Published as: 'Home Is Where We Start From', in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Little Madnesses: Winnicott: Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience* (London: I B Tauris, 2013), 53-63.

Home Is Where We Start From

Annette Kuhn

This chapter explores some of the ways in which cinema memory—memories relating to films, filmgoing and film viewing, and the distinctive discursive features of these memories--works as a particular type of cultural memory. I argue that the concepts of transitional object, transitional space and transitional phenomena, as developed by D.W. Winnicott, are pertinent and illuminating in this regard, especially as they shed light on the psychodynamics of spatiality. I also suggest that these ideas have predictive potential, in that they can help us imagine the *future* of cultural memory and cinema memory.

The data and the thinking underpinning these propositions come from two rather different projects. The first is a study of cinema culture and cinemagoing in Britain in the interwar years which began a number of years ago with some oral history fieldwork and led to the creation of an archive of interview and questionnaire material: this is still ongoing.[1] The second is some newer work exploring the potential of Winnicottian object relations for extending and deepening our understanding of cultural experience in general, and of cinema in particular. By its nature, this latter project concerns itself both with *cinema* in its social--institutional sense and with *film* in its textual, metapsychological, or phenomenological sense.[2] The cinema/film distinction is important, and it is perhaps worth stressing that this chapter concerns itself largely with the former—with cinema as an institution and with cinemagoing as a social and cultural practice.

Some key findings of the 1930s cinema culture project suggested that for this particular generation, cinemagoing was the occasion for the very earliest ventures into the world beyond the home.

> Close to home, almost an extension of home, and yet not home, 'the pictures' is remembered as both daring and safe. Referencing Freud, Michel de Certeau suggests that the back and forth (*fort/da*) movement and the 'being there' (*Dasein*) which characterise spatial practices re-enact the child's separation from the mother. To translate this conceit to cinema memory, it might be argued that, for the 1930s generation, cinema constitutes a transitional object.'(Kuhn 2002): 36

The allusion to de Certeau is to his evocative essay 'Walking in the city', in which it is proposed that the everyday 'spatial practice' of walking urban streets is imbued with a particular experience of movement, a 'moving into something different' that repeats 'a decisive and originary experience, that of the child's differentiation from the mother's body' (de Certeau 1984)(de Certeau109). How was this insight--that, for the 1930s generation, cinema constitutes a transitional object--arrived at? Why is it important? And what might it suggest about the peculiarities of cinema memory and about the future of cinema memory, now that cinema in the form the 1930s generation knew it no longer prevails?

Above all, it is about how place and space figure in certain kinds of memory-stories, and about how memory works through the body, or is embodied. In his phenomenological study of remembering, Edward Casey says that *place* is important in remembering because ‘it serves to *situate* one’s memorial life’ in several possible ways. Firstly, Casey suggests, places can act as containers of memory; secondly, places can be *mises en scene*, or settings, for remembered events; and thirdly, memory itself is like—or indeed is---a place that we can revisit.(Casey 1987) 183-4, ~~emphasis in original~~). Therefore memory both *is* a topography and *has* a topography. It should be noted that at this point the issue is place rather than the more abstract space. The idea of place suggests attachment--‘being in’, belonging—or its absence. Attachment in turn implies a bodily relationship, even a merging of boundaries, between body and place. In the idea of space, movement--movement in and movement through--arguably figures more pervasively; but figurations of place and space are, as will become apparent, intertwined in the psychodynamics of cinema memory.

I was surprised at first to see how insistently place figured in the memories of 1930s cinemagoers. Because this finding is discussed in some detail elsewhere, however, (Kuhn 2002) chapter 2(Kuhn 2004), I shall mention only those aspects of it that are relevant to the current argument. There is a great deal of variation in how place is evoked in these cinemagoers’ memories, and in how metaphors of place organise their memory talk. Nonetheless, emerging from the assortment is an overall sense, above all in informants' accounts of their childhood cinemagoing, of a navigation in embodied imagination, even as they speak, of mental topographies of familiar, remembered territory. This topographical memory talk, evoking as it does a set of spatial practices associated with very specific places, offers important clues as to the ways in which cinema memory works as a distinctive form of cultural memory.

