

## 6

## This Loving Darkness

TRYING out hairstyles, practising makeup techniques and swaggering about like Hollywood gangsters are behaviours that bear all the hallmarks of courtship rituals, and yet they are never remembered as such. And while the back row of the cinema and the 'courting' that took place there are legendary in popular memory, romance and sex do not figure very prominently in 1930s cinemagoers' memories of their adolescence. Times shared with friends of the same sex, for example, are far more often and more vividly recollected. At the same time, some refer to portrayals of romance in films, and others offer memories of how cinema figured in their own love lives. There are some gender differences here, however. Men rarely raise the topics of sex, romance and courtship at all, and only one does so at any length. And while women are more likely than men to volunteer details of their own courting activities at the pictures, memories of spying on courting couples in the back row of the stalls are exclusively male. For a small minority of female informants, cinemagoing is more strongly associated in memory with courtship than with female friendship; and these women seem particularly happy to talk about their own love stories, often making explicit connections between their courting days and the 'romantic' pictures they saw at the cinema.

Overall, three sets of themes emerge in memories of romance, sex and courtship, each associated with particular discursive registers. First, some informants talk about cinemagoing and courting as self-evidently

linked activities, and this approach is associated with repetitive, and occasionally with anecdotal, memory discourse. Second, there is a distinct set of memories about courtship activity inside the cinema, and these are associated with place memory and embodied memory. Third, some accounts make implicit or explicit associations between courtship, romance and sex and the contents of films or the spectatorial engagements evoked by what was on the screen. These references to the 'cinematic apparatus' often embody a past/present trope.

Many 1930s cinemagoers, men and women alike, record that for their generation an invitation to the pictures was the accepted way for a boy to express romantic interest in a girl. As letter-writer Margaret Houlgate recalls: 'A visit to the pictures was often the venue for a "first date"'. It was the boy's part to make the first move, says Margaret Ward: 'If a boy wanted to take you out it was always would you like to go to the pictures'. Courtship norms of the day, adds Mrs Houlgate, ensured that a girl 'never allowed a kiss in the first or even the second date, of course'.<sup>1</sup>

Freda McFarland was not, she says, particularly interested in the pictures *per se*, but remembers her cinemagoing heyday as coincident with her courtship. The man she later married took her to the same cinema every Wednesday night until the couple were parted by the war in 1941.<sup>2</sup> Ashley Bird talks in similar vein about regular visits to the cinema during the long years of his courtship. He met his wife when both were only 15 years old, and the couple married as soon as they could do so without parental consent, in 1938 when they turned 21. Bert Partington's memories underline how taken-for-granted the cinema-courtship association was for his generation, as he recollects his picturegoing habit in the context of the routines of his working week:

Before the war, I was a shop boy. And my girlfriends, or particularly the woman I married worked with me. So as, what we call courting in those days, you tend to go to the cinema. You see we worked till eight o'clock at night. Nine o'clock on Saturdays. So one went to the cinema probably Mondays and Wednesdays. Eh, because you'd go to the second house. Half past eight.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1930s, an evening at the dance hall was almost as popular a leisure activity as an outing to the cinema. As Helen Smeaton says, 'You either went dancing on a Friday or a Saturday or to the cinema'.<sup>4</sup> For some informants, courting is associated with dancing as much as with

the pictures, and indeed dancing is often remembered as more grown up and daring, and more firmly associated with courtship, than the pictures. Mrs Smeaton, who 'liked the dancing as well as the pictures—especially when courting',<sup>5</sup> is one of several informants who draw this distinction. For those like Nancy Prudhoe, who says she stopped going to the cinema once she started going dancing, the two activities are remembered as separated in time.<sup>6</sup>

The dance styles of the 1930s favoured male-female pairing and called for close physical contact between partners. To this extent, the dance hall was an excellent venue for seeking, meeting, or showing off a girlfriend or boyfriend. As a public place it provided the reassurance of safety in numbers, and as a place where looking at and being looked at by members of the opposite sex was positively *de rigueur*, it offered an opportunity for displays of prowess in dancing and of self-presentation in general. Peggy Kent and her friends recall spending hours on Saturday afternoons getting ready to go out together in the evening: they would go first to the pictures and then on to the dance hall. They exchange rather elliptical anecdotes as they step into, and then retreat from, potentially sensitive territory:

HG We only used to go because Hilda was sweet on a man up there and we...

All [Laugh; protest; overtalking]

PK Yes but the thing that we're not going to talk about is...

HG Yes.

PK That he was courting.

HG Yeh.

PK And she used to make him *after* he took the other one home!

[Giggles]

HC I [with emphasis] wasn't going to talk about that!

All [Laugh]

HC It couldn't have been like that! [Unintelligible for laughter]

PK I thought *everybody'd* known about that!

[Laughter].<sup>7</sup>

Cinemas are remembered as places where courting could be conducted in relative comfort and privacy. But for the 1930s generation memories

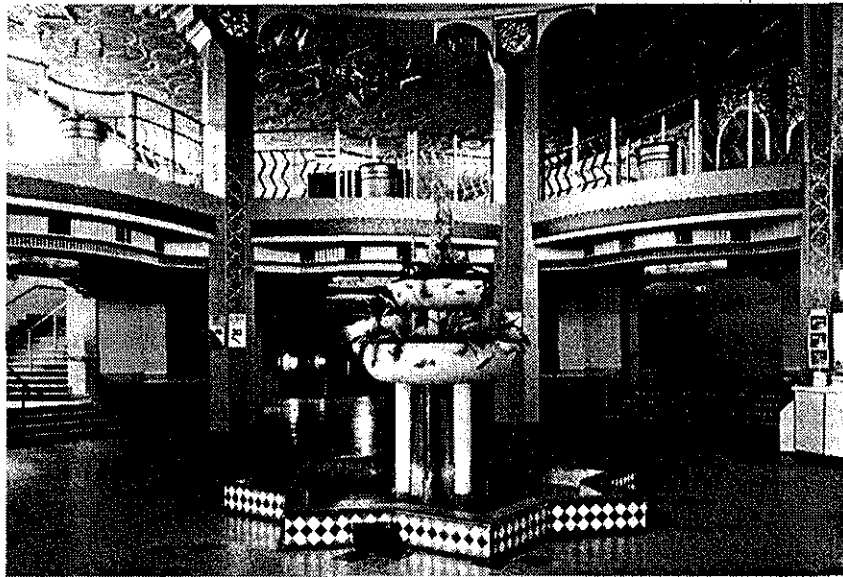
of courtship and romance are associated exclusively with one kind of cinema: the sumptuous new picture palace as opposed to the modest local picture houses of childhood picturegoing discussed in Chapter 3. If both types of cinema are recalled with pleasure, each has very different associations.<sup>8</sup> The luxurious, spacious, modern picture palaces are associated with treats and special occasions and remembered as in every way a far cry from home. These cinemas are the heterotopias of courtship.

