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# Reflections on Researching Cinema Memory and the (R)evolution of Digital Archiving

Annette Kuhn
*Queen Mary University of London, UK*

Dario Llinares
*Ravensbourne University, London, UK*

Sarah Neely
*University of Glasgow, UK*

## Abstract

Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain (CCINTB) is a pioneering inquiry into memories of 1930s cinemagoing conducted in the 1990s by Annette Kuhn. Its research design, incorporating questionnaire surveys and interviews involving male and female participants in various parts of Britain, has become a benchmark for methods of exploring everyday practices during a golden age of cinemagoing. CCINTB's successor project, Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive (led by Professor Richard Rushton), has facilitated the creation of an accessible online infrastructure that has opened up CCINTB's data and findings for further research possibilities. CMDA's co-Investigators Annette Kuhn and Sarah Neely spoke to Dario Llinares, host of the Cinematologists Podcast, about the scope and objectives of the two projects, reflecting on questions of methodology in historical audience research; on the uses and value of digital tools in gathering, recording, analysing and presenting the findings of this kind of investigation; on strategies for making these findings accessible for a range of users; and on the future of cinema memory.

**Keywords:** audiences, cinemagoing, digital archive, memory, film studies, oral history

Author contact: a.f.kuhn@qmul.ac.uk

## Introduction

Questions about the social functions and experiences of cinemagoing have often been at the periphery of concerns for film studies. But in the 1990s a major research project developed by Annette Kuhn offered a seminal inquiry into memories of 1930s cinemagoing. Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain (CCINTB) was based on extensive recruitment of participants and, using multiple semi-structured interviews, became a benchmark exploration of everyday practices during a golden era of cinemagoing. The research outcomes are documented in a range of publications, particularly in the key text *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2002). But the work also represents an evolution in methodology for historical audience research, deploying processes including interpretive sociology, ethnography and oral history.

Some three decades later, the original investigation and its wealth of data have become the focal point for a new project, a collaboration between Lancaster University, Queen Mary University of London and the University of Glasgow called Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive (CMDA). Based at Lancaster University under the direction of Professor Richard Rushton, CMDA has created the Cinema Memory Archive, an interactive digital archive which allows researchers, historians, interested academics from any discipline and members of the public to access all facets of the CCINTB data from anywhere in the world, alongside a physical archive housed in Lancaster University Library. Out of this infrastructure, and with a range of digital tools that present textual, visual and audial data, new research projects, creative outputs and public events have been stimulated.

For Dario Llinares the question of cinemagoing in the digital age has been a defining subject for discussion in many episodes of his Cinematologists Podcast (co-produced with Neil Fox). The depth of study and influence of the original project clearly offer, in their own right, a fascinating focus for discussion. This, combined with the development of the digital archive and its impact on film studies research methodology, opens up the potential to explore a range of other questions.

The following is a conversation between Dario Llinares, Annette Kuhn and Sarah Neely recorded in Summer 2022. It reflects on the contexts of both projects, on some of the themes and discourses emerging from the CCINTB interviews, on methodologies for historical audience research, and on the future study of past cinemagoing.

**Note:** The interviews referred to during the discussion can be accessed via the CMDA website: Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive – 1930s Britain & Beyond (lancaster.ac.uk). These, along with other Cinema Memory Archive assets, can also be consulted in physical form in the Cinema Memory Archive at Lancaster University, by appointment with Special Collections.

## Our Conversation

**Dario Llinares:** Perhaps we can start by going back to the origins of your collaboration and your individual interests, and then segue into how these fed into your current collaboration.

**Annette Kuhn:** The origin is research that began in the early 1990s when I was a lecturer in film studies at the University of Glasgow. I received a grant of £500 from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland to conduct a small, archive-based, inquiry into cinema culture and femininity in the 1930s. This, to cut a long story short, morphed into a much larger project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, called Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain (hereafter CCINTB). So cinema culture and femininity was the starting point of a research interest that I have been pursuing on and off over several decades—for a significant part of my working life, really.

**Sarah Neely:** I should probably say as well, Annette and I first started collaborating when I was doing research for a project with Laraine Porter at De Montfort University—a three-year project looking at Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound. For the project I was working with John Izod at Stirling University to study the topic in relation to Scotland.[1] I knew from Annette's book, *An Everyday Magic*, that there was a wealth of interview material underpinning her own project that related to the period we were researching and was curious about where it was and if there was anything we could consult. We put calls out to see if we could identify anyone from that period to interview but most had passed away by then. So I ended up contacting Annette, and that's how I first began consulting the CCINTB material held in Special Collections at Lancaster University Library—that's how that started. But I can go back even further because there's also a bit of a backstory. I was an exchange student at Glasgow in the 1990s, which was actually when Annette was conducting the research. I was thinking about it the other day because I had been talking to someone who I met as an exchange student at Glasgow and had also taken Annette's melodrama course. We were talking about that course and how great it was. At the time I was studying as an undergraduate at the University of Iowa and was really grateful for the amazing teachers that I had there, including Rick Altman and Dudley Andrew. But I was thinking about it the other day and the fact that the courses I was taking then were about the film *texts*—the first course that got me interested in studying film was Dudley Andrew's French Cinema course. But the melodrama course at Glasgow opened things up in a different way that I hadn't thought about—by looking at the reception and consumption of film and media texts.

**Kuhn:** It was in this area—melodrama—that some influential feminist work on the historical reception of films had been taking place. The course Sarah is referring to focussed largely on

[1] British Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound, AH/L013800/1. For further details see Porter and Brown (2018) and Neely and Vélez-Serna (2019).