One key finding, for example, is the prevalence of the discursive 'walking tour' in informants' accounts of their early cinemagoing: a retelling of their journeys to the picture house, always(implicitly or explicitly) undertaken on foot, and often including very precise details of street names and familiar landmarks. The follwing characteristic account is extracted from a lengthy discursive walking tour by a 79-year-old informant who had lived in Bolton, near Manchester, since the age of five:

> This is St Helen's Road. Beyond. Perhaps about ten minutes from here. Down there. You get the main road. Eh there was the [name of cinema] it was called.... And that was all along that road. But going over to Dean Road, there was the Fern Cinema....[3]

It is an embodied and kinetic memory--a reliving, through the body, of the remembered experience of moving through space and also in and through a very particular and still familiar, though now changed, set of places.

A number of aspects of this kind of topographical memory talk make it distinctive. Firstly, the starting point for the memory-journey is usually the family house, the home; secondly, the journey is highly goal-directed, its destination being the neighbourhood picture house or picture houses; thirdly, there is a sense that the same journey was frequently and repeatedly undertaken; and this is associated, fourthly, with a sense of the journey's ordinariness, its routine quality. Finally, a return home is part of the remembered journey, though this is often implicit in the speaker's account.

Underlying the feeling of coming and going, of repeated movement away from home and back again and of the everydayness of the journey's topography, is a sense of *fort/da*, a trying out of separation and independence in a psychical, emotional and physical space of belonging, security, containment. As observed and reported by Freud, the baby's *fort/da* game (repeatedly throwing a cotton reel out of its cot and its mother/carer repeatedly picking it up and giving it back, to the baby's delighted cries of 'Fort!' (gone) and 'Da!' (back)) rehearses presence and absence and models the lesson that things (including and especially mother) continue to exist even when out of sight (Freud 1984). For object-relations psychoanalysis the psychical activity at work here figures in specific processes of separation-individuation in which the infant and toddler, in a series of phases lasting until the age of about three, separates itself from the external world and from its mother/primary carer and becomes a separate self—a process, incidentally, that does not stop at the age of three: 'For the more-or-less normal adult, the experience of being fully "in" and at the same time basically separate from the world "out there” is one of the givens of life that is taken for granted’ (Mahler 1979):131. For Winnicott, along with the security of a holding environment the young child’s use of the transitional object figured crucially here.

Home is where the 1930s cinemagoers’ remembered pedestrian journeys to the cinema start from; and the places and the landmarks named along the way act, in their accounts, like a string that keeps them virtually joined to home, even as they venture away from home and into parts of the outside world that feel familiar and safe, guiding them as they make their way back home. In these memories of being in places and moving through spaces, in other words, the cinema as a place figures as a kind of extension of home. It is significant that these memories invoke a particular sort of cinema building: the neighbourhood picture house, invariably remembered as modest and accessible (‘one on every street corner’, as a number of informants put it). This is another aspect of their home-like quality (I shall return to the question of different types of cinema later). It is also worth pointing out that informants’ memories of *going to* the pictures are more numerous and lengthier in the telling than are memories of *being at* the pictures. Going-to and being-at memories also differ markedly in both content and timbre. I shall come back to this point as well.

The observation quoted at the beginning--that cinema seemed to constitute a transitional object for the 1930s generation--did not, when it was written, feel like a particularly profound insight, nor was it a very considered conclusion. Neither Winnicott nor object-relations theory were cited because it never occurred to me to do so. The term transitional object is commonplace in everyday parlance, and its usage at this point was undoubtedly imprecise. But this seemingly throwaway allusion somehow set off a new train of thought and a fresh direction for research, and the engagement with writings on, and participation in discussions of, transitional objects and culture that ensued have shown that this casual statement contained an idea that was well worth refining, and exploring in greater depth.

Transitional objects are the ubiquitous first possessions of infants and young children (it may be a teddy, or even an old bit of cloth or blanket) that belong at once to the child and its inner world and to the outside world, occupying the place of imagination, an intermediate position between fantasy and reality. Winnicott famously said: ‘No human being is free from the strain of relating outer and inner reality’(Winnicott 1991): 18, and transitional objects and transitional phenomena help in the negotiation of that relationship. They inhabit what Winnicott called an ‘intermediate zone’, a ‘third area’. This is neither inner psychical reality nor the external world of behaviour and objects, but the space between the two—a bridge, so to speak, that keeps them both apart and joined together. Importantly, transitional objects are material objects, things: they have a physical existence and are pressed into the service of inner reality. They are at once part of the subject and not the subject, and in inner life inhabit the intermediate zone, the space between inner and outer worlds.(Davis and Wallbridge 1990).