Heterotopias, according to Michel Foucault, are unlike utopias (utopia translates as 'nowhere') in being real places, spaces 'outlined in the very institution of society, but... in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned; a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable'.<sup>9</sup> One of the principles of the heterotopia, moreover, is that it 'has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other'.<sup>10</sup> Cinemas, as physical spaces – as *places* – embody all these qualities of liminality and heterogeneity: they are very much part of the built environment, and yet they conjoin the mundanity and materiality of bricks and mortar with the worlds of fantasy and the imagination. Cinemas differ in the degree to which they balance other-worldly as against localisable everyday space; and the supercinema, representing as it does for 1930s cinemagoers the passage from adolescence to adulthood, lies beyond the worlds of home and neighbourhood while still remaining part of a real and accessible world.

Muriel Peck offers a vivid description of one such supercinema, the Astoria in Finsbury Park, London, which opened in 1930.<sup>11</sup> Her words convey the feelings of awe and wonder inspired by these cinemas when they first appeared on the scene:

To go to the Astoria was like going to wonderland. One passed from the ticket office into the foyer which had a marble type floor and in the centre was a fountain and I think there may also have been fish. From there we passed the ticket collector into a carpeted area leading down into a sunken auditorium. The air was faintly perfumed...

The decor was Moorish. Overhead one could see what appeared to be a night sky with stars twinkling. High up there were doors and balconies which were illuminated during the interval and one fully expected a beautiful princess to emerge with her prince.<sup>12</sup>



The Astoria, Finsbury Park

According to 1930s courtship codes, the boy's duty was to impress the girl. So much the better if he could afford to treat her to a good seat in a luxuriously-appointed modern cinema. Several female informants note that the very first time they entered a supercinema or sat in an expensive seat was when they started courting.<sup>13</sup> Alex Mawer says that as soon as he could afford it, he would do what 'pretty well everybody did' and take his girlfriend to one of the plush cinemas in Glasgow's city centre on an outing that was in every way a special occasion:

This was the highlight of the week. There was a bit of luxury about these cinemas. Tastefully decorated, well heated, comfortable seats and of course the latest film releases. For such outings both sexes would put on their best outfits... The girls would make the best of their appearance, often copying the hair style of a favourite actress.<sup>14</sup>

As a young man in employment, Bert Partington also took it for granted that he would pay for his girlfriend when he took her to the pictures, and that he would buy her chocolates, too: 'And of course, best seats were a shilling, 5p that is. A quarter box of chocolates was the same. So was that. You see.' Mrs D.E. Cowles recalls that the chocolates

she was given depended on how well-off her boyfriend was feeling: 'If the boyfriend was flush I would have a 6d box of Rowntrees Dairy Milk chocolates, if he was hard up I would get a 2d chocolate bar'.<sup>15</sup> The association between the pictures, courtship, and giving or receiving sweets or chocolates evokes the sense of plenty and generosity that, as noted in Chapter 3, characterises memories of childhood cinemagoing. In all these accounts, there is an implied contrast between the abundance associated with picturegoing and the 'getting by' of everyday life.

Nancy Carrington was born in 1911, and her courting days predated the supercinema era. Nonetheless, when asked if she ever went to the cinema with her husband before they married, she embarks on a train of thought which links the memory of being in the back row of the stalls with her boyfriend's romantic proposal of marriage, which did not actually take place in the cinema. Significantly, the link in this series of associations is sweets:

*Int* When you were courting your husband, did you go to the cinema with him?

*NC* Oh, I went with him.

*Int* Yes.

*NC* Oh, yes, yes. [*Very definite*].

*SN* Did you used to sit on the back row?

*NC* Yes. [*Laughs*]. Yes we did if we could get there.

*SN* [*Laughs*]

*Int* [*Laughs*] Yes.

*NC* Yes, it used to be very good then, you know, very romantic. *very* romantic. When my husband and I were courting, we used to get, used to be sweets called fairy whispers. They were all colours. And we used to sit, when I lost my mother, we used to sit in the kitchen with dad. And it got on it, 'Do you love me?'. And I'd pass one and say, 'Yes'. 'Will you marry me?'. 'Yes'.<sup>16</sup>

The flip side of these courtship mores was that young men who for whatever reason – being still at school perhaps, or unemployed, or in a poorly-paid job – lacked the cash to take girls to the pictures could feel left out of things. Denying having taken part in the courting that went on in the cinema, Jimmy Murray makes light of how hard up he was as a young man:

*Int* Did you ever [use the back row for courting] yourself when you got a bit older?

*JM* Eh, I never bothered. Well, I couldn't take anybody in't cinema. [*Laughs*]

*Int* [*Laughs*]

*JM* Never had *enough* for two! [*Laughs*].

*Int* Ah, I see.<sup>17</sup>

Nancy Carrington, whose wistful memories of adolescent picture-going involve gallant and courtly young men and generous treats of sweets and ice creams, is repeatedly called to order by her friend and co-interviewee Nancy Prudhoe, who reminds her that the boys they knew were far too poverty-stricken to take girls to the pictures: 'The boys were all out of work!' she insists, 'They used to wait for us girls to pay them in'.<sup>18</sup>

As cinemagoers of the 1930s remember it, sexual activity never figured in romantic attachments between young men and women. Insisting on the innocence of boy-girl relationships in her youth, Mrs Carrington maintains that 'you never let a boy kiss you the first time. *No way!* You'd give him a clout if he did!'<sup>19</sup> Such coyness looks rather different, however, when the story is told from the male point of view. Ashley Bird recalls that he would on occasion agree to take a girlfriend to see the sorts of romantic or melodramatic pictures women liked. He had ulterior motives, though:

*AB* And when we had girlfriends, we had to go and see the, what we would call, sloppy films.

*Int* Yes. [*Laughs*]

*AB* Ye-ah. Stupid teenagers.

*Int* Were you sitting through these gritting your teeth? [*Laughs*]

*AB* That's right. Yes. [*Laughs*] Trying to get [*laughing*] to grips with the girlfriend, that's a fact.

