Introduction: Screen Londons

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Our aim, in editing the 'London Issue' of this journal, is to contribute to a conversation between scholars of British cinema and television, London historians and scholars of the cinematic city. In 2007, introducing the themed issue on 'Space and Place in British Cinema and Television', Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley observed that it would have been possible to fill the whole journal with essays about the representation of London. This issue does just that, responding to the increased interest in cinematic and, to a lesser extent, televisual, Londons, while also demonstrating the continuing fertility of the paradigms of 'space and place' for scholars of the moving image[1]. It includes a wide range of approaches to the topic of London on screen, with varying attention to British institutions of the moving image – such as Channel Four or the British Board of Film Classification – as well as to concepts such as genre, narration and memory. As a whole, the issue, through its juxtapositions of method and approach, shows something of the complexity of encounters between the terms 'London', 'cinema' and 'television' within British film and television studies.

In contrast to the historical and national focus of much work on British film and television, the work on the cinematic city has always had international ambitions, and its temporality has inclined towards the grand gestures of 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'[2]. This is a literature in which, until recently, London has been mainly absent, featuring most frequently in relation to postwar British planning documentaries and 'Swinging London' (which means mainly *Blow-Up* (1966))[3]. While there has long been discussion of literary Londons, there has been a tendency among scholars of the cinematic city to regard London as less worthy of attention than Paris, Berlin, New York and Los Angeles[4]. There is no single London film which is

congruent with, and expressive of, the cinema/modernism/modernity paradigm, except, arguably, *Blow-Up* and, paradoxically, at the end of the twentieth century, Patrick Keiller's justly fêted, melancholic *London*, (1994). So London does not figure in any straightforward way in the cinema/city canon. This absence can and has been variously attributed to the instabilities of the British industry, what are often seen as the inadequacies of its films and film-makers, and the particular qualities of the city itself. As Chris Petit, himself a notable contributor (alone, and with Iain Sinclair) to ideas of cinematic London put it: 'London has been more ill-than well-served by cinema' (2008: 226).

Scholarly attention to screen Londons began to increase after the flourishing of British films – many supported by television – in the 1980s. Here, the inaugural and symptomatic film is the Stephen Frears/Hanif Kureishi collaboration, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), but films emerging from the workshop sector, such as Isaac Julien's *Territories* (Sankofa, 1984) and Reece Auguiste's *Twilight City* (Black Audio Film Collective, 1989), as well as films such as Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) from what Peter Wollen (1993) called 'the last new wave', also played an important part in the re-imagination of London at the end of the twentieth century. In these films, London becomes a crucible for a consideration of the state of the nation, and the way in which city settings permit chance encounters is exploited to explore the new contingencies and propinquities of a post-imperial multicultural London. It is this London, in these films, which finds its way into the city/cinema literature and broader, non-screen-based disciplinary discussions of 'cultural hybridity' and 'postcolonial' cities[5].

Films such as Keiller's *London*, Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993) and Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* (1997) led John Orr to argue that the 1990s had seen a renaissance of London as cinematic city, one marked by a 'neo-Dickensian' aesthetic and the development of a 'post-Bazinian' realism (2002). Robert Murphy too has addressed *fin-de-siècle* London, choosing 1990s romantic comedies such as *Notting Hill* (1999), *Martha – Meet Frank, Daniel and Laurence* (1999) and *This Year's Love* (1999) to argue instead that the post-Thatcher 1990s are marked by 'a yearning for social cohesion' manifest in these urban fairy-tales. *Notting Hill*, paired sometimes with other 'yuppie' films such as *Sliding Doors* (1998), sometimes with 'lower depths' films such as *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), has figured in several discussions which explore London as a world or global city (Dave 2006; Drummond 2005; Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003; Martin-Jones 2006). The creation of the London Film Commission in 1995 (which became Film London in 2003) marked the recognition, not only that there was employment to be gained and

money made from filming London, but also that the international circulation of city images is a significant part of global flows of tourism and capital.[6] For London, reinventing itself as a key financial centre, with the deregulation of the Stock Exchange in 1986 ('Big Bang') and building over its imperial history – the London Docks – with its new financial skyscrapers in Docklands, image was particularly important, as the 'Cool Britannia' episode suggests.[7] For who would want to deal in electronic money in a Victorian city shrouded in fog? Whether films such as *Closer* (2004) and *Match Point* (2005) have succeeded in producing an updated and attractive destination for the industries associated with finance capital, and what will remain of this workforce after the unfolding financial turmoil of 2008–9, is currently unclear.