Hollywood melodramas of a certain period—films like *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945)—with their intended female audience. Students on the course would inevitably ask how cinema audiences of the time, especially women, responded to these films. Contemporary evidence (such as reviews, film studios and exhibitors' marketing strategies and so on) could be informative, I would tell them; but the reactions of actual filmgoers could only be conjectured from these sources. Would it even be possible, fifty or sixty years on, to discover anything reliable about what cinema audiences had thought and felt about the films they went to see? Some empirical research with past female audiences had already been attempted, and I found this work both fascinating and inspiring. It also left some questions unanswered, I felt.[2] Could I perhaps do better? My early training as a sociologist led me to believe that I might be able to add something new in terms of methodological inventiveness and rigour. 'I'm going to have a go at this', I thought. The existing work was focussed on female filmgoers, hence the emphasis on femininity in the Carnegie project. CCINTB departed from this in including both male and female participants.

**Llinares**: I'm just trying to place the work in a lineage of academic disciplines. You're talking about sociology, but this is also cultural history and of course there's a film studies element to it as well, a counter to the poststructuralist/postmodernist approach to cultural analysis and cultural history. Was there a drive towards finding a method to unpack the complexities of personal memory coming from these contexts?

**Kuhn:** I don't think the idea of memory was seriously mooted at this point in relation to cinema. What was happening in the 1990s within film studies was very much a culturalist turn: this was about looking at film in people's lives, at the social and cultural contexts of their cinemagoing and so on; and it explains the reference to 'culture' in the titles of both the Carnegie-funded project and CCINTB. It was really only when the initial findings from CCINTB landed that the significance of the operation of memory became apparent in how informants spoke, in the way they framed those recollections as well as in the actual content of their recollections. So yes, at first the project was positioning itself much within the then culturalist turn in our disciplines. Then it morphed into something else.

**Llinares**: It's almost as if the social implications of cinema, as much as films themselves, were what was of interest to you as a researcher.

**Neely**: It was very exciting as a student when suddenly all of these other areas became relevant subjects of study. So yes, that was very exciting at the time—and still is. Annette mentioned bringing rigour to the kind of methodological approach being adopted, and I think that's something else that inspired me when I did finally make it into the archive and looked at all of the materials in the CCINTB collection. This was after having been involved in my own

[2] For a more detailed account, see Kuhn (2023a: 16-20).

academic research and doing interviews, something which is now a significant method in the area of film studies represented through associations like HoMER, the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception Network.[3] A lot of people are interested in furthering and developing the methods, and Annette's project is considered pioneering in its field because it did establish this kind of rigour in its approach to studying people's memories of cinemagoing.

**Llinares**: Absolutely. It's important to remind ourselves that we're now talking about two different projects: Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain, which started in the 1990s and is ongoing; and Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive (CMDA), which involves opening up and extending the findings of CCINTB through the construction of an interactive website and a Cinema Memory Archive taking both digital and physical forms—with all the implications of revisiting a piece of research where digital technology allows something new to come into view.[4] What was it about cinemagoing in the 1930s, though? Why that particular focus?

**Kuhn:** It's widely accepted by historians of cinema that the 1930s was *the* decade of popular cinemagoing, certainly in Britain. Interestingly, some social policy oriented research was carried out on the subject at the time—during the 1930s, that is. This was prompted in part by what we would now call a moral panic about the influence of cinema on children, and a number of pressure groups, public bodies and academics conducted small-scale inquiries.[5] It was common knowledge at the time that cinema audiences were huge—many people went to the cinema regularly, sometimes several times a week; and of course the 1930s was the decade of the new supercinemas, the Odeons and the Gaumonts. In that sense going to the cinema was then, as a number of CCINTB participants put it, *the* thing to do, the only thing, a big thing in people's lives, particularly in the lives of young people. So the 1930s was an obvious topic of investigation—and of course by the 1990s that generation of 1930s cinemagoers was not going to be around for very much longer.

**Llinares:** The CMDA website notes that CCINTB characterised itself as 'an ethnographic enquiry devoted to gathering data from surviving cinemagoers from the 1930s' and that the

[3] https://homernetwork.org.
[4] McDowell and Nissen (2021).
[5] These include: Birkenhead Vigilance Committee, *A Report of Investigations, June-October 1931* (Birkenhead: Birkenhead Vigilance Committee, 1931); Birmingham Cinema Inquiry Committee, *Report of Investigations, April 1930-May 1931* (Birmingham: Cinema Inquiry Committee, 1931); London County Council Education Committee, *School Children and the Cinema* (London: London County Council, 1932); John MacKie, *The Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry: Being an Investigation Conducted into the Influence of the Film on Schoolchildren and Adolescents in the City* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry Committee, 1933); J. Struthers, *Leisure Activities of Schoolchildren in a Middlesex Secondary (Mixed) School* (MA thesis, University of London, 1939); C. Cameron et al., *Disinherited Youth: a Survey, 1936-1939* (Fife: Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1943).

main data gathering took place between 1994 and 1996, with the project also drawing on a range of other source materials.[6]

**Kuhn:** The research design set out in the ESRC application involved interviews with surviving 1930s cinemagoers alongside primary research in 1930s sources, plus looking at some films. But this plan mutated somewhat once the project was underway. We reached out to potential interviewees through the usual means available at the time: announcements in local newspapers and in publications directed at pensioners, appearances on local radio and so on. This proved extremely effective—so effective in fact that we were overwhelmed with offers of assistance from people who were keen to be involved in the project. Because we had budgeted for a certain number of interviews, it was not possible to include everyone who wanted to take part. So I went cap in hand to the ESRC and asked if I could conduct a questionnaire survey as well. They were very stern about it but agreed in the end, though I don't think we received any extra funding. So our 1995 postal questionnaire survey wasn't in the original plan. As regards the interviews, it was decided to maximise resources by targeting four carefully chosen locations for the interview fieldwork, each representing a different kind of demographic: our home base of Glasgow, where we piloted the interviews, and then in England a rural area (East Anglia), a metropolitan suburb (Harrow) and an industrial conurbation (Greater Manchester).[7]

**Llinares**: So it was not a matter of completed questionnaires coming in and you thinking, 'This person answered these questionnaires really well or fully, let's get in contact'?