*Int* [*Laughs*]

*AB* Stop it, or else, Stop it. [*Laughs*] Yes. You could hear it going on. [*Laughs*] Yes.<sup>20</sup>

Mr E. Harvey remembers one film in particular. When he took his girlfriend to see Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool*, she was so moved by the

film that she clung on to him tightly: 'it was so sad when he sang "Sonny Boy"... I had on a white mac... and during that scene she twiddled a button off'.<sup>21</sup>

Others note that the entire ambience of the cinema auditorium was conducive to courtship. The 'loving darkness'<sup>22</sup> is taken as given, but decor, design and seating arrangements are sometimes described. For example, several informants mention that in some cinemas seats in the back row of the stalls were designed expressly for courting couples:

[O]ur cinemagoing was great way of courting... [One cinema] had double seats on the back row and we used to go and queue early to procure one of these back row 'seats for two' where we could cuddle up together to watch the programme.<sup>23</sup>

Helen Smeaton offers a detailed account of similar seating arrangements in a cinema in her native Glasgow:

We moved from that part of Maryhill, then off Great Western Road and there was a cinema called the Gem. And, by this stage I was what, I was getting up to, I must have been 16, yes, em, and in the Gem, you had, it was very comfortable and nice. And if you went up to the balcony they had the chummy seats. You just sat two each but it had the high, high back and it went straight around, and then it curved round the side. That's where all the [*laughing*] courting couples went, who weren't really interested in the cinema. So every time after I met, ended up with my husband, eh, and then we started going out, we always used to go [*laughing*] to the Gem...<sup>24</sup>

While Mrs Shaw and Mrs Smeaton recall their own courting in the back row, other informants, most of them men, remember the back row as the object of intense voyeuristic fascination. Jimmy Murray gleefully recalls the activities of courting couples in the double seats at the back of a Manchester cinema:

*JM* One cinema had special, eh, special seats. The Scala, there. They were way out like, you know. And they had the back row. They'd took arm rest off so it made one seat for the couples, you know. They could do a bit of *snogging* on the back seat kinda thing. [*Amused voice*]

*Int* [*Laughs*]

*JM* Instead of having arms sticking into the other. Aye.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes the goings-on in the back row proved more interesting than what was happening on the screen, as Brigadier J.B. Ryall recalls:

When a youngster could sneak into the back row of the cinema he sometimes got more pleasure out of the corner of his eye at the 'fumbling' and 'squeaks' that sometimes went on.<sup>26</sup>

There is a clear association in informants' memory-talk between courtship and romance on the one hand and the supercinema's heterotopic qualities on the other. Bob Surtees writes:

Later in the 30s an evening at the cinema with your girl friend. The comfort! warmth! the nearness and love, the dreamland atmosphere. What a lovely world it was! Until '39!<sup>27</sup>

This memory has a sensual quality, conveying the experience of bodily ease and release induced by the cinema's all-encompassing warmth and comfort, and associating this with the memory of physical closeness with his girlfriend. It conveys, too, a palpable sense of missing that 'lovely world' of adolescence with its leisure and pleasures, a world doubly lost: first when war broke out in 1939 and now, in the moment of writing, with old age.

The picture palaces of the 1930s are remembered as heterotopias in a number of respects. They are located at some distance from home; their architecture and interiors are exotic or avant-garde; and they provide amenities of unaccustomed splendour – wall-to-wall carpeting, heating, plush seats. For cinemagoers of the 1930s, these things were clearly enjoyable in their own right. But they are also the point of entry to a further set of 'other' spaces, the worlds of fiction and the imagination offered up on the cinema screen. Location, architecture, interior design, and finally the cinematic apparatus itself: all are of a piece.

Many informants observe that the pictures took them into a different world, an observation none the less apt for being conventional. Indeed, commentators who would frown on clichés about escapism have noted that cinema buildings work exactly like machines that transport users away from the everyday, the 'localizable', and deliver them into the other world opened up by the cinema screen.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, theorists who conceive of cinema as a machine of another kind – an apparatus in which the spectator is caught up in a set of psychical processes centred around vision – are pointing to a key component of the relationship between

cinema and its users. Though not as universally explanatory a feature of the spectator-screen relationship as its proponents suggest, the concept of the cinematic apparatus sits well with the particular combination of the supercinema-heterotopia and the classical Hollywood film which distinguishes popular cinema culture of the 1930s. But while the apparatus model gives centre stage to vision and looking, it is apparent from the memories of cinemagoers of these years that the pleasure of looking at the cinema screen is but a small part of an all-encompassing somatic, sensuous and affective involvement in the cinema experience.

Cinema's engagement of body, senses and feelings has particular resonance where romance, sex and courtship are concerned. For example, it is sometimes assumed that the warmth and comfort of the darkened cinema auditorium may induce a lowering of the defences imposed by the external authority of the adult world or by the internal authority of the superego. If this is so, under what conditions might this process be channelled into erotic reverie or fantasy, or even into sexual activity? In many minds, certainly, sex and the cinema are irrevocably linked, a view succinctly expressed by the cinema reformer of the early 1930s who argues that film dramas 'affect the nerves, and above all, the sexual instincts... In that lies the mysterious secret of the astounding success of the cinemas'.<sup>29</sup> Films' capacity to activate 'sexual instincts', it was felt, could readily promote sexually promiscuous behaviour, both inside and outside cinemas.<sup>30</sup>

The cinema-sex conjunction begs many questions, however. Do different sorts of films channel desires differently? How precisely might the portrayal on screen of heterosexual romance, a prevalent theme of films in the 1930s, engage cinemagoers 'sexual instincts'? While it may well be true that there is an analogy between the psychological processes involved in falling in love (projection, idealisation) and the operations of cinematic identification and star worship,<sup>31</sup> these processes will always be modified in practice by sociocultural factors. Mores surrounding courtship behaviour and patterns of courtship and marriage, as well as demographic factors such as class, age and gender, are all key features of, in Foucault's term, the 'localizable'.

For example, male informants are forthright about their youthful scorn for romantic pictures and for all forms of 'sloppiness' on the screen:

Well, see now, when you're young, if ye, if ye got, eli, men and girls *slabbering* over each other, you know when you're sitting,

they would have catcalls, 'Aw, get them off!' [Shouts] 'Get them off!' That didn't appeal to us. There had to be something happening in a picture. Gangster pictures, there were a lot of gangster pictures. I liked them, because there was a lot of shooting in them.<sup>32</sup>

Research on cinema audiences conducted during the 1930s confirms that there was a clear gender split in film preferences, with boys and young men going out of their way to deride the sorts of 'sloppy' pictures that appealed to girls and women.<sup>33</sup> And yet, as noted above, young men were prepared to endure romantic films if they thought this would help them, in Ashley Bird's words, 'get to grips with the girlfriend'. The assumptions are that a boy's agreeing to his girlfriend's choice of film might make her more favourably disposed towards him, or that a romantic picture might put her in an erotically receptive frame of mind.

Women, on the other hand, expatiate on their enjoyment of romantic films and stars and make the connection between these and their own adolescent romantic longings. These are invariably recalled as innocently romantic rather than erotic or sexual. 'It was a romantic era, as far as I was concerned', says Annie Wright. 'And there were weepies and romantic films. And, as I said, at that age, 17 and you're going out with a boy, there was nothing else. And of course, you was in love and of course, that enhanced the feeling. All these films were sort of made for you. You know you could see yourself in. Well I did anyway.' Mrs Wright's conclusion – 'It was lovely'<sup>34</sup> – echoes other female informants' talk about romantic pictures.