We want to look at screen Londons from a slightly different angle, to suggest that the dominating shape of the city/cinema/modernity paradigm is inadequate to an historical understanding of the complexity of London as a cinematic and televisual city. This requires, firstly, a return to the Victorian city, as it was originally filmed and as it persists, with streets both monumental and mean, but also to how it circulates and is recreated internationally on film sets from Berlin to Los Angeles. As a world of 'toffs and crims' (whether Victorian or earlier, as exemplified from *Piccadilly* (1929) to *The Libertine* (2005)) is so persistent within the London image economy, it demands the investigation of the specific impact of particular aspects of the moving image industries in relation to the circulation of those internationally resonant images of coaches and cobbled streets. However, the full meaning of the imperial city also demands further investigation. It is not just in the 'multicultural moment' of the late 1980s and 1990s that London is produced through Empire, nor the twenty-first-century work of film-makers like Gurinder Chadha and Noel Clarke. There is a 'banal imperialism' suffusing British cinema which is yet to be fully apprehended.[8]

Second, it requires the recognition of the particular significance of television to the British audio-visual economy, so that it is not just *Blow Up* that is significant in 1960s Londons, but also, for example, *Up the Junction* (BBC, 1965) and *199 Park Lane* (BBC, 1965). Previous issues of this journal have begun this work, for example, with Clare Monk's 2007 discussion of *Monkey Dust* (BBC, 2003–5) and Paul Newland's 2008 analysis of *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985–), but the scuzzy, down-at-heel, 1970s Londons of Euston Films – *The Sweeney* (Thames, 1975–8), *Minder* (Thames, 1979–94), *Out* (Thames, 1978), *Fox* (Thames, 1980), for example – have yet to receive due recognition, as is also true of the Peckhams of Rodney, Del Boy and Desmond.[9] This exploration

of the Londons seen on a weekly basis in millions of living rooms is here continued with Sarita Malik's discussion of *King of the Ghetto* (BBC, 1986).

Finally, there are the difficult and productive questions which arise from considering the relations between the present of a film image and the history of a city. The use of film by historians ranging from Frank Mort (2009) to Dominic Sandbrook (2005), writing very differently, and for different audiences, about the 1960s, is indicative of the increased interest from historians in the audio-visual image, but also of the complex methodological issues raised if film and television are to be granted their own specificity rather than merely read evidentially. While historians of London and Britain have increasingly looked to film, there has also been a developing archival turn in relation to screen Londons, whether manifest as increasing attention by film historians to the early London image industries (see, for example, the Birkbeck London Screen Study Collection), the tracking down of long-vanished locations undertaken by Roland-François Lack (2008) or the DVD release of films such as *The London Nobody Knows* (1967). This interest in the archival power of film has been explored in Patrick Keiller's installation/exhibition, *The City of the Future* (2007–8) as well as in work about East London by film-makers William Raban and Emily Richardson, so that the archive of London images is both revisited and renewed, finding new ways of making art from the elusive relation between the 'now-ness' of a film image as we watch it and the 'then' which it evokes.

So we want to make it possible to juxtapose some of these different paradigms, to bring together some of the grand narratives of the cinematic city with the particular histories of one cinematic city. This city, London, is one which is frequently figured as an old city, a Victorian city, and thus set against the modernity of the twentieth century represented by the cinema. Lynda Nead, in her discussion of 'London's Modernity *c.*1900', has suggested that the dominance of Georg Simmel's notion of urban modernity within discussions of the cinematic city has obscured the particularity of Victorian modernity, suggesting that London streets 'seem to belong more to the world of Henry Mayhew than of Simmel. This means understanding the concept of the city in a culturally and topographically more diverse way, and appreciating that modernity is a process of historical fits and starts' (2007: 110). The significance of London's pre-eminence in the nineteenth century, and the formation and circulation of determining images of London – particularly literary ones – from this imperial period should, we suggest, be brought into consideration

of what is often considered the relative paucity of twentieth-century cinematic Londons.