**Kuhn**: What would happen was that we'd publish the project's phone number and address. People could telephone us or, more likely, write a letter and put it in the post—as one did in those days! The project's Research Fellow, Valentina Bold, would then phone people and take them through a series of questions about themselves—year of birth, father's occupation, age at finishing full-time education, that sort of thing (all these records are in the Cinema Memory Archive). From this information and drawing on published data on the class composition of the population and the gender breakdown of the cinema audience during the 1930s, I drew up a roughly representative quota sample of interviewees in each of the four fieldwork locations. People who were not on that list were then sent questionnaires.

**Llinares:** How influential would you say this kind of method has been in subsequent projects of this kind?

[6] 'Research Design, Methods and Sources' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/index.php/history/research-design/ (Accessed: 21 July 2023).
[7] See also Kuhn (2002: 240-254).

**Neely:** It is certainly cited a lot. In fact part of the thinking behind Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive was to learn more from the research methods deployed in CCINTB. When I first looked through the materials gathered for CCINTB it was really interesting to see how everything was organised, as well as the methodological thinking about how you decide on who to interview, the approach, what kinds of questions you ask them, how you follow it up. And these are questions that still come up in discussion at HoMER conferences, for instance, or at the conference we held at Lancaster University in 2022.[8] It is worth mentioning that the CMDA website, which was built by CMDA's Senior Research Associate, Julia McDowell, features a timeline which gives a detailed year-by-year breakdown of the CCINTB project from 1991 through to 2018.[9] Also on the website there are links to pieces by Annette about the methodological approaches to the questionnaire survey and the interviews.[10] But the comparison between current funding for this kind of research—including my own applications for AHRC funding—and Annette's project and application for ESRC funding, one of the early projects getting funding in our field, has also interested me.

**Kuhn:** That's an interesting question because of course the Arts and Humanities Research Council didn't yet exist in the 1990s. If I wanted serious funding for Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain then the obvious place to go was the Economic and Social Research Council; though to my knowledge they'd never before, and I suspect have not since, funded any projects like CCINTB. However, aside from the small grant from the Carnegie Trust, I'd never previously applied for research money. In preparing the application I was fortunate to receive extremely helpful advice from Professor Philip Schlesinger, a media/communications academic, then at Stirling University, who had been highly successful in obtaining funding for his own projects and clearly knew how to write applications.[11] Philip gave me the lowdown on how to structure my application to the ESRC (this, by the way, is also on the website, on the CCINTB timeline). CCINTB—and therefore CMDA—owe a great deal to him.

**Llinares:** There's probably a research project to be done on the writing of research funding bids, isn't there? But coming back to the questionnaire survey, you said that the idea of doing this came after work on CCINTB had begun. I noticed from the CMDA website that there were actually a number of questionnaires—postal questionnaire, diagnostic questionnaire, Tarzan questionnaire, Snow White questionnaire—and I wonder if the project was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative inquiry. What were you after in those questionnaires?

[8] From Cinema Culture to Cinema Memory, Lancaster University, 6-8 April 2022.
[9] 'CCINTB Timeline' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/index.php/timeline/ (Accessed: 21 July 2023).
[10] Kuhn, 2020, 2021.
[11] For example, Philip Schlesinger's co-authored book *Women Viewing Violence* (1992) is based upon research commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Council.

**Kuhn:** The most important questionnaire is the one that was devised for the postal survey that I've mentioned. The other questionnaires in the CCINTB collection came to light when .our archivist, Annie Nissen, was accessing documents in the files and discovered that a number of different questionnaires and question sheets had been used by the Research Fellow in the course of the interview fieldwork. For example, when talking to care home residents she would hand out a question sheet that she had devised for her own records, asking for basic personal details ('diagnostic questionnaire'). But the postal questionnaire is the main one as far as the project's data gathering is concerned; and that was intended to be a quantitative exercise. The form was structured so that it could be coded and computer-analysed, and I subsequently wrote a paper drawing on the statistical data that were produced.[12] The other questionnaires were for our own use, basically to help us decide who to interview or to assist the Research Fellow with her fieldwork planning. The first ever 'questionnaire' is a single-sided question sheet that we now call the 'popular cinema questionnaire': I handed these out at a screening of popular films of the 1930s that I hosted at Glasgow Film Theatre in December 1992, well before CCINTB was planned. One or two of those who completed the popular cinema questionnaire later took part in CCINTB as interviewees.[13] All the various questionnaires are in the Cinema Memory Archive, and the postal questionnaires are also accessible and searchable through the CMDA website.

**Neely:** Another element that I found interesting when looking at the CCINTB collection was something I had never come across before: field notes compiled by Research Fellow Valentina Bold, who conducted all the interviews. She had a background in oral history methods, and so complemented Annette's expertise. She wrote or audiotaped field notes for many of the interviews, commenting on what had gone on. This was of interest to me, too, since I hadn't previously seen field notes used for interviews within a film studies context. For projects I'd been involved in, such as the one on the Highlands and Islands Film Guild, led by Ian Goode at the University of Glasgow,[14] as a team we would always discuss what had come up in our interviews, but none of this was minuted or recorded in any formal way, and I think the CCINTB field notes are an amazing, and quite unique, resource in this respect.