Fans of the film romance invariably emphasise the innocence of the love stories portrayed in the films they saw in their youth, and by implication the innocence of their own adolescent love lives as well. Nancy Carrington makes this point in several ways:

*Int* Did you have any particular favourite kinds of films? You were saying that you liked the romance. Was it the romantic films you liked?

*NC* Well, we used to have lovely romances. [Said warmly] They were so beautiful, you know. Clean romances. You know. Like they'd never show you a couple in bed together. They always had separate beds. You used a lot of your imagination but it was really all clean, beautiful.

*Int* Mm.

*NC* You know, it was real romantic. And of course if we could get at the back seat, then course [laughs; remembering] we used to have a good time, you know. Used to get ice creams in the interval, you know. And, eh, oh used to be great. [Said nostalgically]<sup>35</sup>

I remember I went to, em, it was the Harrow Coliseum; em, picture place, you know. And we went to see *Ramona*. Aw, that was beautiful. I think that was Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. And eh, it was really romantic. Really lovely. And then we'd walk all the way over the hill at the back by the cenotaph, all the way home. You know. Really lovely. [Said nostalgically]<sup>36</sup>

Many informants, male as well as female, take pains to distinguish between past and present, between the films of their youth and the films and television programmes of today, invariably insisting that the latter are too sexually explicit. Beatrice Cooper, for example, recalls that 'films were never that *risqué* that they are [sic] anything like they are today! You know there was a limit on the number of seconds they could kiss each other'. Doreen Lyell notes that 'nobody was shown, no man and woman was shown in bed together... And there was no actual scenes of sex or anything like that'. Jim Godbold complains about films 'where everybody's jumping in bed and that sort of thing... You didn't want to see all this writhing about on the bed and all this'.<sup>37</sup> As Mrs Carrington implies, films of the 1930s left a lot to the imagination, and this was exactly what made them so 'lovely'.

Helen Smeaton, though, tells a story which, while drawing a distinction between love and romance in films past and present, eschews nostalgia and makes fun of her own youthful naivete:

To me, when I was young, I believed all the romantic stuff. I could think of seeing a film, *Seventh Heaven*, I think it was called or something. Somebody called Simone Simone and James Stewart. They were in an attic away up somewhere in Paris and it was all so romantic. And I sat there and I took all that in. I thought that was what love was like. I never bothered about what happened afterwards. I can remember going on thinking about that film for *countless* years. And then when my younger son, the one in America, was about 17, and I was always telling him about the great films that we had when I was young. How ours were so much better. Sometimes they would come on on the telly and I remember

saying, 'This *Seventh Heaven*'s coming on now.' And I said, 'Aw Alan. If you're staying in, look at this, look at this film.' [Laughs] And we sat down to look at it and I remember thinking, 'Oh, my gosh! Did I really think that was good?' And when it was finished, Alan nearly fell about laughing. He said, 'You're right, mother. They don't make films like that any more nowadays.' And I couldn't understand how my whole attitude had changed in about what, about 20, 30 years from I was 16, 17 when I saw it and it was all just so romantic and wonderful. Once you've lived a bit and you see it again. [Laughs] Oh dear, oh dear!<sup>38</sup>

The testimonies of 1930s cinemagoers suggest that interactions between the pictures and their own adolescent romantic dreams, desires and courtship behaviour could take a number of forms. These might range from romantic and erotic daydreams fuelled and shaped by films and film stars, through projections of fantasies onto individuals in their everyday worlds, to more diffuse memories in which cinemas figure as venues for their own courtship, and finally to anecdotal memory-stories in which 'the pictures' becomes a protagonist in informants' own love stories.

The imitative activities described in Chapter 5 all contain an element of cinema-fuelled fantasy, and some are expressions of wishes of a specifically romantic or erotic nature. Emily Soper's memory of her and her friends' feelings towards their favourite female stars captures the urgency of the desire lying behind such identifications: 'We had our special heroines, too, whom we admired and our great desire was to be as beautiful as they and as successful in catching the man of our dreams!'<sup>39</sup>

Others remember adolescent longings provoked by stars of the opposite sex. Ellen Casey's screen idol was Ross Alexander, who appeared in a number of Warner Bros pictures during the 1930s (he died in 1937). So obsessed with Alexander was the 15-year old Ellen that she developed a crush on a young man she thought resembled him. The boy, who – significantly – remains nameless in Mrs Casey's anecdote, was in a good job and could afford to take her to a 'posh' cinema and treat her to a seat in the circle. She is carried away not only by the presence at her side of the companion who in her mind has become her idol ('I was so thrilled being with this Ross Alexander') but also by the magical 'other' world opened up by the musical on the screen:

EC Anyway when I got to about 15 I seen this lad. Well I think he was 19 at the time. I was about 15. And he resembled Ross Alexander. Aw did I chase him!

Int [Laughs]

EC Oh I did. Honestly. He was. He had the same jet black hair. Brushed back as they used to have it. And the same sort of, you know wave. And he *did* resemble. Aw [swooning voice]. I was mad on him... *Finally* I got for him to take me out... [It was a] Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers musical. And it was that one where they were singing. Oh I still remember the song. Even now. Em, 'Cheek to Cheek'.

Int Oh, *Top Hat*.

EC Yeah. Em, how did it start, 'Cheek'. [Sings] 'When we're both together dancing cheek to cheek.' And I thought, oh-h-h. Going upstairs on the balcony! Aa was so *thrilled* being with this Ross Alexander!<sup>40</sup>

Bert Partington recalls that as a schoolboy he and a group of friends cultivated an obsession with a local girl they thought looked like Marlene Dietrich. In this case, however, the admiration was from afar, the fantasy acted out in peer group activity:

BP I can remember the same group at school. We thought Marlene Dietrich was *terrific* you see. And there was a young woman. We were in Bolton then. And we had Wednesday afternoon off school. And on Wednesday lunchtime we used to *race* to the cloakroom. Wash our hands and face. And three of us used to *hurtle* out to the town centre. Because there was a young woman who worked at the gown shop who we thought was like Marlene Dietrich. And we used to sort of stare at her and follow her. [Laughs]

LB [Laughs]

BP And we were normal! [Laughs] There was nothing sinister about it.

LB No. Just admiring.

BP I mean, she wouldn't have been frightened of us. I mean it wasn't that kind of following.

LB Mm.