Patrick Keiller, in recent work, has pointed to the way in which the survival of the Victorian urban fabric of British cities can give an air of dilapidation to later innovations (2008: 35), and cinematic London is certainly a city much shaped by earlier stories and images. We have sought out work which spans the whole of the twentieth century in order to develop and enrich the historical understanding of the different modalities of London as a cinematic and, to a lesser extent, televisual city. Within that historical span, we have concentrated on work in three main areas: London and cinematic genre (here, horror and the musical); London as an imperial city (moving from the Victorian city to the post-imperial); and finally London as a location/material city. Several articles work across these topics – few focus on only one aspect of London on screen – and thus genre/empire/location are proposed, in the issue as a whole, as essential constituents to a broadly conceived understanding of screen Londons.

We privileged genre because, in our view, much of the recent expansion of scholarship on the cinema and city or 'space and place' in film and television has been insufficiently attentive to the way in which generic convention and expectation governs the way in which location is produced in the audio-visual media. Too often, a comparison is made between a cinematic or televisual representation and the location it references, as if this relation is a direct and simple one. However, as several of the essays below indicate, the way in which a particular aspect or area of the city appears in film is often as much determined by generic and institutional history as it is by qualities of the material city. This is well recognised in relation to ideas of the film noir city, often characterised, in the famous words of Robert Warshow in his essay 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero' (1979: 131), as 'that dangerous and sad city of the imagination'. It is, however, perhaps less well recognised in relation to the romantic comedy London of the Richard Curtis/Working Title films, still regularly subject to the criticism of being 'unrealistic'. We invited Peter Hutchings, who has published extensively on the horror film, to consider London in relation to this genre. Scholars such as Raymond Durgnat, Kim Newman and David Pirie have pointed to the strength of the gothic tradition within British cinema, in turn drawing on earlier gothic literature and a 'heritage of horror', while more recent scholars of the cinematic city such as Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli (2003) have characterised cinematic London as a murderous city. Tim Bergfelder (2002) has pointed to the centrality of Jack the Ripper in the German iconography of crime, and has explored the role

169

of German studios in producing an influential foggy, perilous London which has in turn shaped subsequent renditions of the city, such as the Hollywood gaslight melodramas discussed by Guy Barefoot (2001). Hutchings explores the complexity of juxtaposing theorisations of cinematic genre with notions of place, and shows the way in which 'horror London' is much more diverse and much more international than is commonly assumed.

The complexity of the interrelation between ideas of place and genre is addressed in a different way in Jon Burrows' article on early twentieth-century cinematic Limehouse which concentrates on the films deriving from Thomas Burke's bestseller, *Limehouse Nights* and specifically the different realisations of the tale of 'The Chink and the Child' (*Broken Blossoms*). Burrows uses archival sources (such as the records of the London County Council) to investigate the institutional and industrial pressures which produce a 'marked reticence' in the cinematic cartography of the area, permitting contemporary critics to disavow a connection between the opium dens of cinematic Limehouse and a real, multiracial London district. He shows how ideas of cinematic art, Hollywood success and local reception all contribute to what emerges as an instantly recognisable, but vaguely located, generic cinematic East End. Burrows' argument, which draws attention to specific historical determinations of the cinematic East End – as opposed to its generally assumed historical continuities with earlier, literary versions – also enables him to read one of the final, pre-Second World War versions of this story, the 1936 *Broken Blossoms*, as anti-fascist, in some part responsive to contemporary developments in both Germany and the East End.

