes, such as street traffic near the houses of parliament, with its constant succession of vehicle and pedestrians; the arrest of a street betting man; and a domestic quarrel between a jovial husband and an irate wife.⁴⁶

Another claims: 'the two that roused the audience to enthusiasm were representations of the last Derby, and the waves of the seashore'.⁴⁷ The interest in the traffic scene was possibly as much to do with seeing the Houses of Parliament, while others may have never seen the sea before. Alternatively, the fascination in seeing the Derby may have reflected the popular interest in sport and betting in the period. The papers were filled with sport news – of all kinds – and the NEN had a Saturday paper that was entirely devoted to football news and the NEP started its own in 1903.⁴⁸ Sport was an important element of 19th-century popular culture, as it continues to be today, but it may well also have been the case that this film was the first time that many people had seen the race on which they had been placing bets for years.⁴⁹ The showing of other sporting events also indicated that film-makers – like everyone else – were well aware of the enthusiasm for betting and sport, and some of the earliest films made were of football matches featuring local teams.

Projections of Place

These reports also suggest that issues of place were not only central to the location of film consumption, but also to the content of the films consumed. If one looks at the advertisements, one finds a continual preoccupation with images of other places, and this was one of the ways in which film was understood in the period. It collapsed distance so that not only were images of elsewhere brought to audiences but, in the process, it created the illusion of being able to travel elsewhere without leaving one's locality. This illusion was made explicit in exhibitions such as the one by Robert William Paul that is described to *The Era*:

He had been reading the weird romance, *The Time Machine*, and it had suggested an entertainment to him, of which animated photographs formed an essential part. In a room capable of accommodating some hundred people, he would arrange seats to which a slight motion could be given. He would plunge the apartment into Cimmerian darkness, and introduce a wailing wind. Although the audience actually only moved but a few inches, the sensation would be that of travelling through space. From time to time the journey would be stopped, and on the stage a wondrous picture would be revealed – the Animatographe, combined with panoramic effects.⁵⁰

A similar technique was also used for Hales' Tours, which came to England in 1906, and lasted in Nottingham until 1912, although it is not quite clear precisely when it first arrived in the city. The 'tour' featured an imitation railway car (complete with a ticket collector who blew whistles and waved flags) which was made to shake as though it were a real moving train. Within this space, travelogue films were projected that created the illusion that the carriage was travelling through some exotic locale such as the Rocky Mountains or the Swiss Alps.

In this way, these exhibits share with the other fairground amusements a sense of liberation from the body and the sense of spatial restriction that it necessitates. As Bennett argues, discussing the mechanical fairground rides at Blackpool's pleasure beach:

The pleasures offered by these rides are complex and diverse. In some cases, the dominant appeal is that of liberating the body from normal constraints to expose it to otherwise unattainable sensations. The Revolution, the Starship Enterprise (rather like the Ferris Wheel, except that the ride is placed on the inside of wheels and travels upside down) and the Astro Swirl ... all defy the laws of gravity. In releasing the body for pleasure rather than harnessing it for work, part of their appeal may be that they invert the normal relations between people and machinery prevailing in an industrial context.⁵¹

In a similar way, films allowed audiences to travel where it would be otherwise have been impossible for them to go, and they did so at a time when travel itself was becoming a leisure industry for more than simply the wealthy few. In Nottingham, for example, as John Beckett has noted: 'The introduction of the August Bank Holiday in 1870, together with the completion of the line to Skegness in 1873, enabled people to spend a day at the seaside. Ten thousand arrived in the town on August Bank Holiday 1874, and 20,000 in 1882.'⁵²

Of course, this continues a long tradition in which fairgrounds would display the supposed mysteries of exotic places, and would therefore 'teem once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclitc objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune tellers, and so forth'.⁵³ However, again, we must be careful not to simply celebrate these objects as a rejection of the rationalising classifications of the museum or academy. As Chanan has argued: 'Film enabled Britain to export its spectacle, send it into the Empire itself and throughout the "civilized" world.'⁵⁴ However, it also allowed the inverse, the imaginary transportation of the 'civilised' world out into the Empire where it could see the spectacle of its own power. To put it another way, just as the expositions brought the fruits



The fair as a site for the consumption of exoticism. The Goose Fair

of Empire to the centre so that it could marvel in its own power, film images brought the spectacle of Empire to those who would otherwise have never travelled beyond the shores of Britain. One could consume the Empire as spectacle without ever leaving one's immediate locality.