*BP* We just thought she was Wow! She was *absolutely* marvellous, you know.<sup>41</sup>

A few informants, all women, offer highly personal, and obviously treasured, memories of the part played by cinema in their own love lives. These are stories about the transition from courtship to marriage, about how women met their spouses, and about how cinema figured in their courtships. Mrs K. Scott writes: 'when we were courting my husband and I went regularly to the pictures... he belonged to the St Johns Ambulance Brigade [and] would be on duty in his uniform, he had to stand at the back of the stalls and I would sit in the front stalls. Our family think it was a funny way to do our courting!' Olive Johnson adds a postscript to her letter: 'My first proposal of marriage came in the back row of the Odeon!'<sup>42</sup>

Other memories are of husbands now deceased. Mrs M.W. Spicer relates that she went to the pictures with the boyfriend she 'courted for 7 years until married for 42 years, and then he died 12 years ago'. Clarice Squires, in a story which itself exhibits many of the formal conventions of popular romantic fiction – destiny, coincidence, the 'meet cute' – writes about the first time she met her husband:

It was in a cinema queue where I was destined to meet my future husband. He was home on leave and 'The Bells of St Mary's' with Bing Crosby was showing at the Coliseum. My mum went early to save me a place in what seemed like a mile long queue, and I joined her straight from my work. Who should be beside her but handsome Ken. They chatted and Mum explained she was keeping a place for me.

We didn't sit near each other, but seemed to come out the same time...

Now I think this is where fate lends a helping hand. Mum had to catch the bus home as my Dad was on the night shift and being my Mum she couldn't possibly let him go without seeing to his supper. I on the other hand had a card to post in the General P. O. it being my brother's birthday the next day, so say no more that's where it all started and after we got to know each other we were happily married for just over 30 years when he died of cancer 17 years [ago] on 2nd April.<sup>43</sup>

The themes and styles of narration of these accounts of courtship,

romance and sex, and their particular combination of memories of courtship with memories of cinemagoing, are peculiar to the 1930s generation. For this generation, the 1930s is a time that stands out very clearly in memory. The majority of informants were born in the early to middle 1920s, which means that the heyday of Hollywood glamour and the era of the new supercinemas coincided with a formative period of their lives. At the same time, their adolescence was curtailed at the close of the decade by the outbreak of the Second World War, an event remembered by many as a personal watershed, a time of dramatic life changes. Isolated in memory, the 1930s are recollected all the more distinctly from other times in informants' lives. Perhaps, too, because the war brought such profound social changes, not least in sexual attitudes and behaviour, the years preceding it seem all the more innocent to those who were young at the time. Their insistence on how different attitudes to and behaviour around courtship were then may be understood in this light.

As noted earlier, informants rarely address themselves to more than one of the key themes and discourses that characterise memories around courtship, romance and sex. However, one informant's testimony not only interweaves all the themes, but also ties them in with memories of his own sexual awakening and situates them in their social and historical context. In the process, this account throws into relief the specific meanings of coming into masculinity for men of his generation, and the role played in it by cinema culture.

Denis (A.D.) Houlston was born in Levenshulme, Manchester in 1917; and aside from war service has lived there all his life. On leaving school at 17, he went into clerical work, first as an office boy and later as a cost clerk and cashier. Mr Houlston's two lengthy interviews reveal a strong feeling for his locality and a detailed memory of the many picture houses that were once in his neighbourhood. His recollections of the exterior and interior features of his favourite cinemas are exceptionally vivid, as is his memory of cinema programmes and of images, shots and sequences in his favourite films. He joined the *Picturegoer* postcard club in the early 1930s, and his collection of postcard portraits of film stars remains intact, along with a number of letters from and signed photographs of film stars and some film-related publications of the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> Obviously a cinephile, he later became a member of a film society in Manchester.



Mr Houlston's testimony is unusual for the fluidity with which it moves between talk about erotic moments on screen, the sexiness of his favourite leading ladies, courtship activities in the back row of the cinema, and adolescent sexual feelings more generally. Like other informants, he regards the 1930s as a bounded period characterised by a strict and widely-observed set of codes of behaviour around courtship and sex. Unlike other informants, though, he constructs himself as actively involved in the sexual preoccupations of adolescence. In a period marked by sexual innocence and restraint, he contends, the cinema was for him – and indeed for others – a source of education in sexual matters as well as of pleasurable looking.

Mr Houlston reminds the interviewer that during the 1930s he passed from boyhood to young manhood: 'in those days, [19]30, I would be 13, and in 1939 I'd be 22!' In these nine years, memorable for him as a time of considerable intellectual and psychosexual development, Mr Houlston's taste in films and stars underwent some sea changes:

So the, the early impressions were Cowboys and Indians and then, we got farther on to romantic comedies. I'd love to see them again to see how they were but, of course, I don't suppose they'd put them on film now, because. Oh and the musicals, we loved the musicals.

A few years older than most other informants, he entered adolescence before Hollywood films were subjected to the rigorous regulation of the Production Code. Many films of the late 1920s and early 1930s were quite racy, and Mr Houlston remembers well the changes wrought by the Hays Office. It was in the pre-Code years that as a 'romantic school-boy' he began to cultivate an interest in the opposite sex:

DH And of course by that time, with becoming more conscious of, eh, of girls being different from boys, so I started getting my favourite female stars, like Madeleine Carroll.

Int Right!

DH Was the quintessential English star. Blonde naturally! We didn't have colour so I can't remember if she was blue-eyed or not but I mean Madeleine Carroll! [said slowly and lovingly] The first one I ever liked was a silent filmstar, American, Evelyn Brent, who was a brunette and I can't even remember why I fell for her now. But Evelyn Brent sticks in my mind, and I saw her years later in a film, when she

was 70, and I saw the name on the cast list and I thought 'That was my first film star lady love, from the silent days!' Then the next one was Thelma Todd who was a blonde, an American blonde, and she was in these B movies and in these short comedies.

He remembers with special affection the romantic comedies of Ernst Lubitsch, films he characterises as frothy, witty, full of gaiety – and *risqué*: 'Cause it was always about, eh, a man endeavouring to get the lady into the bedroom'. The attraction of the Lubitsch films derives, according to Mr Houlston, from their restraint in the portrayal of sex. This restraint fuelled his schoolboy curiosity precisely about what was not shown on the screen:

It was, it was more an age of innocence and one that comes to mind is *The Love Parade* with Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald and, em, you got things, hints about the gentlemen going in the ladies' bedroom. Well, we never knew what went on there but, em, they'd show you now, you'd have writhing, naked bodies but those days, they'd go through a door and the door would shut and next thing the door would open and it would be the following morning or something like that. So [pause] as curious schoolboys we used to think 'well, what goes on?' Well, when it had a song in that film, and I have a record of it, of Jeanette MacDonald singing it, a song called 'How I would love one hour with you', we gained this impression [laughs] that it took an hour that, that this was the sort of height of bliss: one hour with you! We didn't know quite why it was the height of bliss...<sup>45</sup>

Explaining his preference for musicals, Mr Houlston says:

We loved the musicals because there was lots of chorus girls, eh, and Dick Powell sings in one of the musicals about, eh, 'Why do we go, eh, dames' and the song is called 'Dames' and that's why we go to these shows. Eh, well that's why we as schoolboys went.