While it was obvious to us that the issue needed to confront genre in relation to horror and the gothic, the musical has a rather patchier London history with some extremely unsuccessful but ambitious films such as *London Town* (1946) and *Absolute Beginners* (1986). Of course, there are some successful British London musicals – or films with singing and dancing – such as the postwar Neagle/Wilcox Mayfair cycle and some of the Cliff Richard vehicles such as *Expresso Bongo* (1959) and *The Young Ones* (1961). However, the British difficulties with the genre condense many of the difficulties of the British film industry generally, caught forever between emulation of and differentiation from Hollywood, and usually working with much smaller budgets. Cheap horror has developed a cult following; cheap musicals have proved less attractive. Even the recent version of *Sweeney Todd* (2007), expensively produced, with the cult pairing of Tim Burton directing and Johnny Depp starring, was promoted in Britain with

publicity material which did not reveal that the stars sang. Lawrence Napper uses *Todd* to introduce his discussion of three very successful Hollywood-funded 1960s musicals, *My Fair Lady* (1964), *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *Oliver!* (1968), exploring the way in which this most utopian of genres is, when London-set, preoccupied with social class and the circulation of commodities. As with Hutchings' discussion of 'Horror London', Napper's discussion of the Victorian musical London of the 'Swinging Sixties' demonstrates the international production and circulation of place images, and the way in which notable Londons can be disseminated from film lots far from the River Thames.

The films Napper discusses would all be recognised as musicals within film studies scholarship on the genre, and each has had at least one other incarnation on stage. But there is another, more locally produced body of work in which music plays a defining part. However, it is not the production numbers of the Hollywood studios but, instead, the sound systems and bands of the West Indian diaspora and black Britain which create the affective space of London films such as *Pressure* (1976) and *Babylon* (1980) discussed by Malini Guha in the article with which the issue opens. Guha returns to Siegfried Kracauer's canonical theorisation of the street in the context of the recurrent figure of the chase found in 1970s British Black cinema. Guha seeks to explore whether the post-imperial 'street' in these films can be understood as a historically specific place in which certain narrative encounters recur. She then develops her analysis, through the work of Paul Gilroy, to return to the question of music, pointing to the creation of 'sonic space' in these films as a device through which their stories are rendered both particular and general, in which London figures as both the heart of Empire and as 'Babylon'.

Guha's article, with its emphasis on the heritage of Empire in the London streets of the 1970s, points to a second area of active commissioning, that of work which directly addresses London as an imperial and post-imperial city. The streets of London recur in Maurizio Cinquegrani's analysis of late nineteenth-century actuality films, which explores the way in which Empire was made and remade at its heart in Victorian London as much as overseas. Cinquegrani demonstrates how films such as those by R. W. Paul and his operators documenting Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations recruited viewers to the imperial project while also laying out its wonders and differences.

The only article on television also explores London as an imperial and postcolonial city. Sarita Malik's discussion of the 1986 BBC serial *King of the Ghetto* documents another of the conflicts over the

171

representation of the East End which have recurred periodically in its history. Malik demonstrates how the thematic concerns of *King of the Ghetto* – power struggles within the strategic alliances of squatter activists, Asian families and Labour politicians in 1970s Spitalfields – to some extent embody institutional struggles within British broadcasting over who has the cultural legitimacy to represent the emerging British Asian East End. *King of the Ghetto*, commissioned for BBC2, was written by Farrukh Dhondy, who was, at that time, the Commissioning Editor for Channel 4's Multicultural Programmes. Malik's analysis poses directly the importance of institutional politics in understanding what gets made and by whom, once again suggesting that what finally appears on screen can only be fully understood through attention to a range of off-screen forces. However, she also considers the ways in which the response to this series has provided a template which has subsequently framed discussions of minority representation in British film and television.