Films also enabled 'the projection of the spectacle of the state' in other ways.⁵⁵ Many films were of state occasions, and so sought to create a sense of inclusion in, and reverence for, the imagined community of the nation. While it could not create the sense of simultaneity that is discussed by television analysts,⁵⁶ it did create a sense of close participation within national rituals that would otherwise have remained distant events of which one could only read second-hand reports. Even the experience of simultaneity was strived for by exhibitors and, according to Williams, special efforts were made to show film of the coronation of King George V on the same day as it occurred.⁵⁷

However, despite this preoccupation with foreign places, the appeal of 'local views' such as football matches, crowds and local places does not seem to have been simply that they were cheap to produce. Musser claims that they 'would have elicited little reaction – except that they moved'⁵⁸ but their presence in advertisements and their persistence as a genre of film production seems to suggest otherwise. As Michael Hammond has pointed out, advertisements actively promoted the activity of coming to spot yourself, your loved ones and acquaintances within these images. For example, he notes that 'Pathe made this personal recognition the centre of their campaign for the Pathe Gazettes in 1915'.⁵⁹ One example features a young woman in a work smock with the caption: 'Oh yes, I always enjoy the Pathe Gazette. You see, it shows us pictures of our workshops and the girls just as they are. Besides I've seen Bert several times with his regiment.'⁶⁰ Another example showed a 'wounded Tommy' with the caption: 'I dunno about danger, but those Pathe Gazette chaps that take the pictures were in the thick of it. It's really grand to sit down and see the scenes that you've been in.'⁶¹ As Hammond claims, 'The pleasure in these films is directed at personal, private expectation and couched within the interpellative form of direct address. *You* might expect to recognise someone, or even yourself, in these films.'⁶²

As a result, the function of the 'local views' as familiar spectacles needs some explaining. The pleasure of watching these films (at least, the pleasure suggested by the advertisements that Hammond discusses) is precisely in the act of catching oneself, one's acquaintances or even one's familiar environment captured on film, and this thrill of recognition seems to be the product of two factors. On the one hand, there is the thrill of seeing one's self, one's acquaintances and one's locality through the eyes of others, of seeing it reflected back to one afresh. On the other, there is the thrill of seeing represented that which is usually deemed unworthy of representation, and the pleasure of obtaining a personal and private meaning from a public object.

According to Tom Gunning, the appeal of these local views was their 'lack of dramatic hierarchy [which] invites a different sort of gaze than the one we have learned from classical narrative cinema'. In these local views:

[new] centers of interest bob into the frame unexpectedly, while others depart beyond reclamation. The receptive spectator approaches these images with a global curiosity about its 'many interesting phases,' a curiosity that is being endlessly incited and never completely satiated. The street is filled with endless attractions.⁶³

The pleasures of viewing were not connected to the desire to find a single or dominant meaning within the image that was itself part of a longer, overarching narrative pattern. Instead audience members ranged across the image, searching their own moments of interest and pleasure from within them.

However, the appeal of local views was also that they enabled the exhibitors to demonstrate the wonder of film technology. In other words, the familiarity of the local views demonstrated the visual accuracy of the camera. However, while the ability to recognise a face or place demonstrated the visual qualities of the camera, the camera also transformed the familiar. As Gunning put it:

The motion picture intervenes on this scene, not by organising it, but by capturing it in a form which allows endless repetition, opening the way for a studied appreciation. Instead of an evanescent and immediate experience, the transfer to film allowed the city street to become another sort of spectacle, one mediated by an apparatus.⁶⁴

The camera not only presented audiences with familiar images but also transformed the familiar in the process. It exoticised the familiar and made it into an object of fascination and interest – a spectacle of endless pleasures that could be endlessly rewatched and re-examined.