It later emerges that Mr Houlston's fascination with chorus girls in musicals – he remembers the Busby Berkeley sequences in *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *42nd Street* particularly vividly – has to do with the displays of legs in these films:

DH And the Busby Berkeley. I, I, everybody must say this, of my generation. If only Busby Berkeley had been doing these films when we had colour.

Int Aah.

DH Cause they're all black and white.

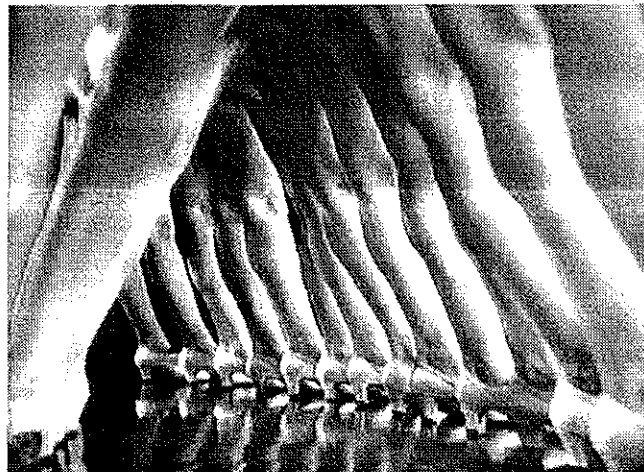
Int Mmm.

DH But I marvel at his routines now. I love his dance routines and, em, they were absolutely and there again, you see, I keep coming back to sex, after, I'll have to have a cold shower!

Int [Laughs]

DH I think but, there's one in particular where em, a modern film, I can see it *now*, it was on the front cover of *The Picturegoer*, whether it's Ruby Keeler, it might have been, I think it was *42nd Street*, and Ruby Keeler's at one end and she comes through a tunnel and the tunnel is composed of the chorus girls' legs, and it's shot...

Frustratingly, the tape runs out at this point, but the shot referred to could well be from 'I'm Young and Healthy', a number in the backstage musical *42nd Street*. The number ends with one of Busby Berkeley's signature tracking shots through the parted legs of a line of chorines. The track between the legs – 'the semantic unit *par excellence* of the show musical'<sup>46</sup> – engages the spectator's look in a mode of address in which 'the technology of cinema creates a necessary identification



between the spectator and the cinematic apparatus'.<sup>47</sup> Here, the relationship between film text and spectator is grounded in the pleasures of the voyeuristic gaze. Describing how gender spectacle in the Hollywood musical is organised through performances of femininity which 'are most clearly constructed through the convention of the crotch shot (moments where attention is drawn to the female genital area) instead of the heterosexual embrace',<sup>48</sup> Nadine Wills draws a distinction between the musical, which offers the gratifications of display and spectacle, and the romantic comedy, whose pleasures derive from withholding, from not showing.

Withholding rather than showing aptly describes the Lubitsch romantic comedies Mr Houlston enjoyed as a schoolboy. And indeed his account of the sources of his adolescent fascination with certain films and stars suggests that what he found most intriguing was not so much overt display as the tease of the partly revealed female body and the brief glimpse of the forbidden. He eloquently describes the details of costuming, mise en scene and camera angle through which these erotically compelling images are presented cinematically. His account also suggests an understanding of the operation of cinematic point of view, in that many of the shots and sequences he recalls as particularly erotic are exactly those which offer the spectator a peek at the forbidden sight:

Once again as a schoolboy, with these, like the rest of my schoolboys you got these nice ideas, we loved it because you got plenty of leg shots and the décolletage was quite generous, more generous than later on, eh, so we would see bits of those female bodies which, you know, we'd only dreamed about [laughs] and, eh, there were shots of stocking tops was a favourite thing and always in pictures the leading lady would have to adjust her stockings some time. So up would come her skirt and we'd all be goggle-eyed and, eh, 'Did you see Lili Damita', you know?

This is all the more powerful where the erotic sight is withheld from characters within the film. Mr Houlston describes the famous 'saucy but nice' scene from a picture which enjoyed wide popular and critical acclaim on its release in 1934. In Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, the Clark Gable character, a louche reporter, is in pursuit of a fugitive rich girl (Claudette Colbert).<sup>49</sup> The pair find themselves forced to share a motel room for a night:

I know there's a scene in that where they have to put up at a motel and she insists on hanging a blanket on a string between the two beds but it's a delightful comedy that, and we thought that was, you know, *risqué* with Clark Gable one side undressing and Claudette Colbert the other side undressing and we knew they wouldn't show us anything if anything did develop. Actually I don't think anything did as far as I remember the story but they were saucy if you follow me, saucy but nice.

Taking the interviewer through his collection of *Picturegoer* postcards of film stars, Mr Houlston shows an example of the kind of image he found particularly erotic, this one involving a bare leg peeking from a lacy negligée:

DH Now you see we thought that was [*hands over photo*] out and out naughtiness.

Int [*Sighs*] Lili Damita

DH She's showing her leg there, I mean that was I mean that, that.

Int And a bare shoulder.

DH I'd have to go and take a cold shower after that!

Int [*Laughs*] Yes.

Here, as elsewhere in Mr Houlston's testimony, the point at which exposed flesh meets clothing is recollected as particularly tantalising. He mentions stocking tops several times, and says he found underwear and scanty, translucent garments especially compelling when worn by his favourite stars. These garments are described in detail and in a manner which conveys the tactility, the feel, of their silky fabrics: Thelma Todd in 'quite daring stockings and what the Americans call teddies'; Anna Neagle in a translucent dress, 'sheer as, like a veil really'; Marlene Dietrich's 'frilly knickers in *Blue Angel!* They sent us, you know'.

Some particularly tantalising shots involving legs and stocking tops feature in films starring his greatest favourite, Madeleine Carroll:

DH But [*Madeleine Carroll*] would sweep anybody off their feet, well she did us anyway.

Int Yeh. So that's from *The Kissing Cup's Race* [*reading off photo*].

DH And she'd got nice legs and, and I'll mention this [*laughs*] I hope I don't keep harping back to sex! But she did one film, and I can't even remember the name of it and it was before the Hays Code.



LILI DAMITA

PHOTO. PARAMOUNT

Lili Damita, from Denis Houlston's collection



Madeleine Carroll, from Denis Houlston's collection

*Int* Right.

*DH* And it was a period piece and it could've been something like Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

*Int* Mmm.