Juxtaposed with work that explores the generic city, we have also included work which attends to the often inadvertent documentary quality of fiction film, and explores the complex and sometimes unanticipated resonance of images of vanished streets and landmarks. These topics are by no means specific to London, and scholars such as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2001), Andreas Huyssen (2003) and Norman M. Klein (2008) as well as the film-makers Terence Davies (*Of Time and the City*, 2008) and Thom Andersen (*Los Angeles Plays Itself*, 2003) have offered different insights into the imbrication of images and memories in our understanding – and forgetting – of many different cities. Pam Cook's short meditation on the transformation of Gainsborough Studios into award-winning 'live/work apartments' introduces some of these themes into this issue, mobilising her exhaustive knowledge of Gainsborough's history as a film studio, while also placing the material fabric of the studio into a different history, that of the post-industrial transformation of workplaces into fashionable new dwelling places.

Gainsborough Studios were in north east London, unlike most other London studios which were away from the pollution and industry of the East End on the other side of town. And it is the East End which has been, and is currently, subject to the greatest changes in the fabric of the material city, from the Blitz, through slum clearance, the closing of the Docks, road building and now the Olympic clearances. Amy Sargeant focuses on *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963), the one feature film directed by Joan Littlewood, who, through the Theatre Workshop based in the East End of London, has been so influential in the emergence of working-class actors on the British stage and

screen.[10] Sargeant moves between the theatrical and cinema versions of *Sparrows*, exploring the way in which the use of real East End locations is just one element of the construction of space within the film. However, she juxtaposes *Sparrows*' situated, dramatically organised concern with the changing East End of the 1960s with a range of other contemporary documentation, such as Young and Willmott's famous survey *Family and Kinship in East London*, to show the way in which the film partakes of, and contributes to, wider social concerns about the destruction of a whole way of life in the name of slum clearance and redevelopment. The authenticity of the film's East End lies in the very transcience of the culture it documents.

This theme of the redevelopment of the East End recurs in Claire Monk's essay on the London film *I Hired a Contract Killer* (1990) by the Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki. Monk places this film within the distinguished tradition of the London view from elsewhere, which includes Roman Polanski's South Kensington in *Repulsion* (1965) as well as Joseph Losey's Chelsea in *The Servant* (1963). However, she then proceeds to explore the relationship between this foreigner's view of London and the resonances that the film has for a native Londoner familiar with many of the locations over the years. So here the relationship between film image and material city is explored in a different way, both reading selected images for their reverberation within the history of London and attending to the changed status of images with the hindsight given by later redevelopment.

The issue closes with an interview by Paul Newland with the producer Gavrik Losey about filming in London. Losey recounts his experiences of making films such as *Villain* in the 1970s, and returns to *Babylon*, one of the films Guha discusses, which he produced and which was shot on location in South London. The interview also provides an insight into the unregulated filming conditions which were the norm for most of the last century. Losey's account of how people went about filming in London in the mid-twentieth century is an instructive contrast with the world of Film London (http://www.filmlondon.org.uk).

The 'London Issue', even at an extended 65,000 words, has proved to be far too small to deal with the topics of our dreams when we first proposed it. Although we are delighted with the articles we have been able to include, we mourn those that have been squeezed out, including a proposed feature on cinema exhibition using interviews with key scholars about their formative cinema-going in the city, an article on the long cinematic history of bombing London, a photo-essay on London's disappearing cinemas, as well as contributions from scholars outside film and television studies about their use of film and

173

television in their understanding of the city. As this list indicates, we conceived of the 'London Issue' of the journal very broadly, hoping to attend to production, distribution and exhibition in the city, as well as the image of the city. As Chibnall and Petley predicted, it is 'London on screen' which has proved the most attractive topic to scholars, and despite London's long history as the centre of the British moving image industry, we received nothing, aside from the Losey interview, primarily concerned with either industry or audience. Less predictable was the way in which, in terms of the proportion of articles submitted, the East End of London claimed with a vengeance its place within the cultural imaginary of the city. This freighting of screen Londons towards the east does point to the East End's continuing generative significance, even as it undergoes Olympics-orientated remodelling, of which it is hard to predict whether it will be better or worse for being done on the cheap. We hope that what we have managed to squeeze into this journal acts as both enticement and provocation to the study of London as site and source of cinematic and television industries, images and narratives. The literature of the cinematic city is much occupied with a discourse of cinema and modernity: shocks, montage, alienation, the crowd. In this paradigm, the city symphonies are the privileged embodiment of a cinematic modernism, while the role of television in creating everyday and 'event' London is ignored. What we have tried to do is to show how a longer view of cinema as a Victorian and modern medium – a medium, in some ways of Victorian modernity – brings London into greater prominence, to a more significant position in our understanding of the cinematic and televisual city.