**Llinares:** You mention that the Research Fellow brought an oral history expertise to CCINTB, and I understand that there are established protocols for oral history interviewing—the dos and don'ts of interviewing and suchlike. But just listening to the interviews I get the impression that Valentina brought something special to the task. She seems to have a very

[12] Kuhn, 1999.
[13] 'Glasgow Film Theatre Workshop (GF-92-000)' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/participant_detail.php?fileRef=GF-92-000 (Accessed: 21 July 2023).
[14] The Major Minor Cinema: the Highlands and Islands Film Guild (1946-71), AH/N001605/1. For further details, see Goode *et al.* (2020).

empathic voice and shows genuine interest, no matter what level of detail or what direction the speaker goes into. The interviews are semi-structured, so there is a subtle steer given here and there. But there is a really genuine ability to draw out interesting nuggets of information from the interviewee. Would you like to say something about the Research Fellow's contribution to the project?

**Kuhn:** There was indeed an interview schedule—or rather a checklist. All the topics on it, which were carefully considered and piloted, needed to be covered, and there was a rough order to them as well. The conversation would always begin with a question about the interviewee's earliest memory of cinema, and this would kick things off nicely. Part of Valentina's skill lay in making the interviewer feel free to pursue their own lines of thought, while always being sure to cover all the elements in the interview schedule.[15] So it didn't feel as though it was, 'The next question is…' Also she was quite young—in her twenties—and not a film historian. People were not intimidated by her, and rapport was usually readily established. Many interviewees in fact thought she was a student, which made them feel relaxed rather than overawed by the idea of somebody coming from a university to talk to them.

**Llinares:** The interviewees also seem very ready to talk about film. One of the things that comes across is a readiness to talk about their lives in relation to their cinemagoing. There is an awful lot of actual film criticism going on in many ways as well. It's like, 'Oh this person was a great actor because of this, this and this', or even, 'I like this star for these reasons'. Fascinating stuff.

**Kuhn:** I guess the other thing from the project that is something to learn from is the fact a relationship with participants is continued. It wasn't just going in and doing one interview and that was it. It was a matter of building a relationship. I think you can hear this in the return interviews.

**Llinares:** How did that take place, then?

**Kuhn:** Everybody was interviewed at least twice. Actually, there may be one or two people we didn't get to for a second interview, but everyone among the core group of informants was interviewed more than once. The Research Fellow's field notes fed into her reports on each fieldwork location. She observes, for example, that in the first interview there is usually a great deal informants want to say—and that they are keen to get it all said and recorded. By the time the interviewer returns a few weeks later, they have had time to think a bit more. It's in the second interview that you hear a more reflective tone, and there's usually a greater depth to the encounter on that second occasion. So having more than just one interview was

[15] For the interview schedule see Kuhn (2002: 244).

crucial in establishing a kind of relationship and a rapport—which seems to have been successful in virtually every case.

**Llinares:** Absolutely. As an example perhaps we can consider Glasgow interviewee (and former cinema usherette) Sheila McWhinnie's recollections of cinemagoing as part of her daily life in the Gorbals, a deprived area of Glasgow, and also of her relationship with her mother:

> **Interviewer**: Right. I was quite interested as well in, when you said that about being brought up in the Gorbals, and what the film meant to you.
>
> **Sheila McWhinnie**: It meant a lot… There was only two outlets in the Gorbals. One was the cinema, and the people lived in them. I mean, it was quite common for people to live in a single apartment. Luckily we didn't. We had a room and kitchen. But there was seven of us. And the only outlet they could get was the cinema. They were very cheap and there was one on every corner. I could name all the cinemas to you that was in the Gorbals. There was practically one on every corner, so people lived in them, they really did. The kids went in for a penny, when the matinees were on they cadged money for them. I've never yet though found the jam jars, for all the cinemas I've worked in! Never been [laughs] anywhere you could sell the jam jars! Never, ever! I think that's a tall tale. But, eh, there was that and the wee dance halls on the corners when they got up to teenagers, and that was it. There was nothing, there was no money for anything else, and people did live. As I say, my mother used to go into the cinema and it used to carry her away. When she went back into the house, she was in an absolute foul mood! [laughs] Because she was back into reality, you know? But it was, eh, you wonder how we did because it was really from when you were a kid. Because we were desperately poor in the Gorbals, tuberculosis was rife. You would be playing with pals who looked hale and hearty, and the next minute they would disappear, you wouldn't see them, and where we stayed in Camden Street….where we stayed the whole close was Lithuanians, that came over from Lithuania, and I don't know whether they felt this was a stigma, but they never seemed to take them to the hospital, they just stayed in the house till they died. So you would be playing in the house for one minute, with your pal, and you wouldn't see them for months and then they'd be dead. It was really dreadful, it really was. It was really rife, it really was. And it was a big thing if a kid died, if a kid died it became like a party! That was the only time you got into the house! Soon as a kid died it was, "Come on, you'll get in and see her!" So you went in to see this wee kid in its coffin, you know, somebody you'd played with.