Winnicott used the term ‘transitional space’ to refer to this third area, the intermediate zone or space inhabited by transitional phenomena. The spatial trope is crucial. Winnicott’s insights on transitional objects link them largely to childhood and developmental issues, in particular to the activity of playing, whose defining characteristics he regarded as a sense in the child of preoccupation, absorption and near-withdrawal, with the activity itself being experienced as outside the individual and yet not belonging entirely to the external world. Any objects drawn from the external world and used in play are also imbued with the character of inner reality. It is also clear that Winnicott believed that alongside their developmental role, transitional phenomena have a structural aspect as well. In particular, he explored the relationship between transitional phenomena and the ways in which adults experience and relate to culture and creativity (Winnicott 1991). For present purposes, I am interested in exploring both the developmental and the structural aspects of transitional phenomena.

With regard to the former, as noted above, Winnicott linked transitional objects and associated behaviours and psychical processes in infants and young children with issues of separation. This clearly means separation from the mother or primary carer in the first instance but, as Winnicott’s dictum ‘Home is where we start from’ suggests, this extends to include separation from a mother-associated place-object, the *home*.(Winnicott 1986; Bergman 1995) In either case, separation is part of a process of development of self as apart from the outside world, and as described by Winnicott this process serves as a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and so eases the child's engagement with and acceptance of the new. It should also be borne in mind that transitional space-at once joins objects together and separates them from each other. The structural aspect of transitional phenomena references the fact that the dynamic equilibrium of inner and outer reality is not confined to the transitional objects of childhood, but continues through adult life. We continue re-enacting playing and other transitional processes throughout life in relation with our 'adult' transitional objects and phenomena: for the strain of relating outer and inner reality, the task of 'reality acceptance', is never complete.(Winnicott 2002): 240

Place-memory, topographical memory, is pervasive in 1930s cinemagoers' talk, as we have seen, and it often manifests itself through tropes of physical movement. As an embodied, kinaesthetic form of memory discourse, place-memory and its invocation of spatial practices re-enacts the interaction of inner and outer worlds that characterises transitional phenomena. And also, through the remembered experience of bodily movement through space in the journeying to and from particular places--here between home and the local picture house—it invokes the rhythms and the repetitions, the ebbs and flows, of separation processes. It may not be strictly accurate to state that, for people recollecting and reliving their own filmgoing as children and adolescents in the 1930s, the cinema building, the picture house, functions as a transitional *object*. But it can certainly be posited that for this generation the regular comings and goings from home to the familiar neighbourhood picture house and back again partake of the transitional-space activities of relating inner and outer worlds; and that in the particular social and cultural circumstances of their time and place these were part of the separation from home and the exploration of paces outside home that are part of growing up.

> As the realization of the irreconcilability of home and outside space becomes a reality, transitional spaces become a necessity for comfortable functioning. In the outside world these transitional spaces must contain elements of both the mother and world outside: the home away from home, the home on wheels, the freedom to come and go, a place to play(Bergman 1995): 64

*

What happens inside the cinema? The remembered walk to the picture house on the street corner is a process of enacting and of restaging one's belonging to a place-object that is outside home and yet like home: one's locality, one's neighbourhood, one's 'manor'. What then takes place inside the cinema is rather different: the virtual experiencing of other, unfamiliar, places. There are in fact two levels involved in the remembered experience of being inside the cinema: being inside the cinema building and in the auditorium on the one hand; and 'being in' (or inside) the world on the screen on the other. Significantly, 1930s cinemagoers' memories of being inside the cinema are far fewer in number, and often seem less coherent, than descriptions of the walk from home to the picture house. At the same time, these rare accounts show an exceptionally vivid and emotionally invested quality. They are often also, and perhaps relatedly, unanchored in space and/or time (as in flash-like memories of isolated images or scenes from films, usually frightening or funny ones); or they may be rueful stories about the speaker's failure to understand or properly to negotiate the difference between everyday space and time and space and time in the cinema (as in memories of sitting through several performances, losing track of time and, once back home, getting into trouble with anxious parents). (Kuhn 2011). In different ways, all these types of memory are about a difficulty or lack of proficiency in negotiating the relationship between illusion and reality; and/or about testing the limits of separation; and/or about managing the transition from the everyday world to the world of cinema and film and back again.