Right from the start, then, more was demanded of film images than simple movement. Within three months of the first film showing in Nottingham, films were already being shown in colour and this was considered to be a great improvement. Even by the end of September 1896, when films had only been in Nottingham for three weeks, a review appeared in the NDE that concerned the Palace's second set of exhibitions and explained why the 'theatographe' (theatograph to everyone else) was so much better than the cinematographe:

A really excellent entertainment is provided by Mr Carl Brennir this week, the programme concluding with yet another series of animated pictures – a series which easily eclipses any previously seen in town. The theatographe is unquestionably a great improvement on the cinematographe. Not only is there a greater variety of subjects but the duration of the pictures is longer, and in one or two instances, notably in the case of the two dancers, they are coloured. There is, of course, the inevitable 'Prince's Derby' and two or three seaside scenes ...⁶⁵

The reference to the 'inevitable' Derby film showed that the reviewer thought that people had probably seen enough of this film, which had already been shown in both July and September of 1896.

Films in Context

A final indication that the 'naive' and 'simplest stories' were not met with uncritical approval was that none of the films were shown alone, except for some twenty-minute films that were shown at Caldwell's photographic gallery. Films were not considered to provide enough entertainment on their own. In July 1896, *Tilby* was the main attraction at the Grand, and it was described as the 'Success of the Century', but in the Grand's adverts, the cinematograph was always second to the main play or pantomime. The 'Lifeograph' did head the bill at the Palace in August and September, as did the 'Theatograph' in September and October, but they were still part of a variety programme and they only remained at the head of the bill for their first week. By their second (and last) week, they were further down the bill, and the Theatograph was now second to the Dandurria Troubadours in adverts, despite being 'the Talk of the Town'.⁶⁶ Thus it was not until the films were longer and more elaborate that they were seen as an evening's entertainment in themselves. The move to narrative and to the feature film may not have been due to a desire to control spectatorship and so discipline audiences.⁶⁷ Indeed, the emergence of the story film, and even the feature film, were related to the emergence of new venues that demanded longer programmes and could showcase their attractions and, even in these venues, films were usually exhibited as part of a variety format.⁶⁸

Notes

1. 'Which was the First Picture House?', unidentified cutting from 1 May 1937 in the Doubleday Scrapbook, Nottingham Local Studies Library, Vol. XIII, p. 83. It is claimed that the first bioscope was at the Palace of Varieties, which is incorrect.
2. Paul Jennings, 'The Rise of Cinema in Nottingham', *Weekly Guardian Special*, 23 October 1920, in the *Doubleday Scrapbooks*, Nottingham Local Studies Library, Vol. II, p. 143.
3. Iliffe and Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham: A Story in Pictures Volume 3*, 1971.
4. Arwell, 1980; Gray, 1996; Sharp, 1969.
5. Rhode, 1976, pp. 15–16. Franklin claims it was on 20 February: Franklin, 1996.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13; Williams, 1993, p. 2.
7. Reproduced in Iliffe and Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham: A Story in Pictures Volume 12*, 1974, p. 88. The term 'living pictures' was another term for moving images.
8. NDE, 14 July 1896; NEN, 7 July 1896.
9. It should also be pointed out that international exhibitions were all the rage at the time, and that the Midlands Industrial Exhibition was held in Nottingham in 1903. Also there was a close connection between these exhibitions and the cinema, and Dibbets and Convents argue that one reason that Brussels had so many more cinemas than Amsterdam during this period was that Brussels hosted five international exhibitions between 1900 and 1930. See, Karel Dibbets and Guido Convents, 2000.
10. NEN, 31 August 1896; NEP, 31 August 1896; NEP 28 September 1896. Iliffe and Baguley claim that the Palace showed films for over a month starting from 31 August 1896. This was not the case according to the papers: the Lifeograph was shown for the first two weeks of September and the Theatograph from the end of September to the first two weeks in October: Iliffe and Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham: Volume 3*, p. 44.