> **Interviewer**: It's hard to imagine now, when you say that. You were saying that your mother was in a foul mood sometimes, when she came back in?
>
> **Sheila McWhinnie:** [laughs] Back to reality.
>
> **Interviewer**: Were the cinemas quite grand then in the Gorbals?
>
> **Sheila McWhinnie:** They were a lot grander than the houses, but they weren't grand. There would be carpets on the floors and things like that that you wouldn't have; it was linoleum, you know? They weren't, in the city they were pretty, I was telling [daughter] Tricia there, in the city, there was always a restaurant, of course, and you could order a meal and it was brought down to where you were sitting in the cinema, in the Regal. And she said, "Oh, I'd like that" and I said, "Oh, I didn't know they didn't still, that they'd stopped that". I thought it was still going on!
>
> **Interviewer**: Is that right? So were there tables in them, then?
>
> **Sheila McWhinnie:** In the La Scala, I didn't know where that is now, it was based in the Savoy Centre, there was a part where you could sit, there was a restaurant part. It was an awful nuisance because there was dings of china and everything at that. You could sit in this half and watch the cinema, and this half was just the seats. But in the Regal, in your ordinary seat you could order up a meal and it was brought into your ordinary seat, so you could sit and eat your meal in the seat. That was in the Regal.[16]

**Llinares:** There is so much to draw out from that, I feel. On the one hand there are questions about how many cinemas there were in her neighbourhood and just how going to the cinema was the main escape route or the main leisure activity that was available at the time. And it also relates to issues that are still talked about today—poverty, immigration and so on. We talk about the film industry today post-Covid, and about how cinemas can lure people out of their homes by offering at-seat service, say. We think that's a new thing, but it was obviously going on in the 1930s. Is there anything in this that relates to some of the wider issues you came across in the research?

[16] Sheila McWhinnie. Participant interview, Glasgow, 21 November 1994. SM-92-004AT001, Cinema Memory Archive, Lancaster University Library Special Collections. For details of this participant, see 'Sheila McWhinnie (SM-92-004)' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/participant_detail.php?fileRef=SM-92-004 (Accessed: 25 July 2023).

**Neely:** You're right, it's such a rich extract in the way that you hear her talking about the different emotions experienced: talking about the pleasurable experience of going to the cinema but then also talking about kids dying around her of tuberculosis. How do you negotiate that as an interviewer, but also how do you engage with that as a researcher, how do you make sense of that? This comes up a lot in this kind of research. There's so much more than just the memory of a film. But another thing I am struck by is the different types of spaces that are being mapped out. You have the geography of where she lived, as well as the spaces of the cinema and the way she remembers them, her memory of that space. Something else that really interests me about CCINTB is the space of the interview itself: being in the space of the interview, and also Valentina's relationship with the interviewee as part of that. Suzy Angus, the sound artist on the CMDA team, made a number of audio vignettes which draw together extracts from the interviews. One of these is about the service of tea and cakes at La Scala, the cinema in Sauchiehall Street that Mrs McWhinnie mentions. We devised an audio walking tour of some of Glasgow's cinema sites, and La Scala was part of that. What comes across in a lot of the interviews is the luxurious experience on offer at the time in some of the cinemas—including La Scala: the sense of it being a special night out.

**Llinares:** This is key because when we use the word escapism and attach it to cinema we tend to think about escaping into the universe of the film world, let's say. This has obviously been written about an awful lot. But just as much, and maybe even more so, what the interviewees are talking about is escaping into their surroundings, the physical environment of the cinema, as much as into a different kind of consciousness: 'Oh here are the film stars, I want to be in their world'. It's as if going into the building and having that leisure time constitutes a break from the physical surroundings they live in day to day.

**Neely:** And it's that dichotomy between it being a unique, special, thing while also being very ordinary and everyday. So Mrs McWhinnie talks about how they 'lived in' the cinema, that there was a cinema on every corner, and it was so cheap that they would go there at every opportunity.

**Kuhn:** There's a distinction between the way people talk about what you might call 'cinema in the world' as against the 'world in the cinema'. Quite a lot of the memory talk in the interviews is about the passage from the one world to the other, and back.[17]

**Llinares:** As the starting point of the project, and in terms of the city space, Glasgow was key, a city that was defined by its cinemas and its culture of cinemagoing.

[17] Annette Kuhn, 2023b.

**Kuhn:** If you go to the website and navigate to the Glasgow home page you'll find a link to a list of all the cinemas mentioned by the Glasgow interviewees.[18] It adds up to something like a hundred—many, many cinemas. Of course, most of them no longer exist. Nonetheless it's part of its story about itself that Glasgow was a 'movie-mad city'.

**Neely:** And it's still hanging on with the remnants of its cinema history, just barely. That's what we found when we did the audio walking tour: just how quickly things are being lost. As I was making preparations to go to Glasgow's East End to look at some of the cinema sites there, I discovered that some of the cinemas that had been converted to bingo halls around the 1960s are now luxury apartments! But we are fortunate that the Glasgow Film Theatre, which was known as the Cosmo when it opened in the 1930s, is still very much in business. La Scala, just around the corner in Sauchiehall Street, is now a branch of Waterstones Books; but the old façade remains. The nearby Regal cinema was very severely damaged in the 2018 Glasgow School of Art fire and might have to be demolished.