*DH* But she was getting ready to go out [*laughs*] in the evening with a long period dress and the cameraman shot it from the floor looking all the way up her legs!

*Int* Aah!

*DH* So you got a, this dress comes down [*indicates*] you know, like a tent [*laughs*] so it was a reversal of striptease really! And it actually, I can remember it now, it was quite beautiful really.

*Int* Mmm.

*DH* But em I suppose you could call it erotic but, I mean we'd never seen under a lady's dress before! [*Laughs*] As little schoolboys you know, and to get this shot of something, [*pause*] looking like that and then this dress slowly descends.



Madeleine Carroll and, aw I, I thought she was *beautiful*, and I've never forgotten her because she was in *The Thirty Nine Steps* with Robert Donat and she was handcuffed to him and as little school-

boys we, we were thrilled to bits that, at one stage, when they're in this crofter's cottage, bothy, she wants to take her stockings off and she's handcuffed so his hand is inches off her [pauses] *bare thigh* and we thought that was the height of daring. We, we went to see that film more than once. And I've seen it since on television [smiles] and I've waited for that to see, sort of, what was so exciting about it, but it was whole thing for t'males of course! But, the stocking tops.

Mr Houlston's adolescent fascination with these scenes clearly has a great deal to do with a play of concealment and revelation around the object of desire. The mention of curiosity about what lies beneath a lady's dress invites reference to Freud's essay on fetishism, in which the inquisitive boy's 'peer[ing] at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up'<sup>50</sup> is linked with his curiosity as to whether or not the woman possesses a penis. The psychical configuration of fetishism, which involves disavowal (simultaneous hanging onto and renouncing the belief that the woman has a penis) is what fuels the fetishist's perpetual fascination with what lies under the woman's skirt. The fetish, significantly, is grounded in looking, and in the conviction that seeing more will satisfy curiosity.

The fetishistic look, along with reverence for the fetish object, are regarded as key elements in the dynamics of various kinds of cinematic fascination, including preoccupation with the technology of cinema<sup>51</sup> and star worship. Mr Houlston's memory of being captivated by Marlene Dietrich in *Blue Angel* ('Oh those frilly knickers! ... we liked the legs of course. Legs Dietrich') calls to mind an iconic image from this 1930 film: a pose in which Dietrich displays naked thighs, stocking tops, suspenders and knickers. As Peter Baxter notes, contemporary commentary on *Blue Angel* (*New York Times* reviewer Bosley Crowther referred to 'the long legs, the bare thighs, the garters, the provocatively ornamented crotch') does indeed suggest that the play of concealment and revelation in the framing and presentation of Dietrich's body throughout the film is exactly what makes it so riveting. Baxter concludes: 'this pose arrests the instant of fetishisation, the instant before the child's glimpse of the female genital organ. Lola's leg tantalises by almost revealing that anatomic feature'.<sup>52</sup>

Mr Houlston's account is testament to one of the key pleasures of cinema, that of looking at the image on screen. As such it gives suggestive



Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*

ethnographic fleshing out to those theories of the relationship between spectator and screen which give centre stage to scopophilia, the drive to pleasurable looking.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the fact that his testimony is exceptional, and that accounts implying more diffusely somatic, sensual or affective engagements predominate in the testimonies of 1930s cinemagoers, indicates the limitations of the scope of such theories. So, too, does attention to the cultural and historical embeddedness of these engagements.

Mr Houlston implies that the feelings aroused by cinema were especially powerful in a climate of prohibition which, as in the 1930s, imposed a taboo on the very naming of, let alone action on, sexual feelings. This is particularly apparent in his repeated interjection of comments to the effect that he was at the time entirely innocent of the implications of his feelings: 'we didn't really know quite why it [one hour with you] was the height of bliss'; 'I stress it was very innocent'. Throughout his testimony, too, Mr Houlston interjects memories of films and stars that are not directly related to the scene he is discussing.



own and his contemporaries' daily lives. Punctuated by historical and sociological observations on courtship behaviour during the 1930s, his narration shuttles between past and present. His conclusion is that the cinema was in every respect the best place for courtship: 'Without cars and without our own flats and all the necessities of post-war youth we relied on cinemas for our courting parlour – warm, comfortable refuges from the cold winter elements outside'.<sup>54</sup>

He is at pains to insist on the difference of those times, and on the importance of understanding the very specific context of the events and the feelings he describes. In one long passage, he alludes again to the social significance of the picture house as a venue for courtship, mentioning the romantic atmosphere of the place – its warmth, comfort, cosiness. He then makes the connection between the 'girl at your side' and the adolescent boy's reveries about a favourite star. He gives an account of the heterotopic counterpoint between immersion ('you were lost') and consciousness of the 'real' world (the girl 'was nothing like Thelma Todd'). He then returns to the present with some observations on the sexual mores of the 1930s, and finally rounds things off with a comparison between past and present:

But, eh, so we had no money, we'd no car, we'd no groups, we had nothing, eh, so all you could ask from a girl, if you'd taken her to the pictures, taken to the Farnside and taken her to the balcony and that was it, they didn't even allow for Romeo; the balcony at the Farnside or the Kingsway or the Regal was the, eh, you know, gateway to Paradise as it were, but we'd nothing. So when you were courting, in the summer you'd, you went, we went in park shelters or something like that, em, you went all over the place but your best place, it's a cliché this, I know, and everybody laughs, but your main courting area was the back row of the cinema. Not for the lewd jokes that you get about it now [laughs] nor the innuendos but because you went there, you were in the back row if you were lucky [laughs] if you could beat somebody else to it, it was, it, you were seeing your film favourites, Thelma Todd, the girl at your side was nothing like Thelma Todd but that didn't worry you, you were in the warmth, it was comfortable, you'd got sweets, they went round with a tray with ice cream and all the rest of it on at the intervals, so it was a cosy atmosphere. So, for two hours you were lost with your girlfriend and you did your courting

there. Em, all very innocent of course, well reasonably innocent courting, em, obviously it didn't give you much scope for the greatest intimacy but there you were. I mean that was it, you accepted that, em, apart from which you couldn't indulge in the greatest intimacy anyway, even if you were in those rows, for two reasons. There was a sense of community then, which there isn't now, and if the girl got pregnant that was a disgrace on the community, particularly your street, on her family, on your family so that kept them, kept you both on the straight and narrow. Cause there was shame in those days. Now shame has inverted commas now. But there was shame in those days.