11. Programme for 'Signal Lights' at the Grand, 9 November 1896.
12. Field, 1974.
13. At a most basic level, the oral histories contain reminiscences of films seen in yards and sheds – events that were hardly likely to have been deemed worthy of comment in press reports. See example of watching early films in a stack yard in Nottingham oral history archive transcript A53/a-b/2: 27; and Roddis, 1993, p. 9.
14. Admission prices:
The Theatre Royal: private box 10s 6d to £2 2s, dress circle 3s, orchestra stalls 2s 6d, upper circle 1s 6d, pit 1s, gallery 6d. Second price at 9p.m.: dress circle 1s 6d, stalls 1s 6d, upper circle 1s, pit 6d.
Albert Hall: front reserved seats 2s, reserved stalls 1s 6d, balcony 1s, gallery, 6d.
The Grand: boxes 21s, dress circle 2s 6d, second circle 1s 6d, stalls 1s, balcony/gallery 3d; pit 3d; gallery 3d.
The Palace: 1s 6d, 9d, and 4d. Stalls 1s at 9 pm; pit and balcony 6d.
15. Hyson Green was a working-class suburb in the 19th century and so it probably housed the families of the lower middle class and well-off working classes. It was also adjacent to Forest Field, which drew on many of its facilities, and had a mixture of different social classes: professionals, skilled and semi-skilled workers, clerks and shopkeepers. See Weir, 1985, pp. 122–31.
16. Asmodeus, 'Revelations of Life in Nottingham', cited in Knight and Cockburn, unpublished paper, n.d., pp. 2, 10, 12.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2, 17.
18. NEP, 1 September 1886.
19. Franklin claims that there were two big marquee entertainments at the 1897 Goose Fair: Collin's Living Pictures and Captain T. Payne's Electric Bioscope. Later there were a total of six of these shows that would move on to smaller fairs once Goose Fair had split up: Franklin, 1996, p. 19.
20. There are a number of histories of Goose Fair, such as Manning, 1994; Nottingham Historical Film Unit, 1973; 1989.
21. John Beckett, 'Leisure Recreation and Entertainment' in Beckett, 1997, p. 385. There is a wealth of material on the social process through which leisure was shaped during the 19th and 20th centuries. See, for example, Bailey, 1978; Clarke, Critcher and Johnson, 1979; Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Cunningham, 1980; Donajgrodski, 1977; Malcolmson, 1982; Mellor, 1976; Parker, 1976; Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973; van Voss and van Holthoon, 1988; Yeo and Yeo, 1981.
22. Cunningham, 1977, pp. 179–80.
23. Cunningham, 1988, pp. 99–107.
24. Cunningham, 1997, p. 179.
25. Steadman Jones, 1982, pp. 92–121.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 108
27. Cunningham, 1977, p. 164
28. NDG, 30 September 1896.
29. Nottingham Archives (NA) M.24,480/A13.

30. NDE, 2 September 1896.
31. NEP, 1 October 1896.
32. Toulmin, 1996, p. 8.
33. Beckett, 'Leisure, Recreation and Entertainment' in Beckett, 1997, pp. 397–8. There are also several more examples in Iliffe and Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham: Volume 4*.
34. *World's Fair*, Saturday 15 October 1910.
35. Franklin, 1996, p. 16. The *Chichester Observer* did describe people leaping for cover as the galloping horses in *The Fire Brigade Call* approached the screen, so not all local papers were 'temperate' in this sense. *Chichester Observer*, 3 October 1897, cited in Eyles, Gray and Readman, 1996, p. 49.
36. NDE, 14 July 1896.
37. He continued: 'In one respect at any rate taste was better then, as the majority of the pictures reproduced were of current events and natural scenery, and were of a distinctly educational type.' This is interesting on two accounts. It first gives an idea of what he considered to be a 'better' taste in films – that is, educational. Second, it is a clear example of the attitude that the present is more progressive, at least regarding technology rather than the type of film.
38. Reproduced in Iliffe and Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham: Volume 3*, p. 39. According to Gray, the first known attempt to put sound to film was in 1889 when William Dickson synchronised the phonograph and Kinetoscope: Gray, 1996, p. 52.
39. NDE, 14 July 1896.
40. NDE, 2 October 1896; NDE, 6 October 1896.
41. Hansen, 1991 and Kirby, 1990.
42. Hansen, 1991, p. 25.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
44. 'The films as well as being short, were naïve and uncomplicated, actualities mainly or having the simplest of stories, but it is probably true to say that, in the early days at least, the mere movement of pictures was sufficiently enthralling to the unsophisticated audiences of the time.' Iliffe and Baguley, *Edwardian Nottingham: A Story in Pictures Volume 3*, 1980, p. 62.
45. Field, 1974, p. 15
46. NDE, 29 July 1896.
47. NDG, 14 July 1896.
48. Denison, unpublished paper, p. 3.
49. Betting was illegal during the period but it seems to have been extensive. Mark Clapson, for example, has argued that illegal book-makers were considerably aided from the 1870s by the expansion of the sporting press and the telegraph: 'The telegraph and the printed page transmitted the information which was vital to ready-money betting away from the course.' Clapson, 1991, p. 28.
50. 'An Interview with Robert William Paul', *The Era*, 25 April 1896.
51. Bennett, 1995, p. 238.
52. Beckett, 1997, p. 410.
53. Foucault, 1986, p. 26.
54. Chanan, 1980, p. 273.