**Kuhn:** We found nine cinema sites in and around Sauchiehall Street in the centre of Glasgow. Our audio tour of these is available on the CMDA website.[19]

**Llinares:** Can we talk a bit about the idea of cultural memory and the meanings and feelings of the past that emerge through the interviews? There's a passage in an interview of Beatrice Cooper, a Harrow participant, where she's talking about stardom. Something seems to repeat itself is reflection on what the stars meant to the participants. It comes across as akin to the fandom we talk about today, but there is something personal and deeply felt, as in this example:

> **Beatrice Cooper:** And a Russian film. I remember seeing, called *Road to Life*. Now it's interesting about that film 'cause I've never, apart from once before the war, it was shown at the Everyman. That film, I'd give anything to see again. Eh, if it's even half as impressive as I remember it, I'd love to see it again. It's probably destroyed or something. But it was absolutely wonderful. It was, I remember so, so, I mean I can't remember films that I saw yesterday. But … it was erm, just after the Revolution. And so many of the children, you know, sort of wandering around. Orphans and eh, they were vagrants. And this marvellous man who rounded them all up and eh, created a school for them. Uh! It was a wonderful film. I, I would love to see it again. Erm, then, yes, then

[18] 'Glasgow' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/index.php/ccintb-places/glasgow/ (Accessed: 21 July 2023).
[19] 'Glasgow Audio Works' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/index.php/glasgow-audio-works/ (Accessed: 21 July 2023).

we moved to Hendon. And the Ambassador at Hendon. It's now the, oh what is it? Is it Cannon or something now? Erm, I don't know. Anyway, it used to be the Ambassador and it played a very large part in my life. And there, oh gosh! I used to play truant. And see things like *The Constant Nymph*. With Victoria Hopper. Eh, was it John, John, no, it was, was it Noel Coward? No. Oh, John Gielgud! John Gielgud. Do you know?

**Interviewer**: I don't, I've heard of the film. I've not seen it.

**Beatrice Cooper**: *The Constant Nymph*. Victoria Hopper. John Gielgud. I believe it was John Gielgud. Anyway, it was most impressive. To me, at that age. Erm, then, things like *Mrs Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. Why I remember that. Gosh! [laughs] I think it was Fay Bainter. Erm, and *Little Women*, of course, with Katharine Hepburn. And then a film which I've never seen since eh, and the young actress that was contemporary with me at that time, eh, English actress called Nova Pilbeam. Have you heard of her?

**Interviewer**: I have, yes.

**Beatrice Cooper**: Right. Now she, I thought she was wonderful. Eh, she was in a film that was directed by Berthold Viertel. Who came from, well, he was originally, I think, Austrian. Erm, and he and his wife Salka Viertel were a notorious couple. They went to Hollywood during, I think before, the war. Because erm, of Hitler and eh the Nazis. And there was a period when he came to England. And *Little Friend* I think was one of the first films he directed here. And erm, it was, I thought, well, at that time I was thirteen, fourteen. I was terribly impressed by it. She was brilliant in it. She was about the same age. And eh, she made just a few more films. But fizzled out. You know. She didn't make much of a career in films after that. And I always felt sorry about that. Erm, I'd like to know what's happened to, to that film. *Little Friend*. Must've been well directed 'cause he was a, I think, a brilliant director. Erm, then I remember, yes, when I was about ten, at that cinema, seeing a film called, an American film called *Divine Love*. Now, I don't know who was in it, but it stuck in my memory. And I'd give anything to know who was in it. It was a very dramatic film and so sad. Uh! I cried buckets for that. Erm, *Divine Love*, yes. And I remember in the same programme *Puss in Boots* [possibly referring to *Puss in Boots*, 1931]. Isn't it funny the things you do remember? Erm, which was awful. It was an English, ghastly thing. [laughs] But *Divine Love* was brilliant, and I've never seen any sign of it since. Erm, and then I began to become, yes, when I was about twelve or thirteen I saw Garbo in *Queen Christina*. And I was devastated. Dazzled. And since then I've become a Garbo

> fan. I'm very much into Garbo and her life and all her films. I don't know! There was something about that woman that was very appealing and fascinating and I suppose, to women mainly, she was a little bit androgynous. [laughs] You can say a little bit. Erm, but there was something about her that fascinated me. And erm, I must've seen *Queen Christina* seven times, at least. I saw all her films. Right. Erm, saw *King Kong*. I saw *Our Betters* with Constance Bennett. I saw *The Old Curiosity Shop*. With a girl, young girl called Elaine Benson. *David Copperfield*. *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. You know, that was the time of Korda. Marvellous films.[20]

**Llinares:** There is definitely something interesting here about identification with women and maybe more than that below the surface because of the way she talks about Garbo.

**Neely:** It also makes me think of how important listening to the interview is, especially to be able to hear the audio as well as read the transcript. There's definitely something to be said about that, the way in which the memory is articulated.

**Kuhn:** Mrs Cooper was the most cosmopolitan of our informants. She lived in Harrow and a favourite film of hers was the Soviet one mentioned at the beginning of the extract. Elsewhere in the interview she recalls seeing Nova Pilbeam on a local train. In fact a number of the British film stars lived in Harrow—Jessie Matthews and Sonnie Hale, for instance—and people might well come across them in real life.

**Llinares:** Did you get the sense that across the responses there are different class identities being expressed, and do these correspond with people's film and star preferences? You said that Mrs Cooper is cosmopolitan in her tastes, and there's a fan element to that and a star preference element as well. There's also a kind of intellectualisation of her experiences. You definitely get that with the working-class informants too. But here it is more of a kind of objective look: this is what the film is about, and this is what it means, and this is why it's good. Whereas with the working-class informants, or the ones that I've heard, there seems to be much more of a sense of how this reflected or related to their own experiences. Does that make sense? How do you think these class elements come out within the research?

**Kuhn:** I think it's about who you like and, when pressed, why you like this or that star, why you like this or that kind of film. Some interviewees couldn't really explain their preferences, though. It's not only class but also where people grew up. In Glasgow and East Anglia, for

[20] Beatrice Cooper. Participant interview, Harrow, Middlesex 20 July 1995. BC-95-208AT001, Cinema Memory Archive, Lancaster University Library Special Collections. For details of this participant, see 'Beatrice Cooper (BC-95-208)' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/participant_detail.php?fileRef=BC-95-208 (Accessed: 25 July 23).

example, we found expressions of a similar kind of fandom. Astaire and Rogers and their films are often enthusiastically mentioned as favourites in both Glasgow and Norfolk. Pressed to explain this, people would say something like, 'They made you want to dance', or 'We'd love a Fred and Ginger film 'cos we danced all the way home'.