### Notes

1. 95-111-1, Margaret Houlgate, Hampshire, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 20 February 1995; 95-244-1, Margaret Ward, Buckinghamshire, to Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain, 31 May 1995.
2. T95-46, Freda McFarland, Bolton, 7 June 1995.
3. T95-87, Ashley Bird, Harrow, 12 July 1995; T95-34, Lois Basnett and Herbert Partington, Manchester, 30 May 1995.
4. T95-2, Helen Smeaton, Glasgow, 23 January 1995.
5. 92-36-9, Interviewer's fieldnotes, Helen Smeaton, Glasgow, 23 January 1995.
6. T95-155, Nancy Carrington and Nancy Prudhoe, Harrow, 30 April 1995.
7. T95-114, Peggy Kent, Hilda Green, Hilda Catchpol, Barbara Harvey and Gladys Kent, Suffolk, 18 October 1995.
8. Annette Kuhn, 'Cinemagoing in Britain in the 1930s: report of a questionnaire survey', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1999), pp. 531-543.
9. Michel Foucault, 'Other spaces: the principles of heterotopia', *Lotus*, vol. 48-49 (1986), pp. 9-17. The quotation is on p. 12.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
11. This was the last of a group of four cinemas designed by Edward A. Stone and built for Paramount: see David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (London: Architectural Press, 1980).
12. 95-164-1, 'The cinema in the thirties', Muriel Peck, Dorset, March 1995.
13. For example, 95-69-1, Mrs Fodden, Cardiff, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 9 February 1995; T95-37, Ellen Casey, Manchester, 31 May 1995.
14. 92-32-1, Alex Mawer, Glasgow, to Annette Kuhn, 30 April 1992.
15. T95-34, Lois Basnett and Herbert Partington, Manchester, 30 May 1995; 95-301-1, Mrs D.E. Cowles, Norfolk, to Stephen Peart, 7 September 1995.
16. T95-82, Nancy Carrington, Harrow, 7 July 1995 (also present Sue Nicholls of Harrow Housebound Readers Service).
17. T95-62, Jimmy Murray, Manchester, 9 May 1995.
18. T95-155, Nancy Carrington and Nancy Prudhoe, Harrow, 30 April 1995.
19. T95-148, Nancy Carrington, Harrow, 22 November 1995.

20. T95-104, Ashley Bird, Harrow, 26 July 1995.
21. 95-302-1, Mr E. Harvey, Norfolk, to Stephen Peart, n.d. 1995.
22. This is a quotation from C. Day Lewis's 1938 poem, 'Newsreel': '...this loving/Darkness a fur you can afford'.
23. 95-74-1, Molly Shaw, Gloucestershire, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 15 February 1995.
24. T95-2, Helen Smeaton, Glasgow, 23 January 1995.
25. T95-62, Jimmy Murray, Manchester, 9 May 1995.
26. 95-48-1, Brigadier J.B. Ryall, Sussex, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 8 February 1995.
27. 95-96-1, Bob Surtees, Gwent, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 6 February 1995.
28. Roland Barthes, 'Upon leaving the movie theater', *University Publishing*, no. 6 (1979), p. 3; Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the visible', in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St Martins Press, 1980), pp. 121-142.
29. *Vigilance Record*, November 1931, p. 41.
30. An intriguing piece of participant observation on this subject was conducted by A Mass-Observer in Bolton in 1938: see 'Outing with a girl stranger' in Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (eds) *Speak For Yourself: a Mass-Observation Anthology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. 39-41.
31. Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
32. T94-12, Thomas McGoran, Glasgow, 30 November 1994.
33. See William Farr, 'Analysis of questionnaire to adolescents 14-18 years', (London: British Film Institute, [1939]) Richard Ford, *Children in the Cinema* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939).
34. T95-33, Annie Wright, Manchester, 26 May 1995.
35. T95-82, Nancy Carrington, Harrow, 7 July 1995.
36. T95-148, Nancy Carrington, Harrow, 22 November 1995. Mrs Carrington is probably referring to the 1928 version of *Ramona*, directed by Edwin Carewe and starring Dolores del Rio and Warner Baxter. The film tells the story of the tragic romance of a young Indian chief and a 'half-breed' girl.
37. T95-153, Beatrice Cooper, Harrow, 27 November 1995; T95-116, Doreen Lyell, Suffolk, 19 October 1995; T95-113, E.J. Godbold, Suffolk, 17 October 1995.
38. T95-72, Helen Smeaton, Glasgow, 28 June 1995. Mrs Smeaton saw the 1937 remake of the Academy Award-winning 1927 Frank Borzage picture of the same title starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell.
39. 95-146-1, Emily Soper, Hampshire, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 13 February 1995. Jackie Stacey discusses similar forms of female identification in *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), Chapter 5.
40. T95-37, Ellen Casey, Manchester, 31 May 1995.
41. T95-35, Lois Basnett and Herbert Partington, Manchester, 30 May 1995.
42. 95-241-1, Mrs K. Scott, Yorkshire, to Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain, 4 June 1995; 95-60-1, Olive Johnson, West Midlands, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 14 February 1995.
43. 95-235, Questionnaire, Mrs M.W. Spicer, Sussex; 95-85-1, Clarice Squires, Gwent, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, n.d. 1995.
44. Mr Houlston was interviewed at his home on 26 April 1995 (transcripts T95-18,

T95-19, T95-20) and on 25 May 1995 (T95-29, T95-30). Interview material quoted here is from T95-18, T95-19 and T95-29. Other extracts from Mr Houlston's interviews are published in Annette Kuhn, 'Memories of cinema-going in the 1930s', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, no. 2 (1999), pp. 100-120; Sarah Street, *British Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000). Mr Houlston has donated his film memorabilia to the Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain project: items 95-34-23 to 95-34-32.

45. *The Love Parade* (Lubitsch, Paramount, 1929) stars Jeanette MacDonald in her screen debut, with Maurice Chevalier. It was nominated best film of the year by *Film Weekly* (27 December 1930). *One Hour With You* is the title of another Lubitsch film, released in 1933 and also starring MacDonald and Chevalier.

46. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 223.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 225. Altman here cites Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1974-75), pp. 39-47; and Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary signifier', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1975), pp. 14-76. See also Lucy Fischer, 'Shall we dance? women and the musical', in *Shot/Countershot* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

48. Nadine Wills, "'110 per cent woman": the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 121-41.

49. In Britain, *It Happened One Night* won Gable the Picturegoer Gold Medal for best performance of 1934, and was among *Picturegoer's* outstanding films of the year.

50. Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927), *The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 7: On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 354.

51. Metz, 'The Imaginary signifier', pp. 71-2.

52. Peter Baxter, 'On the naked thighs of Miss Dietrich', *Wide Angle*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1978), pp. 19-25. The quotation is on p. 25. Baxter quotes from Bosley Crowther's review of *Blue Angel*, reprinted in *The Great Films: Fifty Golden Years of Motion Pictures* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967).

53. For example, Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), Chapters 7 and 8; Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6-18.

54. 95-34-1, Denis Houlston, Manchester, to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold, 8 February 1995.