In these stories, the experience of anticipating the move from the everyday world into the worlds inside the cinema and the film is remembered above all as straddling the border between different realities:

> Standing in the street queuing in pleasant anticipation of what
> the next couple of hours had to offer, as the lights dimmed and
> the screen lit up away we were transported into a world of fantasy;

It is also recalled as involving an involuntary, passive journey, as informants repeatedly talk about being (temporarily) 'transported' or 'carried away':

> It's like being in another world… .And then when I come out, I'm a bit, you know, kind of ooh! A bit, eh, carried away. And, eh, then I come down to earth eventually.[4]

It was noted earlier that two very different types of picture house co-exist in 1930s cinemagoers' memories, and that the neighbourhood or street corner type is associated particularly with place-memory, with the 'containing' quality of the home from home, and with spatial practices associated with the negotiation of separation-individuation issues. The neighbourhood cinema may thus be regarded as in a sense part of home, or at any rate attached to home. The other sort of cinema, by contrast, is remembered as a place that is wholly separate from the familiar and the everyday. It embodies, in memory, some or all of the following characteristics: it is one of the new 1930s supercinemas, or ‘dream palaces’; and it is outside one’s neighbourhood—in another town, perhaps, or in the city centre—and is reached not on foot but by mechanised means of transport; it is a place to go on special occasions rather than as part of a weekly routine; the decor and general ambience of the place is exotic and other-worldly; and it is associated with memories of courtship or romance—that is, with adolescence and adulthood rather than with childhood.

*

These characteristics, I would suggest, have some bearing on how we might imagine the future of cinema memory—by which I mean how (and indeed whether) cinema might figure today in transitional processes, in negotiations of inner and outer realities and processes of separation; and thus how today’s cinemagoers and consumers of films might remember these things in years to come. Questions to be addressed in this context might include: Does cinema figure at all today as a transitional phenomenon; and if so, how? How might this involve issues of place and/or space? How might it involve the body? How might the distinction and the relationship between *cinema* and *film* operate today and in the future?

In approaching these questions, it is clearly essential to take into account the impact of changes in the ways in which films and cinema are delivered to the consumer, and in how and where films are consumed and used. But it goes beyond this, I believe. Transitional processes are not transhistorical: reality perception and experience of the outer-inner relationship are historically and culturally anchored. It is also worth stating that transitional phenomena, particularly but not exclusively as experienced or remembered in adulthood, can have a collective dimension and so become part of a generational memory bank, as indeed appears to be the case with the memories of cinemagoers of the 1930s.

A number of features of present-day cinema might be regarded as relevant to a discussion about the future of cinema memory. For example, there are far fewer cinema buildings today than there were in the 1930s, in real terms the cost of admission is higher, and the frequency of cinema attendance per capita is much lower now than it was in the 1930s. In short, the public places where one goes to see films today are less available to be experienced as part of the daily routine or of the life of a neighbourhood, or as homes from home. Also, the fact that young children no longer attend cinemas unaccompanied by adults has implications for issues around home and not-home spaces, for spatial practices, and and for separation-individuation. Because of the element of distance, people of all ages will generally be less likely today to walk to the cinema and more likely to get there by car or public transport. This will surely have implications for the nature of one’s attachment (or lack of it) to the place, and to memories of the activity of getting there--to the content, weight and experienced significance of the remembered journey.

Furthermore, there is of course now a wide range of technologies through which films are delivered to and consumed by viewers. For a number of years films old and new have featured regularly in the schedules of broadcast, cable and satellite television, for example. As Roger Silverstone has noted, television texts and even the television set itself may acquire some of the qualities of transitional objects: it is a constant, and constantly available, presence in the home, it possesses some of the qualities of the mother/carer; its schedules and content have a cyclical, routine quality, providing a temporal frame for the viewer and offering a venue for exploring and testing the relations between reality and fantasy.(Silverstone 1994): 15. Video and DVD permit repeated viewings of films, allowing the viewer to pause, skim, and so on: the film text itself consequently becomes a different sort of object—one to be mastered, perhaps, rather than submitted to. We can perhaps surmise that different processes of fantasy, illusion, projection or introjection may be involved, say, and even that at this point the boundary between cinema as an institution and film as text becomes more permeable.

Today, too, a wide range of forms of entertainment are available, many of them new: for the 1930s generation on the other hand, cinema was clearly the main, if not the only, attraction. Cinema is rarely now regarded as cutting edge in the way it was in the 1930s: films and cinema are merely one part of a sprawling and heterogeneous media ecology. In this milieu, new modes of delivery of films and new technologies for their delivery make possible a range of different spatial and bodily relationships with the ‘cinematic apparatus’--the physical or the material means of consuming film texts. To the extent that these relationships are potentially more tactile, more immediate, the relationship between films and viewers might in some circumstances become more like that between toys and their users (Young 1989). And yet, to return to Winnicott, we can see that the toy/playing aspect can still potentially involve the kinds of outer world/inner world dynamics at work in transitional phenomena (Young 1989); and that this in turn is likely to impact on future cultural memory. These questions point towards areas of phenomenological and metapsychological inquiry that are ripe for exploration.