**Neely:** With Beatrice Cooper, her interview is unusual in its allusions to political events of the time—the Russian Revolution, émigré filmmakers escaping to Britain and the USA from Nazi Germany.

**Kuhn:** It's very unusual to remember that sort of detail—and indeed to recollect the titles of so many films.[21]

**Neely:** One of the things that the clip also made me think of is the process of memory as she runs through her list of films. What seems to come across in a lot of interviews is a pleasure in trying to remember, or in being reminded of, the titles of films.

**Kuhn:** For CMDA I have had the job of going through the interview transcripts in detail in order to prepare them for being audio-synced for the website. Often an informant will say, 'Oh, this film has so-and-so in it, I can't remember what it was called'. My task was to delve into my knowledge of film history or do a bit of research in order to pinpoint the title of the film that's being referred to. It has sometimes felt as if I am having little conversations with these interesting people who are no longer with us.

**Neely:** There are some joint and group interviews where you have a married couple, say, who share memories of decades of going to the cinema together. For them part of the pleasure of taking part in the interview can be about recollecting that time and trying to recall things such as where they saw the film, and when.

**Llinares:** Is the very idea of cultural memory fundamentally changing, I wonder, now that everything is on our phones and we don't actually have to commit anything to memory? People who are defined by early twentieth-century modernity rather than by late modernity or postmodernity have very particular ways of being able to remember cultural experiences, ways that perhaps wouldn't have been possible before cinema came along. That's not going to happen again because we now have these electronic devices that remember everything for us.

**Kuhn:** I think so. Some of the CCINTB interviewees mention that they sometimes watched 1930s films on television or via video. But of course they wouldn't have been able to do this

[21] On this question see Dibeltulo and Treveri Gennari, 2023.

until the 1960s or 1970s. This—the technologies and platforms of media delivery and their social uses and impacts—is another aspect of remembering, or of not remembering.

**Llinares:** As well as the interviews, questionnaires, letters and so on there are items of film memorabilia such as film star postcards, autographed photos and scrapbooks in the CCINTB collection.

**Kuhn:** This is something else that wasn't originally planned but has turned out to be quite valuable. Much of this material was donated by CCINTB informants. There was no prior intention to create a physical archive, but an interviewee might say, 'I just want [my film memorabilia] to go somewhere where they can still be of some use, you know. Because…I've got no family and nobody is interested in them anymore'.[22] So we have accumulated a decent collection of postcards, scrapbooks, magazines, diaries. We were recently loaned a set of diaries from the 1930s by a lady whose aunt, an avid cinemagoer in Bolton in Greater Manchester in the thirties, had recorded all of her cinema visits.[23] Some of these memorabilia are displayed on the CMDA website.[24] It's perhaps also worth mentioning that each of our core informants has their own homepage where there are links to their interviews, correspondence and so on, as well as to any memorabilia they might have donated.

**Llinares:** Perhaps this is a good moment to talk about the process of constructing the CMDA digital archive and the website. You have all this material from the 1990s and now there are digital technologies which allow you to make the material accessible. How did you go about creating a website to showcase your research and its findings?

**Neely:** And of course it isn't just the materials themselves but all the methodological underpinnings that we felt would be important to revisit and look at in the context of post-1990s development in the fields of film studies in general and cinemagoing history in particular.

[22] Doreen Lyell. Participant interview, Lowestoft, Norfolk, 19 October 1995. DL-95-216AT001, Cinema Memory Archive, Lancaster University Library Special Collections. For details of this participant, see 'Doreen Lyell (DL-95-216)' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/participant_detail.php?fileRef=DL-95-216 (Accessed: 26 July 2023).
[23] For details of this participant and link to transcript of diary entries (KS-22-004PW002), see 'Kathleen Southworth (KS-22-004)' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/participant_detail.php?fileRef=KS-22-004 (Accessed: 26 July 2023).
[24] 'Memorabilia' in Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive: 1930s Britain and Beyond. https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/cmda/index.php/memorabilia-updated/ (Accessed: 21 July 2023).

**Kuhn:** It's perhaps worth mentioning that CCINTB was something of a pioneer in the Humanities in its deployment of digital tools. For example, a Filemaker Pro database was created and maintained in the 1990s: everything informant-related that was gathered in the course of the inquiry (correspondence, question sheets, field notes, audiotapes, interview transcripts, donations and so on) was listed and given an accession identifier. CMDA's highly tech-savvy Research Associate Jamie Terrill succeeded in retrieving all these data, and the old Filemaker database is now part of the digital archive. More significantly, perhaps, CCINTB was an early adopter—indeed possibly the first film studies user—of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (QDA). An application then called NUD*IST (now nVIVO) was used to code and qualitatively analyse the interview transcripts.[25] The plan was for CMDA to do more of that, but this has not happened. It's still there to be done.

**Neely:** And unfortunately, unlike the Filemaker Pro database, we have not been able to digitally retrieve the CCINTB NUD*IST files and searches or feed them into the current version of the QDA software.

**Llinares:** Would you say then that CMDA is a contribution to or development in the field of Digital Humanities, or is the project more about archiving methods? Or is it perhaps both these things?

**Kuhn:** It does of course have the basic objective of just making the material accessible in a digital as well as a physical form. We're also hoping to do something more with it….