55. Ibid.
56. Moores, 1993; Moores, 2000; Morley, 1992.
57. Williams, 1993, p. 69.
58. Musser, 1991a, p. 66. See also Musser, 1991b.
59. Hammond, 2000.
60. *Pictures and the Picturegoer*, 28 October 1915, p. 95.
61. *Pictures and the Picturegoer*, 4 November 1915, p. 115.
62. Hammond, 2000.
63. Gunning, 1997, p. 36.
64. Ibid., p. 35.
65. NDE, 29 September 1896.
66. This was the case for August; NEP, 31 August 1896; and NEP, 7 September 1896.
67. This is an argument made, for example, by Miriam Hansen in *Babel and Babylon* (1991). However, while some may have feared that 'the exhibition sites [of early film consumption] permitted too much interpretive latitude', narrative films do not prevent 'intertextually structured films' (Uricchio and Pearson, 1993, p. 53). Moreover, as Klinger has argued, there is no reason to suppose that inter-textuality and interpretive latitude were necessarily threatening to the film industry. On the contrary, it has often found them very useful. See Klinger, 1989, pp. 3–19. See also, Klinger, 1994; and Klinger, 1995/6, pp. 107–128.
68. In 1910, the cinematograph was being shown at the Empire and Hippodrome as part of a much larger act and it scarcely gets a mention in reviews.

4

Constructing the Cinematographic Theatre: Purpose-Built Cinemas, Community Relations and the Politics of Place

In January 1910, the Cinematographic Act became law, and it fundamentally changed the experience of cinemagoing. The Act was supposed to protect audiences from the threat of fire that was posed by the highly flammable nature of most films but, as we shall see, it was also used to control cinemas in a number of other ways. None the less, at the outset, few exhibitors opposed it. On the contrary, as Rachel Low has argued, initially 'no one pressed more urgently for these regulations than the showman himself',¹ and there were a number of reasons for this. First, while film itself had not been the subject of legislation up to this point, this 'did not mean that [showmen] were completely free of legal restrictions'.² A whole series of contradictory and conflicting local restrictions existed, and the showman hoped that the Act would rationalise this situation. Second, while the showmen 'vigorously denied that any but a small minority of shows would be found wanting',³ they were worried that 'more and more places [were] completely without supervision'.⁴ For the showmen, 'one death due to the carelessness of one irresponsible exhibitor was enough to damage the reputation of all the rest' and legal restrictions were seen as a way of enforcing responsibility among their own ranks and reassuring 'a suspicious public'.⁵

The Act required places of film consumption to apply for licences, which were only granted on the condition that they met adequate safety standards. As a result, after its introduction, many of the places in which films had previously been shown had little chance of obtaining a licence, and films were increasingly seen in buildings that were specially adapted to, or built for, film exhibition: the cinematographic theatres.⁶

However, while the Act was supposedly designed to protect the physical safety of the audience, it was used to control film consumption in other ways. For example, places were not simply denied a licence on the basis of the physical safety of the building, and it is significant that the Crown and Cushion, the seediest of the Nottingham music halls, was denied a licence. The Crown and Cushion served food and drink, and the Act was often used to enforce the separation of food and alcoholic drink consumption from that of film. The 19th century had seen a long battle over the presence of food and drink within places of entertainment, and their presence was clearly seen as problem.⁷ The mixing of different forms of consumption not only suggested that a venue was lacking in respectability, but was also supposed to cause problems of discipline, particularly if alcohol was present.