Notes

1. For example, a significant change between the first (1997) and second editions of Sarah Street's *British National Cinema* has been the addition of a section, 'Place, space and identity' to a new chapter on 'Contemporary British Cinema' (2009: 142–51).
2. See, for example, the essays in the first cinema/city collection (Clarke 1997), but also the discussion *of Blade Runner* (1982) and *Wings of Desire* (1987) in David Harvey's influential *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989: 308–23). There is now an extensive literature on early cinema and urban modernity, including, most prominently Hansen (1991), Bruno (1993), Charney and Schwartz (1995), Singer (2001), and Stewart (2005). For a non-English language engagement with the terrain of the cinematic city, see Jousse and Paquot (2005).
3. In Clarke (1997) the chapter on London is John R. Gold and Stephen V. Ward, 'Of plans and planners: documentary film and the challenge of the urban future 1935–52', while Easthope's 'Cinecities of the 1960s' contains a section on *Blow-Up*; in Penz and Thomas (1997), the London chapter is Bullock, 'Imagining the

post-war world: architecture, reconstruction and the British Documentary Movement'; in Konstantarakos (2000), the only essay on British films is Elizabeth Lebas, 'The clinic, the street and the garden: municipal film-making in Britain between the wars'; Shiel and Fitzmaurice (2003) has no chapters on London, while the companion volume (2001) includes Leo Enticknap, 'Postwar urban redevelopment, the British Film Institute and *The Way We Live*' and Mike Mason on '*Naked*'; Griffiths and Zeniti (2007), with essays on sixteen cities, excludes London, as does Krause and Petro (2003); the essays in Cunningham and Barber (2007), despite being on London, mainly reproduce this paradigm, with marked attention to *Blow-Up* and *London*. On 'Swinging London'/ *Blow-Up,* see Murphy (1992), Luckett (2000), Church-Gibson (2006), Mellor (2007), and Lack (2007).

4. For example, James Donald's sympathetic interdisciplinary study of the city, although it commences with Dickens' London, deals, in chapter 3, with the classical modern/postmodern cinema/city canon (*Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), *Metropolis* (1927)) moving through to the US with *King Kong* (1933), *Blade Runner, Candyman* (1992) and *Batman* (1989), although he does mention Dorothy Richardson's *Close-Up* writing about cinema in London. The recent text-book, *Cities and Cinema* (Mennel, 2008) has six index references to London, but only one of these discusses cinematic London.

5. See Sandhu (2003: 230), where Kureishi is cited as the 'one figure who is responsible for dragging Asians in England into the spotlight', and also MacCabe (1999), Brooker (2002), and Ball (2004).

6. Film London is funded by the UK Film Council and the London Development Agency (with other funders, including the European Regional Development Fund), and took over the remit of the London Film Commission and the London Film and Video Development Agency (LFVDA). Film London calculates that one in ten tourists to the UK, 'spending around £1.8 billion a year', are attracted to the UK by film. See http://www.filmlondon.org.uk.

7. For an influential formulation from the New Labour-associated think-tank, Demos, see Mark Leonard (1997:13): ' "Cool Britannia" sets the pace in everything from food to fashion. Yet around the world Britain continues to be seen in a very different light: backward-looking and hidebound, arrogant and aloof.'

8. The phrase is adapted from Michael Billig's 1995 *Banal Nationalism*.

9. Television Peckhams: *Only Fools and Horses* (BBC, 1981–96) and *Desmond's* (Channel 4, 1989–94).

10. Actors to come through Theatre Workshop include Harry H. Corbett, Thomas Baptiste, and Barbara Windsor. See Sargeant in this issue.

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