The consumption of films and cinema today involves distinctive modes of sociability, relations to places, and spatial practices. For example, home media consumption and the attendant organisation of domestic space have implications for the negotiation of separation issues (bedroom culture, and so on). On the other hand, going out to see a film in a cinema today is perhaps not unlike 1930s cinemagoers’ relationship to cinemas in the second category—those remembered as special, distant, outside the everyday. What will happen to place-memory if the embodied links between home and places outside home are thus transformed, even eroded?[5],

This small case study and the questions that it leaves us with, suggest that the Winnicottian concept of transitional space can offer a great deal not only to the student of cultural memory but also to the cultural researcher interested in exploring the interaction between the psychical and the social-cultural, both in general and in relation to the consumption and use of cultural and media texts of different kinds and in different times and places..

. "Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience (T-PACE)." Retrieved 15 August 2011, from http://www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/filmstudies/t_pace/index.html

Bergman, A. (1995). From mother to the world outside: the use of space during the separation--individuation phase. From Fantasy to Reality. S. A. Grolnick and L. S. Barkin: 147-165.

Casetti, F. (2009). "Filmic experience." Screen 50(1): 56-66.

Casey, E. (1987). Remembering: A Phenomenological Study. Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press.

Certeau, M. D. (1984). The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Davis, M. and D. Wallbridge (1990). Boundary and Space: An Introduction to the Work of D.W. Winnicott. London, Karnac.

de Certeau, M. (1984). The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.

Freud, S. (1984). Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) Pelican Freud Library, vol. 11. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Kuhn, A. (2002). An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory. London, I.B. Tauris.

Kuhn, A. (2004). "Heterotopia, heterochronia: place and time in cinema memory." Screen 45(2): 106-114.

Kuhn, A. (2005). "Thresholds: film as film and the aesthetic experience." Screen 46(4): 401-414.

Kuhn, A. (2006). "Thresholds: film as film and the aesthetic experience." Screen 46(4): 401-414.

Kuhn, A. (2010). "Cinematic experience, film space, and the child's world." Canadian Journal of Film Studies 19(2): 82-98.

Kuhn, A. (2011). What to do with cinema memory? Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies. R. Maltby, D. Biltereyst and P. Meers. Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell.

Mahler, M. S. (1979). The Selected Papers of Margaret S. Mahler, Vol II: Separation-Individuation. New York, Jason Aronson.

Silverstone, R. (1994). Television and Everyday Life. London, Routledge.

Winnicott, D. W. (1986). Home Is Where We Start From. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Winnicott, D. W. (1991). The location of cultural experience Playing and Reality. D. W. Winnicott. London, Routledge: 128-139.

Winnicott, D. W. (1991). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. Playing and Reality. London, Routledge: 1-34.

Winnicott, D. W. (2002). Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis: Collected Papers. London, Karnac Books.

Young, R. M. (1989). Transitional phenomena: production and consumption. Crises of the Self: Further Essays on Psychoanalysis and Politics. B. Richards. London, Free Association Books: 57-72.

---

[1] Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain (CCINTB), Economic and Social Research Council project R000 23 5385. The archive is housed in the Special Collections section of Lancaster University Library, and CCINTB references in subsequent notes are to files in the archive.

[2] . "Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience (T-PACE)." Retrieved 15 August 2011, from http://www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/filmstudies/t_pace/index.html. Some film-as-text related aspects of transitional phenomena are explored in Kuhn, A. (2005). "Thresholds: film as film and the aesthetic experience." Screen **46**(4): 401-414, Kuhn, A. (2010). "Cinematic experience, film space, and the child’s world." Canadian Journal of Film Studies **19**(2): 82-98. See also Phyllis Crème, “The playing spectator”, in this volume.

[3] CCINTB T95-46, Freda McFarland, Bolton, 7 June 1995.

[4] CCINTB 95-232-1, Raymond Aspden, Lancashire, to Valentina Bold, n.d. 1995; CCINTB T95-158, Tessa Amelan, Manchester, 28 May 1995.

[5] On the transformation of cinematic experience in the era of new media, see Casetti, F. (2009). "Filmic experience." Screen **50**(1): 56-66.