**Neely:** That's what our outreach and public engagement programmes are about: not only widening the CCINTB collection's accessibility—for the public as well as for researchers—but also exploring different ways it can be engaged with by different sorts of users. This was part of the idea behind our artists-in-residence initiative—we wanted to see which aspects of the collection creative artists in various media would be inspired by. We also drew on the materials in the collection for a series of creative writing workshops for students, women's groups and attendees at our 2022 conference. These aspects of the CMDA project were obviously constrained by the pandemic. For example, only one of the four artists in residence—the writer Louise Welsh—was able to visit Lancaster and spend time in the physical collection. Louise wrote a story based on memories of the Glasgow cinema, La Scala, that we talked about earlier. We had a filmmaker, Marissa Keating, who made a short film about Thomas McGoran, a CCINTB interviewee who had spent part of his working life as a cinema projectionist and developed a considerable artistic talent in his retirement. The academic and digital artist Catherine Grant made a videographic essay about cinema organists. I co-edited a special issue of LUNE, Lancaster University's journal of creative writing,

[25] Kuhn, 1995.

which features Louise Welsh's short story, *La Scala Sauchiehall Street*, along with a selection of pieces arising from the writing workshops (Welsh 2023).

**Kuhn:** We'd hoped that people would use the website and the archive in teaching as well—for courses on archive management and research methods as well as on social history, cinemagoing history and so on.

**Neely:** I have already used some of the audio for teaching, and it is interesting to find students thinking that cinemagoing is something that's reserved for the wealthy. It can be quite eye-opening for them to discover that at one time everybody, rich and poor alike, used to go to the cinema.

**Llinares:** When I'm talking to the students they say, 'Well, now everything's streaming, and a cinema ticket costs ten quid, and I can't afford it'.

**Neely:** So cinemagoing today—if you can actually call it 'going'—is a totally different experience from what it was in the 1930s.

**Llinares:** Absolutely. Maybe we can finish on that point and think about the value of your project in understanding cultural memory. A final question, then: as we move further away from the twentieth century, away from what we might call the era of cinema, what do you feel a project like CMDA has to offer in terms of thinking about the future of media and cinema?

**Kuhn:** Something that particularly interests me are the psychosocial implications of changes in the ways media in general, and cinema in particular, figure in cultural experience. The findings of CCINTB suggest that for the 1930s generation cinemagoing played a significant role in processes of individuation—how the child gradually separates itself from the world of home and mother/caregiver and engages with the world beyond the home. This is exactly how some of the CCINTB interviewees talk about their earliest visits to the cinema: these, they might say, took place when we were very young, and we would walk to the cinema with children of our own age or even on our own. There was 'a picture house on every corner', and the details of the walk to the neighbourhood cinema—street names, landmarks—are often vividly recollected. There is a sense in these recollections that the cinema—the 'cinema in the world'—felt like an extension of home while at the same time being not-home. It is interesting to reflect on possible future iterations of remembered early engagements with media. How will past cultural experiences be recollected in years to come? People are no longer easing themselves into the world outside home by physically going somewhere else—albeit somewhere familiar and that feels as safe as home—for their media experiences. The cultural experience comes to them. What kind of separation—individuation takes place here, then, and what are the mental processes involved? We can only speculate, of course, but it is

fascinating to think about this in relation to changes in the meanings and the uses of media over time and for different generations.[26]

**Llinares:** That's fascinating. Anything to sum up for you, Sarah?

**Neely:** It goes back to what Annette notes in *An Everyday Magic:* it's not just *what* people remember; it's *how* people remember. This is something I always come back to.

## Biographical Notes

Annette Kuhn is Emeritus Professor in Film Studies at Queen Mary University of London, a Fellow of the British Academy and a Member of the European Academy. She was Director of Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain and is co-Investigator of Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive. Research interests include film history, cultural memory, and object-relations psychoanalysis and film theory. Her books include *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995), *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2002), *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience* (2013) and *Exploring Cinema Memory* (2023).

Contact: a.f.kuhn@qmul.ac.uk

Dario Llinares is an academic and podcaster whose research has focused on a range of cinema and media-related themes. His doctoral thesis explored the cultural representation of the astronaut in literature, journalism, photography and film; and he has published research on the status and practice of cinemagoing in the digital age, on the aesthetics of postmodern film, on representations of masculinity in prison cinema and on podcasting as a media technology. He is co-founder and co-host of the highly respected *Cinematologists Podcast* and *The Podcast Studies Podcast* and co-editor of *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media* (2018).

Contact: dariodoublel@gmail.com

Sarah Neely is Professor of Film and Visual Culture at the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses largely on the areas of film history, artists' moving image and film archives. Her publications include *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait - Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (2016); and, as editor, *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings* (2012), *Reel to Rattling Reel: Stories and poems about memories of cinemagoing* (2018), and Margaret Tait's *Personae* (2020). She is co-Investigator on Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive.

Contact: sarah.neely@glasgow.ac.uk

[26] Kuhn, 2013, 2023c.

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## Filmography

*The Constant Nymph* (Basil Dean, 1933)
*David Copperfield* (George Cukor, 1935)
*Divine Love* (Lewis Seller, 1932)
*King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933)
*Little Friend* (Berthold Viertel, 1934)
*Little Women* (George Cukor, 1933)
*Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945)
*Mrs Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (Norman Taurog, 1934)
*The Old Curiosity Shop* (Thomas Bentley, 1934)
*Our Betters* (George Cukor, 1933)
*The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933)
*Puss in Boots* (M.J. Weisfeldt, 1931)
*Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933)
*Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)
*The Road to Life* (Nikolai Ekk, 1931)